

UKTP Podcast Episode #75

AI-generated Transcript

IntroOther00:03

Welcome to the UK Travel Planning Podcast. Your host is the founder of the UK Travel Planning website, Tracy Collins. In this podcast, Tracy shares destination guides, travel tips and itinerary ideas, as well as interviews with a variety of guests who share their knowledge and experience of UK travel to help you plan your perfect UK vacation. Join us as we explore the UK from cosmopolitan cities to quaint villages, from historic castles to beautiful islands, and from the picturesque countryside to seaside towns.

TracyHost00:41

Hi and welcome to episode 75 of the UK Travel Planning Podcast this week. I am passing the reins to Doug.

DougHost00:48

Hello there. In this episode I'm joined by guest Wes Wetherell. Wes chats to me about his two UK rail trips in 2022 and 2023 and his experience of itinerary consults with myself and Tracy for both of these trips. So, without further ado, let's welcome Wes onto the podcast. So, Wes, welcome to the podcast. Thank you, Doug, great to be here. Firstly, can you introduce yourself and, you know, show a little bit of information about you and where you live.

WesGuest01:19

Sure, well, as you mentioned, my name is Wes and I am a former lawyer. Please don't hold that against me, but I recently retired and I live in the Chicago area in Illinois in the States, so about 30 miles west of Chicago along a train line which is not. It's nothing like the trains we're going to be discussing.

DougHost01:51

So, and I know you've visited the UK before, but how many times have you actually been to the UK?

WesGuest01:57

Well, that was a great question and I had to sit down and think about it. So before I answer you because my answer may be a little startling I first visited the UK, really London, in 2002. I had worked for and until recently worked for a large UK based insurance company. So the first time I came I was all excited about getting to the UK and I stayed at Brown's Hotel pre renovation and I was basically locked in a conference room in our office for the entire week I was there, escaped one night and had dinner directly across the street from Brown. So nothing really.

02:42

I don't know whether that counts or not, but because because of the business connection, I ended up coming quite frequently. So since 2002, maybe three or four times a year on business with an increasingly expanding itinerary, like we generally. We were generally in London, but I am my, our offices were near the monument and bank, that area, but we sort of stayed all over the place marble arch, oxford Circus, tower Hill, barbican Center, kings Cross, so and then later our meetings were more out of the city. So, for example, we were down in Horsham at South Lodge, the, that Manor house down there, and we stayed in Windsor at one point at the Sir Christopher Wren Hotel and I generally would tack a day or two onto the end of the trip for exploring the city or getting out of the city maybe Oxford or Cambridge, because I had some friends there.

03:50

In 2013, I brought my wife over for business and we did a little trip to Paris and Burgundy and then came back to London and kind of worked our way north, ultimately up to Edinburgh and then came back to London I'm not done yet In 2016. And there's a reason I'm mentioning all this. But in 2016, I did a special assignment with the UK based company and I was back and forth a number of times over a six month period and did more day trips on weekends anywhere I could go on the trains, maybe for an hour or two outside of London, so places like Bath or York or Dover, things like that. And then with COVID, everything stopped.

DougHost04:37

Yeah.

WesGuest04:38

So in 2022, I had promised myself a proper farewell trip and so did some planning, thought I knew everything I needed to know about coming to the UK and very quickly realized I was paralyzed because I started to figure out what I didn't know. And so, with your and Tracy's help, I was able to plan a trip last year and did a general trip around the UK and thought so much of it. I asked, and my wife surprisingly agreed to a second farewell tour, which I did this year. So, answering your original question, I think I'd been to the UK on 61 different trips Go Grave. But 2016 kind of bumps the number up because I was back and forth maybe 10 times during that time period. So you'd think I'd know my way around and wouldn't need to be talking to a travel planning podcast group.

DougHost05:48

Oh well, I'm glad you did because I'm pleased to meet you. So on your recent trips you've been visiting a place in the Northwest of England with a family connection, I believe.

WesGuest06:00

Yes, actually, as you mentioned earlier, my last name is Weatherall, and just one train stop east of Carlisle on the Carlisle Newcastle line is the parish of Weatherall, and so it's a little bedroom community, and I had promised my wife that we would visit it. We did in 2013. I came back again, and it's a lovely little village situated on the River Eden. I like to hike, so I hiked through the Weatherall woods and the Weatherall caves and stayed at the Crown Hotel Weatherall, and so it was a little bit of a family connection. I'm not certain what this would say about my ancestry, but when asked why I was there, when people there made the connection between the town name and my name, I said, well, my last name is Weatherall, and their response was hey, that's the same name as our town. Oh.

07:07

So, doug, that's the stock, I think.

DougHost07:10

I come from. Excellent. Now next question how did you go about planning your recent UK trips? I know we had a lot to do with it and I'm so glad that we had the opportunity to help you, even with all your background and your many trips to the UK. So yeah, how did you go about planning your recent trips?

WesGuest07:33

Well, that's a great question because, as I said before I ran into you guys, I really thought I knew my way around. I mean, I had figured out how to get to which train station and how trains generally worked, and if I needed to get a reservation or if I didn't, and the difference between first class and then first class and stuff like that. I kind of felt like I knew what I was doing. But I pretty quickly realized I had an aggressive itinerary. I had no idea whether, in real life, this was going to work and how it was going to. Well, I didn't know if it would work in the first place. And second, I wasn't quite sure about the logistics when I got out of my circle of comfort. And then the last thing was well, two things. The last thing I was thinking of was I wasn't quite sure what I was going to do when I got to some of these places that I had never visited. And then, to throw it in the top, as I'm planning this 2022 trip, train strikes start happening and I'm realizing a lot of the travel planning that I had done on my own through the National Rail Service or websites or things like that. I didn't know how to interpret what was happening and, more importantly, I had no idea what to do if I ran into a problem along the way. And I had never purchased a URail or Brit Rail pass, which is very straightforward once you know what you're doing, but when you don't it's a bit confusing.

09:22

So while I was planning the trip I was sort of searching around for resources and I stumbled into your Facebook group and I think the topics that were raised, even the comments that were there, then your website. Then I realized, hey, there are other resources I could grab. So I bought the Best of Britain travel guide. I got your guide to UK trains,

that stuff I was searching around. I think I bought a couple other things I'm not remembering, and especially the train guide.

10:00

Really, it's one thing to go from Paddington to Oxford and back in a day trip.

10:09

It's another thing to plan a multi-train line trip around the country or to figure out transportation when you're going someplace, say, for example, into the Cotswolds, where there isn't a train stop at every little village or hamlet that you'd want to stop at. So Tracy's suggestions around tours were a big help. For example, last year I took a day tour of the Cotswolds and decided that would be a great way to introduce my wife when she came with me hopefully in the future, because I then figured out there is no way that I'm going to be driving in the Cotswolds and blessings on anyone who can do that and it's not the roads or anything, it's my driving skill or lack the rug. So basically, I had a skeleton outline. As you guys know, I had a rough skeleton that I turned over to you and you guys said, well, that makes sense. So I had a couple of things where you said, well, maybe you should consider this, and that really helped refine both of these last two trips, made them really a success for me.

DougHost11:31

Oh, that's fantastic. I'm pleased the resources were a benefit to you. So you had two reviews with Tracy and I. So how would you describe this experience first, second time or both?

WesGuest11:44

Well, the first time, I was intrigued enough by your resources to say, hey, I'd like to pick these guys brains. To be honest, I'm not sure that, absent the train strikes, I would have done the first review. Having done it, though, I said, well, that was well worth it, and so I came back again for the second one this year. You guys really exceeded my expectations. I'm sounding like commercial at this point, but it's actually.

12:15

It has the benefit of actually being true, because I have two itineraries for both of these last two trips the one I actually took and the shadow one that I thought I was going to take, and I think I would have limped into the finish line with the shadow one in either case, but in both instances, it was a huge help and, as I said, I kind of approached the whole 2022 farewell trip as, hey, I've been there, done it and I kind of think I can get my way around. I had been up to Carlisle before and I realized especially if you're trying to get around well, if I'm trying to maximize what I'm seeing as an example I went to Edinburgh, and with no, I mean I did some research and everything, but I didn't talk to anybody. So when we got there, we got off the train and we were staying I forget the name of the hotel on High Street and my wife and I didn't know how to get from the train station to High Street.

DougHost13:41

I see.

WesGuest13:42

We were wandering around and eventually found some. We realized at that point it's high, so we found stairs and got up to it. But that's just a silly example of any number of things that I wouldn't have figured out on my own, and talking to somebody who has been able to do this in the past is a big help. Oh, that's fantastic.

DougHost14:09

So are the places that you visited or experienced. What are your favorites on your recent UK trip?

WesGuest14:20

Well, a couple. I mentioned weather. All that's always kind of a highlight just for family and emotional reasons and people should Google it. It's a very beautiful little town and kind of quintessential. When I was there last year by accident I ran into friends of mine a former roommate of mine from 30 years ago who lives in Montana in the United States and they were in Carlisle. I talked them into coming out to weather all for a day and they thought it was the most British place that they had visited. So

that's always a highlight, but you would recommend to Doug the Settle Carlisle train line.

DougHost15:07

Yeah, what are my favorites?

WesGuest15:10

And so I did that. This year. I sort of detoured where I was going to get the leads. You had also recommended the National Armory, which really sadly, was closed that day. But you had also walking from city center where I was. I walked to the museum just to get a sense of it and realized that was a distance, but you had recommended the water taxi. That's right in Leeds, it's fantastic. Yeah, so I found the water taxi and had just the best time with one other couple, a Canadian woman and her ex-pat husband from Leeds, who had moved to Canada, back home, visiting for the first time. They're showing me around the city. It was fantastic.

16:02

Oh what a great result. So I'm sorry. I got from Leeds onto the Settle Carlisle line out of Leeds and it was a rainy day and still absolutely gorgeous. I can't imagine what it would be like sunny. But even if I mean the weather didn't deter and you had recommended reservations, I think on the line I had I had a seat which I didn't realize until I got there. I started thinking about it, saying well, there are going to be a lot of people on this line and so having a prearranged seat facing the right direction, on the right side of the train was great, and you had recommended that I get off in Applebee.

DougHost16:54

That's right.

WesGuest16:55

And hike my way down to a pub. I forget the name of it, but that was fantastic.

DougHost17:00

Oh yes.

WesGuest17:02

That's just an example. And then I got off one train, took an hour and 15 minutes, had lunch, came back, went the west rest of the way up. So that was really a highlight for me because I just saw a lot of the stuff that I never would have seen, especially if I'm not a driver. Oh, it's a beautiful driver.

DougHost17:22

Yeah, really is beautiful. Oh, that's fantastic.

WesGuest17:27

I think another place I'd mention was the Lake District. I stayed in bonus on Windermere last year and again rainy day like just raining buckets but there's still. I took a bus or a boat and a bus out to Coniston and had to the Coniston Brewery actually to the Black Bear Pub out there for their Blackbird Bitter, and it just I felt like I saw a lot of what I never would see. And this year I stayed in Ambleside, as you know, and did a wonderful hike around the lake in Rydell and then ended up at the Badger Bar Pub for lunch. So the quintessential out for a walk through the hills around the lake, saw a rainbow, visited a cave, ended up in a pump.

DougHost18:27

It sounds like an ideal trip. It was great. Oh, it's good. So you benefited from, particularly like the Setle Collie how our insider knowledge, the experiences that we visited, personal and places we can recommend to others.

WesGuest18:43

Yes, I should explain for anybody who's listening that, in addition to the consult and the, and buying the, the resource, both of which were very, very helpful, I peppered you with a few last minute questions and thank you for indulging me. But I I'm surprised, and again, I thought I understood the UK system, which is a lot better than the US, but the but

the US is pretty straightforward. You know this. This has a little bit of things that are nicer, but I was surprised at how many practical questions came up in the process of our planning locations of train stations, just figuring out which train passes the right one, to get Terminology, even even when or when when reservations are helpful or when they're not.

DougHost19:40

That's good. So that's when we recommended. You know when you asked your questions and we made recommendations. Do you feel all your questions were answered satisfactorily?

WesGuest19:49

Yes, Well, yes, and you answered questions I didn't have. I'll give you an example the I. We were talking a little bit about reservations last year and I was very confused by the website and when I make reservations, how I do it. And I don't even think I mentioned that, but in our console you suggested that when I arrived I was coming from Heathrow to Paddington. You said, well, when you get to Paddington station, just stop in at the Great Western and book your reservations. And boy, for a 10 minute queue and a very patient agent at the train. I lined up all of my reservations and I wouldn't have thought even to ask that.

DougHost20:41

So, yes, you answered all my questions. Oh, that's great here. So how did you find overall? How did you find using the UK Veil system and the London Underground?

WesGuest20:52

Very, very easy. I was, and I've had a. I was distressed as I was getting ready to leave this time because I couldn't find the oyster card that I've always carried around and I gave up on it and I thought well, I'm going to go contact list this this time, and so I have an Apple watch and I never. I never had any problem just touching my watch to the train system at the, the, the. I had no problems with the Brit rail pass or or signing in and out of stations and in the rare case where I was confused, there was somebody there to help.

21:39

So I thought it was. I wish we had a train system like that in the United States, because, yeah, you can't get there from here.

DougHost21:48

No, I don't you mean. I don't you mean. Well, that's fantastic. So thank you for those answers. And the final question. We always end with the same question, of course what is the top tip you can share with anyone planning a trip to the UK for the first? Time.

WesGuest22:09

Plan. Yeah, planning makes makes the difference. If you don't, as I. As I've mentioned, you guys have been a measurably helpful in my itinerary planning. So I would say plan and consult with somebody. If not Doug and Tracy, find somebody who has been there and can tell you what you're doing. Back to your Facebook page I get the biggest kick out of questions that are raised. We talked about that a little bit, but one one thing that I'm struck by is I'll see somebody who says here's my plan itinerary. Does this work? And I always think that's a great question, and I'm grateful for people that respond by saying yeah, you're a little ambitious or you're chasing from one side to the other. Maybe you should rearrange it. I just think having a sense of where you're going without locking in every minute is because life changes.

23:19

I found myself in Liverpool last year on the day of the Queen's funeral. I was going through Birmingham and was changing trains when the moment of silence came out of the two minutes of silence and the train station stopped. I thought I don't know, that that would have happened in the United States. But it was great just to be flexible and be in the moment and enjoy it. So, plan but leave some space for back and around.

DougHost23:57

Yeah, that's right, the unexpected type thing. So Wes, thank you so much for chatting to us. It's been an absolute pleasure. As always every

time we talk to you, I thoroughly enjoy it, so hopefully we keep in touch and we can speak again in the future.

WesGuest24:14

Well, I'm planning on it. My wife and I are planning a trip to Scotland, and can we make this more difficult for you, scotland? And then we want to go to Cornwall In the same day. Well, not in the same day, no, and I'll give you more details about what we're thinking. But thank you both very much. It's been a pleasure, and I hope we end up in the same continent sometime, because I owe you a pint or two.

TracyHost24:41

Thanks again to Wes for agreeing to come onto the podcast this week. We look forward to chatting to you and your wife for a night in the re-consult next year, Wes. So find the show notes for this episode at [UKTravelPlanning.com/episode 75](http://UKTravelPlanning.com/episode%2075). But that just leaves myself and Doug to say for this week happy UK Travel Planning.