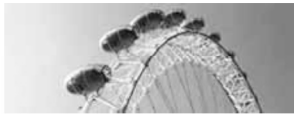




## The Roaming Pen... Eye spy London

**It is said that travel broadens the mind, but does it ever change it? Maybe not but let's take our, usually jaundiced view of London. Overpriced, noisy, dirty, crowded with tourists and basically not somewhere you really want to spend time unless you have too.**

All these views are quite common and some that I share, but recently we had a young, 13 year old, nephew to stay with us for a few days. How do you entertain a teenager these days, a question that I asked many friends, "you can't" was the usual answer, teenagers come with the default setting of being bored and stubbornly morose. After we had exhausted all the possibilities of Brighton Pier, a day in London seemed like a good plan. He had been there before and regarded the prospect with world weary sighs but, failing anything else, went along with our plans. He liked travelling on the tube he said; little did he know that tube travel was not on the agenda. Arriving at Victoria Station, we walked, yes walked, down Victoria Street pointing out the interesting sites, Westminster Cathedral (boring) Westminster Abbey (ditto) the Houses of Parliament (yawn) and then over Westminster Bridge to the London Eye (well yes that was relatively interesting) and we're going on it, OK. The Eye is the biggest tourist attraction in London which makes it the biggest in the country. It gets in the region of 3.5 million visitors a year so the horrendous queues at peak times are no surprise. We booked in advance and were able to fast track and only had about a 15 minute wait. Our nephew was actually interested and almost excited. The 'flight' takes 30 minutes and costs £17.00 for adults and £8.50 for under 15's when booked online. After our 'flight' we went on the 'Eye Cruise' a perfectly pleasant cruise down as far as Tower Bridge and back, great for tourists and there were a lot. The young tourist we were escorting did actually doze off during the cruise, looking at some of the most famous sites in the World was just a little tiring. The South Bank of the Thames has undergone a total makeover over the past few years and is now quite a revelation. The Riverside Walk is one of the most pleasant walks you can have in the Capital. There are usually more street entertainers than you can



wish for. Wander past the National Theatre, the Hayward Gallery, The British Film Institute, The Imax Cinema, Royal Festival Hall, Hayward Gallery and on to the Oxo Tower. A little known fact is that you can take the free lift up to the top of the Oxo Tower, you don't have to go to the restaurant but just walk past the smiling staff and go to the public terrace and it's a great view. Our teenager hadn't noticed that we were still walking and so, having refuelled at one of the dozens of decent places to eat, we pressed on to what is, in my opinion the star of the South Bank, Tate Modern. Much to our amazement he was actually wowed by the building and the current exhibition in the Turbine Hall of Chinese artist Ai Weiwei's installation of 100 million porcelain sunflower seeds. We walked all the way up to the terrace on level seven for another fantastic view of the City skyline with St. Paul's centre stage. It's free to visit any of the Tate Galleries, so this is a real bargain. Still walking we crossed the famous Millennium Bridge to St Paul's and then walked down Ludgate Hill and up Fleet

Street to Aldwych and on to Covent Garden. By now we had been walking for almost four hours, apart from the 40 minute river cruise, and so we were all just a little tired. So we took a rest in one of London's hidden treasures, the lovely garden of St Paul's Covent Garden, known as the actor's church. This is a tiny oasis of calm right in the middle of one of London's busiest tourist sites. On to the British Museum and even more interest was shown by our hitherto bored teenager. Can this be true, we had promised dinner in Chinatown but he seemed reluctant to leave the Samurai exhibit. Dinner was consumed and then we took a gentle stroll through Soho, Piccadilly Circus and across St James's Park with a nod at Buckingham Palace and back to Victoria. The whole day went by without once taking any public transport. We had shown him some of London and despite his teenage angst he had thoroughly enjoyed himself. Although he did not admit it until he returned to his rural home when he announced that "it was brilliant" he had had the best time, ever. Mission accomplished.

*Take it easy and enjoy yourself.*

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## Down the Rabbit Hole

**You have twenty-four hours left to live. The precious moments are already ticking away; the sand is falling through the fingers. You had better choose wisely: how will you spend your last day?**

I was asked the same question recently and thinking about it floored me. Suddenly, nothing seemed important, least of all money or possessions. All I wanted to do was write some letters, maybe make some calls, and then just sit and... well, exist. Experience each last instant fully and consciously. I didn't die. Perhaps I won't until I am 101 years old, perhaps I'll be gone before this article is published. Like the rest of you, I don't really know. In the absence of knowing, death seems too long away to really bother myself about and things like broken boilers, post-Christmas love-handles and my future career plans raise their worrisome heads and start to demand my attention, pretending they are important. They are not. Think about it: what matters in your life? Because, and sorry to be morbid about this, your clog-popping day is approaching, even if it is years, rather than hours away. I take that back: I'm not sorry about being morbid, because this isn't intended to depress you; it is intended to make you think about how precious your life is. According to Eckhart

Tolle, "Time isn't precious at all, because it is an illusion. What you perceive as precious is not time but the one point that is out of time: the Now. That is precious indeed. The more you are focused on time—past and future—the more you miss the Now, the most precious thing there is." That summarises the realisation I had when I imagined having only one day left. The only thing I had with any value was the moment I was experiencing. Tolle's bestselling book, The Power of Now, had never appealed to me because I thought the title was dreadful. It conjured up an image of a vague, self-help money-spinner, re-hashing the principles of Buddhism but only aiming to inflate the writer's bank balance. The image I conjured up was wrong – I recommend it, whole-heartedly. We come into the world with nothing, we leave with nothing, but we don't half accumulate a lot of junk in between. By living in the present moment, none of it matters. There's no need to argue, no need to worry, no need to be upset about a lost big-eared hat. Just existing is enough. Just being. So, to be or not to be? That is the question – what's your answer?

**Continue down the rabbit hole at**  
[www.joshuafranch.info](http://www.joshuafranch.info)



## The stars are out - March 2011

### PISCES: The Fish (20 Feb – 20 Mar)

This has been an unsettled few weeks and you will have had to remain calm when you really didn't feel like it! By now pieces will be falling into place and you will be starting to see things more clearly. The sun will be shining in your life more and more. Thursday bring good news.

### ARIES: The Ram (21 Mar – 20 April)

Choices are high on your agenda this month and you will need to take the lead if anything is to get done. Not everyone will be happy but then when are they ever? Trust your instincts and yourself. Make the most of your appearance. Someone whose name begins with D could be of great influence soon.

### TAURUS: The Bull (21 April – 21 May)

It can be taking longer than usual for you to get the message about something pretty significant and you may be feeling that things are moving too fast. Stick with it, all will become clear in time and you will benefit. Single Taureans could find their status changing this month!

### GEMINI: The Twins (22 May – 21 June)

You may be torn Gemini between sticking to what you know you should be doing and the desire to get away from it all. Go, if you can or at least begin making plans to go – and make it somewhere adventurous! Above all lighten up! Try to see the funny side a bit more. Midweek is the time for you to take gambles, not the weekend.

### CANCER: The Crab (22 June – 22 July)

The full moon on the 19th will light up your understanding of a situation that has been hard to see. A relationship that has been challenging you will become clearer but don't be tempted to dwell on the where and the why. If jealousy is getting you down, lift your spirits with a spot of retail therapy – you deserve it!

### LEO: The Lion (23 July – 23 Aug)

Is that loved one driving you crazy with never-ending crises? Your generous nature will want to help but they really must sort themselves out. Try to stay detached and focus on your own life. Someone with the initial L will be part of you having a lot of fun.

### VIRGO: The Virgin (24 Aug – 23 Sept)

You have been feeling a bit restless and put upon lately haven't you? Well Virgo you are entering a most enjoyable phase and now is the time to accept invitations. Cultural events will excite your creativity and imagination so search them out this month. Be alert to an exciting opportunity after the weekend.

### LIBRA: The Scales (24 Sept – 23 Oct)

Domestic issues will have been at the forefront for far too long; if you haven't made that change, why not? A new approach is what is needed now and this will open up a world of new experiences for you. A Friday will bring a chance encounter with someone who may become very special in your life. Get out there so they can meet you!

### SCORPIO: The Scorpion (24 Oct 23 Nov)

Oh Scorpio! Don't you wish that relationships could be simple for once? Well good news, you are entering a phase where such relationships can become much smoother. Not without the application of a little work of course and possibly some sacrifice but it will be SO worth it! The letter J will have significance.

### SAGITTARIUS: The Archer (24 Nov – 21 Dec)

Someone with the letter T in their name will surprise you with support for an endeavour you have been planning. Talk to people, their responses will please you. Resist the urge to go it alone though, partnership is the way to go! Wait until the end of the week for any important decisions.

### CAPRICORN: The Goat (22 Dec – 20 Jan)

The spring has sprung Capricorn and you will be feeling full of it! You have been through some trying times of late and this new period of romantic opportunity will lift your spirits. Get out and meet life head-on! Saturdays will prove especially lucky.

### AQUARIUS: The Water-Bearer (21 Jan – 19 Feb)

My Aquarius, haven't you been on top of things lately! Your run of being right could make you seem over-confident to others. Make any case you need to succinctly and then just stand back and let others mull over your words; they will get it! The letters N & L will have significance for you.

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