

Travel report by Benjamin Bender

Manchester was a hell of a trip. I wanted to go there since I was old enough to differentiate between good and commercialized music. This was, in any case, the trigger. Actually I had been to England two years earlier. Looking forward to exploring Manchester's cultural heritage, I was pretty excited, but my 25 kg backpack caused a herniated disk. I had to go back to Germany for a check-up. The last place I had stayed was Blackpool, so at least I knew this very city before we went there on one of our day trips. Nevertheless, when we arrived in Salford I was motivated enough to catch up all the things I hadn't had the chance to do when I backpacked. Referring to my expectations I luckily wasn't gutted, although my first impression of the student village was that it was creepy. The view from the 8th floor made sure that Manchester's still characterized by industrialization and its associated working class. Well, after we went for our first shopping trip we discovered that people all over the world can be the same. Some are nice and gentle whereas others are rude and ignorant.

The next day we went to Blackpool and experienced that a confrontation with working class people causes trouble, unless you're clever enough to tell those guys that your profession is something that can be related to hard and exhausting work. Additionally, don't forget to tell them that you're low-paid! So, after we made ourselves familiar with the locals we decided to spend our money on the most crackbrained machine in the universe: a plush toy crane. Although we already spent about twenty pounds on the same machine we stayed the course. Then fortunately, Mario was able to grab a character from an animated movie of which I still don't even know the name. After this attritional day we allowed ourselves to take some deep breaths of the resurrecting air at the beach.

On the third day of our excursion we explored the inner city of Manchester, especially Piccadilly Gardens and Northern Quarter where we were amazed by several graffiti and street art artists. It reminded me of the bohemian side of Paris. I relived the mentality of absolute collectivization when it comes to mutual understanding among all the people interacting there. The next day we had our coach tour to Wales. We also went to the Albion Ale House, which has been voted Wales' of pub of the year. Further it was interesting to witness that all the people seemed so carefree. Altogether a really successful trip!

Two days later we had our trip to Castleton. To me Peak District was the best place we've been so far. It felt just good being detached from all the trouble you actually do not have. This is what I realized when we walked along the scenic houses which almost gave me the impression that we skipped through time. I was just wondering why I noticed so many guide dogs! Even in the restaurant we went to there was a dispenser box for guide dogs. Afterwards it made more sense to me, because I'd seen blind people indeed, but why would blindness be so common in this very area? Or was it because the air was so good and blind people moved there deliberately? The boat tour on the next day was also interesting, although most of us wouldn't pay attention to the guy who tried to give us some knowledge relating to various buildings along the river. Actually we just enjoyed our snacks and swapped ideas on the last days to come.

The eighth day of our excursion was definitely the highlight for me! Referring to our task of discovering Manchester's musical heritage we decided to visit some places which were of extreme importance for the topic. We got up very early in the morning because we knew that time would run out regarding the fact that we managed to get tickets for the Champions League match between Manchester United and Bayer Leverkusen in the evening. Our first destination was Burnage, a little suburb of Manchester, where we wanted to visit a record store called Sifters. The Gallagher brothers used to buy their records there when they were our age and not as popular as they would become. Subsequently we took the train to Macclesfield, which is approximately 20 km away from Manchester. Ian Curtis, leader of the band Joy Division, was raised in this little town. I was totally dignified when I made it to his flat where he used to live. The current owner had removed the house number so that tourists would have problems to find it. Actually that wasn't anywhere nearly as difficult as finding his tombstone at Macclesfield's graveyard. Most of the tombstones are pretty small and all strung together next to the footways. They appeared to be the pavement. But after half an hour we found his

grave. Not least, because it was “decorated” with various souvenirs like band-shirts or cigarette packages from previous visitors. As I already mentioned we finished the day by allowing ourselves the Champions League match at Old Trafford.

The last two days we embarked on our return journey. We all were zonked! I think this is why we weren't as focused as we should have been when we stayed in Haworth. When we reached Hull and later went on deck we celebrated our last evening together. The trip was really great, but I was also looking forward to touching the ground of European mainland again!