

# Movement builds on London's past



**Rick Steves**

While London sits upon an ancient Roman foundation (Londinium), today's city was shaped in a powerful way by England's Industrial Revolution.

In 1800, London had about a million people. By 1900, its population had quadrupled to over 4 million, as people came from the countryside into the big city for the promise of a good job and a better life. "The best of times and the worst of times," this was the London of Charles Dickens and his "A Tale of Two Cities."

Today, London has become a leader in "regeneration" — reusing buildings and spaces from this period to appeal to modern lifestyles, incorporating the city's rich and rusty industrial heritage as it builds for the future. Seeing these sites is to see some of the best examples of today's London.

London's Docklands is a great example of regeneration. In the 19th century, the Docklands was the world's busiest shipping port. Abandoned with the advent of container shipping, it became an industrial wasteland — but today, it's a busy zone of skyscrapers, where workers enjoy good public transit and plenty of green spaces for relaxing.

Just up the River Thames, this trend continues at the Battersea Power Station. In the early 20th century, this brick beast produced one-fifth of the city's energy needs by burning coal — turning lungs black and helping London earn its nickname, "The Big Smoke." The site was decommissioned in 1983 and stood abandoned for decades. Today, its four



Battersea Power Station is one of London's many examples of structures that have been regenerated to appeal to modern lifestyles. **RICK STEVES' EUROPE**

iconic stacks still stand tall, but no longer billow smoke. Instead, the site has been smartly converted into a sleek up-market shopping mall, with modern condos and park-like landscaping stretching down to the Thames. Its piers, which once received coal shipments, now receive sightseeing boats.

Speaking of boats: Regent's Canal is another prime regeneration site. Built around 1820, it helped float the first waves of England's Industrial Revolution. The early 1800s was all about coal, potatoes, and ceramics, and the canal was part of an extensive network that helped make business boom, connecting England's industrial heartland (like Birmingham) in the north, and the world's biggest port (the Docklands). Canals remained

key to industrialization until the advent of steam trains drained them of their importance.

Today, while trains still thrive, industrial canals are antiquated. Their barges and tow paths are not used for hauling coal or grain, but for recreation. Regent's Canal is lined with idyllic greenbelts filled with picnickers and joggers — and its waterways are filled with former cargo boats that are now houseboats, perfect for an unconventional lifestyle or hosting a lazy vacation.

And all around, the post-industrial conversion is in high gear as eye-catching condos and apartment towers come with an echo of what, until recently, was that rusty wasteland. Straddling Regent's Canal is Coal Drops Yard and Granary Square,

where canal boats once loaded up with coal to help power both trains and the Industrial Age. Until recently, this was an area littered with broken glass, drug addicts, and prostitutes. But a 1960s-era visitor wouldn't recognize the place today, which is a clean, thriving commercial center and shopping complex built upon the foundation of its Industrial Age footprint.

The adjacent St. Pancras Train Station is a reminder that transportation infrastructure has always been a foundation of prosperity. Thanks to an expensive project, now recognized as a great investment, it's been transformed from sooty to sleek. The slick "Eurostar" terminal, with bullet train service under the English Channel Tunnel ("Chunnel"), connects Londoners

and Parisians in just over two hours. And with its dramatic canopy of iron and glass, the station stands like a palace remembering the Industrial Age.

Beneath the canopy stands The Meeting Place (aka "the Lovers"), a 30-foot-tall bronze statue that celebrates how trains have long brought people together — and, most recently, how the Eurostar connects England and France. Inaugurated by Queen Elizabeth II in 2007, with a dramatic frieze at its base evoking the drama, history, and romance of train travel, it's a centerpiece of this refurbished station.

You could build an entire visit to London around these physical examples of regeneration. The hulking Bankside Power Station closed in 1981 and now,

after reopening in 2000, is filled with the crackling energy of the Tate Modern Art Gallery. Camden Town, with its canal, old bricks, and venerable market, mixes old and new in an inspiring way. Plush bank buildings, once abandoned, now host vibrant pubs all over the old center. And, of course, the Battersea Power Station, Coal Drops Yard, and St. Pancras Station are primed and ready for you to contribute to their new economy.

*Rick Steves writes European guidebooks, hosts travel shows on public TV and radio, and organizes European tours. This column revisits some of Rick's favorite places over the past two decades. Visit his website at [ricksteves.com](http://ricksteves.com), email him at [rick@ricksteves.com](mailto:rick@ricksteves.com) or follow his blog on Facebook.*

## CELEBRITY TRAVEL

# Russia on Sexton's travel wish list

By **Jae-Ha Kim**  
Tribune Content Agency

Charlie Sexton started playing the guitar when he was 4 years old. Family friend Stevie Ray Vaughan babysat him, introducing him to Jimi Hendrix's music. By 11, Sexton was performing with Vaughan's brother, Jimmie. Two years later, Joe Ely picked him to play lead guitar. At 15, he toured with the Clash. And at 16, he moved by himself from Austin to LA to record his debut album, "Pictures for Pleasure." Before Sexton reached 20, he was sharing the stage with David Bowie and recording with artists like Keith Richards and Bob Dylan.

"When you put it that way, I guess it's kind of incredible that I've been doing this for more than four decades," the singer-guitarist-songwriter-producer said, chuckling. "It has been such an incredible privilege."

This interview with Sexton has been edited for clarity and length.

**Q: Does the music you hear in other countries inspire your own songs?**

**A:** Sometimes. When you travel, you bring back what you've heard and you also take with you what you know. There's this amazing Chinese instrument (saxian) with a long neck and a little snakeskin body. It's a three-string instrument and I'm obsessed with it. I've heard it being played on the street in various parts of the world, and it has the most beautiful, haunting sound.



Charlie Sexton has been touring since he was a teenager, and he wouldn't have it any other way. **MOLLY LEARY**

**Q: Where haven't you performed yet?**

**A:** I haven't played Russia. I'd like to get there some day, though that's not really on the books at the moment. I've never been anywhere in Africa. I really love some of the music that comes out of (there). Never played in Thailand. I spent some time in South Korea, though. I was in Bob's (Dylan) band on that tour.

**Q: Did you enjoy the food?**

**A:** Yes! I love spicy food and Korean barbecue. I can't eat before a show, especially when everyone's having these massive dinners. So I always look for somewhere to eat afterwards, which can be tricky in Japan unless you're in Tokyo. But the thing that's open no matter where you are is Korean barbecue. This has happened literally all over the world. (Laughs) I'm kind of a thin person, so everyone is always surprised when they see me devour everything on the table. And I just absolutely love it.

**Q: Where are some of your favorite places?**

**A:** I spent a long time in Australia, because I had some friends that I worked with. I love Australia. When most people were in high school, I spent a lot of time in Japan doing press and shows. So I have an affinity for Japan, too. And in the U.S., I like touring throughout the West. The landscape is really beautiful. I always feel a bit out

of sorts on the East Coast. I really like Philly a lot and I like being in New York for a bit. But I need to see the sky.

**Q: What is your most memorable vacation?**

**A:** It's funny, because vacations are such an oddity for me, because they're not something that ever really happened when I was a kid, right? But (my girlfriend) Molly and I took a holiday in France a couple years ago for our anniversary. We went to Provence and Paris, saw friends, had amazing meals. ... That was a great trip.

**Q: How long did you live in LA before moving back to Austin?**

**A:** Five years. I moved there to make a record and then didn't leave for a while. But when I moved back to Austin, suddenly I had an extra five hours every day, because it didn't take two hours to get to the grocery store. (Laughs)

**Q: What do you accidentally leave behind when you're touring?**

**A:** I'm pretty methodical about luggage and don't unpack certain parts of the suitcase. My passport always stays in the exact same pocket. My pens are here, my aspirin is over there. But the main thing I always lose are chargers. I've also lost some great scarves, actually.

For more from the reporter, visit [www.jaehakim.com](http://www.jaehakim.com).

## TRAVEL TROUBLESHOOTER

# Family forced to buy tickets twice after FlightHub error

By **Christopher Elliott** | King Features Syndicate

I booked a flight from Buenos Aires to Puerto Iguazu, Argentina, for my family. I bought the tickets on Flybondi, an Argentine low-fare airline, through FlightHub. Despite carefully entering our flight details, the airline said that our passport numbers were random characters. We had to buy new tickets for \$1,114 on Flybondi.

FlightHub blamed the airline, but Flybondi confirmed that FlightHub entered fake passport data. FlightHub has refused to give us a refund, claiming that the tickets are nonrefundable.

How can I get FlightHub to take responsibility for this costly error?

—Emily Day, Brookline, Massachusetts

**A:** FlightHub should have ensured that its system accurately transmitted your passport information to Flybondi. Under the United States Department of Transportation guidelines, ticket agents must provide complete and correct booking details. FlightHub's failure to do so — and its use of placeholder passport numbers — breached this responsibility.

Could you have avoided this? Possibly. If you had checked your Flybondi reservations online, you might have seen the gibberish passport information sooner. You tried to do this, but the airline advised you to check in at the gate.

Keeping a thorough paper trail, as you did, was critical. You reached out to FlightHub's customer service via chat and spoke to a representative once you were in Puerto Iguazu. He opened a case, eventually acknowledged that this was not your fault, and agreed to resolve the problem for your return flight.

You emailed FlightHub photos of your passports. Unfortunately, FlightHub

couldn't modify your flight records in time for your return flight, but you were able to resolve the discrepancy directly with Flybondi for your return flight. So, there was no need to buy a second ticket to get back to Buenos Aires.

After FlightHub admitted that it screwed up, it still wouldn't refund your tickets, arguing that they were nonrefundable. Of course, they were nonrefundable, but you couldn't use them because of FlightHub's booking error.

All it would have taken to get you a refund was for someone at FlightHub to review your paper trail. If I had to guess, I'd say FlightHub is processing its customer service cases using artificial intelligence, which might have missed this. But there's no question about it; this was obviously a FlightHub mistake.

You might have been able to bypass this nonsense. By escalating your case to FlightHub's executives using the executive contacts on my consumer advocacy site, [Elliott.org](http://Elliott.org), you might have gotten a quick resolution.

You say you tried to do so, but no one responded. I contacted FlightHub on your behalf.

"Upon reviewing the situation, we identified that the issue stemmed from a technical error on our end," a representative told me. "The customer contacted us the day before their return flight to request a correction to their passport information. We promptly submitted the request to the airline, but the airline was able to assist the customer directly before they responded to us."

FlightHub issued a full refund of your original flights, plus a \$100 voucher as a goodwill gesture. If there's a lesson here, it's never to assume that your third-party booking site got it right. Always check your flight directly with the airline well in advance of your flight.

*Christopher Elliott is the chief advocacy officer of Elliott Advocacy, a nonprofit organization that helps consumers resolve their problems. Contact him at [elliott.org/help](http://elliott.org/help) or [chris@elliott.org](mailto:chris@elliott.org).*