

As an avid debater and public speaker, most topics are easy for me to write about as I can usually rely on my trusted template of how to structure a speech into good use and be done with it. However, I have written and rewritten this paper 4 times over the past week and a half and ultimately come to the conclusion that no template will be able to do justice to what I saw and experienced in Cambridge. Instead, I am going to write this from the heart and hope that I was able to relay my experiences properly. So, my tryst with England begins where most stories do, at 4 in the morning on a plane working on an assignment while wearing a mask to protect myself from a global pandemic.

Humour aside, the fate of this trip was looking rather bleak at one point due to the Coronavirus and having already missed out on it last year, not until was I past the immigration desk with a Rocky Road milkshake in my hand from the Heathrow airport café in my hand did I actually believe this trip was actually going to happen. It was only once we went on a walk through the streets of Cambridge and I came across an old school British telephone booth that I finally realised I was in Cambridge, and that moment brought with itself an immense sense of fulfilment I hadn't felt in a long time.



After an enchanting tour through the town, which involved us going to Corpus Christi college (the oldest college in Cambridge) and coming across a rather interesting clock to say the least, we were invited for the High Table dinner at Pembroke College in the evening by some friends of St. John's, which was a delightful event; and as I sat at the Eagle Pub with a pint in my hand later that night, I had a strange feeling that one only gets when they sit at some place with incredible history and as I watched a happy couple sit and enjoy their night at the very table where Crick and Watson had come up with the idea of the double-helix DNA, everything seemed alright with the world for a few fleeting moments.



The sheer amount of history of the “two best colleges” of Cambridge (Reverend Chong's words, not mine) in Gonville&Caius and Trinity was not lost upon even a layman like myself, so when we had two esteemed professors of the former in Professor Liang and Professor Scherpe speak to us the next day telling us about their lives at Cambridge and their struggles to get there made me question a few decisions I had made previously and forced me to ask myself some really difficult questions, forcing myself to do some long overdue introspection as I paced back and forth in the lawn as we prepared to take their leave.

And then, the punting.

Having heard a lot about this from my friends, I had large expectations from the punt down River Cam and the experience more than lived up to the hype. With the breeze on my face alongside a grin I couldn't seem to shake (that was mostly down to our hilarious punter Ben) I was enthralled and amazed by all that Cambridge had to offer and its many tales which over the years had turned into folklore and I thought about Ben's many anecdotes, thinking that the men and women in these buildings used to be some fresh-eyed undergraduates and have, in one way or another, established a legacy no one can deny them. Now, I cannot fully relay the experience for the reader here, but I hope these pictures can help you get some idea.









We also visited Churchill College for a High Table dinner, which provided a refreshing change of pace with its traditions (or lack thereof) and brilliant wine.



The most impressive College by far however, was Trinity College. Visiting a place as drenched in tradition as Trinity College is rare as there are few places like it. Its architecture tells the stories of kings, scholars and the men of God at the same time. And as an Indian that seeks to make his name worldwide, perhaps one of the proudest feelings I ever had as an Indian was at the Trinity College High Table looking across the Dining Hall at the portrait of Amartya Sen and I excitedly told everyone around me who the great man in the portrait was, bewildering a fair few bystanders. One of my favourite moments was also a conversation with Isaac, an American PhD student that was pursuing his doctorate in Computer Analytics who had been invited by Rev. John, the chaplain of Trinity College. Isaac and I spoke of growing up in working class families and choosing to pursue Computer Science along with his many trysts with the Cambridge 'evening'-life as in his words, "Nightlife doesn't exist in this town."

Trinity College also provided a rather stark reality check in the form of its evensong, as its choir's performance put most of my life's work in music right down to shame. An hour of spine-tingling music and many goosebumps later, I realised that good music really was an out-of-body experience and a skill unlike any other.



While our time at Oxford was brief, it was where I did most of my thinking. As I stood atop the University Church at Oxford looking down at the town, I thought of a lot of things. The first thing that came into my mind was how institutions such as Cambridge and Oxford have thrived over the centuries and while I couldn't think of a proper enough answer, I could primarily narrow it down to three factors: their excellence, their resilience and their willingness to adapt.





After an eventful dinner the next day at Cambridge as I sat waiting at Heathrow waiting for boarding to begin for the flight back home, Xu Zhimo's poem came into my mind and I realised that I had come to and left Cambridge without a trace just as he had. However, its trace on me would be one that will last for a lifetime.

