

"O, to be in England now that April's there." Poet Robert Browning wrote it a century or more ago, and it's still a great idea for the springtime senior traveler. Since our retirement, we've made many pilgrimages to the British Isles. We've done in different ways: joined tour groups, roamed alone and spent two weeks doing bed and breakfast and sightseeing treks in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland. Even though we were already in our 70s, our best springtime adventure in Great Britain was when we went everywhere with just backpacks and no schedule.



A favorite memory is riding local buses through the Irish countryside in late April, and experiencing the brilliant green trees and pastures Irish poets sing about. When we walked along country roads, we sometimes paused to watch cute newborn lambs cavorting in the April mists.

Some lambs had big red dye spots on their flanks, and we asked a local man what that meant. He said in his charming Irish brogue, "You really don't want to know." We found out later what the red marks meant at the restaurants and bed and breakfast inns. The main course was often fresh spring lamb.

London, of course, is a place of never-ending sights, sounds and history. American composer George M. Cohan, wrote "You're A Grand Old Flag" and other patriotic songs. After he toured London, he said "If I had been born in England, I would've waved myself to death." We've visited Westminster Abbey, the Houses of Parliament, the Tower of London, Trafalgar Square, Piccadilly Circus, the British Museum and many historic buildings, castles and other sights.

We've had lunch in a charming tearoom built into the catacombs below St. Martin in the Fields church, munched fish and chips in Hyde Park and joined families for holiday dinners in Wales and Ireland.

London's theater district rivals New York's in both quality and quantity, and the prices were considerably lower, at least when we were there and the dollar still had some value. England also has a bad rap reputation for having awful restaurants when compared to France and Italy. It just ain't so. In fact, there are many excellent French and Italian restaurants in England, along with Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Russian and even some good ole American McDonalds.

If you're planning your spring vacation now, check in on the great variety of offerings in the British Isles at your travel agency and/or on the internet. Don't forget to pack some warm

clothes. Despite what poet Browning wrote, April in England is great, if you like walking in chilly London fog or rain.