I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o’er vales and hills
When all at once, I saw a cloud
A host of golden daffodils
Besides the lake, beneath the trees
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze...

– William Wordsworth
Oh, treat the last three lines as just poetic exaggeration! I did wander lonely as a cloud through Wordsworth country, but there were no daffodils. By the time I visited, they had blossomed and already wilted, unseen, unsung, and unappreciated by me! But there were other flowers, buds, shoots, tendrils, and leaves; all sprouting with such joy, reaffirming my faith in the cycle of life that I almost forgot the dancing daffodils. It is as though Mother Nature was celebrating her wedding, so profuse was her ornamentation, and so felicitous the setting.

The Lake District

Otherwise, England’s Lake District is not unlike some of our own hill stations. There are gentle hillocks and rolling meadows, all velvety and carpeted with soft grass. The terrain is undulating, with shimmering lakes, serene cottages, and a profusion of lambent, green foliage that fills your eyes and senses. The setting is such that it will bring out the poet in the most boorish of beholders!

Taking the Virgin train

Long years ago I had spent three precious years of my youth in England, but I never did manage to visit Wordsworth country and the longing to do so had never died. So, recently, when I got an opportunity to visit Wilton Park, an imposing castle with a formidable intellectual reputation situated on the outskirts of London, I decided to chug across to Lake District. Taking a Virgin train to Windermere is not the best way to reach Lake District; the train is crowded, cramped and noisy. But it, at least, chugs towards a land that is tranquil, beautiful, and serene! Besides, it runs on one of the oldest railway lines in England, having been built in 1847. As the train enters Cumbria, the scenery gets better. Boats moored along narrow water channels bob gently while...
creeper-draped cottages studded with roses perch placidly on the banks, making the setting picture perfect.

**Bowness-on-Windermere**

From Windermere station, my boutique hotel housed in a charming Victorian mansion is just a step away. Windermere and Bowness are actually two adjacent villages which now seem to have spliced into one continuum, bearing the name Bowness-on-Windermere. There is just one high street and the entire village clings to this artery. All the shops that line the street are boutiques that hawk charmingly worthless but nevertheless endearing little objets d’art. There are numerous teashops and bakeries; mountaineering stores, and little shops selling all things Peter Rabbit. Author Beatrix Potter had drawn inspiration for her famous children’s book from her summer holidays in the Lake District. It is perfect for a leisurely stroll along the Promenade of the picturesque Lake Windermere or a picnic in all its various charming spots. You can also visit the nearby Victorian estates, many of which are converted into hotels, take an afternoon tea, or have lunch at a historic pub. Windermere is a ribbon lake that has more length than depth, or width. It is supposed to be a glacial lake, filled with snow melt and held by moraine (accumulation of unconsolidated glacial debris such as soil and rock). Hugging the lake are several quaint English villages and as many as 18 islands are perched right in the middle of the lake. Mercifully, one can travel to all these villages and islands by boat. You can disembark anywhere you like, amble through quaint and cobbled village streets and catch the boat again when you’re done, so as to visit the next village. They bear such nostalgic names that leap out of your childhood English text books. I visited Birch Holme, Snake Holme, Hawes Holme, Kendal, Ambleside, and Westmorland.

**Beatrix Potter and Peter Rabbit**

Lake District is not only about Wordsworth, in fact, it is a lot more about Beatrix Potter these days. The Japanese are particularly fond of Potter whose books are used to teach English to Japanese kids. Beatrix Potter is such a nostalgic association for those of us who as children were enormously entertained by the antics of Peter Rabbit. Beatrix was also an artist, bringing alive in vivid water colours all the animals in our picture books – the animals that she grew up with in a sprawling farm house in Ambleside.
She was a conservationist, sheep farmer, naturalist, illustrator, and a natural scientist, all rolled into one, and an inspiration for many generations of youngsters growing up in rural England. In fact, if Lake District has withstood the onslaught of urbanisation and retained its quaintness and native charm, the credit goes largely to Mrs Beatrix who strove to keep the landscape unscarred. All the royalties that she earned from her phenomenally successful books she used to buy up large tracts of land so that no one would set up smoking chimneys and factories that dot the rest of the English landscape.

Being one with nature

When in Windermere, just walk. Or even better, follow your heart, bury your bare feet in the cool grass, let the dew caress your face, roll with abandon in the meadows, trudge up the gentle incline of the hills to catch a breath-taking view of the glacial lake. Or just sprawl on the grass and watch the birds flying past in regimental formation. While walking admire the quaintness of the cobbled streets, or sit and watch a village county football match. Or just shop for charming curios. The village church bells began to peal with such solemnity that I was woken from my reverie.

The Bard of the County

Of course, you can’t visit Lake District without paying your respects to the bard of the county. The rose-draped Dove Cottage in which he grew up and chased his beloved sister Dorothy across the meadows is now a much-visited museum maintained by the National Trust of UK. There is a steady stream of pilgrims queuing up to glimpse the premises of the great poet. William and Dorothy were the second and third of five children of Anne and John Wordsworth. It was a crowded family with five servants all busy with daily chores and a sprawling garden which must have inspired young William to pen all those haunting lines which continue to delight and enrich the lives of millions of his admirers. Two plaques in the adjacent St Oswald’s courtyard announce to the world the exact spot where Wordsworth and his wife Mary Hutchinson are interred. Also buried in the same spot are the couple’s three children, Dorothy’s sister, and a friend.

I wrap up my visit to Lake District with a mint cake at Kendal. Perhaps, I will come again when the daffodils blossom and dance beneath the trees.

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