

# Threading the Needle

Text and photo by Christic Moral

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As winter settles in, the days grow shorter, and a grey expanse of clouds dominates the sky. Though the days may be drab and a world away from sunnier, more comfortable times, their weight is lightened by the holiday season, with long evenings being brightened by Christmas lights and decorations across the country. With much to look forward to between the holidays and the new year ahead, winter serves as a time for growth in new ways, with unique challenges. Until the holidays arrive, we find new ways to break the humdrum routine that forms from escaping the cold, from finding new hobbies to spending time with loved ones.

Being in my second year of medical school, I have felt the excitement of experiencing my first winter pass. Last year was full of firsts. I saw snow fall for the first time, explored the Christmas markets around London and even stood around a brazier sipping on hot chocolate with friends. After all those firsts, I am left facing the realities of the changing weather, and venturing outside

in the cold no longer feels like the most appealing choice. I often walk back from my Friday hospital placements, which has become a sacred time for me to listen to music and ruminate about my past week. Of course, a 40-minute walk in thin trousers, which are barely saved by my thermals, is not quite so enticing when the weather is in the single digits, and the winds render umbrellas useless against the cold and piercing rain. Taking the bus feels much less ceremonious, but it certainly saves me from freezing. Going to the grocery store requires greater effort, and I am almost always lured to my cupboard instead, enticed to live a meal or two off of my quickly diminishing supplies of instant noodles. With such big changes to living, the weather of the day becomes more than just small talk. An hour of sunshine feels momentous enough for friends to make impromptu plans to enjoy it.

Resigning myself to being outside less has shown some benefits. With my usual routines now broken, my friends and I have found new ways to spend time together. Cooking together has been a great way to try new recipes, share laughs and learn about each other. My friend has convinced me to love peppercorns, which I usually avoid, and I have convinced him to start using frozen mixed berries, which I am sure is infinitely better than going for months without a single fruit. We also held a potluck at our flat with other members of the Singapore Medical Society of the United Kingdom (SMSUK) members from our batch, where we brought a variety of dishes that reminded



us of home. Besides that, I have also been playing music together with my friends at home. Though we usually book music rooms for practice, we have been opting to practise at home to escape the long travel times. This has certainly been a different experience, having to figure out quirky workarounds to get guitars and a borrowed electric drum set to play through a single portable speaker. When the speaker inevitably runs out of battery, we sit and talk while patiently waiting for it to recharge. Last year, winter was about braving the cold to spend time outside. This year, it has been about finding new ways to make the most of each moment.

SMSUK has also had its fair share of activities for members to stay connected, from watching *The Phantom of the Opera* at our annual Dinsical (dinner and musical), to having a trip together to Glasgow or even having fun at an escape room. In this edition of Letters from the UK, Ritvik shares his experience of navigating winter in his first year of school.

Text and photos by Ritvik Gupta

Ritvik is a first-year medical student studying at Imperial College London.



Winter during my first term of medical school was a unique experience. It took some time getting used to the early sunsets and chilly days. Rather than feeling dull over the days, I found it to be a very memorable and enjoyable time.

This term was full of new experiences, including meeting new people, exploring new places and slowly adapting to life in medical school in London while being away from home. Winter became a part of that backdrop. There were times when I took a step out and was met with a sense of regret, notably when the wind hit my

face at 60 km/h. Growing up in Singapore, where sunsets are consistently around 7 pm, evenings felt long and predictable. In London, it would be completely dark by 4 pm, which slowly became my new normal. While many hoped for later starts to their classes, a small part of me looked forward to days that began and ended early, simply to experience daylight on the commute home.

Like most medical students at Imperial College London, I stay in accommodation in North Acton. This means a daily commute of 30 to 40 minutes to campus at either South Kensington or Charing Cross. As bad as that might sound for university accommodations, it really was not. Sharing a packed tube with fellow Imperial students made the journey feel quicker and more familiar. The peaceful walks through Hyde Park to campus were a highlight, and something I genuinely looked forward to each day.

A huge defining factor of this term was the people around me. Time spent with new friends made the cold and darkness easier to ignore, as did long walks through London, spontaneous meals and day trips outside the city that broke the routine. Exploring new neighbourhoods, often bundled in layers of clothing, became a small adventure in itself. Food, however,

was a greater challenge. As someone who grew up eating spice with every meal, learning to settle for milder flavours took some adjustment, and it made me appreciate the comforts of home even more. Near the end of the term, I was introduced to the Scotch bonnet chilli, which thankfully helped, but it was never quite the same as back home.

There were quieter moments too. Evenings spent indoors, dealing with a faulty radiator, taught me the value of a thick duvet and the simple comfort of staying in bed just a little longer on dark winter mornings. Those slower days created space to pause, reflect and recharge amid the busyness of the first term, giving a welcome balance to the constant pace of lectures, new routines and social experiences.

Finishing my first term in university feels less defined by academics and more by adjustment and growth. The cold and gloomy days were something that subtly shaped the term and made it more memorable. Being back in Singapore for the winter break, however, has allowed me to find comfort in the warmth and light at home. While the break is coming to an unfortunate end, there is excitement in seeing what the second term has in store for me. ♦



Mini golf at Puttshack during Freshers' Fortnight



Dinner at a Thai restaurant near Hyde Park