

2020 - An Eye-Opening Reflection



Since it is January again, I suppose I am expected to write a review of last year, and, reflecting on last year, make some predictions (or at least suggestions) about the future.

The problem is that, like the ubiquitous BMW driver, I am not too sure I want to look in the rear-view mirror! ...and I am quite certain about my reluctance to 'indicate' how 2021 will work out.

I do have just a few observations, though.

Well since I mentioned BMW, until the end of 2019, the employee installing indicators and mirrors at the BMW factory must have considered his job totally soul-destroying, knowing that as each car left the factory, it would be the last time his mirrors and indicators would ever be used.



Last year, however, he probably felt quite smug, knowing that his work was considered essential by Regulation (EU) 2019/2144 of the European Parliament, which listed all automotive safety features required in Europe. Unlike millions around the world, this employee would be an essential worker, and still have his job in 2020.

Working from Home

Until 2020, 'working from home' was usually a sneaky day off to break up the week, or to ensure a long weekend, whilst avoiding the boss's reprimand for absenteeism.

As it turns out, I was completely wrong! 'Working from home' no longer means catching up on daytime reality TV, cups of tea, and a snooze on the sofa.

And on a serious note, I must say I am grateful to the staff of the Strategic Expat's supplier companies, who worked tirelessly from their own homes to ensure that queries were answered, problems were solved, and clients' issues were addressed and processed.

Worthless Passports

As a Brit, and like many Europeans and Americans, I never really thought too much about my ability to travel. I didn't, for example, consider the travails of other nationalities in arranging visas for foreign travel, even to countries for which I could just turn up with a passport and be admitted. 2020 certainly levelled-up the field in this respect! Or should I say 'levelled down'?



Regardless of the colour of my passport, I now realise my freedom to travel was a privilege many never had, and which has been taken away.

My new-found equality with other various passport-holders still feels like injustice, despite the very logical reasons for it.

With the number of new Covid vaccines now in distribution, let's all hope at least some travel restrictions will soon be lifted.

Antisocial is Good!

Remember the days when we were expected to go to the office party, visit the in-laws, go to the wedding of the distant cousin we haven't seen for years, and be introduced to all those people you didn't know, whilst being polite and dignified as if 'on display'?

While I am usually more than happy to go out for a beer or three with friends, those more formal occasions where everybody is 'on best behaviour' are not my thing. All that hugging and kissing the cheeks of distant female relatives is simply not me! I will never be 'the life and soul of the party'.

I enjoy being me - an unknown, and completely not-famous 'James May of Top Gear fame'. I now also realise that there are thousands of others like me. 2020 was the year we were allowed to be ourselves!

Be as antisocial as you want - it's now good to be like that! No mingling no 'drinks parties' where I can't drink, no banal polite conversation. What a year 2020 was. I am even held in very high regard at home for NOT wanting to visit the mother-in-law. It doesn't get better than that.

Experts, Experts Everywhere

Social media giant Twitter has quite a lot to answer for, essentially reducing meaningful conversation and debate to little more than shouting matches of less than 280 characters - Facebook and others are, in my view, of similar debateable value.

I suppose I should confess now, that I have never 'tweeted'. Although I am reminded by email that I have apparently signed up for an account, even the username and password are beyond me. I suppose I have a 'handle' but have no idea what it is.

Fortunately, my absence from Twitter is not a problem, as there are always plenty of articles to read elsewhere, and, just occasionally, Facebook comes to the rescue with its wealth of information.

I have noticed how many experts are available and eager to help, whatever your problem. In 2016, there were lots of British and EU trade experts, with deep knowledge of European politics, and economics. By early 2017, the experts were explaining all about the American political system, aberrant presidents, and trade wars. In mid 2018, they could explain North Korean ideology as Kim and Trump met in Singapore.



Amazingly, by early 2020, we had millions of specialists in infectious diseases...

Virologists, biochemical engineers, and even Presidents! - All au-fait with vaccines and immunology, and with enough time on their hands to discuss the issues of the day, a few, often sour, words at a time.

I can only assume that with all this expertise available, 2021 is looking much brighter.

Gold or an Alternative Commodity?

Many investment experts would suggest that commodities should form a small part of most investment portfolios, and gold is often touted as an asset of intrinsic value.

The metal itself, derivative contracts, or shares in gold miners are all possible asset choices. However, for the investor, it is important to remember that gold does not produce a dividend or interest, so the only way to profit is by selling to another investor, prepared to pay more.



2020 presented the opportunity for the toilet roll to come to the fore as the commodity of choice. Unlike gold, it offered several benefits as a portfolio holding.

Unlike gold, ownership of toilet rolls conferred not only increasing asset value, but street cred, and the envy of those who missed out at the shops...

(not to mention its traditional use, which presumably also increased exponentially, for some reason).

Given the huge volume of sales of toilet rolls, one might wonder if it's more traditional usefulness could put it into the 'industrial commodities' index? The humble bog roll increased exponentially in value, with supplies running out in supermarkets across Europe and America during March and April. Fights broke out amongst shoppers at Aldi (though Sainsbury denied any arguments in their stores), as ownership became a mania. It must have been a little like 1637, and the tulip bulb mania of Holland. (read about it [here](#))

I suspect that, like the tulip bulb investors of Holland, the bog-roll buyers of Morrisons and Walmart will see the value of their asset go down the aforementioned toilet as the Covid pandemic subsides!