

# Welcome to London

*One of the world's most visited cities, London has something for everyone: from history and culture to fine food and good times.*

## Time Travel

London is immersed in history, with more than its share of mind-blowing antiquity. London's buildings are eye-catching mile-stones in the city's unique and compelling biography, and a great many of them – the Tower of London, Westminster Abbey, Big Ben – are instantly familiar landmarks. There's more than enough innovation (the Shard, the London Eye, the planned Garden Bridge) to put a crackle in the air, but it never drowns out London's well-preserved, centuries-old narrative. Architectural grandeur rises all around you in the West End, ancient remains dot the City and charming pubs punctuate the banks of the Thames. Take your pick.

## Art & Culture

A tireless innovator of art and culture, London is a city of ideas and the imagination. Londoners have always been fiercely independent thinkers (and critics), but until not so long ago people were suspicious of anything they considered avant-garde. That's all in the past now, and the city's creative milieu is streaked with left-field attitude, from theatrical innovation to contemporary art, pioneering music, writing and design. Food in all its permutations has become almost an obsession in certain circles.

## Ethnic Diversity

This city is very multicultural, with a third of all Londoners foreign born, representing 270 different nationalities. What unites them and visitors alike is the English language, for this is both our tongue's birthplace and its epicentre. These cultures season the culinary aromas on London's streets, the often exotic clothing people wear and the music they listen to. London's diverse cultural dynamism makes it among the world's most international cities. And diversity reaches intrinsically British institutions too; the British and Victoria & Albert Museums have collections as varied as they are magnificent, while flavours at centuries-old Borough Market now run the full gourmet and cosmopolitan spectrum.

## A Tale of Two Cities

London is as much about wide-open spaces and leafy escapes as it is high-density, sight-packed exploration. Central London is where you will find the major museums, galleries and most iconic sights, but visit Hampstead Heath or the new Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park to escape the crowds and view the city's greener hues up close. Or venture even further out to Kew Gardens, Richmond or Hampton Court Palace for excellent panoramas of riverside London.



## Why I Love London

By Steve Fallon, Author

Like most Londoners, I revel in all our familiar landmarks – Big Ben, Tower Bridge, the murky Thames, the London Eye. I still thank the former government that made some of the greatest museums and art galleries in the world free to one and all. The choice of restaurants, bars and clubs is legion, and what's not to love about a city with more lush parkland than any other world capital? But the one thing that sets my adopted city apart from any other is its amazing tolerance. 'As long as you don't scare the horses, mate, you'll be all right here,' I was told when I arrived here more than 20 years ago. Guess what? It still hasn't happened.

**For more about our authors, see p448.**