

# Understand London

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Has ever-expanding London become the 'Capital of Europe'?

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London has been defined by waves of immigrants – from the Celts and Romans to 'New Europeans'.

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From Roman remains and medieval churches to ultra-modern skyscrapers, London is a head-spinning compendium of building styles.

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London is paved with poetry and prose – from Chaucer and Pepys to Dickens and TS Eliot.

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Few world cities come with music credentials as diverse, or as innovative, as London.

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London has served as the iconic backdrop to an array of films and boasts a thriving media.

# London Today

The 2012 Olympic legacy bequeathed a feel-good factor to London that just seems to go on and on. Tourism has increased by leaps and bounds in the past few years – aided and abetted not just by the Games but by one royal wedding and two royal births. But it's more than all that. London has reaffirmed itself over and over as a capital of new ideas, cultural dynamism and change.

## Best on Film

**Withnail & I** (1986) Cult black comedy about two unemployed actors in 1969 Camden.

**Skyfall** (2012) Sam Mendes' masterful contribution to the James Bond franchise.

**Bridget Jones's Diary** (2001) Eponymous bachelorette seeks and (spoiler!) finds love, with London as a gorgeous backdrop.

**A Royal Night Out** (2015) Comedy and romance ensue when Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret step out for VE Day celebrations.

## Best in Print

**Journal of the Plague Year** (Daniel Defoe; 1722) Defoe's classic reconstruction of the Great Plague of 1665.

**White Teeth** (Zadie Smith; 2000) Poignant multi-ethnic romp in post-millennial Willesden.

**London Fields** (Martin Amis; 1989) Gripping, dark postmodern study of London lowlife.

**Oliver Twist** (Charles Dickens; 1837) Unforgettable characters and a vivid depiction of Victorian London, seen through the eyes of a hapless orphan.

**Sour Sweet** (Timothy Mo; 1982) Vivid and moving portrayal of a Hong Kong Chinese family moving to London in the 1960s.

**London** (Edward Rutherfurd; 1997) Sweeping drama that brings London's epic history vividly to life.

## Happy Days (May Be) Here Again

London is the world's leading financial centre for international business and commerce and the fifth-largest city economy in the world. As the economic downturn of the last decade fades into memory, the UK is increasingly a nation of two halves: London (and the southeast) and the rest of the country. The capital generates more than 20% of Britain's income, a percentage that has been rising over the last 10 years. Employment in London is rosier than the rest of the nation, with the jobless rate at just under 6%; the price of property is double the national average; and incomes are 30% higher in London than elsewhere in the country. And tourism continues to grow at 3.5% a year. But there's a flip side: 28% of Londoners are living in poverty compared with just 21% in the rest of England (as defined by having an income less than 60% of the national median).

## Capital of Europe

What has become the world's most cosmopolitan place in which to live continues to lure immigrants from around the globe. Rich investors from Russia, the Middle East and China seeking a stable place to invest capital jostle for space with others looking for opportunities that are in short supply back home. Indeed, London is now France's sixth-biggest city, with upwards of 400,000 French nationals living here. According to the last census (2011), almost 37% of London's population is foreign born – with almost a quarter born outside Europe. Today an estimated 270 different ethnic groups speak 300 different languages and, despite some tensions, most get along well.