

Welcome to London

One of the world's most visited cities, London has something for everyone: from history to culture, art to architecture.

Time Travel

London is immersed in history. Not so much that it's precious, but there's sufficient antiquity and historic splendour (Tower of London, Westminster Abbey, Hampton Court) to blow you away. London's buildings are eye-catching milestones in the city's unique and compelling biography. There's more than enough funky innovation (the Shard, the Aquatics Centre, the Gherkin) to put a crackle in the air, but it never drowns out London's well-preserved, centuries-old narrative. Architectural grandeur rises up all around you in the West End, ancient remains dot the City and charming pubs punctuate the Thames riverside. Take your pick.

Art & Culture

A tireless innovator of art and culture, London's a city of ideas and the imagination. British people are fiercely independent thinkers (and critics) so London's creative milieu is naturally streaked with leftfield attitude, from theatrical innovation to contemporary art, pioneering music, writing and design. And that's even truer in these testing recessionary times. The artistic bar has been nudged higher, the audience is more demanding and the Olympic Games are limbering up, so London is moving heaven and earth to entertain. Revel in the choice.

Diversity

English may be the national tongue, but over 300 languages shape London's linguistic soundscape. These languages also represent cultures that season the culinary aromas on London's streets, the clothing you glimpse and the music you hear. It can seem like the whole world has come to town. Museums, such as the British Museum and the Victoria & Albert Museum, have collections as diverse as they are magnificent, while flavours at markets such as Borough and Exmouth range across the gourmet spectrum. London's diverse cultural dynamism makes it quite possibly the world's most international city, while being somehow intrinsically British.

A Tale of Two Cities

London is as much about high-density, sight-packed exploration (the West End, South Bank, the City) and urban dynamism as it is about wide-open spaces and leafy escapes. Central London is where you will find all the major museums, galleries and most iconic sights, but escape to Hampstead Heath or Greenwich Park to flee the crowds and put the city's greener hues into gorgeous perspective. Or venture even further out to Kew Gardens, Richmond or Hampton Court Palace for effortlessly good-looking panoramas of riverside London.



Why I love London

By Damian Harper

Growing up in Notting Hill was fantastic but what truly made me adore London was living all around it. Many Londoners are defiantly local, but to me it's not all about one area. It's the pumping vitality that animates one part of the city and the leafy tranquillity of others. Much of London's a whole mosaic of local histories and teasing them apart linguistically is magic. Take any name and see what you unearth: Aldwych (Auld-Wych – meaning the 'Old Settlement') is slap-bang in the centre of town and unsurprisingly the innocuous Holywell Lane in Shoreditch once bubbled over with sacred waters, while Chiswick was *the* place to go for cheese.

For more about our authors, see p464.

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