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Too Much To Do In London!

By Martin Kleinman

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No one can truly say they know London well. To know London completely is impossible. London changes faster than pigeons descending into the fountains of Trafalgar Square. Home to inhabitants for over 2,000 years now London has grown from the protective circle of the Tower to a sprawling metropolis, the ideal platform for constant illustrious activity.

Always where there is history there are tales to tell. Tourists are naturally drawn to the regular tourist attractions, yet it is the true travellers that seek deeper to find the gems of a 2,000 year-old town. It only takes a very small amount of investigating to find something more rewarding, more interesting, more inspiring in London, than the London Dungeons (although it must be said - is a damn good laugh if you can bear the hour long queues!).

For instance, not even a minute's walk from the London Dungeons is the Hay's Galleria. This gem is for some totally bizarre reason hidden from all guidebooks and tourist information - no doubt to preserve its lack of thousands of tourists making it a less exclusive haven. Please go there! It's a beautiful indoor/outdoor menagerie of a few select shops, with a vast concourse of cafes, market stalls, bands, presentations, and of course, it overlooks a beautiful part of the Thames.

Turn right from Hays Galleria and you find yourself in a Thames-side walkway next to the newest buildings in town. The architecture is phenomenal, and these lord-mayor buildings are still so new that you can imagine that the cellophane has just freshly been peeled off all the windows. You are welcome to enter the Lord Mayor's building (it's the one shaped like a golf ball), go to the top and marvel at the mind-boggling roundness of it all - plus of course see the spectacular views of the HMS Belfast, Tower Bridge & the Tower of London. Continue strolling directly into the I-Witness open-air gallery, before maybe snacking on a hot-dog in the mini-fairground.

Walk past the green that previously hosted many Hollywood film premieres in giant marquees, the David Blaine in-a-box episode, plus many other varied events, and you are literally underneath Tower

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Bridge, keep walking and you are now in Shad Thames, a true delight of traffic-free, cobbled streets full of people, giving you a precise feeling of how the London streets felt hundreds of years ago. It is as if these streets have been restored from long ago, thus delivering to the traveller a wonderfully rich blend of old and new in the same vicinity. Circle around Shad Thames, past the ever-changing Design-Museum, and find yourself in Butlers Wharf, a charming quay-side collection of bars & restaurants all overlooking the Thames opposite the equally picturesque St Katherine's Dock. Trust me when I tell you that Butlers Wharf is the ultimate in romantic settings.

Hays Galleria to Butlers Wharf is one walk of quite possibly hundreds to choose from, in fact - that's a whole day right there! There are equal delights even if you turned left out of Hay's Galleria instead, especially the Clink Street Prison Museum, Vinopolis (Wine Museum), Borough Market, Southwark Cathedral, I could go on....

Great streets, great walks, great museums (forget the big-ones - go to the Children's museum in

Bethnal Green for a real treat). It is frustrating to think that the bulk of visitors to London wind up staying in some of the least interesting areas. Paddington & Bayswater are both great areas, being so close to Hyde Park & Kensington Gardens (now home to the finally-completed Princess Diana shrine). Kensington & Earls Court have their highlights too, but there is more to London than the tried and tested tourist routes.

I recently stayed in a five star hotel in the middle of the city on the weekend for less than one hundred pounds a night, and was amazed at exactly how completely empty the city of London was. I was in heaven! There I was in the middle of one of the oldest cities around, and I had it all to myself! City hotels are notorious for being completely empty on weekends, hence the great rates. I am sure tourists pay over the hundred pounds per night threshold to stay in 'trendy' Kensington et al, when they could easily stay next to Tower Bridge, St Paul's, Millennium Bridge etc, for much less.

Needless to say that the City of London (the financial centre) is absolutely coloured with history, everywhere you go there are buildings proclaiming their 16th century origins, and they are in abundance.

I was recently taken to what is supposedly one of the oldest London pubs in existence. Again, this pub is not only hidden from the guidebooks and the common information sources, it is also hidden from the public! I had to be taken there, as I would never have been able to find it unless accompanied. This pub is hidden from the world. It is sandwiched between two narrow streets and therefore completely obscured from any main thoroughfare. It has its own courtyard and as you stand supping a pint outside, it is as if you are in Victorian London. Look down the misty streets and it is easy to conjure up an old bobby on the beat blowing his whistle, or Jack the Ripper lurking in the shadows. Oh - and there's a 150 year old tree growing through the building, to add to the oddity of the pub.

Hampstead is another great area waiting to be discovered. Covered in green spaces, Hampstead (North London) is perfect for the idyllic setting combined with the close proximity to the big-smoke. Steeped in its own folklore, Hampstead was home to Dick Turpin (apparently he was born at the Spaniard's Inn - hugely popular and famous pub on the Heath) of which his ghost still roams Kenwood

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house, and the surrounding woodlands. The high streets of Hampstead, Belsize Park, and the immaculately kept Primrose Hill are possibly the last untouched-by-commercialism streets in London (no Starbucks here!). If you want breath-taking views of the city, historical sites detailing the 'first entry point into London', combined with al-fresco dining, and an altogether more relaxed atmosphere, Hampstead is the place, and less than 15 minutes on the tube to the city centre! Now do you see why it seems frustrating that tourists stay in less desirable areas when they could stay in an altogether more inspiring location, just as close to all the major attractions?

Of course, Hampstead is one of London's many beauty spots, yet the city is not all about beauty. As with any home to approximately 10 million people, varied activity is rife. London events cannot help but affect all, every Londoner has an opinion on the congestion zone, on the ill-fated Millennium Dome, on Tony Blair, in fact on any topic you care to mention. Start a conversation with any London black-cab driver - typically famous for their outspoken views, and you will find yourself immediately thrown into the debate of the day.

So, when visiting London do not even attempt to see it all - you cannot.

In a city where already this year a Roman road has been uncovered a mile below ground level dating back to 1 AD, and where Paddington workers uncovered Brunel's first iron-bridge - one they didn't

know existed - London is forever creating wonders on a regular basis.

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Previously in the travel industry for many years (Sales

Manager of London hotels, and before that sailor of the seas on many an international cruise). Love to write, love to travel, love to exchange travelling experiences.

Use London for your company's big meetings

By David Wilson

There are lots of reasons why you should use London for your company's big meetings, and here are three of the most obvious:

1. London is one of the world's most vibrant and exciting cities
2. London is well served by international and local travel links
3. London has a plethora of world-class venues; from basic rooms in big hotels to large custom-built, state-of-the-art conference centres.

London is considered a world leader for business; as a result the facilities that the city has to offer are tailored to the discerning business traveller. So, if you opt to use London for your company's big meetings you won't be far from anything that you would need, either professionally or for leisure.

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There are almost 94,000 hotel rooms in London and over 6,000 eating establishments, so finding somewhere to stay or have dinner is never a problem! With accommodation to match every corporate budget and with many establishments offering an all-in rate including meeting rooms, London is an ideal venue for any company's big meetings!

There is no doubt that because of its fantastic transport links – two major international airports at Heathrow and Gatwick plus three smaller ones, major motorway and road links, a major Eurostar hub and extensive public transport – the capital is easy to get to from most parts of the world. And once in London the excellent integrated public transport system allows easy, cost-effective travel from hotel to venue and vice versa.

After business is concluded why not treat your company's employees to a taste of the superb London nightlife? With restaurants offering every type of cuisine and a superb theatre district in the capital's West End there's always somewhere to go and something fabulous to do! There are 150 theatres, 200 nightclubs and over 3,800 pubs in London. So, after the big meeting is concluded there are a multitude of leisure and entertainment options for you and your fellow employees.

Put your employees in the sort of bustling, energetic environment offered by England's capital are they are bound to be inspired before they even set foot in London for your company's big meeting; they'll be enthused and energised by the city itself.

London is fast-moving towards a 24 hour, seven days a week culture so regardless of the time of arrival of your delegates or the time of your big meeting then there are facilities to cater for them. Certain hotels offer early riser breakfasts from 4 a.m. in the morning, or alternatively later riser breakfasts until 12 noon. With so much going for the capital you should really consider using London for your company's big meetings.

Article by David Wilson

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