

Local's London: See the best of it minus the crowds

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FOR THE CALGARY HERALD

Throughout the muggy summer months, London is a city teeming with tourists all clamouring for the same attractions. But there are plenty of gems to behold besides those on display in The Tower. Here's an insider's view to a slice of London most tourists haven't taken a bite of.

1. Cheaters Changing the Guard

Why queue over an hour in advance to watch Changing the Guard at Buckingham Palace when you can take in their rehearsal 45 minutes earlier without the hoards?

Those with children will enjoy a play at St. James's Park playground, directly across the street from Buckingham Palace. When the bombastic beats begin around 10:30, rush across Birdcage Walk to Guards Museum for a bird's-eye view of the pageantry.

2. Horniman Museum

Those who think London is without a great, interactive children's museum haven't explored the Horniman. The Victorian tea trader's collection of natural history and anthropology artifacts from around the world lives at this free museum.

Here you'll find one of the U.K.'s largest collections of musical instruments (playing them is encouraged in their music room), Egyptian mummies and an aquarium. With panoramic views of the city, you'll want to spend a few quiet moments in its verdant 6.5-hectare gardens before heading across the street to Triangle Gardens for their physics-inspired water-play area and sandpit.

3. Trafalgar Area

Peering at Old Masters sandwiched between sweaty tourists at the National Gallery can be excruciating but at the much less crowded National Portrait Gallery next door, you'll be privy to thousands of portraits of the greatest figures in British history.

From Hans Holbein's portrait of Henry VIII to the familiar, iconic photos of the likes of Princess Diana and Mick Jagger, viewing the original portraits outside of textbooks and magazines seems surreal.

Be sure to catch either a lunchtime or evening candlelight concert at St. Martin-in-the-Fields located across the street from the Portrait Gallery. Downstairs the 18th-century crypt of St. Martin offers breakfast, lunch and dinner in Cafe in the Crypt. Insider's tip: their afternoon tea is one of the least expensive in the city.

4. Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew

Not only is Kew Gardens a World Heritage Site, it's one of the world's leading botanical sites containing one out of eight known plant species.

Boasting multiple exhibitions, guided biodiversity walks and an interactive outdoor play area, explorers young and old can make a full day of this once regal site. If time permits, venture outside the garden gates to The Original Maids of Honour for a cream tea or their namesake cake, which can be traced back over 200 years.

5. South Bank and Southwark

Head straight out of Waterloo Station and veer right once you hit the south bank of the Thames for a jaunt that'll take you all the way to Tower Bridge. Dotted with performing artists and live music, make a quick splash in the water fountains outside South Bank Centre before strolling down to Gabriel's Wharf for a bite or browse in their eclectic shops.

Continue on past the Tate Modern and Shakespeare's Globe Theatre to find the gothic Southwark Cathedral, the oldest Cathedral in London, dating back to 600 AD.



Nothing beats a stroll along the bank of the Thames for a jaunt that'll take you past the Houses of Parliament all the way to Tower Bridge. Below, the South Bank Centre Fountain is the cure for a muggy day.

Photos, Jody Robbins for the Calgary Herald

If You Go

- Both Air Canada and British Airways fly direct to London from Calgary.
- Expect free admission at most museums, however, donations are appreciated upon entry.
- Consider taking a riverboat to Kew, Richmond or Hampton Court Palace from central London for a more leisurely pace, www.wpsa.co.uk
- Tipping in restaurants is now customary. For restaurants, include a 10 to 15 per cent gratuity, while bars and taxicabs only require you to round up to the nearest pound.
- Most pubs welcome children and many out of the city core will have an outdoor play area.

For more information, visit the following websites:

- www.theoriginalmaidsofhonour.co.uk, The Original Maids of Honour Teahouse
- www.petershamnurseries.com/cafeandteahouse.asp, Petersham Nurseries
- www.tomskitchen.co.uk/tomsterrace, Tom's Terrace
- www.2stmartin-in-the-fields.org, St. Martin-in-the-Fields restaurant, Tom's Terrace, and free children's activities during summer weekends.
- www.highgate-cemetery.org, Highgate Cemetery

The unimpressive bridge in front of the Cathedral is actually London Bridge but the next bridge along the river path is the fairy tale Tower Bridge.

6. Army Museum

The history of the British army from the Redcoats to recent conflicts lives at this interactive museum in the heart of tony Chelsea. If you're a history buff, you'll likely fancy the museum's recreations of a First World War dugout and trench and the Battle of Waterloo (using 75,000 toy soldiers), not to mention the skeleton of Napoleon's favourite horse.

7. Harvey Nichols

Whereas Harrods reeks of tourists, Harvey Nics drips with well-heeled locals. Purveyor to the Queen, this is now the place to shop and be seen.

Enjoy cocktails and views of Knightsbridge in the Fifth Floor Champagne Bar or take the tots to their Fifth Floor Cafe for a meal and equally splendid views. If a pilgrimage to Harrods is required, at least savour a macaroon at Laduree, the infamous French patisserie where the upper classes get their sugar fix.

8. Somerset House

Located in the heart of London between the Thames and the Strand, this neo-classical building



houses three impressive galleries focusing on Impressionist paintings, Czarist treasures and decorative arts. The fountain court delights weary tourists with 55 water jets during the summer heat and in winter transforms into a grand outdoor ice rink. Check out Michelin chef Tom Aikens' new restaurant, Tom's Terrace, and free children's activities during summer weekends.

9. Richmond Park

The oldest of the Royal Parks dates back to King Edward in the 14th century and currently serves as roaming ground for 650 of Her Majesty's deer.

The site is immense, covering 1,000 hectares of parkland, which is ideal for picnicking and horseback riding (hourly rides available). Or, consider renting a mountain bike to explore the old stomping grounds of ancient monarchs.

10. Petersham Nurseries

When the city gets too much, trip over to the very West End for a world relatively undiscovered by tourists. From Richmond, meander along Petersham meadow, past a herd of cattle and you'll find a restful haven in the Petersham Nurseries' garden.

Hobnob with the likes of Nigella

Lawson and Madonna in the delightful garden cafe (youngsters welcome) for a posh nosh on celebrity chef Skye Gyngell's seasonal fare.

11. Highgate Cemetery

The most fashionable Victorian cemetery in its time (imagine 30 burials a day back then) makes for an atmospheric half-day excursion.

Roaming the pathways in this lush natural setting, you could easily forget where you were if not for the ornate and occasionally ostentatious memorials. From there, wander over to Hampstead Heath, one of the city's most famous green spaces, for a breath of fresh air.

12. Hampton Court Palace

Gifted to Henry VIII reluctantly by Cardinal Wolsey, this Tudor palace is the most spectacular of the Royal Palaces. With actors in period costumes performing historical re-enactments of Henry and his many wives, it's easy to feel as though you've stepped back into imperial court life.

Visitors can explore the vast Tudor kitchens, view state apartments with furnishings and artifacts from the Royal collection and get lost in one of the world's most famous mazes, planted for William III in 1690.

Americans worst for pool and beach etiquette: survey

POSTMEDIA NEWS

With 2010 tracking to be the warmest summer in decades — if not ever — in many parts of the world, in many cases, that means perfect strangers have to share precious real estate at public beaches and pools to cool off. But not everyone knows about the unwritten rules of waterside etiquette.

Travel website TripAdvisor polled more than 2,000 U.S. travellers and found that, for the second year running, Americans "take the swim cap of shame as the worst beach and pool offenders," according to the site.

Eighty-two per cent of respondents think people often violate some form of beach or pool etiquette, while 30 per cent have gone so far as to ask a stranger to stop behaving rudely at the beach or pool. New Yorkers were named the worst culprits, followed by travellers from Florida and New Jersey.

The most common violations were blasting loud music, at 22 per cent, beach-chair hogging at 18 per cent and urinating in the water at 14 per cent.

However, while 15 per cent of travellers maintain that urinating in the water is the most annoying violation of beach and pool etiquette, 53 per cent think it's acceptable to urinate in the ocean, if no other swimmers are near, and four per cent think it's acceptable in the pool.

As for kids, 52 per cent of travellers think it violates etiquette when parents change their children's diapers in public at the pool or beach, and 85 per cent think it's unacceptable for a young child to go in the pool without a diaper on. Sixty-three per cent think there should be designated child-free areas altogether.

When it comes to skimpy suits, sometimes less is more, with 75 per cent saying it's acceptable for women to go topless at the beach or pool, in countries where it's culturally the norm. However, 35 per cent think Speedos for men is a no-no, while 29 per cent think the same of women in skimpy bikinis.

Respondents were more lax about drinking alcohol near water, with 71 per cent of respondents saying alcohol should be permitted on the beach.

Smoking ranked as the second-biggest pet peeve in 2009, but dropped off this year's lists.

However, 83 per cent think smoking should be banned around pools, while 64 per cent think it should be disallowed at the beach.

Essential dos and don'ts

- Don't ask a stranger to help apply suntan lotion; 77 per cent of travellers think this is unacceptable.
- Don't be a chair hog: 85 per cent think it's unacceptable to get up early and leave stuff on beachside or poolside chairs for hours on end.
- Do have a shower before entering the pool: 32 per cent think it violates etiquette not to rinse off (39 per cent confess to rarely doing so).
- Do keep your distance: 26 per cent maintain that, at a crowded beach, travellers should sit at least two metres away from other strangers. While on an uncrowded stretch of sand, 38 per cent think it's in order to sit at least six metres away.

—Courtesy, Trip Advisor

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Sunday, August 1	Monday, August 2	Friday, August 6	Saturday, August 7
Country Dinner to Big Valley (Steam) (A) Don't be surprised if bandits show-up. We have been having a bunch of trouble with the notorious Reynolds Raiders over the last few years and try as they may the railway police seem baffled as to how to catch them. And yes! You should be safe while visiting Jimmy Jock Boardwalk, the little town within a town. Includes buffet meal and entertainment. Departs Stettler 2:30 p.m. Returns Stettler 7:25 p.m. Sponsored by Baird Denture Clinic - Stettler	Rail Fans Special to Big Valley (Steam) (A) This is Alberta Prairie's annual event showcasing railway equipment and locomotives. Highlight will be a visit to historic railway town. Locomotives and other rail equipment on display and open to public. This trip is really a "Country Dinner" with an added feature. Mountain class No. 6060 will pull back to Stettler. Departs Stettler 11:00 a.m. Returns Stettler 4:55 p.m. Sponsored by Battle River Sports - Stettler	Family Special to Big Valley (Diesel) (F) Clowns and children's entertainers will perform for the kids. Includes roast beef buffet meal. Special pricing makes these trips the most economical choice for families with children. Departs Stettler 2:30 p.m. Returns Stettler 7:25 p.m. Sponsored by Don's Car Sales - Stettler	Country Dinner to Big Valley (Steam) (A) Stop in historic railway town highlighted by visits to fully restored second-class (depot) railway station that doubles as part of the community's museum, and the remains of a fourteen stall roundhouse that has been turned into an interpretive centre. Includes roast beef buffet meal. Departs Stettler 11:00 a.m. Returns Stettler 3:55 p.m. Sponsored by Hulley's Hideaway - Big Valley

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