

## TRAVEL

## RIDING THE THAMES IN STYLE

Dinner cruise fills  
appetite for  
London**By Mansoor Ladha**

“When you’re tired of London, you’re tired of life,” someone is reported to have said. This is true of London, which has lots to offer in terms of history, monuments, architecture, culinary experiences, food tours, royalty, excitement and pomp celebrations.

For me, London has fast become a second home. I spent quite a bit of time in London when I was studying journalism in Cardiff, Wales, in the 1970s. After moving to Canada, it has become a definite stop-over on my way to any other country in Europe, Asia or Africa. Always an enriching, exciting and worthwhile experience.

On my recent trip to London, I had the pleasure of undertaking a dining cruise on the River Thames offered by City Cruises. River Thames is the most significant river if not the longest in the United Kingdom with well-known famous historical and cultural landmarks and buildings on its banks.

At one time, River Thames was called River of Death when the river had burst on its banks, causing death and destruction in riverside settlements. During Victorian times, it became the River of Pleasure when there was an added interest in the river as a source of leisure, especially rowing events and boat races.

Today, it’s a popular place for tourists, visitors and even local residents. We were welcomed on board during the Thames cruise by a smartly dressed steward who escorted us to our table by the window. All the tables for two on the boat are strategically located near the windows so as to allow visitors to get a full view of the river. I was impressed with the panoramic views when I went on the open upper deck and watched as hundreds of years of history floated by. The upper deck also has seats for those who want an uninterrupted view from the top.

City Cruises offer afternoon tea, lunch or dinner cruises to suit your schedules. Our cruise — a lunch cruise — gave us an excellent opportunity to see the

various famous buildings on River Thames and photograph them in daylight. Our lunch menu consisted of lemon roasted chicken with mushroom sauce, served with potatoes and vegetables, followed by truffle cake with raspberry sauce and coffee.

A dinner cruise offers a complete night out, resembling a floating restaurant, with a live singer, great food and amazing views. While the dinner is served with a bottle of wine, a live entertainer sings pop tunes and songs from the West End musicals with an opportunity to dance the night away. Among the special events scheduled is a three-course dining experience with live Elvis tribute performance and an Elvis disco during the cruise.

Those with food allergies or food restrictions are also well catered on the cruise. When making cruise bookings, one can select vegetarian or gluten-free diets. Other special occasions such as Christmas and New Year’s Eve are also arranged to celebrate the occasion in style with a romantic cruise along the River Thames. Patrons on a New Year cruise were able to welcome 2017 in style by watching spectacular fireworks display on the banks of the Thames. As a 2016 pre-Christmas event, cruise organizers had a treat whereby parents could take their kids to Sail with Santa.

Boats are also available for private parties while Christmas party lunches and dinners are available throughout December.

It’s undoubtedly the best way to learn the history and landmarks of London. A leisurely cruise down the River Thames is like watching a thousand years of history roll by. Our cruise started and ended from the Westminster pier. Since the boat cruises very close to the banks, we were able to have a closer look at the Houses of Parliament, the Tower of London, Westminster Abbey, Buckingham Palace and numerous expensive apartments, condos and hotels which have sprung up to take advantage of the river bank view.

The infatuation of Londoners and visitors with the Thames continues to grow. City Cruises alone carries millions of passengers every year. Every time one takes a Thames cruise, there appears to be a bold new addition to the skyline.

When you think of England,



PHOTOS BY MANSOOR LADHA

A City Cruises boat filled to capacity takes tourists on their routine sightseeing tour.

you think of royalty, pomp and pageantry. The British are known for being obsessed with them. After watching London’s landmarks on Thames, we were able to experience a royal habitat when we stayed at Oatlands Park Hotel, an hour’s drive from London. Located in Weyburn, Oatlands Park Hotel is a historic country house hotel in the heart of Surrey, on 10 acres of picturesque parkland.

The hotel, which was built in the 18th century, has undergone renovations, retaining its rich British history as it was the site of a grand Royal Tudor Palace. The Oatlands Estate has been home to Kings and Queens of England, played host to Emperors and earls, and has been immortalized in both prose and paint throughout the centuries. It has luxury accommodation, fine food and various outdoor activities, including a golf course on site.

In 1927, Oatlands was extended with new rooms and a ballroom wing added with the restaurant. The present owners took over the property in 1986, restoring and refurbishing it to a standard taking the Oatlands Park Hotel into an exciting new era. The hotel has 144 air-conditioned rooms spread over three floors with free WiFi and



London’s most glorious bridge, the Tower Bridge, a result of a 19th century contest, allows tall ships pass through.

internet service in public areas and all rooms. Most of the times, it is fully booked during the weekend for weddings, anniversaries and birthdays. Its restaurant, named Broadwater Restaurant, has extensive menu and buffet served most weekends with live music. There is also a bar/lounge as you enter the main door for a relaxing conversation over coffee or drinks with friends. Among the other facilities offered are a 24-hour fitness centre and train station pickup service for patrons.

In summer, the hotel has a magnificent patio on the lawns

to take advantage of the weather. Oatlands is the pride and joy of the village of Wyburn by providing employment to local residents and boosting the local economy.

Yes, it’s true, London is the place to experience royalty, pomp and pageantry because you can never get tired of what it has to offer.

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The Tower of London stands majestically for more than a thousand years as evidence of its grim reputation.



The famous Oatlands Park Hotel which was home to Kings and Queens of England.