

# FROM THE BRIDGE

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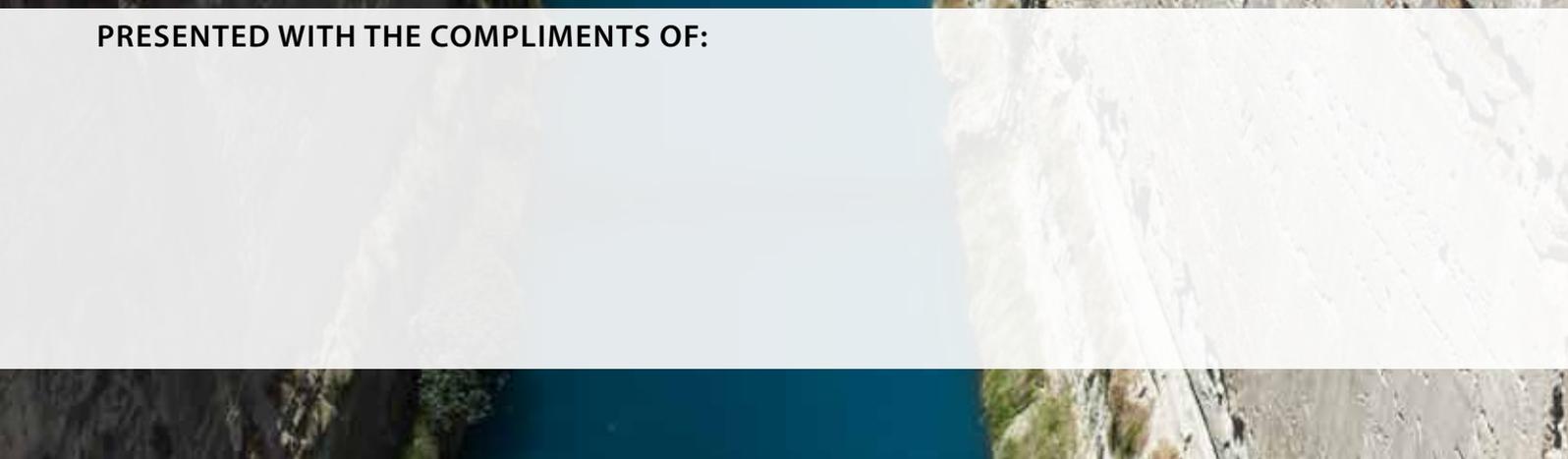
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# INTO THE HEART OF LONDON

London city's first dedicated cruise terminal, the London City Cruise Port, is under construction in Greenwich and set to open in 2017.

WORDS: JASMINE CRITTENDEN





Take a circuit on the London Eye

To arrive in London via The Thames is to leap straight into England's heart. Perhaps no other force has had so powerful an impact on the nation's past. Legend goes that the first human to live on the river was a Trojan prince named Brutus, who ousted a local community of giants. Believe that or not, it's certainly true that, around 50 AD, the Romans stormed in. Pouncing on The Thames's prime location for trade, they founded the lively settlement of Londinium and laid down the city's first bridge, where London Bridge is today.

Since then, the mighty, 300-kilometre long waterway has flowed through London's history—hosting one of the world's biggest ports, inspiring famous theatres like Shakespeare's Globe and, most importantly, providing lodgings for Mole, Rat and Mr Toad. In the words of actor Martin Freeman, "You absorb 2000 years of history just by being near The Thames."

Yet, right now, most international visitors can only reach London by air, rail or road. From 2017, there'll be another option. The city's first dedicated cruise terminal, the London City Cruise Port, is currently under construction at Enderby Wharf, Greenwich—a perfect spot from which to explore the city.

Within walking distance of the port site lies the UNESCO Maritime Greenwich World Heritage site. It is here that all time begins and ends. Start your adventure by straddling two hemispheres at the Prime Meridian, a.k.a. Longitude 0°. Since 1884, every person on the planet has set their clock according to their distance east or west of this invisible line.

You'll find it in the grounds of The Royal Observatory. Wander inside to touch a 4.5 billion-year-old asteroid, tour the universe at London's only planetarium and learn how a carpenter named John Harrison figured out how to calculate longitude, revolutionising navigation and besting establishment boffins. Also part of the site are Christopher Wren's baroque masterpiece, the Old Royal Naval College, and the National Maritime Museum, the largest museum of its kind in the world.

Just next door to that is England's first classical building, the Queen's House, designed

by Inigo Jones and built in 1616. James I gave his wife, Anne, permission to commission it, by way of saying sorry for cursing her in company after she accidentally shot one of his hunting dogs. That's some royal apology.

Fancy a sailor's life? Imagine adventure on the high seas with a visit to legendary 19th century tea clipper *Cutty Sark*—one of the final and fastest vessels of her era.

Leave time to wander around glorious Greenwich Royal Park, which you might well have spotted in *Sense and Sensibility* (1995), *The Secret Agent* (1996) and, of

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Artist's impression of the new London City Cruise Port

With Greenwich as your access point, a significant amount of London is seeable in a day. But you might decide to stay longer.

course, *Longitude* (2000). No filming planned during your stop? Guarantee yourself a world-class live performance with a ticket to the epic, 20,000-capacity O2 arena, located on Greenwich Peninsula.

From Greenwich, there's a few ways to head into London central. Continue your river voyage with an invigorating ride on a Thames Clipper, take the Underground or jump on the Docklands Light Railway. For a bit of fun and some cracking views, take a circuit on the London Eye, which is an enormous Ferris wheel for kidults perched on The Thames at Southbank. Then it's a lovely saunter over Westminster Bridge to iconic sites like Big Ben, the Palace of Westminster and the mystical Westminster Abbey, where a number of England's national figures are buried, including Isaac Newton, Geoffrey Chaucer and Charles Darwin.

A gentle stroll through St James's Park leads you to Buckingham Palace—if you're around between April and July, the magnificent changing of the guard kicks off at 11.30am.

Next up is a sampling of London's art, theatre and literary culture. In The National Gallery at Trafalgar Square, hangs Van Gogh's *Sunflowers*, Monet's *Water Lily Pond* and Michelangelo's *The Entombment*. Heading east, you'll notice the streets narrowing into



The new port will feature enhanced public areas



Iconic sites are only a short walk away



Catch the changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace

the secretive laneways of Covent Garden, an enchanting tapestry of independent eateries, old-fashioned boutique shops and magical theatres, including the Royal Opera House. Meanwhile, a short walk westwards takes you to Piccadilly Circus, the wild bohemian haunts of Soho and the British Museum, home to the Rosetta Stone.

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by starting or ending your holiday there. The London City Cruise Port will act as a terminus, in addition to hosting turnarounds. So you can easily add a London sojourn to your itinerary.

All in all, the plans are promising some rather impressive facilities. At present, the only cruise ships able to travel The Thames are those small enough to access one of two pontoons, found at Greenwich and Tower Bridge. Larger ships have had to content themselves with stopping at Tilbury Docks, in Essex, about 20 nautical miles down river.

However, the new port will make life much easier for mid-size ships. Though it won't take mega vessels, like Royal Caribbean's 6360-guest *Allure of the Seas*, it will handle ships as long as 250 metres, carrying up to 1600 people.

In other words, companies like Holland America and Silversea will be throwing celebratory tea parties.

The port is expecting to welcome about 55 ships every year, with guest numbers averaging about 658 per visit. It might well be time to start working on your finest Queen's English. ■



Explore Covent Garden's laneways