

# SUMMER in the city

— BY SUE WATT —

*With the 2012 Summer Olympic Games on its doorstep, the English capital is celebrating like never before. Come for the sport; stay for the new attractions, live performances and groundbreaking exhibitions.*

With its pulsating nightlife, world-class eateries and eclectic art scene, London is an exciting city to visit at any time. Its skyline, a fusion of contemporary and classic architecture, overlooks landscaped parks, centuries-old markets and the mighty River Thames, which twists its way through the metropolis. But this year, with the Olympic and Paralympic Games about to descend on the capital for the third time in its history, London is livelier and more inspiring than ever. As the London 2012 Festival gets underway – celebrating the Games through art, music, dance, theatre, fashion and film – there’s never been a better time to spend summer in the city, with or without a ticket to the Olympics.

## **DAMIEN HIRST AT TATE MODERN**

Even if your taste in art doesn’t extend to dead animals in glass boxes, you can’t help but admire Hirst’s ingenuity and originality, evident in this first British retrospective of his work spanning a career of more than 20 years.

Featuring such iconic pieces as *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1991) – a tiger shark in a vitrine of formaldehyde – and *A Thousand Years*, depicting the life cycles of flies that feed off the severed head of a cow, he is one of the most influential, if controversial British artists of recent years. April 4 through September 9.

## **LEONARDO DA VINCI: ANATOMY AT THE QUEEN’S GALLERY, BUCKINGHAM PALACE**

For more traditional portraits of bodies and body parts in a classic setting, head to The Royal Collection at the Queen’s Gallery in Buckingham Palace. Da Vinci was fascinated by the human body, having trained in anatomy as an apprentice artist in the late 15th century and assisted in dissecting corpses in Italian hospitals later in his career, enabling him to create accurate scientific drawings of skeletons, muscles and organs, including one of the first of a foetus in the womb. Throughout his life, the



renowned Renaissance artist accumulated his sketches with the intention of writing a treatise on anatomy, but he died before completing it. These drawings now form the largest exhibition of Da Vinci's anatomical studies and demonstrate the depth of his understanding of the human body. May 4 through October 7.

**THE OLYMPIC JOURNEY: THE STORY OF THE GAMES AT THE ROYAL OPERA HOUSE**

Don't have a ticket to the Games? You can still feel a part of it by following the history of the Olympics in this free exhibition at the Royal Opera House, one of London's most elegant buildings, complete with Grand Classical portico, in the heart of Covent Garden. Starting with the ancient Greeks and ending with present-day Olympic icons, the exhibition details the story of the Games and its revival more than 100 years ago. Displays include medals dating back to 1896, all the torches in Olympic history, and film footage and archives from The Olympic Museum in Lausanne, culminating in the inspiring Hall of Champions, starring modern Olympic heroes. July 27 through August 12.

**LONDON 2012 RIVER OF MUSIC**

No celebration of London would be complete without the inclusion of the River Thames that snakes and curves across the city. Another free event, River of Music, takes place over two days and features great music from across the world at waterside venues around town. From America, R&B, jazz and soul septet Naturally 7 and the innovative Scissor Sisters will be performing at the Tower of London; Asia is represented by Indian tabla virtuoso Zakir Hussain, among others, at Battersea Park; and performers from Africa include Grammy Award-winning singer Angélique Kidjo, taking to the stage at Jubilee Gardens in Southbank. Other locations include Trafalgar Square and Somerset House (for European artists) and the Old Royal Naval College, Greenwich (Oceania), right on the doorstep of the Olympics. July 21–22.

**ONE EXTRAORDINARY DAY: STREB ACTION**

London's skyline is like no other: Westminster Palace and Big Ben stand proud alongside the London Eye towards the west of the city and St Paul's Cathedral and the Old Bailey can be seen flanking the 30 St Mary Axe building (better known as the Gherkin), the Tower of London and the yet-to-be-finished Shard London Bridge, western Europe's tallest building, to the east with Canary Wharf. It's the perfect setting for New York-based dance group Streb to demonstrate its extraordinary skills – a mix of extreme athleticism and creative dance – from dawn until late into the night. Guaranteed to leave mere mortals gasping. Keep an eye out for dates and venues; if you love dance, you won't want to miss this. June 21 through September 9.

**POETRY PARNASSUS AT LONDON'S SOUTHBANK**

If you prefer entertainment of a more sedate, reflective nature, take a trip to London's Royal Festival Hall at the city's Southbank Centre, which is hosting the largest festival of



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**THE CAPITAL'S (NEW) ASSETS**

Fine jewellery merchant Bulgari opens its new five-star hotel in the heart of Knightsbridge in the spring. It will have solid-silver chandeliers and a sweeping silver staircase in the bar, a cigar shop, a swimming pool and its own private cinema. With a sister property in Soho, hotel Z Victoria opened in the vicinity of London's Victoria Station in March, promising style and high-tech appointments at affordable prices.

Gordon Ramsay's latest venture, Union Street Café, will cover two floors of Harling House near Borough market, a mecca for the city's foodies, offering a more casual dining experience than his other venues. Ceviche in Soho's Frith Street welcomed guests in March, promising the best of Peruvian fare and, of course, classic pisco sour cocktails.

For a drink with a view, check out the new rooftop bar overlooking Somerset House and the Thames at Sol Meliá's freshly minted hotel, ME London, opening in May on the Strand. And for some of the city's best cocktails, try the Experimental Cocktail Club in Chinatown – it's open until 3 a.m.

**LONDON CALLING**

**Clockwise from above:** Overlooking the city and River Thames; a busker in Covent Garden; a street sign in the same district; fruit for sale in the London suburb of Covent Garden.

**Opening spread:** London's Tower Bridge is one of the city's most recognisable landmarks.



poetry in UK history. Poetry Parnassus will include poets representing each of the 200-plus nations competing in the Olympics, giving readings, talks and performances with translations in English. Jude Kelly, Southbank Centre's artistic director, has called it "a weeklong gathering of poets, for poetry's sake, to celebrate language, diversity and a sense of global togetherness." June 26 through July 1.

#### THE WORLD SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL

He's a quintessential character in the capital's literary history, so the inclusion of an homage to Shakespeare in the London 2012 Festival is hardly surprising. Events include "Globe to Globe" at the Globe Theatre, a series of performances of all of the bard's 37 plays, each in a different language: a Maori version of *Troilus and Cressida* featuring a haka, perhaps, and the first-ever performance of *Love's Labour's Lost* in sign language. April 21 through June 9.

The British Museum will host *Shakespeare: Staging the World*, an exhibition portraying London in Shakespeare's day through items that are brought to life in his plays, including jewels, maps and pieces of art. July 19 through November 25.

#### THE MAKING OF HARRY POTTER WARNER BROS. STUDIO TOUR

From classical storytelling to the modern equivalent: if you're pining for Harry Potter, take a trip to discover the secrets and the sets behind the most successful film series of all time.



#### BEST IN SHOW

**This page, from left:** Celebrating WorldPride; shoe lovers won't want to miss the Christian Louboutin exhibition.

**Opposite page, from top:** Old-meets-new at the St Paul's and Millennium Bridge; the Olympic countdown clock.

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DRIVE THE CHANGE



Peek into Harry Potter's legendary cupboard under the stairs at 4 Privet Drive; walk around the imposing Great Hall at Hogwarts; and take a look at Dumbledore's office, Gryffindor common room, the Weasley kitchen and the loveable Hagrid's hut. You can also learn all about the green-screen technology used to simulate the famous Quidditch matches and about the special effects, animatronics, make-up designs and costumes that went into making the Harry Potter films so extraordinary. All year; tickets must be booked in advance.

#### WORLDPRIDE

As if the Olympics and the Royal Diamond Jubilee weren't enough, London is also hosting WorldPride this summer, so head to Soho in the West End for the biggest party in the city. More than a million people are expected to attend this two-week festival of art, culture and campaigning run by Pride London for the worldwide lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT)

#### FIT FOR A QUEEN

**Below:** Queen Victoria's Memorial, outside Buckingham Palace.



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community, the highlight of which will be the WorldPride Parade, starting from Baker Street on the penultimate day. Expect extravagant floats, fancy costumes, feather boas and plenty of fun as the parade passes landmarks and central London bursts into life with live music, dance and some of London's hottest DJs. June 23 through July 8; WorldPride Parade on July 7.

#### CHRISTIAN LOUBOUTIN AT THE DESIGN MUSEUM

No divas or fashionistas would want to miss this first UK retrospective of the iconic shoe designer at the Design Museum. Over the past 20 years, Louboutin's designs – from stilettos to studded sneakers (all with his trademark glossy red soles) – have become synonymous with chic. The exhibition explores Louboutin's detailed design process, from the initial drawings, construction and prototypes through to the final stages of production. Follow the footsteps of his well-heeled customers, among them Jennifer Lopez, Madonna and Gwyneth Paltrow, and admire the sheer artistry and femininity of his work. May 1 through July 8. •

Photography by Will Whitford and courtesy of Damien Hirst and Science Ltd, Prudence Cuming, Phillippe Garcia, The Trustees of the British Museum and Pride London/One Sunny Day.

#### HALL PASS

**Below:** Royal Festival Hall will host dozens of events in the lead-up to the Olympic Games.



## travel facts

#### GETTING THERE

Asiana offers flights from Sydney to London via Seoul. 1300-767-234; [au.flyasiana.com](http://au.flyasiana.com)

British Airways offers daily flights from Australian capital cities to London. 1300-767-177; [britishairways.com](http://britishairways.com)

Renault Eurodrive can help with car hire for London and the rest of Europe. 61-2/9299-3344; [renaulteurodrive.com.au](http://renaulteurodrive.com.au)

#### WHEN TO GO

The 2012 Summer Olympic Games runs from July 27 to August 12, and London 2012 Festival runs from June 21 through September 9.

#### WHERE TO STAY

- Bulgari Hotel & Residences. 171 Knightsbridge; 44-207/591-2442; [bulgarihotels.com](http://bulgarihotels.com)
- ME London. 336-337 The Strand; 44-808/234-1953; [solmelia.com](http://solmelia.com)
- Z Victoria. 5 Lower Belgrave St.; 44-20/3551-3700; [thezhotels.com](http://thezhotels.com)

#### WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

- Ceviche Peruvian Kitchen & Pisco Bar. 17 Frith St.; [cevicheuk.com](http://cevicheuk.com)
- Experimental Cocktail Club. 13A Gerrard St.; 44-20/7434-3559; [experimentalcocktailclublondon.com](http://experimentalcocktailclublondon.com)
- Union Street Café. Harling House, 47-51 Great Suffolk St.; 44-20/7592-1226; [gordonramsay.com](http://gordonramsay.com)

#### WHAT TO DO

- The British Museum. 44-207/323-8181; [britishmuseum.org](http://britishmuseum.org)
- Design Museum. 44-207/940-8790; [designmuseum.org](http://designmuseum.org)
- The Royal Collection, The Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace. 44-207/766-7300; [royalcollection.org.uk](http://royalcollection.org.uk)
- Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. 44-207/240-1200; [roh.org.uk/theolympicjourney](http://roh.org.uk/theolympicjourney)
- Southbank Centre. 44-844/847-9910; [southbankcentre.co.uk](http://southbankcentre.co.uk)
- Streb Extreme Action. [streb.org](http://streb.org)
- Tate Modern. 44-20/7887-8888; [tate.org.uk/modern](http://tate.org.uk/modern)
- Warner Bros. Studio Tour London – The Making of Harry Potter. 44-8450/840-0900; [wbstudiotour.co.uk](http://wbstudiotour.co.uk)
- WorldPride. [interpride.org](http://interpride.org)
- World Shakespeare Festival. [worldshakespearefestival.org.uk](http://worldshakespearefestival.org.uk)

#### FURTHER INFORMATION

Contact Visit London for a wealth of information about the city and latest events [visitlondon.com](http://visitlondon.com) and [festival.london2012.com](http://festival.london2012.com) for what's going on specifically around the festival. In Australia, contact Visit Britain for tips on travelling to the UK. [visitbritain.com](http://visitbritain.com)

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