

Getting to know multicultural London

London's melting pot culture means there is a different history everywhere you look

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Monday May 13 2013, 1.00am BST, The Times



London is home to the largest Chinese New Year festival outside China
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Embracing London is about much more than getting to grips with Britishness: the UK's capital is one the world's most multicultural cities. Roman soldiers, Huguenot silkweavers, Jamaican airmen, Bangladeshi sailors and a whole host of other people from around the world have helped to shape its history and its future.

"London is a city that has been going for so long that multiculturalism has become a habit," said Georgina Young, a senior curator of contemporary history at the Museum of London. "There are communities here from pretty much everywhere in the world. During the London Olympics we discovered that there were people from every competing country already living here."

The best way to learn about London is to get out and experience it by talking to people, said Young, who spends a lot of time doing just that in her job. Festivals, exhibitions and other events are other entertaining ways to get to know the city's layers. "And museums are a fantastic resource as well, and they are absolutely free."

London hosts an enormous number and variety of festivals. It has the largest Chinese New Year festival outside China and other celebrations include Vaisakhi (Sikh New Year), Diwali (the Hindu Festival of Lights) and the Shubbak festival of Arab culture, as well as many more events.

Walking around East London is a good way to see how different communities have played their part in the city's development. Today Spitalfields and Brick Lane are best known for their Asian connections, with some of the city's most popular curry houses to be found in the area.

London has had Asian and Afro-Caribbean communities since the 18th century. "As Britain built an empire more people came in as part of that from the Asian subcontinent and from Africa and the Caribbean,". The slave trade also played its part, with Afro-Caribbean people arriving as slaves or servants of slave traders.

Irish people is the "most unseen community" in London. "They have been here since James I. They built London, from the docks through to the sewerage systems and the railways."

Other multicultural hotspots worth a visit include Ridley Road Market in Dalston, with a mixture of people from Turkey and West Africa; Green Lanes in Haringey, which has some great Turkish restaurants run by people with Anatolian heritage; the Portuguese and Moroccan shops around Goldborne Road, just off Ladbroke Grove in West London; and Korea-influenced New Malden.