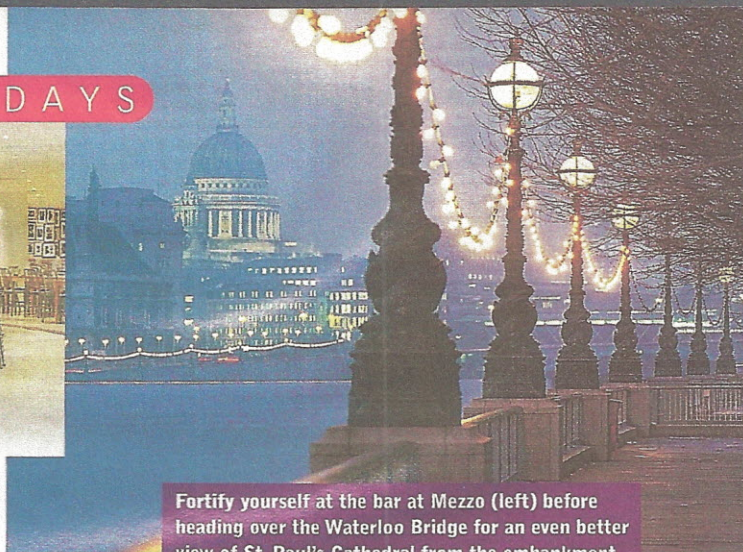


London: it's hip to be cool



Fortify yourself at the bar at Mezzo (left) before heading over the Waterloo Bridge for an even better view of St. Paul's Cathedral from the embankment.

Great restaurants, trendy new hotels, and all-night dance clubs—yes, we are talking about London. Perhaps inspired by the relaxation of the liquor laws (think back to a few years ago, when pubs closed for the afternoon and it was tough getting a drink after midnight), London is kicking up

its heels. Here's a rundown of some of the coolest places in town.

HIP HAVENS The best new lodging on the block may be the Covent Garden Hotel. Smack-dab in the middle of the theater district, with loads of fun shops and restaurants nearby, this is the place to stay. It has large, light, airy rooms (more elegant than funky) with huge windows overlooking the rooftops of London and a great espresso bar just downstairs. The odds for celeb spotting are very high. Reservations: 0171-806-1000. The Leonard, a new boutique hotel located on a quiet lane just off the main shopping drag of Oxford Street, is another great find. Actually three town houses knocked together, the place has the

feel of an exclusive boarding house. Fax reservations: (800) 394-5938. **EXOTIC EATS** Belgo Centraal, a funky Belgian restaurant where the waiters dress as monks. Mixed reviews on the food and service, but a trip here is definitely an experience. Covent Garden area. Phone: 0171-813-2233. Coast, a hip spot in Mayfair, has great food and ceiling lights that look like plaster breasts. Phone: 0171-495-5999. Mezzo, Terence Conran's gigantic restaurant extravaganza, is actually three different restaurants. With its good food, great bustling atmosphere, and live jazz several times a week, it's a site to see in Soho. Phone: 0171-314-4000. Wagamama, a favorite haunt of Londoners in search of a Japanese-food fix, has a new location near Piccadilly Circus. The local press has pronounced the dining options here "fast food as an art form." Phone 0171-292-0990.

TRENDY TOURING Check out the Globe Theatre. Shakespeare rules at the newly opened 1990s version of the Bard's famed playhouse. Although the official theater season here begins in June, you can tour the building, see the exhibits, and whip into the gift shop for souvenirs. Roam Soho. Much of the sleaze of previous years is gone, making this the happening area for those looking for fun. (Think Greenwich Village, thanks to the strong gay presence in the neighborhood.) The area features plenty of great inexpensive restaurants, late-night bars, and dance clubs. Walk across the Waterloo Bridge for what continues to be one of the best views in town. Look in one direction toward St. Paul's Cathedral, look in the other and see the gorgeous Houses of Parliament. Even with all the changes, strolling this span is a great reminder that you are enmeshed in the heart and history of London. For information, contact the British Tourist Authority at (800) 462-2748 or (212) 986-2200. —S.A.S. > 28

great escapes

Produced by Mary-Ellen Banashek and Susan A. Segrest



BEWITCHING SALEM

Where in the world might you encounter a broom-riding witch accompanying Santa on his Christmas Eve flight? Try Salem, Massachusetts, where in 1692 twenty people were executed for allegedly sympathizing with the devil. Any time of year, the **Salem Witch Museum** is a haunting experience, with its depictions

of the Salem witch trials. And over at the nearby **Salem Witch Village**, a discussion of medieval witch hunts leaves visitors shivering from

more than just the cold weather. But witches aren't the only ones airborne in Salem during Christmas. Santa descends from the roof of the **Hawthorne Hotel**, where revelers sing carols. Some activities from previous years: Combining the frightful with the festive during December, a narrated trolley tour featured Scrooge aboard, performing a spooky version of *A Christmas Carol* while making ghostly stops into Christmas past, present, and future. There are also horse-drawn-carriage rides, dances, and a New Year's Opening Night that counts down to the witching hour and a fireworks finale. Admission to most holiday events ranges from \$3 to \$7. For more information, call Salem's Office of Tourism & Cultural Affairs at (800) 777-6848. —Toni Brett

Dramatic witch trials and peaceful parks are all part of Salem's heritage.