

# A Sense of LONDON

England's capital is approaching celebrating 2 000 years of history, with over 30 million visitors annually seeking to immerse themselves in the city's two millennia of history. South Africans account for a good slice of that tourist pie and for those who've done the tried and tested iconic London sights, I've curated a collection of new capital-city adventures, each designed to feed one of the senses. **BY JARED RUTTENBERG**





**TASTE ALL THE CAPITAL HAS TO OFFER**

Soho is a favourite for Londoners after work, and in the centre of the action is a brand-new underground experience. In speakeasy tradition, the Park Row journey starts through a secret bookcase and winds two floors underground to a 1920's Gotham-styled space that is so sprawling and magnificent that it feels too incredible to be true. There's daily entertainment to be enjoyed while sipping on the capital's finest cocktails and all this deep under Soho. But wait, there's more, once a night, 20 fortunate people can experience what's possibly London's most exciting dining experience.

In an exclusive section of Park Row, The Monarch Theatre is a dining spectacle; seven courses of molecular gastronomy are paired with fine wines; and then the entertainment: each course is introduced by a narrator and enhanced by the floor-to-ceiling screens with 360-degree projection mapping.

Expect smoking cocktails, impressive set changes, floating plates, sensational flavours... and many more surprises to offer a night you won't easily forget.

[parkrowlondon.co.uk/monarch-theatre](http://parkrowlondon.co.uk/monarch-theatre)



**SMELL THE FRESH AIR ALONG THE WATERWAYS**

In addition to the River Thames, which famously snakes its way through town, a series of canals dissect the city. In the classy docks of Canary Wharf, there's a new and unique way to explore the canals. Skuna Boats offers guests a chance to rent a bespoke electric and easy-to-self-drive boat with a wood-fired hot tub. Moreover, you get to captain it down the canals for an adventure with passersby turning their heads in envy.

The boat is heated at 38 degrees Celcius and takes up to eight people, along with a cooler box stocked with drinks of your choice. There's also a BBQ boat if you'd rather fancy staying dry and braaing a meal while navigating the docks.

[skunaboats.com](http://skunaboats.com)

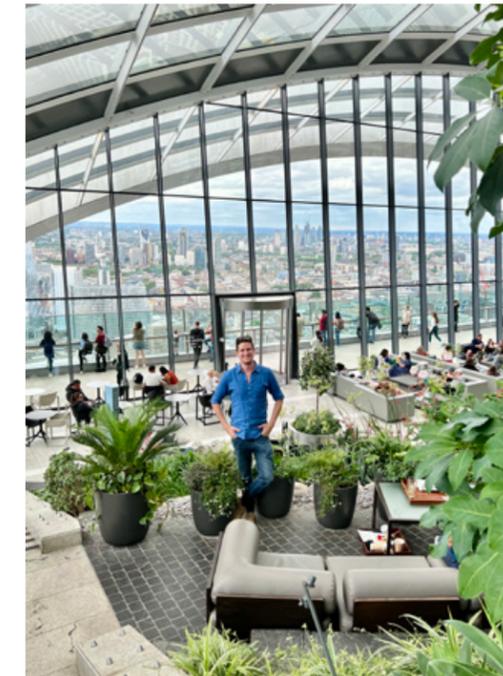


### TOUCH DOWN AND TRAIN WITH THE LOCALS

You won't find it hard to achieve those 10 000 steps while exploring the streets of London, but if you're after a little more activity, head to Hampstead Heath, barely 20 minutes from the city. Here you can walk or run your heart out, or my favourite, a swim in the wild. Although there's a lido (England-speak for a public pool), head further up the park for the ponds. Three natural ponds offer bathers a chance to bond with nature while getting in those lengths. There are dedicated ponds for men and women and a mixed pool. Walk-ins are accepted, but best book your slot ahead of time; each session lasts an hour and costs around £4.

Hampstead Heath is also home to one of 57 parkruns across London. Join keen locals every Saturday at 09h00 at Lime Avenue, opposite Well Walk, for a 5km stroll or sprint. Remember that the London Overground is bike-friendly for cyclists, and Hampstead offers kilometres to explore.

[parkrun.org.uk](http://parkrun.org.uk) and [cityoflondon.gov.uk](http://cityoflondon.gov.uk)



### SEE THE CITY FROM ABOVE

The London skyline has transformed in the past decade and now sports a string of glass skyscrapers. 20 Fenchurch Street, or 'The Walkie-Talkie' as it's affectionately dubbed, is one such, rising 160m above the city. The 37th floor is open to the public, with two bars, occasional yoga sessions, and dining in an enclosed glass garden on the roof. Known as the Sky Garden, the views over London are incomparable.

To avoid disappointment, book your free place ahead of time on the website. Order a tittle from one of the two bars or further elevate your dining experience with a meal at one of the two restaurants.

[skygarden.london](http://skygarden.london)

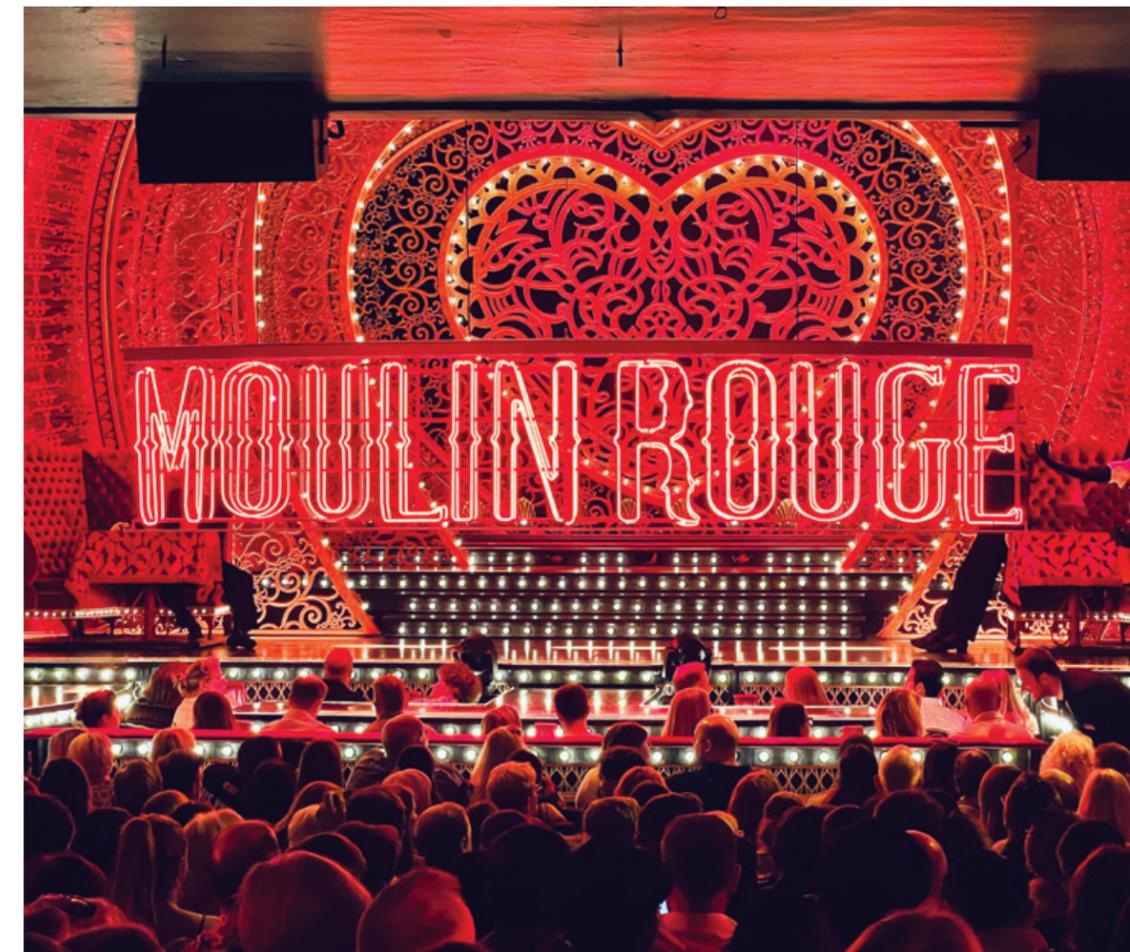
### HEAR THE SOUND OF THE CAPITAL

No London visit is complete without a visit to the West End, and 21 years after Baz Luhrmann's *Moulin Rouge* had people singing along with Nicole Kidman and Ewan McGregor, the movie has been transformed into a show-stopping musical. Expect a rousing near-three hours of spell-binding energy. There's all the Moulin classics such as 'Your Song' and 'Come What May' - and a host of other modern favourites paired with electric choreography and dazzling outfits.

[moulinrougemusical.co.uk](http://moulinrougemusical.co.uk)

If you're after something more classical, St Martin-in-the-fields - the impressive church that stands guard over Trafalgar Square - has a long tradition of musical performance, both orchestral and choral. For the budget savvy, watch the online programme as there are often free lunchtime concerts.

[stmartin-in-the-fields.org](http://stmartin-in-the-fields.org)





**REST YOUR HEAD AT THE LONDONER**

Barely a year old, The Londoner has quickly become the talk of the capital. Luxury hospitality group Edwardian Hotels has spread its wings to include The Londoner, and it's a rather extraordinary feather in its cap.

Occupying a space in the desirable central location of Leicester Square, the hotel spans an impressive 16 storeys: from the several stories carved underground offering conference and events spaces to the shimmering glass and iconic blue-tiled stories above ground. Classified as a 'super boutique hotel', with over 350 rooms, there is still infinite attention to detail and personable service.

When it's time for sanctuary from the city, head down to the appropriately titled The Retreat, a pool, sauna, steam room, gym and spa tucked away underground. Later as the sun sets over the city, enjoy the signature cocktails from '8 at The Londoner', an izakaya rooftop bar that celebrates the traditions and informal style of Japanese drinking establishments. Or visit one of the other five unique food and dining options spread throughout the hotel. Endless spoils in a city that wears its history on walls, but the heart within those walls.

[thelondoner.com](http://thelondoner.com)



# FLYING WITH CLASS

Saying goodbye to lengthy layovers and multi-stop journeys, I took advantage of Virgin Atlantic's direct Joburg to London flight. Thanks to a sneaky upgrade, it was time to recline horizontally at 33 000 feet, tucked in my duvet and sipping on French Champagne. With more seat buttons than a Range Rover and a food and dining experience to rival any bistro, Virgin Atlantic's Upper Class cabin may be the classiest route to London, uninterrupted.

And if that's not enough, flying Upper Class entitles you to the Clubhouse at Joburg airport and then Revivals at Heathrow where a refreshing shower and cooked breakfast of my choice was waiting. Capetonians don't despair, the good news is daily flights from the Mother City resume on 5 November.

Depending on your route, lookout for flight options that include the new A330neo. These beautiful new aircrafts are 11% more fuel efficient – so 11% fewer emissions – and an impressive 50% less noise contour. They also feature the brand new Retreat Suite, the most spacious suite in Virgin Atlantic's history. With ottomans that double up as extra seats, up to four people can comfortably dine, chat, play games and more.

[virginatlantic.com](http://virginatlantic.com)

