

TRAVEL TALES

HELPFUL HINTS FOR THE JEWISH TRAVELLER

By MIKE COHEN

LONDON, ENGLAND: The history of London, England stretches back over thousands of years. For my recent family trip to the British capital (www.visitbritain.org), this was an exercise in authentic learning at its best. My first piece of advice is to purchase an oyster card. This is a plastic smartcard you can use instead of paper tickets as pay as you go credit for the bus, tube, tram, DLR, London Overground and most National Rail services.

WHERE TO STAY: The Kensington Hotel (www.doylecollection.com) at the corner of Queen's Gate and the Old Brompton Road is part of the Doyle Collection, a privately owned group of eight luxury

hotels located in the most fashionable neighbourhoods of five major cities around the world - three in London, one in Bristol, two in Dublin, one in Cork and one in Washington.

This was a fabulous place to stay. There is a full-time concierge desk and the folks there spare no effort to assist you. The front desk and upper management make it a point to get to know every guest on a first-name basis. We had a very unique suite: one main door opens leading to a small hallway, with two other doors at each side. They can be left open or closed. One has a king sized bed and a very large bathroom while the other has a queen. The units are very spacious and

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have scored direct hits. During the war, a rocket hit the Denbar paint factory here causing a large blaze when the chemicals caught fire.

The facility was empty at the time, but several workers in the factory next door were wounded. Today, a few weeks later, the debris has been cleared, although a burnt smell still hangs in the air. Owner Baruch Kogan says the total damage is about \$4 million, most of which he will get back from the government.

"We are already cleaning up and we will rebuild within three months," Kogan said. "We have no intention of going anywhere."

When it comes to a longer-term solution, Kogan makes a distinction between Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority, and the Islamist Hamas

which is behind the rocket fire.

"Abbas is trying to talk to Israel without any rockets and that's the way it should be," he said. "But Hamas doesn't want peace – they just want to destroy us."

Sderot Mayor Alon Davidi likes to take visitors to a hill on the western edge of the town with a clear view of Gaza. Among the Palestinians killed in the past few days by Israel's relentless air bombardment of targets in the Gaza Strip were dozens of civilians. Davidi says he regrets any loss of life but blames the Palestinians of Gaza for choosing Hamas.

"Look at my city," he says. "Hamas is trying to kill my children. I didn't do anything to them. Are there weapons in Sderot that they are trying to hit?"

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excellent for families to spread out and not be on top of each other. There are in-room safes. The 150 room hotel is situated only a few blocks from the South Kensington tube station and close by different restaurants and a couple of grocery stores. The ground

floor of the hotel is a series of interconnecting drawing rooms, with welcoming open fires, large bay windows, and many original features such as the handsome stone staircase. The rooms are individually decorated in an elegant country

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house style, using sumptuous fabrics, deep upholstery and an eclectic mix of contemporary art and furnishings. There is complimentary high speed Wi-Fi throughout the hotel, 24 hour room service, a spa and treatment room, luxurious, bespoke treatments and therapies which can be booked in room, laundry and dry cleaning services, a fitness suite, luxury car service and DVDs and game consoles.




We enjoyed a daily buffet breakfast in the main restaurant, called Aubrey, and returned there twice for absolutely fabulous dinners. Their fish and chips and sea bass are terrific. The hotel welcomes many Jewish guests. Upon request they are able to cater for any dietary requirements. The closest synagogue (Westminster Synagogue) is one stop away at Knightsbridge on the Piccadilly tube Line.

JEWISH COMMUNITY: There are more than 260,000 Jews residing in England and Wales, Visit Jewish London and the London Jewish Forum(www.visitjewishlondon.com), your “go to” site to get a pulse on what is going on here. It will provide you with all the information you need about Jewish sites, services and events going on around the UK. There are listings of synagogues of all denominations, kosher or Jewish-style restaurants and accommodation, places of Jewish cultural interest and listings of events hosted by these various places and organizations. Check out the London Jewish Museum of Art, the London Jewish Museum, the Jewish Military Museum and the London Jewish Cultural Centre (LJCC). In January 2011, the LJCC launched a unique new Holocaust education website, www.the-holocaustexplained.org which provides 11 to 14 year olds with everything they need to know about the Holocaust. Designed and written to support the National Curriculum in an appropriate and accessible way, the site broke new ground in providing young people with online information, timelines, maps.


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images, a glossary of over 600 words, and, most importantly, films of survivors telling their stories. Jewish walking tours of London are also available.

London has always been the center of Jewish life in this country and is the oldest place of Jewish settlement in England. The Jews of England first arrived in London in the wake of William of Normandy's conquest of England. It is thought they arrived shortly afterwards, though the first documented reference to a Jewish quarter in London, only comes in c.1127, when they had arguably been there for some 50 years or more. Initially they were just a small group, only reinforced in numbers with Jews fleeing from the Rouen pogrom in 1096.

Historically the British royal family has had a very friendly relationship with the Jewish community. Members of the royal family routinely attend Jewish events and support Jewish causes and charities. When Queen Elizabeth II celebrated her diamond jubilee, many synagogues throughout the Commonwealth read out a prayer for the monarch.

Mike Cohen's email address is info@mikecohen.ca. Follow his travels at www.sandboxworld.com/travel and on Twitter @mikecohen.ca

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