

The Sun-Herald
Travel

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INSIDE
GROUP TOURS
SPECIAL REPORT



A photograph of a person from the waist up, wearing a black corset with white horizontal lacing and black gloves. They are leaning on a dark metal railing. The background shows a city street with buildings and a bridge structure.

Street theatre

A guide to London's tribes

Cover story

Big city birds of a feather

Know your tribes and you will have a true London experience, writes **Rachael Oakes-Ash**.

It's human nature for like to stick with like. Put a group of people together in an empty room and watch them search for similarities. Once discovered, they'll form tribes based on socio-economics, politics, gender, dress and passion.

The city of London is one big mix of tribes, dictated mainly by postcode or the colour of the tube line. In one day it's possible to mingle with the hoi polloi of Belgravia, strut your stuff with the "look at me" crowd in Shoreditch or drop your consonants with the tribes of Notting Hill.

The rich and famous

Mayfair and Marylebone

Hedge fund princes of the 1990s blew a new wind through Mayfair, clearing the streets of its stuffy old-world ways.

Mayfair is where it's at right now. Though, with the downturn in the British economy, those hedge fund offices may soon be up for rent, so make merry in Mayfair while you can.

The city's sleeker set descends upon this area, which borders Marylebone to the north and St James to the south.

It's home to tailor heaven Savile Row and the luxury power brands of Bond Street. Sotheby's has an office in the area and The Dorchester, Browns, Connaught and Claridges hotels all revel in their Mayfair address.

Expect suited city folk and their entourages, who use Mayfair as their entertaining district.

Many a deal has been brokered in the

Old money to burn

Belgravia, Knightsbridge, South Kensington and Chelsea

Arabian oil tycoons and eastern Europeans hang in Knightsbridge, western Europeans in South Kensington, generational money with heritage in Belgravia and trustafarians in Chelsea. The "SW" postcodes of London are well established for those who like their loafers Gucci and their rings signet. Mozart, Chopin and Tennyson have all laid their hats to rest in this district; today Nigella Lawson, Margaret Thatcher and Elle Macpherson call the area home.

Harrods and Harvey Nichols fight it out in Knightsbridge for fashion ladies who lunch, though Harvey Nichols' famous Fifth Floor food emporium wins every time. The Bibendum flower stall cafe next to design shrine Conran Shop serves up coffee and croissants for some streetside people-watching, while London's only three-starred Michelin restaurant, Gordon Ramsay, is in Chelsea on Royal Hospital Road.

Gwyneth and Chris's favourite exotic Indian, Amaya Restaurant, sits well in Knightsbridge, Tom Aiken's casual kitchen packs a crowd in South Kensington and you can't go past the Cross Keys pub in Chelsea for Sunday lunch. Be warned, Chelsea can attract a hooray-Henry toff set of lager-drinking rugger buggers with their pearl-wearing "gelfriends" on a bad night.

Chelsea's Kings Road, once a shopping strip dedicated to the creative and fashion, fav and



Connaught's lush new bar after a £70 million (\$151 million) refurbishment, while Paris Hilton and young royals favour the VIP area at Whisky Mint nightclub for late night tete-a-tetes.

The Dorchester's China Tang is a haven for the likes of Kate Moss and her friends. David Tang's China-inspired den also happens to have the cheapest super lunch in town, £15 for a midweek yum-cha-style delight.

Oxford Street splits Mayfair from Marylebone with Selfridges, a shrine to shopping design, right on the border.

Once a lacklustre area, Marylebone has turned the corner and boasts Madonna, Ringo Starr and style maven Sienna Miller among its residents.

Marylebone High Street is known as "the village" and it is here you'll find the banking set supping on chai lattes after one too many Krugs the night before.

The direct tube line to Canary Wharf opened up this region as a residential option for those in pin-stripe suits.

And yes, Madame Tussauds still exists on Marylebone Road, much to the chagrin of the locals who would prefer that the pesky tourists remained in naff Leicester Square.

has long since surrendered to high street franchises but Sloane and Motcombe streets in Knightsbridge provide all the international luxe fashion a gal can need, for a price.

The "young royal set" and their crew have put basement members-only club Boujis in the paparazzo's eye; the rest of us just head to London's finest day spa at the Mandarin Oriental for a good lie down.

Generation Y Not Me

Clerkenwell, Shoreditch and Hoxton

British shock artists Damien Hirst and Tracey Emin first put this inner East End area in the eye of the fashionable set in the '90s and the controversial White Cube Gallery is still here today. Now East End rents have blown out, warehouses converted to fancy-pants studios and the creative media set have moved in with their venture capitalist pals. It's still creative and the hip look-at-me crowd still wander the streets in all sorts of retro-inspired fashion.

The East End cockneys still serve up fish and chips from "caffs" or "greasy spoons" but they're competing with gourmand dining like St John



Restaurant in Clerkenwell, known as "nose to tail dining" and everything in between for lovers of offal, or the vibey Andalucian Moro Restaurant, also in Clerkenwell. Now it's all about the "mockney" or middle class cockney at Jamie Oliver's Fifteen restaurant or the Rivington Grill, with hearty home fare of welsh rarebit and bubble and squeak, gourmet-style.

There's a great buzz to this area, with markets galore that centre around Brick Lane, the home of curry and the famous 24-hour Beigel Bake House. Try Sunday (Up)Market at the Truman Brewery for local upcoming designers or Old Spitalfields Markets for vintage pieces. Peruse the streets for quirky one-off design boutiques, art galleries and people-watching or head straight to

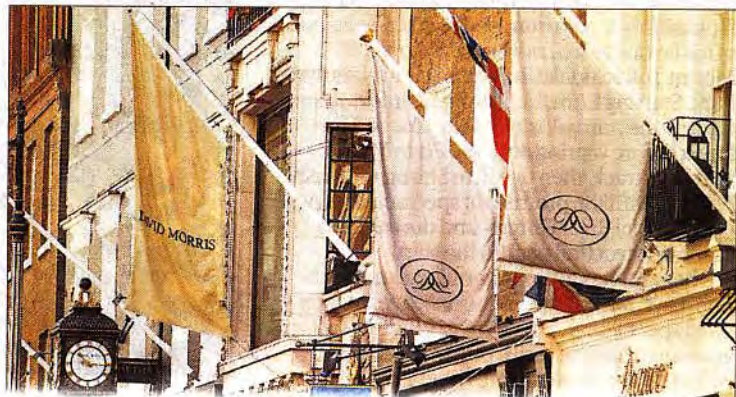
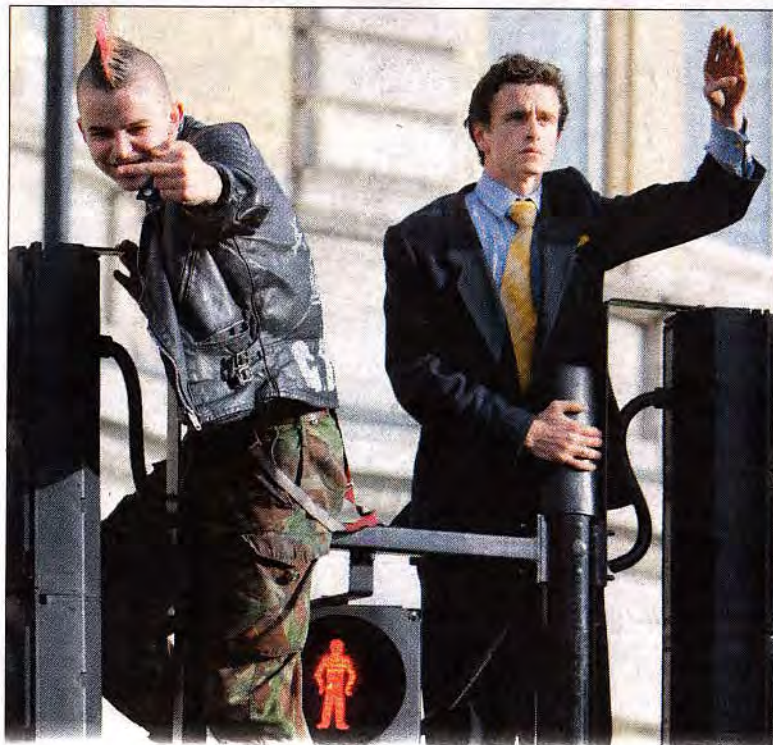
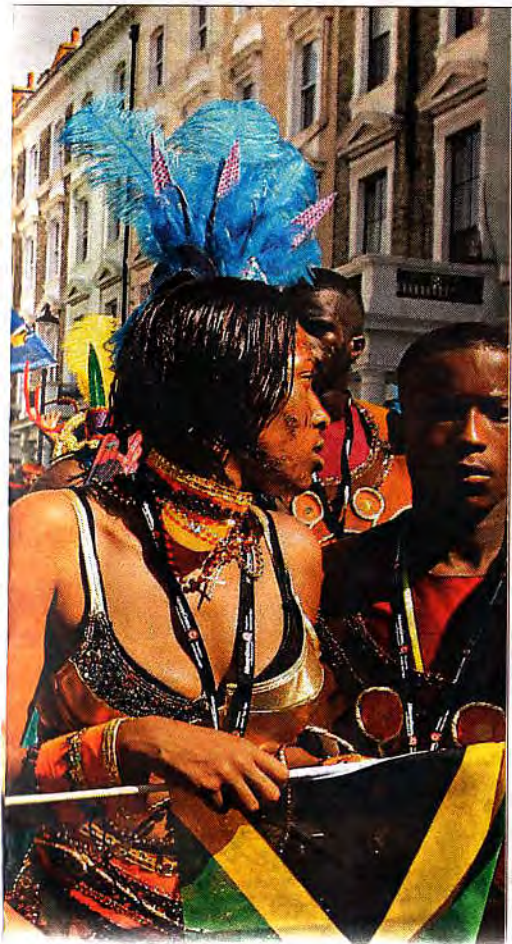
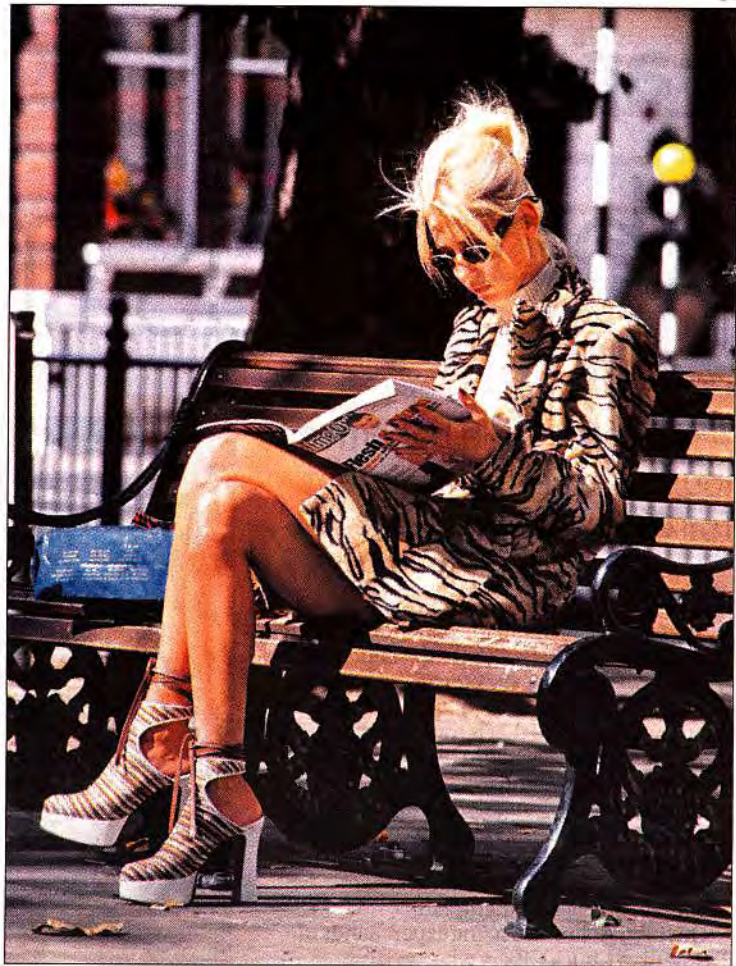
The George and Dragon Pub for seriously camp hilarity in front and behind the bar.

Rebels ... with cash

Primrose Hill and Camden

Best known for the Camden Markets, the northern portal of Camden was once a seething mix of angst-ridden, Goth-like teens who lived out their punk rite-of-rebellious-passage in the daily markets. It's now filled with Camden trendies sporting '80s-inspired fashion labels and calling Kelly Osbourne and Pete Doherty their new best friends while chugging Grey Goose vodka at Proud nightclub.

They're oblivious to the waterways that





navigate this area, the locks and canals between Camden and Little Venice in Maida Vale: canals that reveal a romantic side to London filled with waterside pubs for late afternoon tipples. For a scenic walk, follow the canal route from Camden to Little Venice, stopping for a pint along the way.

Neighbouring Primrose Hill is filled with the film set. Expect to run into actors, playwrights, directors and authors. Regents Park takes in some of Primrose Hill, which is a genteel, pretty district of London with historical architecture and a subversive creative culture.

The traditional pubs of these areas have all been taken over by the rise of the gastro pub; Gordon Ramsay opened his York & Albany in NW1 last October.

Bourgeoisie

Notting Hill, Kensington, Shepherd's Bush
For a while there, the west's Notting Hill was creative, really creative. Inspired with vibrant colour from Caribbean immigrants, it celebrated the melding of cultures with the Notting Hill Carnival every August. The celebration goes on but the mews and terraces and rough and tumble streets are renovated to within an inch of their lives to appear more bohemian than their conservative residents. It's all about the roof terrace in Notting Hill and the higher the better, preferably with a view of Portobello Road.

Westbourne Grove serves up enough designers to keep the upper middle-class happy; E&O is the

drinking hole of choice, with an Asian fusion dining room; Ottolenghi's superb gourmet finery fills the Smeg fridges of the homes surrounding this cafe; and the Electric Club is a private members-only upstairs treat for creative types, if they have the invitation and the money. It's a mix of downright dirty and super swanky and where the two collide, the creative action happens.

The Portobello Hotel's suites are famous, not least for Kate Moss bathing in champagne, while the Millers Residence is a visual feast of artefacts and curios in a quirky residence-style hotel.

Kensington borders Notting Hill with Kensington Palace, gardens and the famed Kensington High Street – a shrine to middle-of-the-road retail therapy. In the back streets of

Cultural melting pot ... (clockwise from far left) the Notting Hill Carnival; Camden High Street; stylish in Sloane Square, Chelsea; high-end fashion on Bond Street, Mayfair; suits and brutes in central London. Photos: Getty Images; photolibrary.com; AFP

> TRIP NOTES

- **Getting there** Emirates flies from Sydney to London via Dubai. Phone 1300 303 777, see emirates.com.
- **Further information** www.visitbritain.org.

Olympia you'll find two of the best pubs in London. The Havelock Tavern is a rustic pub with secretly good grub frequented by locals. The Scarsdale is a tiny pub near High Street with a sweet front courtyard and a pub restaurant serving hearty cuisine.