

LONDON

European Holiday Of A Lifetime

When Charles Dickens got bored, he apparently used to pop over to Covent Garden to count the pineapples. Covent Garden in his day was a noisy, colorful market. The warehouses were full of fruit, flowers and vegetables from all corners of the Empire and fleet-footed porters flurried back and forth with creaking carts, creating a cacophony of sound with the stalkkeepers crying out their wares.

These days, Dickens would barely recognize the place. The former market has moved to Nine Elms near Vauxhall and Covent Garden has been spruced up and turned into a spiffy shopping centre with over 30 shops, craft studios, galleries, boutiques and restaurants.

It's not as noisy as it was in the 19th century, but the exterior looks much the same as it was then. If anything, the buildings look better. The attractive iron and glass facades have been cleaned and the elegant Italian-style piazza, designed by Inigo Jones in 1630, has come back into its own again, now that it has been freed from the clutter of overflowing stalls.

But Covent Garden is only one of several areas that have taken on a new lease on life. London, following in the footsteps of cities like San Francisco, Boston and New Orleans, is undergoing a renaissance of sorts—restoring, rebuilding and redecorating its run-down districts, injecting them with life and turning them into new, exciting tourist attractions.

The Garden (as locals call it), is steeped in the history of the theatre (there are over 18 theatres in the surrounding area alone) and the narrow streets that wind around the complex are lined with theatre supply stores, art galleries and fine art book stores.

St. Katharine by the Tower is another new development. It is, as its name suggests, right next to the Tower of London, which in itself takes a whole day to go around. St. Katharine is a kind of London version of Toronto's Harborfront, a collection of wharves and warehouses converted into stores, snack bars and a pub. Cobblestone walkways line the River Thames and the docks have been made into a marina, complete with a floating maritime museum.

The docks, like Covent Garden, had their heyday during the days of the British Empire. They were designed by Thomas Telford, the Scottish canal builder, and the place was a hive of activity during the 19th century when ships of all shapes and sizes sat in the harbor, loading and unloading their colorful cargoes.

Ivory, cloves, cigars, spices, sugar and rum were all carried onto carts, pulled by heavy, plumed horses, the tractor-trailers of their day. Travelling menageries entertained the passers-by and the drinking houses were crammed with all manner of folk. It was a place where, according to a contemporary report, you could buy "bear, a beer or a whore" at any time of the day or night.

Things had quietened down considerably by the time the 20th century rolled around. By the end of the 1960s, the docks were derelict, their warehouses empty and the windows smashed. Today St. Katharine's is unrecognizable. Linchpin of the new complex is a World Trade Centre, a hotel and a jetfoil terminal. St. Katharine by the Tower was restored primarily to attract business to a rundown area, but because of its proximity to the tower and the Thames it has become a tourist attraction as well.

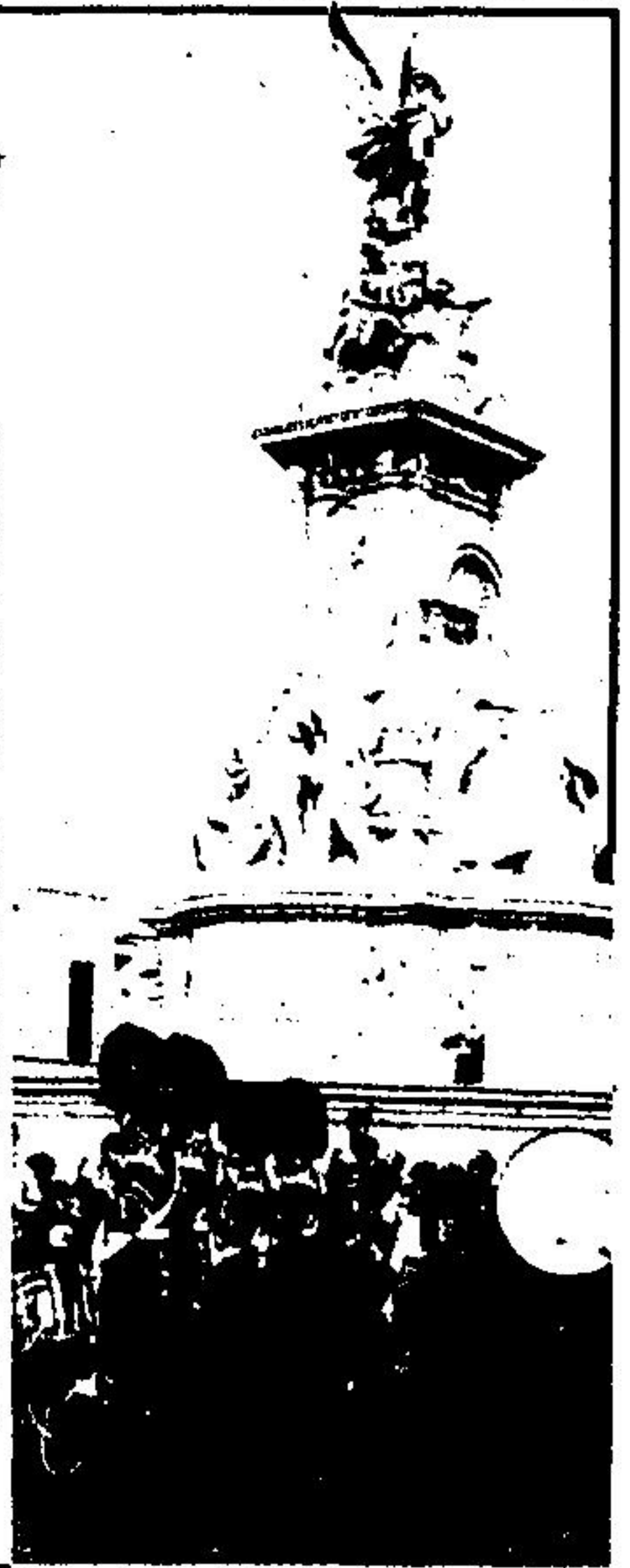
Many of the warehouses have been made into gift shops and snack bars and the Dickens Inn, an 18th century pub, is a delightful spot to stop for lunch. The hostelry was discovered quite by accident. When workmen started stripping a brick warehouse, they discovered a timberframe building underneath and the pub has been renovated in period style, complete with wooden floors liberally sprinkled with sawdust.

Travel Information

Because of the favorable rate of exchange (roughly \$2 to pound sterling), London is once again a cheap destination for Canadian travellers.

British Airways links Toronto with London and this season the airline is offering hotel and theatre packages at rock bottom prices.

Further information call Roos Travel, Georgetown Marketplace, 877-0138.



Club Med...

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children at 6.30, and then the staff has post-dinner activities such as movies or games until 9 p.m., when the youngsters head back to mom 'n' pop. Babysitters can take over at that point or perhaps after the nightly show put on by the GOs or a visiting professional troupe, like the mimes of Eleuthera or the voodoo dances of Haiti.

Some of the activities for the younger kids are the same as for the older group, but the two schedules are staggered so the little ones never get underfoot with the "big kids." The activities range from your basic YMCA or summer camp programs (arts 'n' crafts, swimming, movies) to the not-so-routine, such as the daily videotaping, circus skills or computer workshops, video games, snorkelling, sailing or water skiing.

Despite the obvious romancing of the family market, Club Med is not trying to turn itself into an overgrown daycare center. Not every village will have a Mini Club, which will cut down the pitter-patter of little feet and the inevitable distractions that can occur when youngsters congregate.

Apart from simply being away from kids—and that factor alone can make many a vacation successful—the Club Med schedule can "hit a home run" for those who want to do a little or do nothing, those who want to sit and read a book in the special shade beach at Punta Cana, for instance, or participate in every activity, shoot every basketball, return every volleyball serve or tennis volley, catch every pop-up in softball or touch every piece of coral seen while snorkelling or scuba diving at, say, Buccaneer's Creek in Martinique, or Fort Royal in Guadeloupe.

Swimming, water skiing, snorkelling, sailing, volleyball and tennis are found at every village in the American Zone. Paradise Island's 20-court tennis layout, by the way, is the biggest hideout for racquetballers in the Club Med system.

Eleuthera and Fort Royal not only boast Mini Clubs, but are the only villages with an underwater photo laboratory (no charge for camera use but a small fee for film). Eleuthera, Caravelle and Ixtapa are the lone computer workshop sites, while Ixtapa offers a chance to play golf free on a nearby Robert Trent Jones Jr. championship course (small charge for clubs and carts). And scuba diving is available at Buccaneer's Creek, Fort Royal, Eleuthera, Cancun, Playa Blanca and Tahiti.

Barbara Thomas met a honeymooning couple from Toronto in Eleuthera who focused on the scuba diving. "They'd never gone ocean diving before, although they had just gotten their certification at home, but it was for fresh water, so they were anxious to learn about the ocean. They enjoyed that part of it, but they also said it had cost them \$60 a day just to rent equipment when they were taking lessons at home, but the equipment didn't cost a thing at Club Med; it was all part of the whole thing."

That kind of economic saving is another appealing aspect of Club Med. Except for liquor and souvenirs and incidentals, everything comes complete with the package price. There are no additional charges for equipment, court time or you-name-it except in rare cases.

Every village has one or more excursions, which are available at extra cost, such as the daylong trip to the fascinating, historic hilltop Citadel of Cap Haitien in Haiti, shopping trips from several villages, or the deep sea fishing at Eleuthera or Playa Blanca.

"I don't know about anyone else," says Bob Gibson, "but that's the only way we could have afforded this trip. We knew what it was going to cost right from the start, except for our booze and maybe some T-shirts or other souvenirs. We're not big drinkers, so that's no big expense and it really means, with their special rates for the girls, that we all get a relaxing and enjoyable vacation."



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