

DESTINATIONS

London legends and our loonie

Cultural pursuits here don't have to be expensive

by Jane Stokes

It was a bikini they told us at the Museum of London. A "leather bikini" to be exact, "probably worn by an entertainer, or exotic dancer, in the 1st century AD." Evidence, we all agreed, that some of the more important things in society never change.

The bikini, when worn correctly, would have been "tied on each side by leather laces" and is just one revealing piece of Roman life to be unearthed and excavated within the original, walled-city of London.

Very little of the actual walls have survived the times however. But thanks to the tireless effort of the Museum of London, it is easy to envision that period of several hundred years in which the Roman capital, *Londonium*, was built: its Forum, its law courts, lavish baths and palaces, arcades and shops, plus a 35,000-seat amphitheatre discovered only three years ago under present-day Guildhall.

And yet, since London has faced such adversity in its past, putting the pieces in historical sequence now requires insight and imagination. The city was sacked and abandoned after the Romans left, and then during the Great Fire of 1666, practically all of London, including the distinct, half-timbered homes of the Tudor times, were burned to the ground. Today — but only after massive reconstruction following the bombing of World War II — this ancient city real-estate is a formidable financial centre.

East of here, follow Middlesex Street into the lively ethnic villages and the home of Cockney culture. Rollicking street markets attract the tourists and so does the vast and excellent choice in curry houses, middle-eastern, and kosher eateries — all of which are valid proof that one can still get a decent meal, at a decent price in London.

Affordable dining

In fact, if you want even more choice head back over to The Queensway, north of Kensington Gardens off Bayswater Road. Restaurant meals here, like all-you-can-eat Chinese, Thai, Indian, Malaysian, Italian, German, Swiss, English pub-food, French bistros and even Tex-Mex — are priced most reasonably for London at around \$50 or so for two.

Affordable nights

The tree-lined, Bayswater Road area is also known for reasonably-priced accommodation. Canadian tour operators are constantly looking for ways to keep travel costs in line. This year for example, look at the Air Transat Holidays Buying Guide and all the hotel options available in the Greater London Area. Note as well, the increasing number of weekly charters to

destinations all over England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales. Here are some of their accommodation ideas:

- The very central, very popular areas of Bayswater, Bloomsbury, The West End, and South Kensington are all on the program. Best value options include: The Commodore Hotel, in the Bayswater area, near to Oxford Street and Hyde Park, offering elegant rooms and continental breakfast; St. Giles Hotel, in the West End theatre district, near Covent Garden, offering small but comfortable rooms, with continental breakfast; The President Hotel, near the British Museum in the Bloomsbury area is also considered a "best buy", and so is The Kensington Plaza Hotel in the upscale South Kensington area, near Harrods.

- Or, from the same brochure, identify and book the hotel of your choice *a la carte* from a huge selection of one, two, three, and three-plus star hotels.

- Apartment and Studio accommodation is designed to save on the cost of meals. Look at the program offered in London from \$189 for a studio per night. Paris, Brussels and the south of France are also featured from \$116 per studio, per night.

Historic walking tours and Sunday markets

Today, the original Roman one-square-mile of London is called *the City* and includes such landmarks as The Old Bailey, The Royal Exchange, The Stock Exchange, St. Paul's Cathedral, The Tower of London, Tower Bridge and St. Katherine's Dock. The northern boundary of the City is a street called London Wall. While there, drop in to the Museum of London bookshop, pick-up a self-guide tour map and walk where the Romans walked, starting right outside the museum door. If you want to stay longer at the museum, entrance tickets are around \$7, or if you arrive late on a Sunday afternoon, it's often free.

In fact Sunday is a splendid day in the City. The atmosphere is totally opposite the pace from Monday to Friday when this, one of the most important financial centres in the world, swells from 5,000 residents, to more than 300,000 employees. Generally,

it's chaotic with traffic, but on most Sunday mornings, you could literally walk right down the middle of central Lombard Street and Fenchurch Street, also known to be two of the oldest roads in Britain.

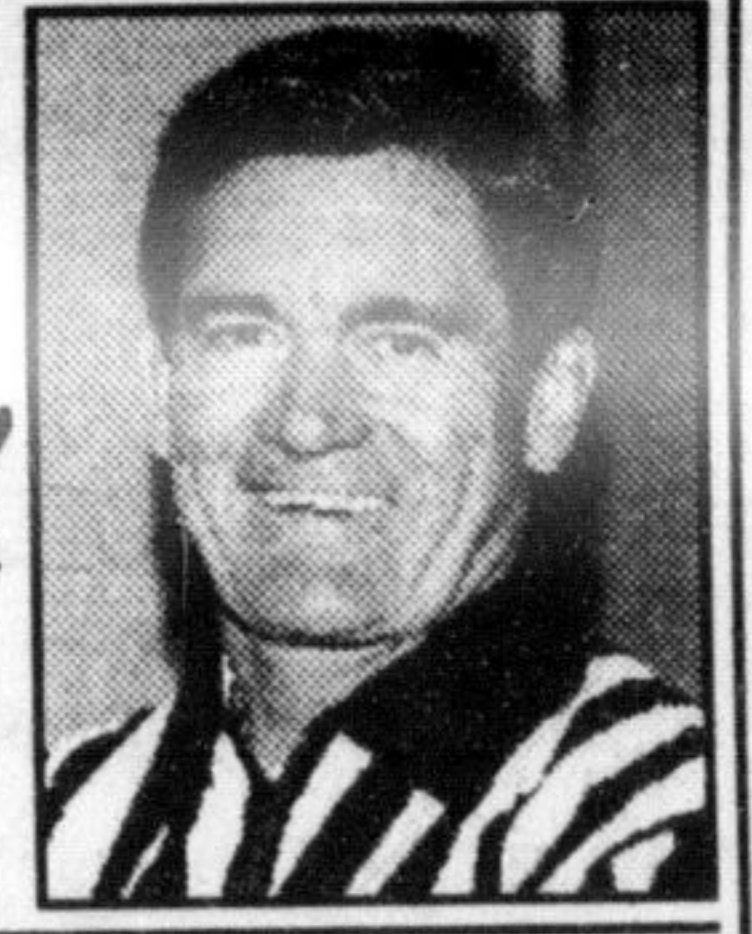
And then again, you may have much more fun at the markets.

Head a little further east and you're at Petticoat Lane, the matriarch of the Sunday markets with its lively exchange of both current and dated household goods, music, books and antiques, and plenty of fashion, including flamboyant clubwear and the latest in inside-out, underwear.

You'll find genuine bargains too, particularly in leather. So don't forget, since Petticoat Lane merchandise is priced marginally higher than the lesser known Sunday markets, be sure to bargain them down. Who knows, you may go home with a really good deal on a leather bikini.

Travel

with
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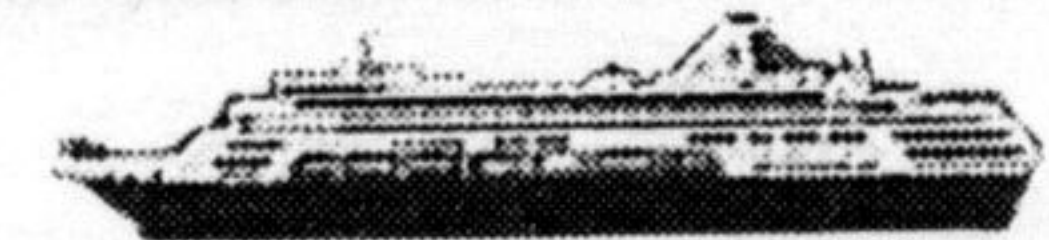
WE ALL TALK/THINK/DREAM/PONDER ABOUT TRAVEL TO FAR-OFF DESTINATIONS, but right here at home in Canada there are as many interesting points of interest as anywhere in the world. From the BEAUTIFUL, BREATHTAKING ROCKY SHORES OF NEWFOUNDLAND, and all the Atlantic region, on into QUEBEC with its history, to the PRAIRIES and their offerings, and finally to the MANY SENSATIONS OF OUR WEST COAST region - THERE IS SO MUCH TO SEE AND DO! Of course, RIGHT HERE IN ONTARIO, there is a diversity of interesting sites to visit/stay - terrain, small town, big town, city, etc. environments - a variety to match the best!




HAVING JUST RETURNED FROM A TRIP THROUGH MEXICO AND THE UNITED STATES, we can vouch for the fact that as much as there is to see and relate to on these JUNKETS ACROSS NORTH AMERICA, we have a tremendous amount to offer right here at home - maybe not with the depth of history, but every bit as exciting and interesting. While travel to those far-off destinations such as Asian and former Soviet Union countries continues to increase somewhat relative to the number of folks now able to travel (have the time, and money!) so too does travel across Canada. The slogan - YOURS TO DISCOVER (borrowed from Ontario) applies right here at home in Ontario, and across our great country.



BRITISH COLUMBIA IS AN EXAMPLE of the diversity within our country, right in their own province. From the statured ROCKY MOUNTAINS to the PACIFIC OCEAN, to valleys of orchards, rural areas of small towns and cattle and horse spreads, to the cities - VANCOUVER, VICTORIA - the ferry boat rides, the floral offerings - the list goes on and on. STANLEY PARK, the largest city park in North America at 1000 acres right in downtown Vancouver - a treat to visit just to see the massive trees, to BUTCHART GARDENS, a must-visit in Victoria along with the historic EMPRESS HOTEL for afternoon tea - on up Vancouver Island, or the OKANAGAN to see the wineries, or salmon spawning in the rivers - so much to see and do.



BOOK YOUR ALASKAN CRUISE NOW - your ship will be one of over 300 sailings to leave from the PORT OF VANCOUVER this summer, and while you are there plan an extra week, or two, to visit what B.C. has to offer before you cruise or after you return. A WONDERFUL OPPORTUNITY which more and more people are taking advantage of. FOUR NEW CRUISESHIPS this year join the 25 or so already sailing out of there - SO, DO IT NOW - GO - THE CRUISE TO ALASKA, and the many ports of call - a very, very memorable trip, and tied into a visit to Beautiful BRITISH COLUMBIA - little else matches it.

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