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Princess *Diana's* LONDON

For an insider's look at its luxuries,
follow in the footsteps of royalty.

Beautiful, intuitive, demanding, complex. Diana, Princess of Wales was all this and much more. A lightning rod for controversy, the "Queen of People's Hearts" seemed to split public opinion into two camps—those who admired her for her compassion, humanitarian work and glamour and those who didn't see what all the fuss was about.

Although she has been gone for almost 10 years, interest in the princess continues. A Google search of her name draws nearly 11 million citations. Scores of books about her have been published, and the recent "Diana, a Celebration" exhibition at the Dayton Art Institute attracted more than 120,000 people, making it the institute's second-highest attended offering in its 87-year history.

"I'm not a royal watcher, but she was special," said Peggy St. Amand, who drove from Union, Ky., to see the display of dresses, personal mementos, photographs and rare home movies.

Whatever it was about Diana that made her one of the most famous people of the late 20th century, the magic dust still lingers, perhaps nowhere more than in London.

Visitors to the British capital can dine at



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BY BARBARA
WAYMAN





ARTS AND EXHIBITIONS INTERNATIONAL



Lady Diana (opposite page) became a princess when she walked down the opulent nave at St. Paul's Cathedral (left). Her sense of style was renowned; it's shared in the Style Gallery exhibit at Althorp (above), where Diana is buried.

some of her favorite restaurants and shop at many of her most frequented stores. In addition, new statues, parks and museum exhibits have been established in memory of a woman who received the world's adulation, yet remained enormously insecure.

Taking advantage of a discount airfare to London on bmi Airlines, I set out to follow in the footsteps of a princess to get a sense of what Diana's life in London was really like.

POMP AND CIRCUMSTANCE

Great first stops for any Dianaphile in London are Kensington Palace and St. Paul's Cathedral. Kensington Palace was Diana's London residence, and St. Paul's was the setting for her July 29, 1981, wedding to Prince Charles, watched by 750 million TV viewers around the world. Both are stunning architecturally and fascinating to walk through.

Approaching the wrought-iron gates of Kensington Palace, it's hard to believe the building started out as a modest suburban mansion. To be fit for its first royal occupants, the house was enlarged significantly. Princess Victoria of Kent was living here in 1837 when she got the news that she had become Queen Victoria, just one of a host of royals who have called Kensington Palace home over the past three centuries.

While Diana's former apartment is not open for public viewing, other apartments are, along with a collection of royal ceremonial gowns. Also at Kensington Palace until July is an exhibit of photographs of Diana by Mario Testino, which show a carefree and laughing princess modeling some of the dresses she later auctioned for charity. Several of the dresses are on view, including the famous "John Travolta dress" Diana wore for her first visit to the White House, where she danced with the *Saturday Night Fever* star. I found poignancy in the photographs, knowing that the portrait session was Diana's last, taking place just five months before her death.

The glamorous era of Diana began at St. Paul's Cathedral

SAMPSON LLOYD/ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL

with a fairytale wedding in a spectacular ivory taffeta gown. St. Paul's looks much prettier now than when the princess' wedding took place, having just undergone a comprehensive restoration to remove centuries of dirt, grime and soot. After five years of work, the tarps and scaffoldings are down, revealing sparkling mosaics, gorgeous sculptures, clean stone and detailed wood carvings.

Visitors should plan to spend at least two hours seeing everything from the paintings at the top of the dome down to the crypt below, including a walk up the center aisle just as Diana did, while being surrounded by 3,500 guests inside and 600,000 well-wishers lining the surrounding streets. When the weather is fine, a climb to the Golden Gallery offers a rewarding view of London.

THE SPAAAAH

An aspect of the life of a princess that I find very appealing is being indulged with spa treatments. Princess Diana regularly scheduled what she called "Pamper Diana" days, which included a range of restorative pleasures such as aromatherapy, zone therapy (which stimulates pressure points in the hands and feet), acupuncture and deep tissue mas-



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sage. While Diana did once vacation at a spa, she generally preferred to receive her services from individual therapists. So while I couldn't check out her favorite pamper palace, I found an excellent haven near Hyde Park called Spa Illuminata, with a Roman- and Greek-inspired decor.

"You expect Cleopatra to walk in with some milk at any time," said Manager Nichola Rose. Spa Illuminata has a range of water, steam and aroma treatments, going far beyond the basic offerings. Since Diana was so adventurous in this area, I tried the tactile sound therapy, which involved listening to gentle harmonic vibrations through a headset while receiving a head-and-neck massage. Twinkling lights glowed like stars in the darkened room, and I must admit I felt deeply relaxed, both during and after the 30-minute treat.

SHOP LIKE A ROYAL

Now ready to really hit the shops, I started with London's most famous shopping mecca—Harrods. A favorite of the princess, Harrods is more of a feast for the senses than a traditional department store. Diana was said to have stopped in Harrods to purchase Erno Laszlo skin care items, La Perla lingerie, and stockings from Christian Dior and Le Bourget, among other items. I spent hours wandering the more than 1 million square feet of selling space and was particularly captivated by the abundant displays in the jewelry department, perfume shop and food hall.

Harrods is owned by the father of Diana's last love, Dodi Fayed, who commissioned an eight-foot bronze statue of the two for the store. Titled *Innocent Victims*, the lovers gaze at each other and raise their hands to hold an albatross, a symbol of eterni-

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Tributes

Althorp—If you missed the "Diana, a Celebration" at the Dayton Art



Institute, you can still check it out at Althorp, Princess Diana's 500-year-old ancestral home 90 miles outside London. In addition to a 100-plus room mansion with historic paintings, rare furnishings, silverware and ceramics, Althorp also showcases the life and work of the princess through audiovisual presentations and exhibits. Althorp also is the princess' final resting place; she is buried on an island in the Round Oval Lake. Althorp is open during July and August. For more information, visit www.althorp.com.

The Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Walk—Established by the Royal Parks, this self-guided tour takes visitors on a seven-mile walk through Hyde Park, Green Park and St. James' Park and past palaces and sites associated with the princess. Ninety rose-decorated aluminum plaques guide the route. A brochure called "A Walk for Diana" has a map and is available at London tourism offices.

The Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Playground—The Royal Parks Playground in Kensington Gardens was redesigned in 2000 to celebrate Diana's love of children. It has six play areas and includes ladder ramps, tree phones, a mermaid's fountain and a wigwam camp with totem poles and teepees. More information is available at www.royalparks.gov.uk.

The Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fountain—In 2004, Queen Elizabeth opened a granite fountain in Hyde Park as a tribute to Diana. The design of the fountain mimics Diana's life, with unsettled water flowing from two directions until it meets in a calm pool. The fountain has become one of London's most popular tourist attractions. For details, visit www.royalparks.gov.uk.

The regal Draycott Hotel is a five-star beauty located on a quiet garden square (below), and it features individually decorated rooms (left). The hotel is near high-end shopping and London's theater district.

Before You Go

- **bmi Airlines:** www.flybmi.com
- **Kensington Palace:** www.hrp.org.uk
- **St. Paul's Cathedral:** www.stpauls.co.uk
- **Spa Illuminata:** www.spailluminata.co.uk
- **Harrods:** www.harrods.com
- **Harvey Nichols:** www.harveynichols.com
- **Ladurée:** www.Laduree.fr
- **Cocoon Restaurant:** www.cocoon-restaurants.com
- **The Draycott Hotel:** www.draycotthotel.com



ty and good fortune. Since its unveiling in 2005 on the eighth anniversary of the car crash that killed the pair, the statue has been a source of controversy in London, with some questioning the tastefulness of the tribute and its setting. We'll never know if Diana would have approved of the artwork, but its larger-than-life size makes it hard to miss.

Not far from Harrods is Harvey Nichols, which was another of Diana's favorite department stores, carrying everything from designer fashions to housewares. I stopped at the perfume counter to sample the Annick Goutal Passion perfume that Diana routinely wore. Its rose scent seemed to suit the woman who was called "England's Rose."

A world-class shopper, Diana had many other favorite retailers in the London area. To shop like a princess, travelers should stop at Janet Reger on Brompton Road for fancy lingerie and Butler & Wilson on Fulham Road for costume jewelry that Diana delighted in passing off as the real thing.

UPPER CRUST

Diana once said *Ménage a Trois* in Knightsbridge was her favorite restaurant. It served only appetizers and desserts and was designed for women by restau-

rateur Anthony Worrall Thompson after he observed that women he dated gravitated toward those sections of the menu. Although *Ménage a Trois* has closed, Knightsbridge's *Le Cercle Restaurant* has a similar menu, offering a wide variety of small French dishes and plenty of mouthwatering desserts like chocolate fondant, banana trifle and pear par-fait with salted soft caramel.

If Italian food appeals, dine at *San Lorenzo* in Beauchamp Place, another of the princess' favorite haunts. Her son William once surprised her by reserving a table for the two of them when he was still a boy.

Not wanting to miss out on some of London's newest dining hot spots, I had tea at *Ladurée* in Harrods, a tea salon, bakery and restaurant rolled into one. There is seating in three areas: the marble-filled main room, the maroon velvet upstairs, or the chic black-and-silver lounge. Don't miss trying the renowned macaroons, which come in such flavors as lime ginger, raspberry lemon and rose petal.

My most memorable meal in London was at *Cocoon Restaurant & Bar* on Regent Street. *Cocoon's* chefs marry Japanese, Chinese and Thai cuisines in a vibrant environment that was packed with beautiful people during my visit. The decor is fascinating, with rose petals inside Plexiglas tables and mod black-and-white pod chairs that look like something from the 1960s.

A PERSONAL PALACE

For an unforgettable home base in London, the Draycott Hotel is a perfect choice. Steeped in Edwardian splendor, its beautifully appointed rooms would have made Princess Diana feel right at home. Just around the corner from London's fashionable Sloane Square, the 35-room hotel was built from three grand brick townhouses that date to the 1880s. The decor is gorgeous and sweet touches like complimentary tea and cookies each afternoon or champagne before dinner made me feel incredibly pampered.

So what did I learn from exploring London on the trail of one of its most famous inhabitants? In many ways, it's good to be the princess, surrounded by beautiful environments, wonderful food and gracious service. Yet on a daily basis, Diana had to cope with constant surveillance, loads of rules and restrictions, and gangs of paparazzi. As we've come to know, Diana's life was not as happy as it initially seemed.

Perhaps Diana's legacy is the knowledge that human beings are works in progress. Being vulnerable and flawed doesn't bar one from touching others. In fact, sometimes it allows for much greater impact. And while you're at it, a little glamour never hurts.

■ *Barbara Wayman*
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