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Secret London - An Unusual Guide



Synopsis

Where can you find monsters in Trafalgar Square? Whatever happened to Bedlam? Where can you praise God, buy meat- balls and have a sauna? What's in the House of Dreams? To which secret society does Prince Charles belong? What's the trick to instant weight loss? Secret London, An Unusual Guide, is the original and still the best of all the many alternative London guides: accept no imitation. Authors Rachel Howard and Bill Nash have prowled the city streets, seeking out the hidden, eccentric and overlooked. Now the definitive insider's guide to London has been fully updated, with over 40 new entries and a brand new look. Far from the crowds and the usual clichés, London still reserves a number of hidden treasures for those who know how to wander off the beaten track.

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Customer Reviews

Rachel Howard is a journalist and copywriter who has lived in almost every borough in London. A regular contributor to Conde Nast Traveller, National Geographic Traveler, and The Guardian, Rachel writes mainly about travel, food, and the arts. She previously spent a decade writing speeches for the Greek foreign minister. But that's another story. Bill Nash is an actor and writer, with family roots all across London. An obsession with the city's corners is the foundation for his contribution to this book. He lives in Brixton with his family and an ineffective cat.

"It's a serene, unpretentious little place with a real sense of community - a perfect spot to settle in

with the Sunday papers while your kids make a beeline for the poisonous plants." - from SECRET LONDON, regarding Chumleigh Gardens

London is my favorite city of all those in the world I've visited. SECRET LONDON by Rachel Howard and Bill Nash (with photos by Stephanie Rivoal and Jorge Monedero) is for travelers like me who've been there more times than I can count and might foolishly wonder what there's left to see. This "unusual guide," which can fit in a backpack, is divided into the city's geographic areas. They are, with the number of described points-of-interest in parenthesis: Westminster to Camden (35), Temple to Angel (38), Tower Bridge to Shoreditch (26), Marylebone to Shepherd's Bush (14), Westminster to Hammersmith (10), South Bank to Brixton (15), Whitechapel to Woolwich (19), Greater London - North (20), and Greater London - South (14). There's also a bonus section listing thirty-five Unusual Bars, Cafes, and Restaurants around town. Each area is prefaced both with a color map showing major streets and a numerical listing of the points-of-interest for that area; the numbers are positioned on the map. The majority of the points-of-interest are described by a single color photo and a half-page to a full page of text that includes address, website, phone number, hours, admission fee (if any), and nearest Tube station. On each page there may also be noted "Sights Nearby," which may or may not be included in the numbering scheme. Of the 191 numbered listings, I'm ashamed to admit that I've seen only two: John Snow's Cholera Pump and the Thames Flood Barrier. Having admitted my disgrace, however, I must point out that most, if not all, would appeal to those whose interests are rather esoteric, and I likely wouldn't visit many of them anyway. The City of London Bowling Club? The Cherry Tree at the Mitre Tavern? The Fan Museum? The Handlebar (moustache) Club? The Twinings Tea Museum? The London Buddhist Centre? The Fetter Lane Moravian Burial Ground? The Bread Basket Boy? The West Reservoir? The Marylebone Cricket Club Museum? The Magpie Alley Crypt? The Brixton Windmill? The Traffic Light Tree? The Giant Scribble? Um, no to all and many more, I'm afraid. But, I would attend to such as: the Westminster Abbey Undercroft, the Hyde Park Pet Cemetery, the Museum of Brands, Packaging and Advertising, the Materials Library, Nunhead Cemetery, Relics of the Elephant Man, the BFI Mediatheque, the Old Operating Theatre, and a few more. Perhaps even Chumleigh Gardens to watch the unsupervised kids make a beeline for the poisonous plants. I'm awarding five stars to SECRET LONDON because it does beautifully what it was intended to do, i.e. provide guidance to London's unusual and alternative attractions. My only complaint is that the authors' dry humor is displayed only rarely.

Once you feel familiar with a given city, how do you start to delve into the place at a deeper level? We took Secret London *An Unusual Guide* and it was a delightful

way of finding some new and unusual things to see. We were based Fitzrovia/Bloomsbury and so focused on some of the suggestions for that area. An interesting excursion to The Hardy Tree, in Old St Pancras Churchyard (just 5 minutes' walk from at the back of St Pancras, was a bit of a revelation. How often had I passed by that graveyard without realizing the gems within. Author Thomas Hardy originally trained as an architect and was involved in clearing graves to make way for the extension of the Midland Railway. Dealings with dead informed his writing in later years. Today, those stacked up gravestones have been incorporated into a tree over the years and makes for a real blend of man-made and natural elements. The same graveyard offers up the tomb for John Soane (architect of Dulwich Picture Gallery, also mentioned in the book). This provided inspiration for the iconic red telephone boxes that dotted the city until very recently. Who know? Have you noticed the caryatids at St Pancras Church, modeled on the Erechtheum of the Acropolis? Now rather blackened because of its location on, Euston Road. Sculptor Charles Rossi constructed them off site and when they were transported from his studio to the church, he discovered they were too tall. He thus cut out their midriffs. And the gems just keep rolling in. A lovely guidebook to take you away from the big tourist attractions.

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We used this guide on a recent visit to London, and found it useful, opening doors to the obscure we might not have noticed. The descriptions are accurate as far as we tested them, and the format is portable. There is another book with the same title - get both! More fun than Pokemon Go.

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