

Living the London life

by GERALYN EDWARD

HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS of British visitors head to Barbados each year to enjoy the place they call "Little England" but one of the best kept secrets is the city that many of them leave behind.

London, the sophisticated, eclectic metropolis is not only the major financial centre in Europe but it is also one of the finest examples of a country that has meticulously preserved its architectural heritage.

And for those who have taken a particular interest in ensuring that Barbados capitalizes on Bridgetown's designation as a United Nations World Heritage Site, will be blown away by fact that the city of London features no less than four World Heritage Sites. London has a diverse range of peoples and



THE VIRGIN ATLANTIC BASE has been the site of many movies, including a James Bond sequel.





THE POPPY appeal in London's Victoria Station.

cultures, and more than 300 languages are spoken by the more than nine million citizens who call it home.

The British capital is really one of the best uncovered treasures that many Barbadians overlook as they head off to places like New York, Miami or Toronto. But ask anyone who has been smitten by the London bug and you would be told to dismiss the misconception that London was too expensive, cold or even too far away. Virgin Atlantic makes the eight-hour flight to England appear like a hop and skip because of the red carpet service that it lays out for travellers.

As Beverley Layne, Virgin's marketing and public relations executive, explained, a visit to London and its offerings in culture, food, shopping and way of life will change your perspective on which city to choose for your next vacation.

The extremely reliable and comprehensive network of underground, rail, bus and taxi services make getting around the city a breeze.

The shopping is also a major attraction. Just observing Londoners will show you why they are among the fashion trendsetters in ladies and men's apparel.

The must-sees in London include Covent Garden, Westminster Abbey, Big Ben, the River Thames, and Buckingham Palace. There are also the sidewalk cafes and street performers, as well as the dizzying and seemingly never-ending streets of fine shopping and restaurants that range from coffee shops to the most exquisite eateries offering culinary delights from around the world.



ONE OF the many street performers in London.



EVEN in late October thousands of visitors flock to the

THE WORLD-FAMOUS Harrods store by



Ten things I loved most about London.

1: Travelling Upper Class on Virgin Atlantic from Barbados to Gatwick and falling asleep on those seats that convert to beds after my choice of two episodes of *Big Bang Theory* and the British documentary *Anne Boleyn* – England's first Queen to be executed.

2: The great British service that aims to keep customers happy. There was always someone there to make long lines move quickly whether it was in a department store, at the airport or in the Underground.

3: Visiting *The Virgin Base* where the airline's employees go through their

rigorous training and annual refreshers. Also, being among the first to view Virgin Atlantic's new uniforms to be launched soon around the world, was among the highlights.

4: London's efficient transport system. From my hotel at Gatwick Airport, it was so easy to access Central London. Every 15 minutes without fail the Gatwick Express takes you on a 30-minute trip to London's Victoria Station from where you can explore this wonderful city. My £20 day travel card allowed me to ride the Gatwick Express, the London Underground, and most buses without paying a cent more within

a 24-hour period.

5: The Big Bus Tour. A guided tour of London's most magnificent sites aboard the city's famed double decker buses with live commentary from very entertaining tour guides. These unobstructed views of places like Buckingham Palace, Westminster Abbey, the Tower of London and Trafalgar Square are a photographer's delight. The trip also includes a stunning river tour option on the Thames. Best of all – with one ticket you can get off at any attraction, take photographs and hop on the next Big Bus that passes every 10 to 20 minutes for no extra fee.

6: Covent Garden, on the West End of London, is a popular shopping site that's teeming with visitors, hilarious street performers, food, quaint shops, and outdoor cafes among beautifully restored neo-classical buildings.

7: Trafalgar Square made me feel at home with the similarities between Historic Bridgetown and London.

8: As a former fan of Miami shopping, London has become the new go-to for quality products at great prices. From Gap to Zara, H&M, Primark to Marks & Spencer,

the range is awesome.

9: VAT refunds. If you are a visitor to London after you shop just take your receipts to the store's customer service section where a form is generated which you take to customs at the airport and get back all the value added tax you paid either in cash or placed on your credit card.

10: Dining out. And no – menus are not limited to fish and chips. Like any modern city, London's offering ranges from swanky French-style brasseries and oyster bars to pubs and coffee shops.