



Regent's Park Open Air Theatre, London

www.allwaystraveller.com

Evenings with the stars – under the stars

Regent's Park Open Air Theatre, which is located in Queen Mary's Gardens, on the Inner Circle of Regent's Park was founded in 1932 by Sydney Carroll and Robert Atkins.

It has been one of London's unique theatrical attractions ever since.

The theatre itself is surrounded by woodland, which is invariably used to great effect as a stage backdrop.

It is the UK's largest permanent professional outdoor theatre and, during the summer months, stages a programme of drama, comedy and musicals.

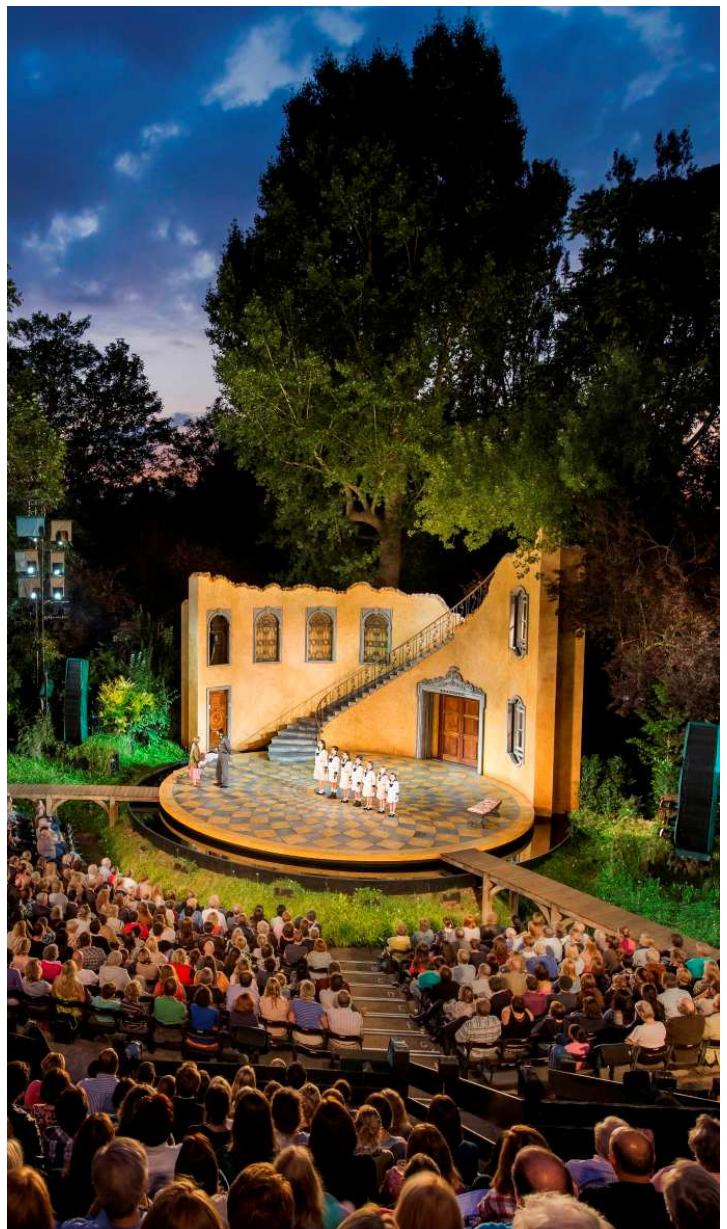
Stars of stage and screen are keen to perform here.

And despite enjoying one of the largest audience auditoriums of any London theatre, the tiered seating and overall ambience gives the *Regent's Park Open Air Theatre* a real intimacy and special atmosphere.

The best way to make the most of a visit is to arrive early with a hamper and chilled wine (or opt for the theatre's fine selection of food and drinks).

A pre-theatre picnic on the picnic lawn is a delight in its own right.

Ashley Gibbins
Managing editor
AllWays traveller



Peter Pan



The Sound of Music



Porgy and Bess

A personal view of the Open Air Theatre



A wonderful evening at this theatre - come rain or come shine

By Ashley Gibbins

Disturbances from the auditorium, be it chattering or mobiles sounding off, can be the bane of the actors life. So off-putting.

The late, great, Richard Griffiths found this so frustrating he was known to stop a performance to lambast the culprits.

So what to do when the, albeit gently rhythmic disturbance comes from the constant cooing of a pigeon on a branch at stage left.

At this theatre it is par for the course and part of the appeal.

In fact the evening I enjoyed Hobson's Choice, an owl flew across the stage (albeit silently).

One also spots the high flying aircraft soaring into the sunset on their transatlantic crossings and the stars appearing as night time falls.

An illustrious history

The history of the Open Air Theatre is a truly illustrious one.

In 1932 a play by Italian dictator Benito Mussolini at the New Theatre (now the Noel Coward) 'bombed'.

In desperate need of a production, theatre impresarios Robert Atkins and Sydney Carroll staged a short-run production of *Twelfth Night*.

An institution is born

When the time came to move out of the new theatre the pair took their production to a makeshift theatre in Regent's Park and a theatrical institution was born.

The following year, in its first full season, the Open Air Theatre revived *Twelfth Night* and staged the first of, many subsequent productions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

From then on it was no looking back.

In 1934 George Bernard Shaw wrote *The Six of Calais* for the theatre and, between 1939 and 1945, it was only one of two (with the Windmill) to stay open throughout wartime London.

As Regent's Park Theatre Ltd, the theatre operates as a registered charity.

Over the years the Open Air Theatre has built up an audience of part loyal supporters, part London tourists and, finally, those visiting Regent's Park who manage to take in a performance by chance.

What you need to know



Peter Pan

Getting there

The Regent's Park Open Air Theatre is located in Queen Mary's Garden - within Regent's Park - and is a 10 minute walk from Baker Street underground station.

The Annual season

The annual season runs from May to September and will attract 140,000 theatre goers.

The productions

The theatre embraces a wide range of playwrights including: Arthur Miller, Oscar Wilde and Anton Chekhov. It is also well known for its spectacular musical revivals.

In recent years the theatre has produced family shows aimed at introducing younger audiences to the theatre-going experience.

The season is then supplemented by one off evenings of comedy, musical concerts and screenings of film classics.



Seven Brides for Seven Brothers

The first visit is unlikely to be the last

For London theatregoers like myself, the first visit is not going to be the last.

One just gets hooked on the place.

To get the absolute most from a visit to Regent's Park Open Air Theatre, one should take a pre-planned approach to each performance.

Enjoy the park itself



The first thing to do is to arrive at Regent's Park as early as possible so as to be able to enjoy the lakes and gardens themselves.

Those dashing through the park, so as not to miss 'curtain up', will not be able to appreciate one of the worlds finest city green spaces,

Even the 10 minute stroll through the park, from Baker Street tube, is a real pleasure.

All the more so if you stop and sit a while.

Swans, ducks, geese, moorhens, coots and heron all vie for your attention, and that bread if you have any.

The nesting season of mid to late spring, when the young chicks and cygnets are about, is a real 'ah look, so cute' time of year.

Pre-theatre dining alfresco

The Theatre sits in landscaped grounds and provides a dining experience in its own right.

There is an outside picnic lawn, a summer café and a covered dining area circles the whole of one side of the auditorium.

The gates open well in advance of each production and those in the know are ready.

The theatre is more than happy for guests to bring their own picnics and drinks although it does offer an excellent range of dinner dishes and a fully stocked bar - with Pimm's always popular.

The productions

Each season, the theatre offers a balanced blend of classic drama, comedy and musicals.

The casual ambience continues in the auditorium itself.

The comfortable tiered seating offers a fine view of the stage from wherever.

And finally the audio is excellent, which it needs to be with the theatre roofless.

The auditorium



The raked 'arena style' auditorium, with 1,250 new and very comfortable seats, is one of the largest in London.

And yet the unique location of the setting and the casual ambience that prevails makes for an intimate experience.

Wining and dining

The theatre gates open 90 minutes before evening performances and 60 minutes before matinees (visit openairtheatre.com for exact gate opening times)

The theatre welcomes theatre goers bringing their own food and drink, which can be consumed in the picnic lawn.

You are welcome to take drinks in to the auditorium but are asked that you do not eat during the performance.

Regular visitors to the Regents Park Open Air Theatre invariably make the most of the setting by arriving early to dine or picnic before the performance.

If not, the theatre itself offers an excellent selection of dining options with a summer café, barbecue and bar.

Despite it being in the outdoors, and following customer feedback, the theatre and theatre grounds are completely no smoking.

Those who wish to smoke should ask a member of staff who will let them out of the theatre exit gate.



Lord of the Flies

A true theatrical experience – whatever the weather may hold

You will now realise that I, along with so many other theatre goers, find the Regent's Park Open Air Theatre an absolute delight.

When I wax lyrical about it to others, there is invariably a question about the weather? This is England after all.

Let me assure you, the weather is all part of this theatrical experience.

Planning a visit here includes consulting the weather forecast.

And having sun cream can be as important as bringing rainwear.

We also make sure that we have the items of the warmer clothing to put on as the evening progresses and temperatures fall.

Whether you are a Londoner or someone enjoying a short break in the city, if you are there during the spring and summer check out the Regent's Park Open Air Theatre.

And if you can go, go - come rain or come shine.

The 2016 productions

The 2016 Regent's Park Open Air Theatre season will include :

Michael Morpurgo's Running Wild
13 May to 12 June 2016.

The Theatre will be transformed into the depths of the Indonesian jungle, as we follow Will and an elephant called Oona on their journey to survival.

Henry V
17 June to 9 July 2016

Shakespeare returns to the Park to help celebrate the 400th anniversary year of the Bard's death.

Jesus Christ Superstar
15 July to 27 August 2016

The 2016 musical is a new production of Jesus Christ Superstar, directed by Timothy Sheader.

Pride and Prejudice
2 to 17 September 2016

Finally, following its sell-out run in 2013, Pride and Prejudice returns to the theatre for 19 performances before it embarks on a UK tour.

The weather

Each visit is different depending on the season and weather.

It is a genuine experience to enjoy a performance as the light of the day fades and the stage lighting takes prominence.

And to watch a performance during light rainfall is memorable in itself.

The trick, naturally enough, is on being prepared – be it with sunglasses and suntan lotion, warm clothing and blankets or waterproofs.

Despite the vagaries of the English weather, an average of 94% of each year's performances are completed.

However, as the stage and auditorium are uncovered, bad weather may result in productions having to stop and re-start.

Productions are never cancelled before the start time but, in cases where one cannot be completed, tickets can be exchanged for another performance or production.

There are no refunds but there is no time limit on exchanging tickets due to weather.

Visit openairtheatre.com/terms for full terms and conditions.

Getting tickets and more information



All my sons

Information on purchasing tickets can be found on the theatre's website.

www.openairtheatre.com

A snapshot of the Regent's Park Open Air Theatre



Hobson's Choice



The Sound of Music



Porgy and Bess



Ragtime



To Kill a Mockingbird



Twelfth Night

AllWays traveller and the International Travel Writers Alliance (18pt)



AllWays traveller provides travel features to destinations worldwide from the journalists in the International Travel Writers Alliance.

www.allwaystraveller.com



Ann Mealor is a professional travel writer and photographer and Commissioning Editor of *AllWays traveller*



The International Travel Writers Alliance is the world's largest association of professional travel journalists.

www.itwalliance.com



Ashley Gibbins is a professional travel writer and photographer and Chief Executive of the International Travel Writers Alliance.