



Greenwich offers so much - in its own right!

A visit to Greenwich is all too often tagged on as a brief excursion during a city break to London.

This makes it more likely than not that many visitors leave this historic Thameside town having merely skimmed the surface of what it has to offer.

Were Greenwich anywhere else in the country, it would be on a par with Chester, York, Bath and Stratford-upon-Avon as a cultural short break destination.

The town basks in the rich seafaring history that has seen it securing UNESCO World Heritage Site status as Maritime Greenwich.

The World Heritage Site takes in the Royal Observatory, from where the Prime Meridian (0° longitude) was established, and which forms the basis for the global system of timekeeping and navigation.

The Observatory is part of Royal Museums Greenwich, which take in the National Maritime Museum and the Cutty Sark and there is also Greenwich Market and Greenwich Park, the oldest enclosed Royal Park.

Linking with Maritime Greenwich is Greenwich Peninsula, with *The O2* and the vibrant Design District.

Together, Maritime Greenwich and Greenwich Peninsula makes for a short break destination that rewards greatly in its own right.

<https://www.visitgreenwich.org.uk/>

Ashley Gibbins
Commissioning Editor
AllWays Traveller





Maritime Greenwich



Greenwich Peninsula

Complimentary contrast in abundance

By Ashley Gibbins



I first became acquainted with Greenwich back in the 1990s when working in PR for the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, with a role of publicising the regeneration of London Docklands.

Tower Hamlets Isle of Dogs neighbourhood was at the epicentre of a scarcely believable transformation, with Canary Wharf taking shape and luxury properties being built around it.

Like or loathe what was taking place, and opinion was certainly divided back then, it was dramatically changing the skyline and the cultural makeup of this side of the Thames.

For relief from the frantic activity taking place, my team and I would make regular summer evening sojourns in Greenwich.

The 10-minute walk through the Greenwich Foot Tunnel under the Thames, which first opened in 1902, could be a little dank.

But it would see us emerging into a different almost bygone world.

For here was a town steeped in history and, more important at that time, with any number of welcoming ale houses, in the centre or along the riverside.

Greenwich Park, one of the oldest of the Royal Parks, also offered leisurely strolls to Blackheath on warm Sunday afternoon's, with yet more ale houses never too far out of reach.

I also managed to get to Greenwich to review productions at its excellent theatre and have been to a couple of networking events on the Cutty Sark.

During the 2012 London Olympics, Ann and I were back in Greenwich Park for several of the equestrian events during the Games and Paralympic Games.

When Sophie, our young niece, came to stay, she had to see Big Ben.

But Sophie also loved the hours cruise from Westminster Pier to Greenwich, before travelling back via the Docklands Light Railway and selfies with Beefeaters at the Tower of London.

Over the years, our excursions to Greenwich have therefore tended to be short, single focussed visits.

Until now, when I had the chance to really get to know the place.

A short break in Maritime Greenwich and Greenwich Peninsula

We recently enjoyed a two-night, three-day break here that gave the time to really discover that part of the London Borough of Greenwich inscribed by UNESCO as the Maritime Greenwich World Heritage Site.

It also allowed us time to discover what is happening on the adjoining Greenwich Peninsula.

The Peninsula is perhaps understandably known as being home to *The O2*, and by many exclusively so.

It is, after all, the world's most popular entertainment venue with a staggering annual schedule of music concerts, sporting competition and comedy performances; any number of dining opportunities; ongoing activities and an outlet shopping mall with some 60 designer brands.

Come out at North Greenwich tube station and one is at the entrance to *The O2*, which is where most people are going to head.

But look just beyond *The O2* and one finds a great deal more to enjoy at Greenwich Peninsula.

Our visit to Maritime Greenwich and Greenwich Peninsula made me realise what I had been missing all these years.

An epitome of English artistic and scientific endeavour

The Maritime Greenwich area was inscribed a UNESCO World Heritage Site, in 1997.

Greenwich achieved this for its 'Outstanding Universal Value to the world because of a number of key attributes that together help tell the story of Britain at sea, and of world time-keeping, navigation and exploration'.

UNESCO recognised the buildings and the park within the World Heritage Site as 'symbolising English artistic and scientific endeavour in the 17th and 18th Centuries'.

On our short break, we decided to take in the major attractions within Maritime Greenwich.

These included the Royal Museums Greenwich, along with Old Royal Navy College, Greenwich Market and Greenwich Park, one of the Royal Parks.

Our stay would then allow us another day exploring Greenwich Peninsula.



Old Royal Naval College

Royal Museums Greenwich

The Royal Observatory

This is where Greenwich Mean Time and the Prime Meridian were first established, and where visitors can straddle the line that divides the Eastern and Western Hemispheres, as almost everyone does (yes including Ann and myself).

It is one of London's iconic landmarks and has been the focal point for astronomical research and navigation since being established by King Charles II in 1675, with 350th anniversary celebrations throughout 2025.

The Prime Meridian, as I learnt listening to a fascinating guide at the Observatory, is the circle on the surface of the earth that passes through both poles and was used to unify global navigation, mapping, and establish a coordinated global time system.

Greenwich was chosen, in 1884, due to the dominance of British navigational charts and role in maritime navigation.

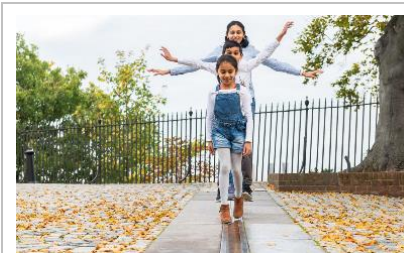
Visiting today, the original observatory building designed by Sir Christopher Wren, holds a fascinating museum detailing the history of timekeeping, astronomy and navigation.

The Time Ball on top of the Observatory drops daily at 13.00 as it has done since 1833 to help ships synchronise their clocks.

The Peter Harrison Planetarium shines images onto a domed ceiling that brings the solar system, stars and galaxies 'to life'.

More information

<https://www.rmg.co.uk/royal-observatory>



(Images : <https://www.rmg.co.uk/royal-observatory>)



(Images : <https://www.rmg.co.uk/cutty-sark>)



Cutty Sark

Cutty Sark is one of the first things one sees when emerging from the Greenwich Foot Tunnel or arriving in the town by river.

Built in 1869 on the River Clyde, it was one of the last and fastest of the tea clippers that brought tea from China to Britain as quickly as possible.

Happily, the ship was rescued in 1954 and towed to Greenwich where she opened as a museum.

During its permanent berth here, Cutty Sark survived two serious fires before being completely restored and enhanced with the new state of the art museum that now encases it.

The introduction of steamships pushed Cutty Sark away from the lucrative tea route and she plied her trade in various parts of the world, and under different names, before falling into disrepair and looking set to be lost forever.

It makes for a truly fascinating couple of hours, during which one can get to experience the 'sights, sounds and smells of life and times on board' Cutty Sark during her heyday.

One can walk the main deck to see the ship's towering masts and rigging and to clamber up it on a new *Rig Climb Experience*.

Below deck there's the fully restored captain's cabin and crew quarters and cargo holds.

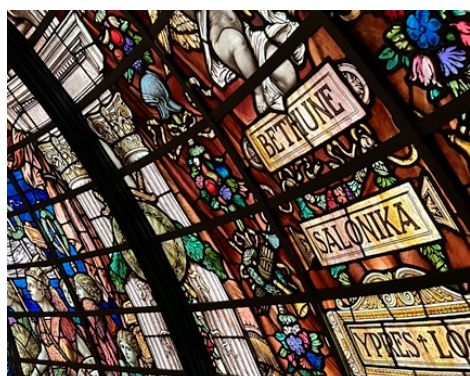
Equally important is the chance to talk to the 'oh so knowledgeable' volunteers who will happily answer the questions that add the final link in understanding why this magnificent ship was and is so important to Britain's maritime heritage.

We learnt, for example, that Cutty Sark took her name from a short nightgown, called a cutty sark, worn by the witch Nannie in Robert Burns' poem Tam o' Shanter.

Nannie is the figurehead that adorns the ship, even though witches were said to be unable to cross water.

More information

<https://www.rmg.co.uk/cutty-sark>



(Images : <https://www.rmg.co.uk/national-maritime-museum>)



The National Maritime Museum

The National Maritime Museum is one of the most interesting museums one could hope to find – and it's free.

Taking in its eight galleries, one can view one of the largest collections of maritime artifacts anywhere, with the focus firmly on Britain's naval history and maritime achievements.

There are any number of ship models along with maps, paintings, navigational instruments and manuscripts.

A very poignant part of a visit is in the *Nelson, Navy and Nation Gallery*, which displays personal items belonging to Admiral Lord Horatio Nelson.

Here is the uniform he was wearing when fatally wounded by a musket shot at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805.

Another memorable moment was gazing at the Baltic Exchange Memorial Glass, which was created to commemorate Exchange members killed during the First World War.

Originally part of a larger installation in the organisation's London headquarters, in 1992, a terrorist bomb exploded outside the Baltic Exchange, killing three people and injuring 91 others.

The National Maritime Museum wants us to 'discover epic stories of exploration and endeavour that have shaped our world today.

It achieves this and, being fully accessible, will fascinate and enthrall visitors of all ages.

More information

<https://www.rmg.co.uk/national-maritime-museum>



The Queen's House

The Queen's House is 'the jewel in the crown of Maritime Greenwich'

And rightly so. The House, which is England's first classical building, was designed by Inigo Jones in the 17th century.

It was built in 1616 as a private retreat by Anne of Denmark, the queen consort of King James I of England.

It is said the King paid for its construction after accidentally shooting Anne's dog.

The house, designed by Inigo Jones, is considered one of the first examples of classical Palladian architecture.

Unfortunately, Anne never saw her house completed. She died in 1619, and it was Queen Henrietta Maria, the wife of King Charles I, who oversaw its completion in 1635.

Under Henrietta's patronage, the Queen's House became a 'House of Delights', with a painted ceiling by Italian artist Orazio Gentileschi and his daughter Artemisia.

Highlights include the Armada Portrait of Elizabeth I, painted to commemorate the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, and those of Anne of Denmark and Queen Henrietta Maria.

There are also marine-themed artworks of seascapes, naval battles and Greenwich and the Thames with portraits of explorers and sailors.

Visiting the Queen's House today, for free, one finds it an art gallery containing over 450 artworks spanning centuries and reflecting its royal and maritime history with temporary exhibitions and artists' in residence.

More information

<https://www.rmg.co.uk/queens-house>

More information

<https://www.rmg.co.uk>

The centrepiece of Maritime Greenwich

Even on a cold December day, a walk through the grounds of the Old Royal Naval College was an imperative.

This riverfront area is the centrepiece of Maritime Greenwich, with a history that stretches back 600 years, when it was the site of the Tudor Greenwich Palace.

King Henry VIII was born at Greenwich Palace in 1491 and Queen Elizabeth I in 1533.

The iconic Baroque building that now stands on the site was designed by Sir Christopher Wren and is one of the finest examples of 17th and 18th-century architecture.

During its time it has been the Royal Hospital for Seamen and retirement home for sailors and a training facility for naval officers.

The grounds of the Old Royal Naval College are now open for everyone to enjoy, with cultural events, concerts and exhibitions being staged here throughout the year.

One of the best ways to appreciate the splendour and history of the Old Royal Naval College is on a guided tour.

While regular history tours take place at set times daily, and private tours also available, we opted for a truly fascinating tour that detailed how and when the buildings and grounds of Old Royal Naval College has been as a film location.

Although it may not always be recognised on screen, the College has provided a backdrop for countless films and TV features, for over a century and remains much in demand.

More recent examples include *Les Misérables*; *Four Weddings and a Funeral*; *Pirates of the Caribbean*; James Bond's *Skyfall* and Netflix's *The Crown*.

<https://ornc.org/news/lights-camera-action/>

The Painted Hall

Any visit to the Old Royal Naval College will lead you to the magnificent Painted Hall, heralded as the UK's Sistine Chapel.

It was designed by James Thornhill, between 1707 and 1726, and its stunning ceiling and walls painted by him.

The scenes celebrate British monarchy, naval power and maritime exploration, with the surfaces resplendent in striking images depicting 200 figures including kings, queens and mythological creatures.



Visiting the Painted Hall, after the National Maritime Museum, was another poignant experience, as it was here that Admiral Nelson lay in state following his death at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805.

His body had been preserved in a cask of brandy for transporting back to England and laying in the Painted Hall.

Thousands passed coffin before Nelson's body went by river to St. Paul's Cathedral for a state funeral in January 1806.

More information

<https://ornc.org/explore-whats-here/painted-hall/>

More information

<https://ornc.org/>

Greenwich Park



Steve Daniels

Greenwich Park, the oldest of London's enclosed Royal Parks offers tremendous views of the Thames and across the river to Canary Wharf and beyond.

It covers 183 acres and served as a hunting park for Henry VIII and has a number of 'veteran' trees, some over 400 years old.

Lying on its side within the Park is Queen Elizabeth's Oak, which experts believe was originally planted in the 12th century.

The tree formed part of the grounds of the Palace of Placentia, home to the Tudor royal family, and Henry VIII is said to have danced around the tree with Anne Boleyn.

Their daughter Elizabeth I, after whom the tree is named, is said to have picnicked beneath its canopy or within its hollow trunk

When the palace grounds became Greenwich Park, the hollow tree was used as a prison for criminals caught on the grounds.

The tree died in the 19th century but was left standing, partly supported by ivy. It fell in a storm in June 1991 and has been left lying where it fell, protected by a fence and marked with a plaque.

Visitors to the Park will find a new café and learning centre and a bigger viewing platform at the General Wolfe Statue

Landscaping work to the slope has restored this area to original, *Grand Ascent*, steppe design.

More information

<https://www.royalparks.org.uk/visit/parks/greenwich-park/greenwich-park-revealed>

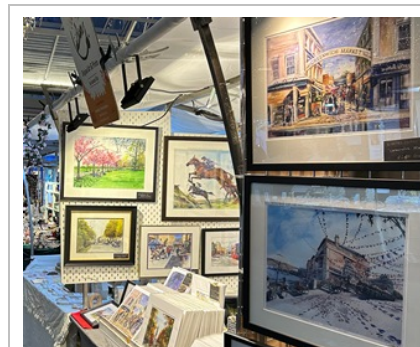
Greenwich Market

Greenwich Market, founded by Royal Decree in 1700, is one of London's most historic – and popular.

The covered market has stalls laden with arts and crafts and antiques and bric-a-brac and is also the place for great street food.

More information

<https://greenwichmarket.london>





Greenwich Peninsula offers complimentary contrast

While Greenwich Peninsula sits immediately next to Maritime Greenwich, it offers the visitor a completely different experience.

This one-time industrial heartland of South-East London is seeing an ongoing regeneration and renaissance that has already created a thriving cultural and residential hub.

And yet, each year some 10 million people visit Greenwich Peninsula, with most of them not realising just where they are. Including Ann and myself in the past.

The vast number are there for *The O2* and, with North Greenwich tube on its doorstep, go no further than the three minute walk from the top of the escalator into the arena.

Just beyond *The O2* is Greenwich Peninsula and a great deal more to enjoy, either as part of a visit to *The O2* or in its own right.

The Peninsula Masterplan

The regeneration of Greenwich Peninsula is driven by the 'Peninsula Masterplan', which lays out a long-term vision for the area.

This has already seen the area emerge as a 'dynamic, sustainable and vibrant community' with new homes, public spaces, bars and restaurants and a range of leisure and entertainment facilities.

We arrived at Greenwich Peninsula via an eight-minute trip on an Uber Boat by Thames Clippers and took *The Tide* walkway through part of the Peninsula, then into *The O2* to the *InterContinental London - The O2*, our hotel for the stay.

The Tide

The Tide is an elevated riverside linear park and walkway that embraces public art and epitomises what is being achieved around it.

Along the 1km route one comes across 17 public art installations and sculptures including six by Damien Hirst.

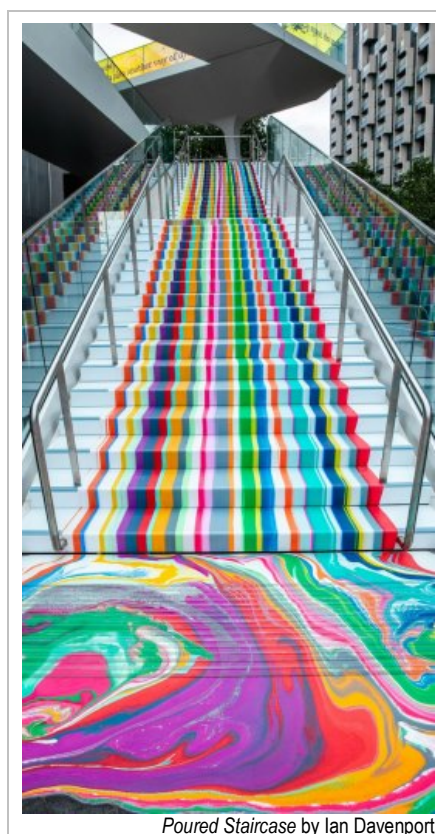
As the area develops still further, so *The Tide* will extend to become a 5km walk through Greenwich Peninsula.

NOW Gallery

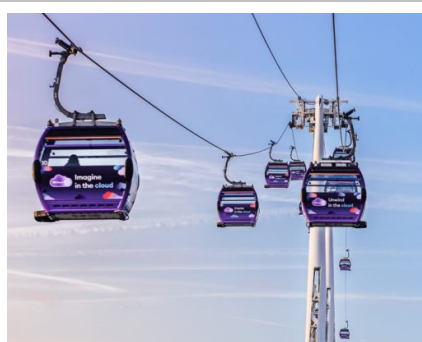
NOW Gallery is a dynamic free exhibition space that has rolling exhibitions focussing on contemporary art, fashion, photography and design.

More information

<https://nowgallery.co.uk/>



Poured Staircase by Ian Davenport



Special Events

A series of seasonal events take place throughout the Peninsula, with a highlight the annual Urban Village Fete every May.

This is when Greenwich Peninsula lets its hair down, with live music, makers' markets, street food and classic village fete entertainments.

<https://www.greenwichpeninsula.co.uk/whatson>

Design District

The purpose-built Design District, which is London's first, dedicated hub for creative entrepreneurs and startups.

Design District is a collection of 14 eclectic buildings, designed by eight different architects whose remits were to 'create a dynamic and diverse architectural landscape'.

When designing Design District each architect was charged with building in natural ventilation, high ceilings, north-facing lights, and pedestrian movement, to create 'a healthy and happy workplace'.

The creatives who now work here add a real vibrancy to the visitor experience.

Dining

Within the Design District one also finds some great places to dine, particularly before or after a visit to *The O2*.

We had a tremendous lunch at Bureau restaurant, which offers sumptuous European cuisine, and Canteen Food Hall & Bar, a street food and drinks hub within its 'bubble'.

Here you will find food and drink vendors serving international options, while more bars and restaurants are to be found next to *The Tide*, close to the riverside.

<https://www.greenwichpeninsula.co.uk/whatshere/food-and-drink>

Greenwich Peninsula Ecology Park

The Greenwich Peninsula Ecology Park is four acres of freshwater urban wetland that is a habitat for an array of wildlife.

It is a spot for birdwatching, walking the trails and enjoying the wildflower garden.

<https://www.greenwichpeninsula.co.uk/whatshere/greenwich-peninsula-ecology-park>

IFS Cloud Cable Car

We also took a trip on the IFS Cloud Cable Car at Greenwich Peninsula, which is the UK's first urban cable car.

Doing so provides a unique aerial link across the River Thames between Greenwich Peninsula and the Royal Docks and offers panoramic views of the river below along with *The O2* and *ExCeL London*.

<https://www.greenwichpeninsula.co.uk/whatshere/ifs-cloud-cable-car> and <https://tfl.gov.uk/modes/london-cable-car/>

Demon with Bowl

Next to the cable car is the astonishing *Demon with Bowl*, a large-scale 'headless' bronze sculpture that is part of Damien Hirst's fictional *Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable* series, first exhibited at the Venice Biennale.

Standing at just over eighteen metres, it is a copy of a smaller bronze recovered from the wreckage, this was the rest of a disembodied bronze head excavated in the Tigris Valley in 1932.

<https://www.greenwichpeninsula.co.uk/whatshere/demon-with-bowl-by-damien-hirst>

So well worth the effort

With all that there is all for the visitor to do and see at Greenwich Peninsula, it really is worth checking out on any trip to Greenwich and/or *The O2*.

More information

<https://www.greenwichpeninsula.co.uk/>

On top the world's most popular entertainment venue

The O2, which dominates Greenwich Peninsula, is the world's most popular music and entertainment venue.

Originally known as the Millennium Dome it was the flagship project for the UK's Millennium Celebrations in 2000.

Transitioning into *The O2* and reopening in 2007, it stages an almost continuous schedule of concerts by the biggest names in the music and comedy industry along with sporting events.

There is also a plethora of permanent entertainment including a cinema, ten pin bowling, indoor skydiving and the hugely popular *MAMMA MIA - The Party*.

The O2 brings together dozens of food and drink outlets and *Outlet Shopping at The O2* offers discounts on luxury and high-street brands.

Up at The O2

While millions get to *The O2* every year, only a very, very few of them get to climb over the roof.

Up at The O2 gives the chance to do just this in small groups and provides amazing views of London with the chance to spot landmarks up to 15 miles away.

One can book a ticket to climb during the day, when the sun is setting over the Capital or at twilight when nighttime London sparkles and glows all around.

Up at The O2 supports wheelchair users and climbers with medical conditions to enjoy the experience.

Ann and I climbed *The O2* in December, taking a twilight route up one side to the summit and back down the other.

This had the bonus of there being a snow globe at the summit.

It was a truly unique experience, and I never use this word lightly.

We start with a briefing and video at what is called 'basecamp' before getting into our climbing gear, boots and harness.

And then it's off, with me wondering just how physically strenuous this was going to be.

It was fine and, with us loop chained to the central wire, was absolutely safe.



UP at The O2



We take it slowly, with regular stops along the way to admire the view and London landmarks pointed out by our trusty guide.

Getting to the summit there is a break on the large circular viewing platform before the walk back down.

There were then handshakes all round for the achievement.

This was 90 minutes we will never forget, and I would highly recommend everyone going *Up at The O2* at least once.

More information

<https://www.theo2.co.uk/>

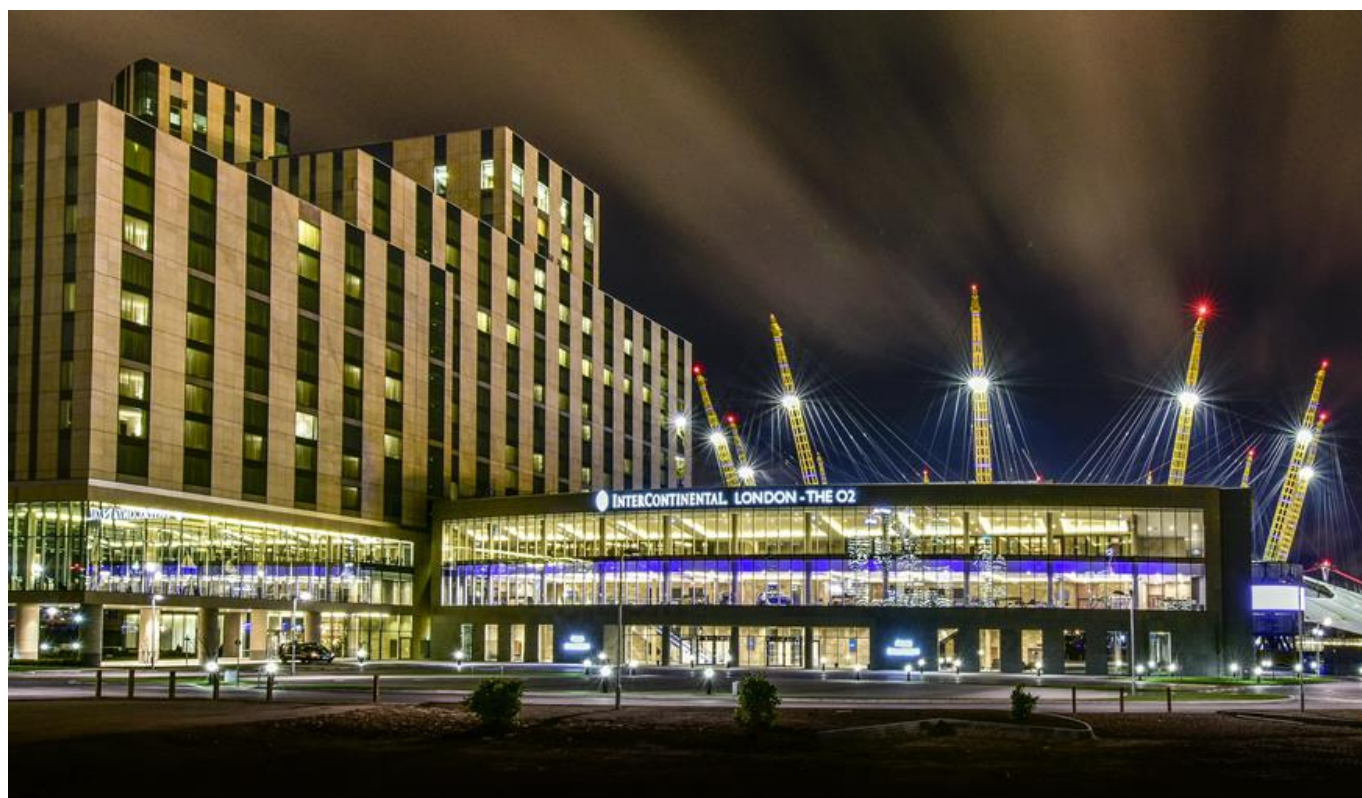
<https://www.upattheo2.co.uk/>

A place to stay Maritime Greenwich and Greenwich Peninsula

The InterContinental London - The O2

The InterContinental London - The O2 is chic, modern, stylish and right next to *The O2* itself.

By Ann Mealor



It provides a great base for a short break to Maritime Greenwich and Greenwich Peninsula.

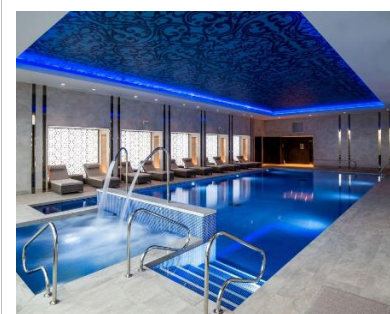
Easily accessible by tube, Docklands Light Railway and the scenic Uber Boat by Thames Clippers, the *InterContinental London - The O2* is ideally placed for exploring Maritime Greenwich and Greenwich Peninsula.

As you would expect from a prestige, international hotel brand, staff were very efficient and check in was swift and smooth.

Our room

Our room, a junior suite, had a comfortable sitting area where we sipped our morning coffee, and an evening glass of wine as we took in the spectacular nighttime views over *The O2* and London beyond.

Soft, fluffy dressing gowns and slippers were in the spacious bathroom along with a selection of finely fragranced Bal D'Afrique toiletries.





Wining and dining

The hotel has plenty of places to eat and enjoy a relaxing drink whilst taking in the riverside scenery.

The nautically themed Clipper Bar is elegant and stylish whilst the more casual, European, Market Brasserie serves dishes using fresh fruit and vegetables grown in the rooftop garden.

The Eighteen Sky Bar, a swish, roof top cocktail lounge offers a stunning panoramic vista across the city and the 2 AA Rosette, Indian inspired Kinaara is ranked as one of the capital's top restaurants.

Breakfast

We tucked into a fabulous breakfast each morning in the Market Brasserie. There was so much on the buffet, we were spoilt for choice!

Fresh fruits, yoghurts, juices, smoothies, cold meats, smoked salmon, mackerel, cheeses, crusty breads, bagels, hot dishes (eggs, bacon, tomatoes, roasted vegetables, mushrooms, sausages etc), delicious pastries, cereals and more including fresh honeycomb which I loved, were all temptingly displayed.

The serving team were excellent, keeping dishes well stocked and removing empty plates quickly from the tables.

All was well presented and looked fresh and appetising.

After such a hearty breakfast, nothing else was needed until the end of the day, and it all tasted so good it was a shame not to go overboard and make the most of it.

However, we did spend each day walking off our mid-morning banquet exploring Greenwich Peninsula and Greenwich itself.

On our return, each evening there was complimentary warming mulled wine in reception - a very nice touch, which I for one, appreciated.

All one would expect

As well as a fully equipped 24-hour gym, the hotel has a luxury spa with an award winning, heated, 17m swimming pool lined with comfy loungers along with a large jacuzzi, a wood lined sauna, steam room and relaxation room with help yourself herbal teas and snacks.

There is also a range of rejuvenating facials and soothing massages on offer.

More information

<https://iclondon-theo2.com/>



The trip to Maritime Greenwich and Greenwich Peninsula, from central or east London is as enjoyable as it is easy.

Uber Boat by Thames Clippers



Uber Boat by Thames Clippers is the river bus service serving commuters and leisure travellers, with a fleet of 23 vessels that carry up to 230 passengers London.

Its newest hybrid vessels, named Earth Clipper, Celestial Clipper and Mars Clipper, are designed to significantly reduce emissions and operate fully on battery power with zero emissions while in central London.

Uber Boat by Thames Clippers offers a convenient, very comfortable and scenic way to get to Greenwich and other stops along the river including Canary Wharf, London Bridge, Westminster and Battersea.

The daily service operates at regular and 'on the dot' timed intervals from early morning until late evening with a range of ticket options, including hop-on-hop-off.

The company is also launching Orbit Clipper, the UK's first fully electric ferry in Spring/Summer 2025, which will operate a cross-river service between Rotherhithe and Canary Wharf.



The Docklands Light Railway

The Docklands Light Railway, known by most as the DLR, is an automated light metro system serving the London Docklands area and surrounding parts of London.

The service starting from Bank in the City, Tower Gateway by the Tower of London and Stratford in East London, uses the same ticketing system as the rest of London's public transport network.

The DLR is fully automated, with an attendant but no drivers onboard, and with much of the network operating above ground which adds greatly to the experience, particularly when travelling through Canary Wharf just before arriving at Greenwich.

The Tube

There's also the option of getting to Greenwich by London Underground, the 'Tube', which is one of the world's most extensive and effective metro networks.

The Jubilee Line goes to North Greenwich and the new Elizabeth Line to Canary Wharf, where one can hop on the DLR to Greenwich.

More information

<https://www.thamesclippers.com/>, <https://tfl.gov.uk/modes/dlr/> and <https://tfl.gov.uk/modes/tube/>



More information

<https://www.visitgreenwich.org.uk/>

AllWays traveller and the International Travel Writers Alliance



AllWays traveller is the consumer travel magazine from the International Travel Writers, providing independent travellers with views of the world from Alliance travel journalists.

www.allwaystraveller.com



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

www.itwalliance.com



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