

traveler



The Langham, London, has been a West End icon since 1865.

Elementary, My Dear London

A grand Victorian hotel sets the scene for a 2012 London adventure that includes one queen, one chorus of Olympic games, and one mysterious enclave of oddly-shaped roads and corridors where literary legends spun some of the greatest tales of all. **By Sherry Thomas**

Mr. Sherlock Holmes, who was usually very late in the mornings, save upon those not infrequent occasions when he was up all night, was seated at the breakfast table. It was a peculiar situation,

the group of us being summoned together under circumstances not unlike one of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's great mysteries.

There would be one queen, one Olympics Vil-

lage, one grand old Victorian hotel and a gaggle of travel journalists from around the globe. The first three players, characters if you will, would reveal clues to their own subplots in all due time.

A tour of Buckingham Palace would be in order, as well as a day spent sleuthing the back story of how an Olympics Village came to rise up out of the once-gritty streets of London's East End.

But first, there is the metaphorical matter of breakfast, and our arrival here at The Langham Hotel — a fixture on the West End since a certain Prince of Wales (aka the future King Edward VII) christened it into London society on June 10, 1865, and some 20 years later, a certain Sir Arthur Conan Doyle would dine with one Mr. Oscar Wilde and the managing editor of *Lippincott's*, a prominent literary magazine of that day.

Wilde's contribution was a little story called "The Picture of Dorian Gray." Mr. Doyle, not yet knighted, would submit a mystery titled "The Sign of Four," featuring a second appearance by a detective whose nomenclature would rise above the author himself.

"Now, Watson," said Holmes, rubbing his hands, "we have half an hour to ourselves. Let us make good use of it. My case is, as I have told you, almost complete; but we must not err on the side of overconfidence. Simple as the case seems now, there may be something deeper underlying it."

London, capital of England, presumably all of Britain, has been equally charming and vexing Americans for centuries. We've rocked (and rolled) to its pop icons, rushed to the telly for its royal weddings, and gone perpetually ga-ga over its fine bone china, genteel manners and boy wizards. What now? Why this year, do we journey across the ocean to London?

Elementary, my dear Traveler.

London 2012.

It's all happening — right here, right now. This is the year.

If you've never been, or haven't been lately, or are just looking for a good excuse to see Kate Middleton's wedding dress at the Palace, we've put together a Quintessential guide to London in the year of Queen Elizabeth's 60th Jubilee, which also happens to be the year of the first Olympiad held in London since 1948.

So pour your cup of tea, or glass of ale, and come now. Can't keep the queen waiting now, can we?



Last year The Langham, London opened the first Chuan Spa in Europe. Created by Langham Hospitality Group, the spa is based on the philosophy of Chinese medicine, with more than 60 treatments available.

Chapter 1: "It Happened on Regent Street."

Notebooks out. Time to set the scene.

As we have already deduced, The Langham debuted on Portland Place, "at the top of Regent Street," with no shortage of royal attention and fanfare. The prince himself was on hand, as was every high-ranking royal and dignitary of the time. Lurking in the shadows, of course, were the writers and artists and ale-soaked poets. But we'll get to them.

First, a bit of history is in order.

The land where the hotel sits today was first purchased by English architect John Nash and later sold, in part to the Crown, and in part to Sir James Langham. Decades of planning — and about 300,000 pounds Sterling — later, the first stone was laid in the foundation of what would be billed as Europe's first "grand hotel." When The Langham Hotel opened that summer of 1865, it served the "crème de la crème" of London society. And in the years that followed it became one of the first hotels to boast hydraulic lifts (also known as "rising rooms"), electricity, and later, air conditioning.

Then came the Americans. With the Civil War over and the continent beckoning,

such American literary luminaries as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Samuel Langhorne Clemens (aka Mark Twain) checked in to The Langham en route to exotic destinations. It is no wonder then, that the likes of Sir Doyle would come to call on its fine restaurants and lounges as the backdrop of power meetings and story settings. The hotel is mentioned by name in such Sherlock Holmes tales as "A Scandal in Bohemia" and the previously cited "The Sign of Four." In the latter story, which The Sherlock Holmes Society of London suggests might have been "sold" to the *Lippincott's* editor at The Langham, the father of Miss Morstan's character was said to be staying there — immortalizing the hotel for all time.

But as the giddy age of Victorian excess came to an end, The Langham fell on a few periods of hard times. Zeppelin raids during World War I left some damage to the grand hotel, which nearly fell into bankruptcy during the Great Depression.

The building was hit again during World War II, when damage from a German bomb caused flooding, which in turn caused the hotel to close for several decades. Not that it was completely out of commission, but only 11 out of 110 hotel rooms remained open.



With its own dedicated entrance on Portland Place opposite BBC Broadcasting House, the newly reinvented Roux at The Landau restaurant brings the culinary talents of father and son Albert and Michel Roux, Jr., together for the first time in 19 years. David Collins' design at the Langham's flagship property is nothing short of stunning.

American broadcaster Edward R. Murrow was among the few that stayed at the Langham while reporting on the war. The hotel was used in the James Bond film *Golden Eye*, doubling as The Grand Hotel in St. Petersburg, Russia. The building was annexed by neighboring British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), reopening as a hotel again in 1991, first as a Hilton, and by the end of the 20th century, a flagship property of the Langham Hospitality Group.

In 2009, after a five-year, \$130 million renovation, The Langham's position as one of London's "grand hotels" was again restored. If elements of the "new" hotel feel strangely Asian, strangely zen — smack-dab in the midst of Regent Street and all its button-down, scarf-to-the-chin finery, here's a clue. Langham Hospitality is based out of Hong Kong, and that influence is unmistakable, especially at its signature Chuan Spa. The finest doctors

in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) are brought in as consultants. On this London 2012 mystery tour, you might encounter one of them. Did the West just meet the East? Why yes, she said. It did.

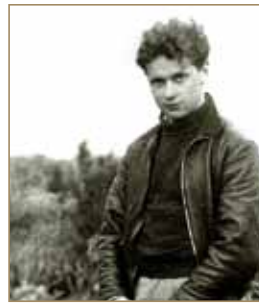
Chapter 2: **"The Case of Mr. FitzRoy."**

Grab a Langham umbrella (they're complimentary, as long as they're returned in good order). The scene is about to change. We're off, on foot, to the nearby streets of a neighborhood most peculiar.

But first, know this: In the fabled days of mighty kings and their many mistresses, a "fitz" was any illegitimate child born of said king. Meaning anyone today with a surname beginning in Fitz may have secret origins to royalty. It also means that in another time in London, the neighborhood surrounding

The Fitzroy Tavern (preferred public house of Dylan Thomas, George Orwell and many others), known as Fitzrovia, might have been considered derelict. And therein lies the drama, and for so many expatriates and London bohemians, the attraction.

Developed by Charles FitzRoy (who became Baron Southampton) in the late 18th century, the area was cobbled together as a puzzle of sorts, an oddly shaped mishmash of streets and tiny corridors between buildings. Playwright George Bernard Shaw lived on Fitzroy Street in the 1880s, as did many of his contemporaries. Dylan Thomas' days at The Fitzroy Tavern at Charlotte and Windmill Streets were said to end with many a night of debauchery, poets and criminals arm to arm at the bar, cigarette smoke billowing into the street. It was the stuff of great novels, and great memoirs. A few blocks down another literary crowd, Virginia Woolf and her Bloomsbury



group, were also stirring and inspiring late nights of creative conversation. Hers was a more intellectual, salon set, all taking place inside a series of Georgian townhouses at Regents Park.

Today, the once bawdy Fitzrovia is the hip epicenter of fashion, media, television studios and advertising — including Getty Images. In addition to all the literary stars, British rock bands have also been known to make early appearances at clubs in this area, including everyone from Pink Floyd to Coldplay.

The area between Fitzrovia and Bloomsbury is also where you'll find the British Library, home to more than 150 million items (adjacent to the picturesque Pancras train station) and the British Museum, a national collection that dates from prehistory to modern times.

These, too, are places worth bearing fat notepads and a looking glass.

Just save a page or three for old Marylebone. Unlike the more urban Fitzrovia, this old village town of historic mews was once the site of cattle grazing in the fields outside of London. Today, this quirky “village within a city” is where we will discover the renowned Madame Tussaud’s wax museum, the 1932 art deco BBC headquarters, the historic Baker Street Station, Platform 5, and the former home of none other than Sir Doyle himself. Isn’t that right, Mr. Holmes? Yes, but that walking tour will have to wait for later. The queen beckons.

Chapter 3: “Her Majesty, The Queen.”

As Americans, we all know about the beloved late Princess Di and the less beloved Charles. We know about the handsome princes, William and Harry, and we know even more now about Kate Middleton, aka Lady Catherine, aka potential future queen of England. But most of us know less about Queen Elizabeth, Britain’s monarch for 60 years.

She is, for most of us, merely that gray-haired queen — the one we see on TV and speaking at proper times and rarely commenting on her royal family’s behavior. Recently, we even learned that she would take a pay freeze as part of the new UK austerity measures. Even so, it’s as if she’s always been of a certain age, and a certain appearance.



The Queen’s guards at Buckingham Palace.



The “green room” at Buckingham Palace is one of the public spaces that can be seen on a tour.

But when British citizens celebrate Queen Elizabeth's Diamond Jubilee this summer, they will be celebrating more than just another figurehead. They will honor a woman who came into power at age 25 and has ruled the country for 60 years, the only monarch to reach such a landmark other than Queen Victoria, who celebrated her Diamond Jubilee in 1897.

Her Majesty had experiences her children and grandchildren did not, things that represent a different time in England, and in the world. When she married Lieutenant Mountbatten (now His Royal Highness The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh) at Westminster Abbey in 1947, it was a relatively simple occasion. With England still recovering from World War II, Princess Elizabeth had to collect clothing coupons for her dress, just like every other young bride-to-be. She and Prince Philip, who happens to be a great-great-grandson of Queen Victoria, have four children, eight grandchildren (including William and Harry) and one great-grandchild.

There are many special events already scheduled this year to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, including a pageant at Windsor Castle in May, a river pageant on the Thames, and a special diamond exhibition at Buckingham Palace from August 1 through Sept. 30. However, the main celebration — which will involve bank holidays, school closures and extended pub hours throughout England and Wales — will be over the extended weekend of June 2-5.

If you happen to be visiting during this time, be sure to prepare for extra crowds, and a chance to witness a piece of British history. But the case of London 2012 is far from closed.

There is a torch coming, one that hasn't passed through London since 1948.

On to the East End.

Chapter 4: "The Torch, The Fishmonger and The View."

It seems very suitable for the purposes of this tale that to get to Forman's Fish Island, you need to take a bus through London, get out and walk down to a pier by a little canal and board a boat. Anything less complicated would be less interesting.

London 2012: A Traveler's Guide



Keep this handy directory with you as you plot out your journey.

Alfred Dunhill: If you really want to feel like you're in a Sherlock Holmes mystery, pop over to Alfred Dunhill, barber and tailor to royalty for decades. Housed in the former London residence of the Duke of Westminster, the retail shop reflects Dunhill's legacy as curator and keeper of all that is bespoke in men's clothing and accouterments. Prices are at the top of most budgets (think \$10,000 for a suit) but anyone can get a shave and a haircut at the barber, and there is a lovely bar at ground level where you can walk in and order a Pimm's cocktail, or a cognac to go with your Cuban cigar. The atmosphere alone is worth a soak. For more information, go to www.dunhill.com.

Buckingham Palace: One of the most recognized structures in the world, Buckingham Palace is as quintessential to London as the double decker bus and the signature red telephone booth. Famous, yes, but often misunderstood. Though there are special exhibitions (including one on Lady Catherine's, the Duchess of Cambridge's white lace bridal gown and tiara) the palace is not a museum. It is the monarchy's working headquarters, and where the queen spends much of her workweek. Citizens can always tell if Her Majesty is present by the flags that fly overhead. If she is there, the Sovereign's standard will be flown. If she is not, you will look up and see the Union Jack. The palace is open to the public from July 23 to October, when the queen makes her annual visit to Scotland. Tickets are booked by time slot so plan ahead. Go to www.royal.gov.uk/theroyalresidences/buckinghampalace.



Forman's Fish Island: Since 1905, Forman's on the River Lea. This is officially the closest eatery to Olympic Village with rooftop panoramas like no other. In fact, our salmon lunch came with unparalleled views across the river to the stadium and other facilities. Executive Chef Lloyd Hardwick, formerly of the Tate Modern, is the genius behind this British dining experience. Be warned, however, that this place isn't very big. As a restaurant, seating is limited. During London 2012, the space will be primarily used as a corporate event and party venue, with two spaces for 200 and 600 respectively. Go to www.formansfishisland.com for a web cam of views from the Forman's window.

London's East End: Pity our group never made it to Spitalfields, which savvy Londoners regard as one of the trendiest markets on the East End. With clean, steel loft-like lines and classic Victorian brickwork, Old Spitalfields Market has been the go-to hipster spot on Commercial Street for decades.



But with all the Olympic hoopla, nearby Canary Wharf and the proximity of London City Airport, we may be hearing more about Old Spitalfields and the newly reinvented East End stateside this summer. Though with the recent opening of All Saints Spitalfields on our own Michigan Avenue (www.allsaints.com), perhaps that time has come. For a complete list of shopping, restaurants and other neighborhood attractions, go to www.londoneastside.co.uk.

Queen's Diamond Jubilee: This is a big year for the queen, and everyone will be toasting Her Majesty. A new charitable trust has been launched in her honor, and the Jubilee Woods Project will create a 460-acre public woods (6 million trees, including 60 "Diamond Woods" is the goal) in Leicestershire to commemorate her reign. For more information about Diamond Jubilee exhibitions, digital projects, and celebrations throughout the city (if you know someone who lives in London, you could even plan your own Diamond Jubilee street celebration) go to www.direct.gov.uk.



London 2012: A Traveler's Guide



Summer 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games:

Yes, it's thrilling, but if you plan to visit London during the Olympic and Paralympic Games (July 18-Sept. 14), prepare to plan ahead. Londoners have been for a year, at least. Most Olympic venues are located at Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park on the city's East Side. In addition to London Olympic Stadium, there is also an aquatics center, a velopark, an international press center, a North Greenwich Arena and a strange-looking sculpture for the occasion known as The Orbit (designed by renowned architect Anish Kapoor). Expect to be a little overwhelmed and expect the Tube and other transit systems to be very crowded, and running on special schedules. Don't expect there to be spectator parking. Those spaces are limited and rightfully reserved for the disabled. For a London 2012 Spectator Journey planner and information about game tickets and related events, go to www.london2012.com.



The George: Every savvy Traveler knows that the secret to discovering a new neighborhood is discovering, and designating, a new "local." Our preferred public house while staying at The Langham was



just down the street and on the edge of Fitzrovia. Dating from 1677, The George pub not only serves some of the finest cask ales from hand pumps, but the fish and chips (with mushy peas) was so authentic it's actually served on a cutting board. With a pint of ale, it's a meal to remember. Also memorable are the crew of Australian lads who live upstairs and tend the bar, day and night — as well as for the BBC types who pop in regularly. As one of our merry journalist party noted, "This is London." Located at 55 Great Portland Street, around the corner from The Langham. Find out more at www.traditionalpubslondon.co.uk.

The Langham, London: With its distinctive turreted façade, The Langham Hotel has been a West End landmark at the "top of Regent Street" since 1865. Frequented by royalty, celebrities and literati, a \$130 million renovation in 2009 has placed The Langham back in its rightful position as Europe's original "grand hotel." Books have been, and continue to be, written about this place. Ask the concierge about the ghost of Napoleon's nephew, and about the origins of the new Middleton Rose Garden. Surprisingly, it has nothing to do with Lady Catherine, though it would make a most agreeable place for a tea party. Go to the web site for special packages this summer, and rates that range from reasonable to truly regal. www.langhamhotels.com/langham/london



Visit Britain Tourism: This is London's year for travel and the experts at British Tourism are standing by to help. And with thousands of tourists expected to descend this summer, you should take them up on it. For more information, including links to order free guides and maps, go to www.visitbritain.com.

Westfield Stratford City Shopping Center: Yes, *that* Westfield, that same one that manages our own Old Orchard Shopping Center, recently became the 44th domestic sponsor and the Official Shopping Centre Developer of London 2012. If you decide to head out to the East End, it's a must-see, just to say you did. Stratford City is being billed as the "largest urban shopping centre" in Europe, and it is estimated that three-quarters of spectators will pass through on their way to Olympic Park during the games. For more information, go to uk.westfield.com/stratfordcity.



There is another character here as well, being old man Forman, who may be the original East Ender. H. Forman & Son is a fourth generation family owned salmon smoker. Established in the East End in 1905, Forman's is supplier of smoked and fresh fish to the finest hotels, restaurants and chefs, including Gordon Ramsay, Fortnum & Mason and The House of Lords. But this is all to-day, a heady time when Forman's is serendipitously poised to reap all the benefits of its location — smack dab across the river from Olympic Village and all its myriad game venues, with panoramic views that are unrivaled.

Flash back to the early part of the 20th century, back to the gritty, working class East End London. Flash back to the original Forman, a Russian Jew named Harry (who arrived in 1905). The immigrant quickly got busy doing what he knew best, curing fish in barrels of brine from the Baltic. It didn't take long for him to discover another treasure, not too far away — Scottish salmon, which is today regarded as some of the best in the world.

If we're searching for metaphors in this story as a way to tie it all together, the past with the present, the people and the places, Forman's is where this chapter of London 2012 begins and ends. It is truly an island, a stalwart icon for a century. And yet, it represents all that's new and rapidly evolving.

From Forman's you can see, literally, an Olympics legacy unfolding. Not just for this year, but for the future. What will happen there this summer? There will be a torch. There will be triumphs and there will be defeats. But most of all, there will be something that not just the East End, but all of London, hasn't seen in its long and illustrious history. The last time an Olympiad was held here, the year was 1948, and World War II had just ended. Princess Elizabeth was newly married. The Langham Hotel had just been bombed. There were Olympic games in London, but they were, like everything else at that time, very modest, relatively spare, and poignant.

London 2012 is meant to be big — larger than life even. And the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Stadium is set to be a project that endures, one that will outlive the Olympic and Paralympic Games and serve as an anchor for the newly reinvented East End, and as a tribute to Her Majesty.

Chapter 5: “The Detective Returns.”

And here we are again, back at The Langham, with another plot twist. By now you know that Londoner Guy Ritchie’s *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* has already been released at cinemas around the world. The detective returns, and with all the fanfare in London this year, the clever powers that doth run The Langham — thoroughly modern and reinvented for the 21st century — wouldn’t dare let their connection to one of their famous “regulars” go without notice.

Guests who book “The Sherlock Holmes Package” will have the luxury of residing in the “Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Suite,” a duplex garrett-style spread located in the hotel’s turret, plus a litany of other Holmes-themed amenities. Imagine the views of the city from there. Imagine the clever stories you’ll have to tell to your friends back here after walking the streets of neighboring Marleybone with an insider. Imagine the metaphorical mystery to your London 2012 adventure solved. Case closed with a pink Langham bow.

But is it? Are all details accounted for? Let’s take another look, and go back to where we started, with Mr. Holmes, and that hotel at the top of Regent Street. It is obvious by now that Holmes wasn’t really at breakfast that morning. That was merely a writerly ruse to draw you into the story. Others though, characters in this plot, have shown evidence of being connected in ways that not even Sir Doyle could have surmised. Trace back through your sleuthing notebooks to the opening of The Langham Hotel in 1865. We know that Queen Victoria’s son, the prince who would become King Edward the VII, is the one who opened it. Keep looking through the old files and you will find that in 1910, Edward VII dies, leaving the throne to his son, George V. But when King George V dies in 1936, passing the reign to his son, Edward VIII, a scandalous love affair would change history. Edward VIII quickly absconds to marry a Mrs. Wallis Simpson, an American, and a regular guest at The Langham. As a result, George VI would become king, and his two young daughters would become princesses. One of them was Elizabeth, who attended her parents’ coronation at



Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth.

Westminster Abbey, where she would later marry and ascend to become Queen of England. Had fate’s plot fallen a different way, this might have been a different tale. But this is merely a prequel. The real Case of London 2012 — set to be the adventure of the summer — is yet to be written. That part of the yarn, we leave entirely to you. 