Being a Tourist for the Day

NADIA KABIR BARB

I don't know if it is just me or whether most people find that after living in a city or town for an extended period of time you become somewhat oblivious to your surroundings. Unless you happen to have guests, going sightseeing just does not make it onto your list of top ten things to do on a weekend or even holidays. London is a city steeped in history and culture and almost every area has monuments and buildings of historical or architectural relevance. Regardless of this, it is very easy to become jaded and even blind to it and I have even found myself avoiding places that are considered 'touristy'! But every now and then when I do find myself in a situation where I am showing people around famous parts of London or happen to visit places that I might not regularly go to, it can be quite an eye opener.



Always something going on at Covent Garden.

A few days ago I ended up in Covent Garden, a popular shopping area and tourist site. It is definitely somewhere you would not normally find me on a Saturday afternoon but my youngest daughter's birthday had me and my husband traipsing around this popular destination with nine 14 – year – old girls. It was a rather miserable day with the sun on a leave of absence and the cold penetrating even the warmest of jackets, a day I would far rather be ensconced in a warm dressing gown cradling a hot cup of tea than be jostled by hordes of people. It was also quite a challenge keeping the group of teenagers together as it was bustling with people and far busier than we had anticipated. The weather obviously did not seem to have had an impact on or deter the hundreds of people milling around me.

Covent Garden has over the centuries changed and evolved from being a busy Saxon trading port in the 7th century called Lundenwic to a 40 acre kitchen garden for the Convent or Abbey of St Peter at Westminster when it acquired the name 'Convent Garden' and which also became a major source of fruit and vegetables in London for centuries; to becoming the first open square in England and known as the Covent Garden Piazza with residential buildings in surrounding areas designed by famous architect Inigo Jones; to being a place known once again for being a hub for market traders, fruit and vegetable sellers. It is also home to the famous Royal Opera House and the London Transport Museum.

In the late 19th century a flower market was also established in the south Piazza of Covent garden. Some of you might recall the 1964 film 'My Fair Lady' starring Audrey Hepburn, in which the main character, Eliza Doolittle is actually discovered by 'Henry Higgins' in Covent Garden selling flowers. The 1970's Alfred Hitchcock film 'Frenzy' is about a Covent Garden fruit seller who becomes a serial killer!

Over the last few decades, Covent Garden Market has been revamped and reopened as a retail centre and today it is one of the busiest tourist destinations in London.