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ISSUE 24 - SPRING 2026

Spotlight on Deptford

Interview: Clare Grogan

Local restaurant guide

A visit to Sri Lanka



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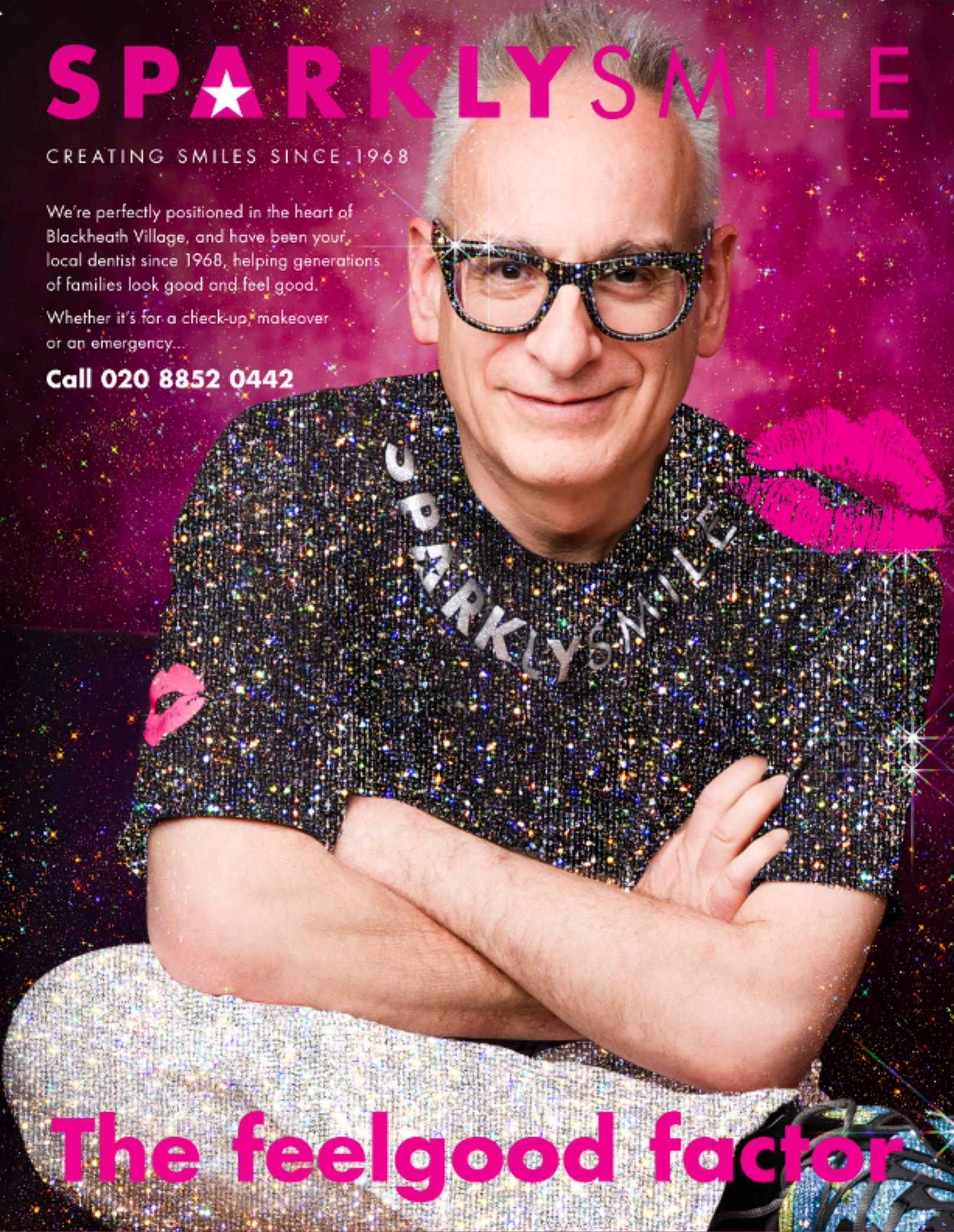
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Cover: Old Deptford Dockyard

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It's always really gratifying receiving all the lovely comments we get about Black and Green Magazine. It is clear that there's a sizeable and growing readership that appreciates our strong emphasis on the best quality editorial, and we hope that you consider it a welcomed free asset to the community.

As well as covering local news and features, our quarterly magazine ventures further than south London, with celebrity interviews, lifestyle, property and travel articles, and much more.

We're hoping that you'll be keen to get involved in our magazine in some way, whether as a reader, advertiser, or perhaps stockist. We'd certainly welcome your views and suggestions, and please send us information, letters and photos you think suitable for the magazine.

Unfortunately, the magazine can't exist from advertising alone, so please consider helping secure its future by taking out a subscription to guarantee your copy (just email us at info@blackandgreen.biz), or perhaps by becoming an investor in this dynamic title.

We hope you enjoy this issue!

The Black + Green team

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What's on

David Hockney: A Year in Normandie

Until 23 August

Showcasing a series of new paintings for Serpentine alongside the artist's monumental frieze *A Year in Normandie* (2020-2021), on view in London for the first time, this exhibition marks the artist's first presentation at Serpentine. It comprises five still lifes alongside five portraits that depict members of the artist's close circle, including his family and carers. These paintings are united by their frontal composition and by the recurring motif of a gingham tablecloth that provides the setting for each composition. In these new works Hockney combines abstract and figurative modes of representation. Accompanying the exhibition, Serpentine presents a large-scale printed mural by David Hockney in the garden at Serpentine North. The work highlights a scene from *A Year in Normandie's* spring cycle depicting a tree house. The monumental digital print will be displayed at the back of the North Gallery, echoing its creation in David Hockney's own garden in Normandy.

Serpentine North Gallery, West Carriage Drive, W2 2AR; 020 7402 6075; serpentinegalleries.org; free

DYSPLA: The Neurodivergent Aesthetic

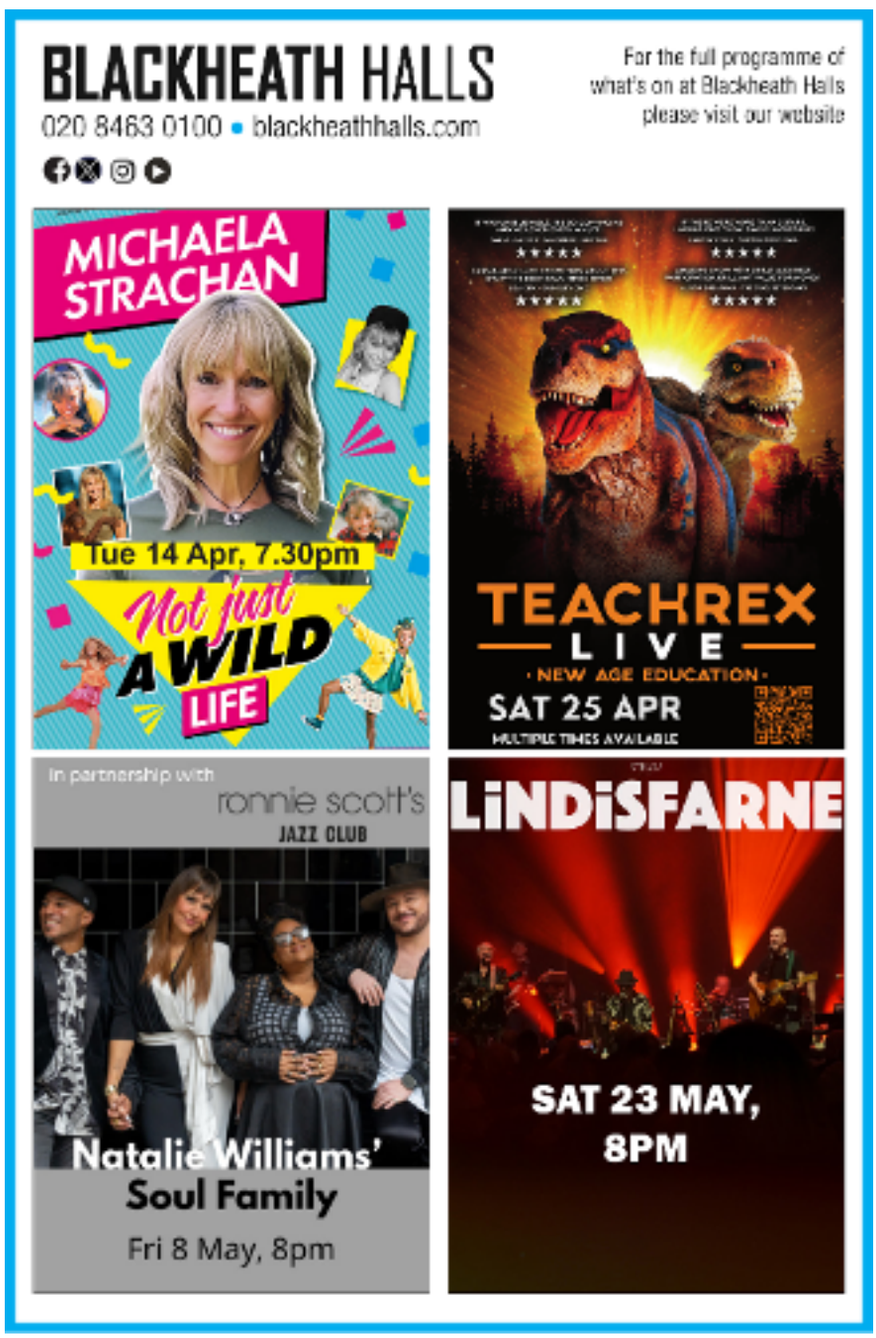
9 April to 6 May

DYSPLA is a London-based, award-winning, neurodivergent-led arts organisation known for their pioneering digital art narratives and for expanding the conversation around disability aesthetics. This exhibition featuresart made by neurodivergent people, inspired by nonconformist cognition, and proposes that cognitive difference can generate distinct aesthetic methodologies.As part of this residency, DYSPLA will digitally reproduce historical and newly created artefacts alongside works developed during workshops with students from Kings Park Newhaven School, Greenwich, funded by the Royal Borough of Greenwich. These artworks will be printed on billboard paper and assembled into a large-scale installation designed to unpack, challenge and visualise what is meant by the Neurodivergent Aesthetic.

Stephen Lawrence Gallery, 10 Stockwell Street, Greenwich SE10 9BD; 020 8331 9954; greenwichunigalleries.co.uk; free







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What's on

Haven't Stopped Dancing Yet May Disco Ball

Saturday 9 May, 7.30pm

Haven't Stopped Dancing Yet is back to give everyone a spring burst of feel-good 70s and 80s disco. Expect classic hits from the fabulous DJ Lady G (Solar Radio), flash-mob style routines and a packed dancefloor. Dress up if you like (prizes to be won) enjoy free retro sweets, and get ready for a seriously joyful night out!

Blackheath Halls, 26 Lee Road, Blackheath SE3 9RQ; 020 8463 0100; blackheathhalls.com; tickets £20



The Very Busy Bumblebee

Friday 29 May, 11am and 1pm

Mr. Grumpy the Gardener is a litter bug! When he is finished with his sandwich bag and coffee cup he just throws it on the ground! Mr Grumpy also doesn't like bees. He doesn't like them buzzing or flying round his head, and he's always worried they will sting him. But Beatrice the Very Busy Bumblebee wants to whizz from flower to flower, collect nectar and make lovely sweet honey, and she certainly doesn't want rubbish messing up her lovely garden. Can Beatrice teach Mr. Grumpy to tidy up and just how important she is for the garden and for the whole world?With themes of friendship and sustainability, this sweet, funny show is the perfect introduction to live ballet and helps children understand just how important looking after our planet really is.

Blackheath Halls, 26 Lee Road, Blackheath SE3 9RQ; 020 8463 0100; blackheathhalls.com; tickets £9



Thames-Side Studios Open Studios Weekend

Sat/Sun 6/7June, 11am-5pm

With over 550 studios, Thames-Side Studios Woolwich has been supporting London's creativity since 2016, offering affordable studios and facilities for its inspiring and diverse community. Open Studios offers the chance to explore the site and discover how the artists and makers work in their spaces across a variety of practices. Over the weekend there will be a range of art exhibitions, street food, free workshops and kids' activities- something for everyone to enjoy.

Studio practices cover a wide range, from painting, illustration, printmaking, ceramics, sculpture, glass art, jewellery, fashion, leatherwork, weaving, embroidery, woodwork, furniture making, picture framing, photography, film and video, sound composition, instrument repairs, upholstery, fabrication, and more. Free limited parking is available on site.

Thames-Side Studios, Harrington Way, Woolwich SE18 5NR; 020 8301 8844; thamesside-studios.co.uk; free

Blackheath Conservatoire: free on Fridays

Friday 17 April, 1.30pm

Conservatoire tutors are musicians for whom performing is an essential part of their practice and these lunchtime recitals are an



opportunity for them to showcase their talent. On 17 April Duo Brikcius, two cellists, brother and sister Anna Brikciusová and František Brikcius, will be performing music for two cellos by Johan Sebastian Bach, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Gioachino Rossini, Gabriel Fauré and contemporary Czech composer Irena Kosíková. All ages are welcome, including babies and children. Optional retiring collection at the end, all donations go directly to the performers.

Blackheath Conservatoire, 19-21 Lee Road, Blackheath SE3 9RQ; 020 8852 0234; conservatoire.org.uk



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"I'm genuinely proud that this young girl in Glasgow had a dream, and has worked every year in a business she loves ever since"

Interview: Clare Grogan

Actress, writer, restaurateur and Altered Images' singer on her epic career

BY BEN WEST

Clare Grogan is perhaps best known for fronting 1980s band Altered Images, which was one of the most influential groups to emerge from the UK post-punk and new wave scenes, selling millions of records worldwide in the process.

Working with legendary producers Martin Rushent (The Stranglers), Mike Chapman (Blondie) and Tony Visconti (Bowie), they achieved three Top 10 albums and six UK top 40 hits including *Don't Talk to Me About Love, I Could Be Happy, Happy Birthday,* and *See Those Eyes.*

Clare married her bandmate Stephen Lironi in Glasgow in 1994, and they adopted a daughter, Ellie, in 2005. While Stephen produced Altered Images's last album, *Mascara Streakz* in 2022 - the first new Altered Images album for 40 years - he runs London restaurants that they own, which takes up a lot of his time.

"The restaurants are a lot of work," she says. "We've got three restaurants: Bar Esteban, Escocesa and Muresco - one in our neighbourhood, Crouch End, one in Stoke Newington, and one in Soho. My contribution is the drinking and eating bit."

Clare sees her ability to sustain her career all this time as a formidable achievement.

"I'm 63, and I've never had a proper job. I'm not boasting about that, but I'm genuinely proud of the fact that this young girl in Glasgow had a dream, and has worked every year in a business she loves ever since. And I think people underestimate how hard that is.

"I've recognised time and time again that performing is just in every fibre of my being. I love performing in front of an audience, and when I'm not getting to do it, it's almost painful."

She no doubt cannot wait until Altered Images embark on a UK-wide tour in September. The 1981 album that launched their careers, *Happy Birthday,* will be performed in full alongside their other greatest hits.

"Our audiences are a real mixture of ages these days. Obviously there's a lot of people of my own generation, but 80s music has generated a sort of younger audience as well, because they just love the songs. It was a unique period in music in terms of the style and the energy. And I think the individuals that were involved in it, all of us, we dared to be bold back then."

With Altered Images all based in Glasgow, Clare manages to return to Scotland pretty regularly.

"It has been a really great thing the band are there, because I don't have family in



Glasgow anymore. I've got lots of friends there, but having my band there really keeps me attached to it and keeps me up with what's going on in the city. I love it. It's my hometown."

If pop stardom and owning three restaurants wasn't enough, Clare's also somehow found time as a radio and television presenter and as an author of successful children's books - and as an actor. At the same time as Altered Images hitting the big time she starred in the cult-classic BAFTA-winning film *Gregory's Girl*.

"I love the fact that my acting career started with Bill Forsyth, director of Gregory's Girl. He's an amazing filmmaker, and he's a really lovely man. He saw something in me that I hadn't seen in myself. There's something quite powerful about that, when somebody that knows his stuff chooses you to be part of their world."

Shooting to stardom in both the pop world and film world must have been overwhelming, and perhaps when things calmed down it would be difficult to cope with.

"I had great fun with it for a very long time - and then I didn't. I think that because I'd never expected success on the level that it happened, that I had no real life experience, means I didn't really ask big questions about what it was. All I knew at the time was I wanted to take a pause. And what you don't realise when you're young is you're not in control of pressing play again.

"I think that because Bill gave me that platform when I was young, he gave me a confidence in my ambition. Sometimes my confidence wobbled big time, it really did. But I kept on, just kept going back to the fact that the people that you get to work with see something in you. It's a really, really powerful thing. And maybe you don't realise it till later on."

Subsequent acting roles Clare has taken on have spanned television, radio, film and theatre, and have included parts in *Father Ted, Skins, Red Dwarf, Taggart* and *EastEnders.*

Do she think things are easier for women now in these industries, or have they not really changed?

"It's such a big question. I don't think it's an easy business, full stop, for anyone. And sustaining it is definitely tricky. But I sometimes get disappointed when I hear younger artists today talking about the difficult experiences they've had.

"So I think it has moved on to a certain extent. I really do. I think that for me, it's changed because I am somebody who's now in a position to be able to say 'that's not happening'. When I was much younger, I wasn't in that position.

"I think when you start out, at first you just want to please everyone. You just want to get it right with everyone. And I think that's when it becomes tricky, not being able to stand your own ground.

"But it's a tough business. I think it always has been, and it always will be. But I do think women's voices are being listened to more and that's got to make a difference. It



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really has.

“When we released our last album, there was a 37-year gap in albums. Some may call me a slacker, I don't know. I'm signed to a label called Cooking Vinyl and they're a lovely, really successful small label, but you have to be very hands-on and involved. I was a bit scared of social media initially and then they said ‘you're going to have to really, really embrace this.’ because that's the way you're going to sell the record.

“First time round it was so different for me. There was a whole marketing team and I would just turn up at places. But actually I really like being very involved in it now. And I loved starting over again, getting to play the new album and appearing at the Rough Trade record shops and a lot of really quirky things that young bands get to do. To get the opportunity to do that, it was fun.

“I'm really glad my daughter was around because she's my technical advisor as well as my daughter. She understands the world of social media on a level that I don't. It was very handy having her. I'd be like, ‘Ellie, I don't know what I'm doing’. But I started really getting into making little films. The self-promotion thing is quite weird, because I grew up with people saying no one likes a show off. But this industry is all about showing off. I think our generation think it's all so self-centred, posting about everything. But you just have to get over that.”

Clare was the inspiration for Spandau Ballet’s *True*

There’s another less known string to Clare’s bow - the inspiration for the huge Spandau Ballet hit, *True*, written by the band’s Gary Kemp.

Spandau Ballet flew to Nassau in the Bahamas to record True, written by Gary in 1982 when Gary was 23. Their biggest success, it has a smooth, dreamy, slow-tempo feel and memorable saxophone solo, and became a hit in more than 20 countries worldwide the next year. It has since appeared in films such as *Sixteen Candles* and *Pixels*, and TV series such as *Modern Family, The Simpsons* and *Family Guy.* It has been covered many times.

The slick, blue-eyed soul ballad has rather vague and abstract lyrics but is about the difficulty of expressing honest romantic feelings, hence the words ‘Why do I find it hard to write the next line?’. Kemp has said that he was influenced by the music of Al Green and Marvin Gaye - and there’s a tribute to Gaye within the lyrics, ‘Listening to Marvin all night long’.

“Gary and I were friends, and he was really nice, and I could tell that he liked me,” says Clare. “But at that time we had very crazy, busy lives, both in bands, at opposite ends of the country all the time.”

Yet they still managed to meet up.

“Spandau Ballet and Altered Images used to play five-a-side football together. So when Spandau Ballet came to Glasgow, they'd go to Bellahouston, the sports centre, and play football with the Altered Images five-a-side team, which sometimes included me - when they were really desperate.

“I always get quite embarrassed when I hear True now. I used to tease my husband a bit about it being a song that Gary had written about our relationship. But it was honestly based on the fact that I had no idea that it was me Gary had in mind. It was like, ‘this is awkward, because suddenly this joke between me and my husband had turned



into something else - that it really was true.’ “

However, she never performs the song live.

“No, never. It's not my song. But it's hugely flattering, it really is. It's a nice thing to have in my life.

Altered Images tour the UK throughout September: tickets available via alteredimages.band

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Where to eat tonight?

A guide to some restaurants in Blackheath, Greenwich, Charlton and Woolwich

Southeast London offers an exceptional variety of restaurants at all budgets offering a diverse choice of cuisines. Here's a selection of some of them in the locality.

The Ivy Café, Blackheath

Although it doesn't possess the glamour of the original Ivy Restaurant in West Street in central London, which has long been popular with celebrities, the Blackheath branch of the chain is still stylish, with an upbeat vibe. Service is attentive and the menu varied, including classics like French onion soup and fish and chips, to more adventurous options like crispy duck salad with cashew nuts, watermelon, hoisin sauce and ginger, making it sweet, salty and spicy all at once.

43-45 Montpelier Vale, Blackheath, SE3 0TA; 020 3940 1010; ivycollection.com

Everest Inn, Blackheath

This popular restaurant has been serving authentic Nepali and Indian cuisine since opening in 2005. To give an idea of the standard of its dishes, in 2025 it received a Good Curry Guide Award, recognising what the judges described as two decades of culinary excellence, consistency and community commitment. As well as traditional Indian dishes like tikka masala, korma and jalfrezi, it has an extensive range of far less usual options. They include lamb shank with Nepali spices, steamed momo chicken or vegan dumplings, Timuri goat curry and battered lakeside fish with lemon.

41 Montpelier Vale, Blackheath SE3 oTJ; 020 8852 7872; everestinn.co.uk



Everest Inn, Blackheath

Banana Tree, Greenwich

Situated in central Greenwich moments from Greenwich Market, Banana Tree's pan-Asian menu brings together the fiery, fragrant flavours of Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia and Japanese favourites all on one plate. Whether you're craving the heat of a Thai curry, the comfort of a steaming bowl of ramen, or the sticky sweetness of a classic Pad Thai, there's something for everyone. Choose from small plates, wok tossed noodles, ramen, laksa, regional curries, and specials like Japanese grilled seabass with teriyaki and chilli, and Chocolate miso caramel fondant.

30 Stockwell Street, Greenwich, SE10 9JN; 020 3917 4191; bananatree.co.uk


The Ivy, Blackheath

Kailash Momo, Woolwich

To be honest, Kailash Momo's exterior doesn't look too appealing, however keenly priced good Nepalese and Tibetan dishes are on offer, such as freshly made momo (dumplings), thukpa (noodle soup) and chow mein. Other dishes include Bhatmas Sandeko (roasted soya beans, green chilli, onion, ginger, garlic, coriander leaves and lemon juice), Wai Wai Sandeko (a tangy, spicy snack made with crunchy noodles mixed with chopped vegetables, lime, and Nepalese spices), and Chicken Shabhaleym, a traditional Tibetan pastry with salad.

79 Woolwich New Road, Woolwich SE18 6ED; 020 3489 8901; kailashmomo.com

Zaibatsu, Charlton

As above, the exterior doesn't suggest a culinary haven, but when you step inside and see how consistently popular this unpretentious Japanese fusion restaurant is, you'll see that it offers exceptionally good value tasty dishes that bring people back again and again. Having moved from its previous premises on Trafalgar Road and a two-year pause in operations not of its choosing, its large menu still has choices like sushi, sashimi, tempura, noodles, rice dishes and salads. The Malaysian chicken curry cooked with spices, curry leaves and coconut milk is particularly good. It's unlicensed but you can bring your own alcohol.

242 Woolwich Road, Charlton SE7 7QU; 020 8166 6150; zaibatsufusion.co.uk


Banana Tree, Greenwich

Côte Brasserie, Blackheath

Overlooking Blackheath and All Saints Church, the menu here features classic French dishes alongside contemporary twists on traditional favourites. Everything from eggs Benedict to French toast made with sweet brioche and topped with peach and raspberry compote, plus beef bourguignon, moules marinière, vegan burger, lamb ragu and more.

15-16 Royal Parade, Blackheath, SE3 0TL; 020 8852 9548; cote.co.uk


Cote, Blackheath

Buenos Aires Cafe, Blackheath

This longstanding restaurant inspired by the classic confiterias and fabulous parillas of Argentina. With Argentina's cuisine influenced by Spain and Italy, they serve steaks and grills, pizzas and pastas and desserts based on old family recipes. They boast one of London's few Argentine-only wine lists and the beef is sourced from Argentina's Pampas itself, which produced meat that is flavoursome, succulent and low in cholesterol. Almost everything else on the menu is homemade by the chefs, including the ever-popular chorizo.

17 Royal Parade, Blackheath, SE3 0TL; 020 8318 5333; buenosairescafe.co.uk



Northern Sri Lanka: a hidden gem

Almost all Sri Lankan tourist itineraries focus on the south - but now the north is opening up

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY BEN WEST

“Cow ahead!” I shout to the driver, although it is very unlikely he hasn’t noticed the huge animal standing in the middle of the road in front of us.

We are fast approaching it - my driver is keen on racing along the roads, whether surfaced or muddy, populated by people or stray dogs, or unlit vehicles when it gets dark - which isn’t doing much good for my nerves.

“I am one of the fastest drivers in my company,” he says proudly, and I have no inclination to dispute him. However, later on when I scream as a lorry is heading straight towards us soon after we have overtaken on a blind bend, he informs me that in 25 years of driving he has never hit anything. Well, there’s always a first time.

This first day in Sri Lanka is an assault of the senses, a 400-kilometre drive straight after an 11-hour flight from London, from Colombo International Airport in the southwest of the island to Jaffna in the extreme north, which normally takes around eight hours but we accomplish in seven-and-a-half unsurprisingly.

It is all a blur of colours - glimpses of emerald forests and plantations, bright blue, yellow and red tropical birds, golden, colourful temples, huge hulking garishly painted buses, red, pink and peach hibiscus flowers, the orange and rust robes of Buddhist monks, the bright and fresh green, yellow and red tropical fruits and vegetables sold by the roadside.

There's quite a hubub too - urban bustle, roaring tuk-tuk engines, the toot of horns used by impatient drivers, the pitter patter of the heavy rains on this mid-May day, and occasionally mobile bakery trucks called *Choon Paan* vans, playing high-pitched tunes such as Beethoven’s *Für Elise* to attract customers.

Few visitors to Sri Lanka experience the north of the island, not least because the north and east of the country were off limits during the civil war, which ran from 1983 until 2009. The north is dominated by Tamils, and where Hinduism is practised, whereas in the south, Sinhalese is the dominant language, with most inhabitants practising Buddhism.

However, the north of the island is at last opening up, with new hotels, restaurants and improved roads being installed to entice visitors. Lucky for those who prefer discovering destinations not swamped by tourists, the process is still in its infancy. A good indication of this is the fact that leading Sri Lankan hotel chain Jetwing Hotels has 17 hotels in the southern part of the island and only one in the north, the supremely comfortable - and very good value - Jetwing Jaffna Hotel.



The city of Jaffna has a feel that differs distinctly from those further south. No doubt it is far more influenced by India than much of the island: the Indian mainland (at Dhanushkodi) is only around 15 miles (25 kilometres) away from the Jaffna Peninsular, across the Palk Strait.

With the majority of the population here being Tamil rather than Singhalese, there are numerous ornate Hindu temples and the food is generally spicier than in the south.

Considering that Jaffna was very much affected by the civil war, being a central stronghold for militant organisation the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and enduring decades of military occupation and intense fighting, it is surprising that none of this is apparent to the visitor.

The city saw massive destruction, with roughly 80% of homes damaged, widespread landmine contamination, and the displacement of a significant portion of its population.

However, today you experience a friendly, lively and relaxed city that feels completely safe. Indeed, many people greet you with a smile and the courteous Namaste sign, their hands pressed together as if in prayer, followed by a slight bow.

Jaffna is situated on a peninsula with beautiful lagoons, mangroves and islands. Jaffna Fort, built by the Portuguese in 1618 and later expanded by the Dutch, survived the civil war and is a popular spot to visit at sunset as it enjoys stunning views of the city’s lagoon and the centre of town.

A walk along the beach road takes you to the 3km long Passaiyoor Fishery Harbour and the hundreds of colourful fishing boats moored offshore, as well as - if you don’t leave it too late in the day - fishmongers calling buyers to auction at the fish market. The gold-embellished Nallur Kandaswamy Kovil Hindu temple is another fixture of Jaffna that should not be missed, while a trip to the hectic bus station gives a lively glimpse of everyday Sri Lankan life.

Going northwards, Kadurugoda, at the town of Chunnakam, a suburb of Jaffna District, is a striking ancient archaeological site consisting of around 20 stupas (typically dome-shaped sacred Buddhist monuments) and a number of stupa foundations made from grey coral stone, ranging from about 8 to 23.5 feet (2.5 to 7 metres) in diameter. They have distinguished patterns with small holes all over them. The site dates back at least two thousand years and it is believed that the stupas contain the remains of Buddhist monks.

There are Buddhist monuments in the Hindu-majority north because historically Buddhism was practised by both Tamil and Sinhala populations throughout the island before an invasion by the Chola in the 10th century, leading to a decline in Tamil Buddhism.

There is a real holiday atmosphere the hot and sunny Sunday morning when I visit the Keerimalai Naguleswaram Temple, an ancient Hindu shrine and significant pilgrimage site three miles (five kilometres) north of Jaffna. It is one of the Pancha

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AT THE HEART OF GREENWICH SINCE 1979

Ishwarams, the five historic Shiva temples on Sri Lanka, holding great religious significance for Hindu devotees worldwide. By the temple sits the Keerimalai Springs, natural, freshwater pools carved out of stone and situated right by the Indian Ocean.

Considered sacred, there are separate areas for men and women, who believe that bathing in the waters cleanses the spirit, brings good fortune, and helps heal various skin diseases. Men are jumping and diving in, while the women are more sedate. There are one or two people here sitting in homemade wheelchairs, having lost lower limbs, no doubt due to landmines that had been placed in the region during the civil war.

Heading to the Mannar Peninsular it is not long before I spot what I think are donkeys wandering by the roadside, but more accurately are members of a feral population of *Equus Africanus Asinus*, otherwise known as the African Wild Ass, thought to be the ancestor of the domestic donkey. They were brought to the area centuries ago by Arab traders to transport goods and people. Around 3,000 of these animals live in the wild in the Mannar, Puttalam, and Kalpitiya areas today, facing threats from habitat loss, inbreeding and abuse. They are also at risk of being killed for meat despite being protected under the country's Flora and Fauna Protection Ordinance.

However, a sanctuary in the area, The Donkey Clinic and Education Centre, works to provide healthcare for injured, abandoned, or sick donkeys. Visitors can feed, pet and learn about the animals in the Centre's peaceful and shady surroundings as well as buy some beautiful hand-crafted cloth bags and other fund-raising souvenirs.

It is run by Sahul Hameedtu Al-Hathir and his family after he abandoned his career as a software engineer, sold his house, and set up the Centre in 2019, working closely with the local community. Since then more than 500 donkeys have benefitted from veterinary care and shelter. Some have been adopted, others set free into the wild again, while a few have been retained for the Centre's educational programmes.



There is a rather larger variety of wildlife on offer at Wilipattu National Park, an ancient tract of dry zone forest and Sri Lanka's largest protected area. Here, some of my party are lucky enough to spot a leopard, known as a notoriously elusive big cat, lurking in the undergrowth.

Although I miss it, soon after I'm rewarded with the sight of a large sloth bear right in front of me, feasting on a termite mound. I don't appreciate how special this is until our guide, Dhanushka, points out that sloths are almost impossible to spot in the wild, and that he has only seen four in a decade.



Wilpattu translates as 'Land of Lakes', as there are numerous villu, natural, sand-rimmed water basins that support unique ecosystems vital for the park's diverse wildlife, especially during dry seasons.

The park faces numerous challenges, from illegal encroachment, poaching, climate change and related events such as droughts. However, you wouldn't be aware of this when driving through the park, which is a delight. I - or in most instances more accurately, Dhanushka - spot eagles, hornbills, bee-eaters, cormorants, plovers, kingfishers, jungle fowl, peafowl (or as we call them, peacocks), mongoose, lizards, geckos and elephants.

It is a superb end to a tour of a lesser-known region of 'The Teardrop of India', so-called due to the distinctive shape and location of Sri Lanka just off the Indian subcontinent.

While no doubt many, many tears have been shed during Sri Lanka's troubled past, it is heartening that today visiting it you will find the friendliest, most welcoming people - and fastest drivers - who are blessed to live amongst some of the most beautiful landscapes on Earth.

Getting there: Sri Lankan Airlines (srilankan.com) flies direct to Colombo from London Heathrow

At the airport: Holiday Extras (holdayextras.com) makes arranging airport parking, meet-and-greet and airport hotel stays easy

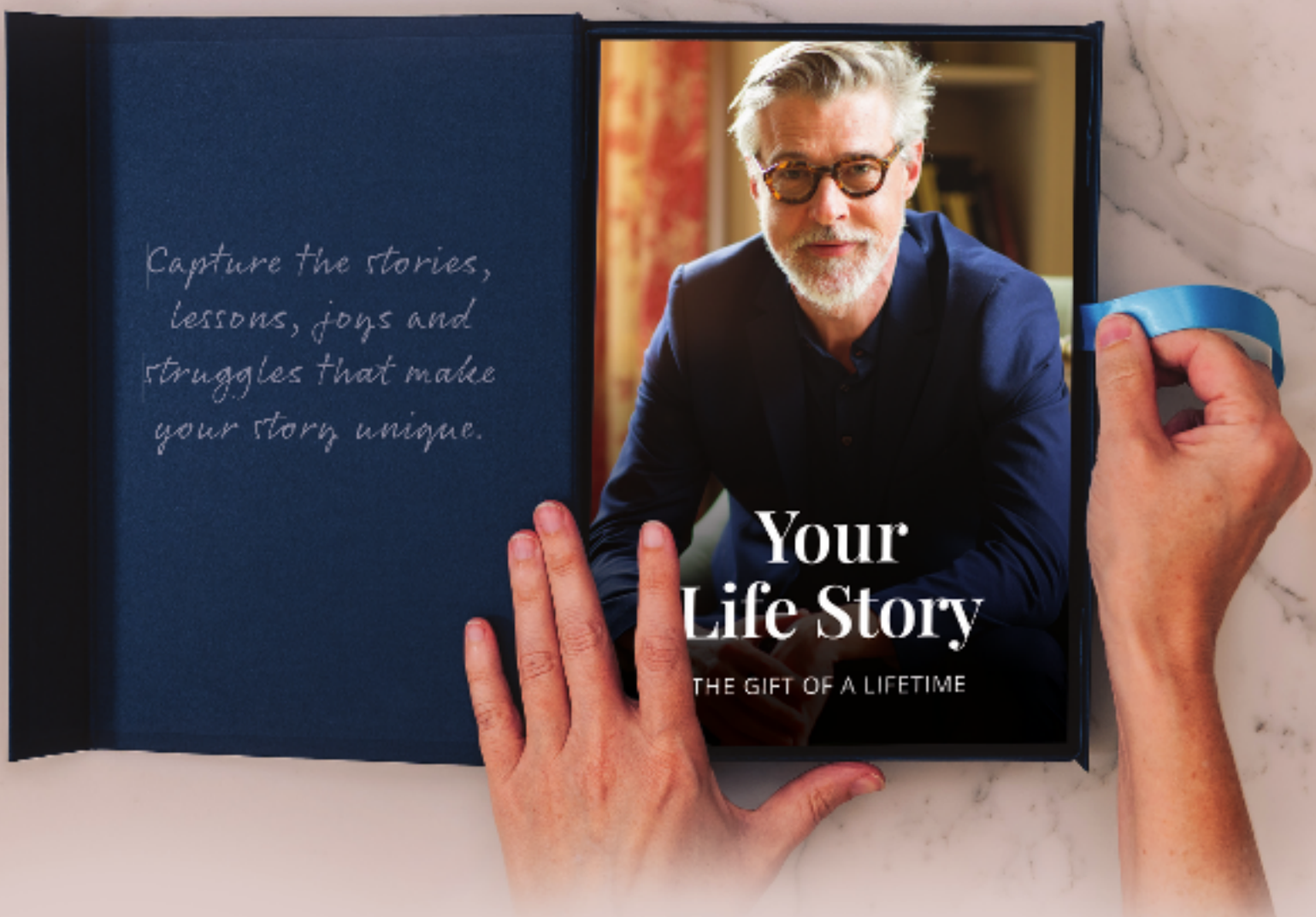
Accommodation: The Jetwing Jaffna (jetwinghotels.com) makes a luxurious base in the centre of Jaffna

Tours: Blue Lanka Tours (bluelankatours.com)

Guidebook: Sri Lanka, Bradt Guides, £17.99 (bradtguides.com)

Further information: Sri Lanka Travel (srilanka.travel)

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Spotlight on Deptford

BY BEN WEST

Where is it?

Just five miles from central London, it is sandwiched between Greenwich to the east, New Cross to the southwest, Blackheath to the southeast and Surrey Quays to the northwest, in the Borough of Lewisham in southeast London.

What's it like?

Although a cliche in writing, Deptford is a place of great contrasts. It's seen as being fashionable and buzzing, if a bit rough around the edges, having lively indie and creative scenes. Goldmiths, University of London in nearby New Cross and Trinity Laban conservatoire of music and dance in Greenwich have long assured the area has a sizeable population of arts students, and they no doubt add to the vibrant vibe and hip reputation - similar to that of Peckham - that Deptford possesses.

Added to the mix is still of course a large proportion of longstanding residents, as well as young professional newcomers looking for a lively 'affordable' place to live with good transport connections.

History

Originally named after a deep ford crossing the River Ravensbourne, a tributary of the River Thames, Deptford was situated on the ancient road from London to Canterbury and mentioned in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. It is famous for its rich maritime history: Henry VIII founded a royal dockyard there in 1513, which became Britain's most prominent Tudor shipbuilding centre. The dockyard closed in 1869 and the area slid into decline, becoming a military and industrial zone, and later went into great decay. Heavy bombing during the Second World War was another notable setback.

A changing neighbourhood

Like so many London neighbourhoods, Deptford has greatly changed in recent years. Gentrification has brought a host of trendy cafes, craft beer outlets, snazzy restaurants and the like appearing - and delighting homeowners who have seen their homes shoot up in value, estate agents flogging properties for bumper commissions,





and young professionals working in places like Canary Wharf looking for somewhere lively and well-connected and (relatively) affordable to live.

Yet not all locals who have known the area for years are so thrilled with how things have been evolving. Sky-high property prices have forced many out, old institutions like Manze's Pie and Mash Shop which served pie, mash and liquor and jellied eels for 111 years until January 2025 have gone, and there has recently been a fierce fight to stop Lewisham Council pedestrianising Deptford High Street for fear of the move destroying local businesses, isolating vulnerable residents and accelerating gentrification.

Although the street has for years been closed to traffic for three days a week so that markets could be held, a permanent closure to traffic was seen to be too much. Almost 3000 people responded to the pedestrianisation consultation, and in response the Council has halted it, saying that it will focus on improving lighting and instigating a clean-up including removing damaged signs and old phone boxes, and adding such things as cycle hangers, more greenery, and wayfinding signs.

Thriving music scene

Venues such as The Amersham Arms, the Bird's Nest, The Piehouse and The Albany performing arts centre (the latter established in 1894) have long ensured a healthy live music scene in Deptford, and numerous famous bands started their careers in the area.

Members of Squeeze and Dire Straits lived on the Crossfield Estate in the late 1970s and had early gigs in the area. Squeeze's first singles and Packet of Three EP were on the Deptford Fun City label, while one of Dire Straits' most famous early songs, *Sultans of Swing*, was set in a local pub, although no-one seems to agree or remember exactly which one - including members of the band.

Pioneering punk Mark Perry of Alternative TV, who also edited the *Sniffin' Glue* fanzine, also lived on the Crossfield Estate, while Blur's Graham Coxon and Alex James met at Goldsmiths, leading to the band's formation in 1988.

Indie rock band Athlete, known for their debut album *Vehicles & Animals* and the number-one album *Tourist*, also formed in Deptford, in the early 2000s.

A vibrant artistic hub

Its proximity to Goldsmiths University, Trinity Laban Conservatoire, its independent galleries and spaces and studio complexes like APT, Cockpit Arts Deptford and ArtHub, and artistic venue The Albany make it a popular place for artists, musicians and designers.

Green spaces

There's not a great deal - principally Deptford Park, Brookmill Park and the churchyard around the impressive Thomas Archer baroque church, St Paul's. However, Blackheath's expanse of green and the adjacent Greenwich Park are pretty near and easy to get to.

Famous historically significant figures

Diarist Samuel Pepys, worked in Deptford and as Secretary to the Admiralty, ordered a fleet of ships to be built there in the 17th century.

Fellow diarist John Evelyn leased his Deptford home, Sayes Court, to naval officer John Benbow, who then sublet to Russian Tsar Peter the Great for four months while he studied shipbuilding.

Sir Francis Drake was closely associated with Deptford, and in 1581 Queen Elizabeth I knighted him aboard his ship, the Golden Hind, which was moored there.

Playwright Christopher Marlowe was stabbed to death in Deptford aged 29, and buried at Deptford's St Nicholas Church.

More recent famous residents

Journalist, comedy writer, radio DJ and screenwriter Danny Baker was born in Deptford, as was Cockney Rebel frontman Steve Harley. Oscar-winning actor Gary Oldman grew up in the area.

Deptford is known to be lively: is there anywhere tranquil?

With its markets and many shops, cafes and bars, Deptford High Street is certainly pretty hectic much of the time. However, away from the main streets it can be quiet, not least because of the numerous cul-de-sacs in the area.

Housing

Seen as one of the cheaper neighbourhoods of Zone 2, approximately 50% of Deptford residents live in social rented accommodation. Only about 20% of residents own their homes, while 26% live in private rented accommodation.

The last couple of decades has seen a number of residential development schemes launched, and new-build homes have accounted for around 40% of homes sold in the past decade. Pricey, shiny new riverside apartments sit alongside council estates.

There is a sizeable number of period terrace homes and flat conversions, and the St John's and Deptford Park conservation areas have an impressive stock of Victorian houses. There are 17th century cottages in Tanners Hill.

Albury Street, where 18th century shipwrights used to live, is particularly sought after. Houses there have carved wooden porches decorated with flowers and cherubs, and the bonus of views of St Paul's church.

Transport connections

Deptford has great connections to central London, with Deptford, Deptford Bridge, St Johns, New Cross and New Cross Gate stations all in the vicinity. Deptford railway station is just a seven-minute train ride from London Bridge, and Cannon Street is 12 minutes away. The DLR takes you to Canary Wharf in around 13 minutes, while the Overground at New Cross takes 16 minutes to reach Shoreditch High Street. Blackheath, Greenwich and Peckham are a quick and easy cycle ride too. However, traffic is often slow around peak times on the main traffic artery, the A2, in and around the New Cross Road and on to Blackheath Hill.







NEIGHBOURHOODS

Shops

Go to long established Rag 'n' Bone for vintage clothing, Upside Down Records for vinyl, Terry's Discount for everything for the home and Deptford Market Yard for a little collection of independent shops, cafes and restaurants.

On Deptford High Street there is a market on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays selling clothes, fruit, vegetables and fish, with bric-a-brac, jumble and household good off the high street in Douglas Way, and street food on Saturdays in Giffin Square by the library.

Cafes

London Velo is a cafe and bar that also provides bike servicing and gear; Deli X is a delicatessen and cafe; vegetarian and vegan coffee bar The Waiting Room has an art and book exchange; Deptford Does Art is a vegan café, bar and art gallery.

Restaurants

Marcella is an Italian restaurant from the people behind acclaimed Artusi in Peckham; pho restaurant Panda Panda - for great banh mi; bar restaurant and nightclub Buster Mantis for Jamaican cuisine.

Pubs and bars

Cosy Catford Rhum Arrangé is a specialist French rhum bar and cafe; the Dog and Bell is a popular characterful pub among long-time locals and arty students and beer lovers - and one of the few pubs offering three Irish stouts: Guinness, Murphy's and Beamish; the Brookmill is a popular pub by Brookmill Park; The Endeavour is a late-night bar with an underground feel, that has art residencies, live music, comedy and DJ sets; Villages Brewery has a tap room, ideal for those with a taste for craft beer.

Schools

Primary schools include Grinling Gibbons, Tideway Academy and Ashmead; secondaries in the area include Deptford Green; for further education there is Lewisham College.

Walking tours

Details of acclaimed Deptford walking tours are at charlesboothwalks.com

Environmental discovery centre

Creekside Discovery Centre is an environmental education centre for all ages on the tidal Deptford Creek, a tributary of the River Thames and home to hundreds of salt and freshwater plants and creatures. Wildflowers bloom, eels migrate, kingfishers dart past tower blocks and juvenile fish find refuge in hidden nurseries. It is a rich, ever-changing habitat teeming with life and waiting to be discovered.







The Community Hospice mini-marathon is back

Is your child a speedy sprinter or a cheerful jogger? Either way, get them active and involved this Spring by taking part in Community Hospice's Mini Marathon – making a real difference for families who need end of life support and care in southeast London.

Open to all children aged 5 to 16, this is a great family day out with live entertainment, face painting, sports, activities and more.

Every child receives a medal and a goodie bag from our event sponsors JLL while those who raise more than £30 in sponsorship are



entered into a draw with the chance of winning even more exciting prizes!



Join six-year-old Harry and his mum Charlotte in taking on this year's Hospice Mini Marathon, with Harry aiming to raise as much money as possible for the hospice, or in his words: "A thousand trillion pounds!"

Harry, from Kent, adds: "I'm looking forward to getting the medal, other children should join me, it will be fun."

With a distance of 2.62 miles around Royal Greenwich Park, the Hospice Mini Marathon takes place on Sunday 10 May with entry £12 per child or £50 for five children.

Sprinters, runners, walkers and joggers are welcome, with every step helping us provide end of life care in the hospice, at home, and in local hospitals

This year, we are raising vital funds towards the revamp of our inpatient unit. Yoursupport will be helping families to share precious moments together.

Starting in 2013, this annual Hospice Mini Marathon always sells out fast so don't miss out! On-the-day registration is not guaranteed and will only be offered if space allows, at our discretion. If available, the on-the-day registration fee will be £25 per child.

Thanks to corporate event sponsors JLL for their long-running support of this event and the hospice.

Here's the details:

Date: 10 May 2026

Time: 09:00 -13:00

Location: Royal Greenwich Park, Shooters Hill Road, Greenwich SE10 8QY

Organiser: Community Hospice (communityhospice.org.uk)

Distance: 2.62 miles

Go at your own pace - walk, run, or jog round the 2.62m course

Entertainment bought to you by Rock Choir, Tony, Play It On Pans

Open to children aged 5-16 – children under 8 need to run with an adult

Registration fees (which include a medal and a JLL goodie bag for each child):

Standard entry: £12 from 3 February

Team package: 5 children for £50 (£10 each)



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Whatever your age, the best smiles are built on care, confidence and restraint. At SparklySmile, luxury means preserving your natural teeth for as long as possible - so you can smile, eat and live with comfort, with the least intervention necessary.

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Founded in 1968 by Jo Eisenberg, the practice quickly earned a reputation for progressive techniques, a gentle approach and a strong emphasis on preventative care. His philosophy built lasting relationships with generations of patients. In 1988, his son Phil joined the practice, expanding its cosmetic capabilities while remaining true to its conservative, patient-first ethos. Under his leadership, a carefully chosen team of dentists, hygienists, an endodontist, orthodontist and implant dentist joined the practice.

Cosmetic dentistry evolved - but it never took over. Experience taught them that the best results come from understanding when not to intervene as much as when they see things that need putting right.

Thoughtful dentistry, tailored to you

With decades of experience, SparklySmile's team help you get the very best from your teeth with minimal treatment. To them true luxury is durability, comfort and confidence - knowing your teeth are strong enough to let you enjoy whatever you like, without worry.

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Your first SparklySmile appointment begins with conversation. During a comprehensive consultation, they will discuss your teeth, your concerns and your expectations.

Only then will they examine your mouth, using advanced imaging so you can clearly see what's happening. They may take digital, low-radiation X-rays and, where appropriate, use 3D



scanning technology to gain a detailed understanding of your oral health.

With this thoughtful planning, they can then provide expert advice and treatment for gum problems, fix broken teeth, move them with advanced orthodontics and replace missing teeth with implants if necessary as well as improve their appearance when desired.

When dentistry is carried out carefully, the result isn't just a smile - it's ease, confidence and longevity.

Nervous? You're in safe hands

If you feel anxious about visiting the dentist, you're not alone - and you'll be listened to. SparklySmile's calm, sympathetic approach and modern techniques make treatment as comfortable as possible.

They are happy to talk you through every step.

Why not start the conversation today and give SparklySmile a call.

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Stronger bones, better balance: the case for weighted vests

Some 15 years ago I bought my first weighted vest. It was black, rigid and designed to wrap around a barrel shape rather than a human body. No wonder it drew confused and hostile attention from people passing by. I became reluctant to use it in public spaces because it looked like a stab vest.

Weighted vests date back to antiquity, especially for military training and Greek athletes, but eventually found their way into the modern day world of home exercise.

Today they are enjoying a revival. Designs are soft, adjustable and contoured to body shape. They come in colours, either with adjustable or fixed weights, and are comfortable. I'd like to think they will inspire curious onlookers since research shows weighted vests improve bone mineral density, prevent weight gain and improve balance and stability. This makes them especially useful for older adults as well as youthful warriors and athletes!

The Chief Medical Officer's Physical Activity Guidelines set out what exercise might look like and what it will do for you. For older adults, dance and tai chi are recommended activities to improve balance and stability.

There is no reason why any adult couldn't wear a weighted vest to dance or glide through a set sequence of tai chi moves based on age. A weighted vest distributes its weight around one's torso evenly and allows for body- and hands-free movement. A brisk walk wearing a weighted vest is going to challenge your heart and lungs and make you use more energy.

The guidelines also point to different activities to meet your unique needs so if getting stronger is what you need, you'll do well to wear a weighted vest for free form strength exercises like lunges and squats for your legs or push ups, and planks and bridges for chest, arms, back and torso.

You'll accelerate building muscle whether it's towards off bone thinning, lifting heavy shopping or showing off your shape. Wearing a weighted vest to play badminton or tennis could do a



lot for your health, including your brain.

You'll need to get two things in place before you start wearing one. Just like gym machines, dumbbells and classes, weighted vests have limitations and so do you.

Always check with your GP and specialist exercise advice for conditions, as well as physiotherapists and fitness professionals for fine-tuning your training. They have all undertaken endorsed professional education for you.

Family members, mates, neighbours, onlookers and celebrities are only ever going to tell you what works for them. Choose the recommended weight and abide by manufacturers' guidelines for injury free progress, rather than rely solely on goodwill.

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