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Summer in the City

POSTED ON JUL 15, 2010 IN BLOG NEWS, GENERAL | 16 COMMENTS

Yes, it's so hot you could fry an egg on the sidewalk (but don't – the gum is bad enough) but summer is also time when we are spoiled for choice when it comes things to do, enjoy and experience.

If one more person says, "It's not the heat – it's the humidity," I may have to hurt someone. Why? Because it's the heat *and* the humidity. Trust me. 'Gotham Girl' I may be but I was raised on the Gulf Coast. I know of what I speak. Lest anyone think I am becoming Gotham Grouch however, rest assured that I actually love this time of year – despite grumbling about the weather. Sure, summer in the city can be frustrating and annoying but can also be great fun and amazing.



The good: Ice cream, tennis tournaments, music festivals, Shakespeare alfresco, dining alfresco, movies alfresco – everything alfresco. The less good: The heat that presses down on you, radiates up off the sidewalks and bouncing back at you from reflective building surfaces. The crowds that flock in to see the same top ten attractions as last year's crowd flocked in to see. The resigned look of those heading underground who know stifling platforms await them.

Whether I am referring to London or New York is completely up to you. All of the above apply to either or both. Of course, you can't help but notice how distinctly different all those similarities can be.



Ice cream always tastes good but there is something about strolling down the street on a warm summer evening – perhaps indulging in a bit of window shopping – that makes it taste even better. I can't pick just one 'best ice cream in NYC' at the moment – I have too many choices and each is a slightly different experience. The Brooklyn Ice Cream Factory makes amazing ice cream and it is right near the Brooklyn Promenade. If there is a more perfect place for an ice cream cone stroll than that, I have yet to find it. Looking for something a bit more out of the ordinary on a sultry summer night in Gotham? Try Ciao Bella Café – known for unusual flavors – maker of my favorite mango sorbet. I don't have wide experience of ice cream in London but I've indulged myself at [The Parlour at Fortnum and Mason](#) (their raspberry ripple is calling my name even now) and enjoyed some of the best café affogato I've ever had at [Scoop](#). It was so good, my friend and I sent back for more. What is your favorite London ice cream stop?

I could talk about ice cream all day but there's more to summer in the city than that.

One of the most summer-defining events in London is the [Proms](#). It has a heavy Broadway element to it this year with events celebrating both Sondheim and Rodgers and Hammerstein. Is it just me or does



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it seem like Stephen Sondheim's 80th birthday has been going on for years now? Also this year there will be two 'Last Night of the Proms' – the actual Last Night and the recreation of the initial Last Night. Check out the Proms schedule to see what's on and where. NYC also has a summer classical music festival – Lincoln Center's annual [Mostly Mozart Festival](#). It's a bit shorter than the Proms (only running a month), but like the Proms was founded to offer a more informal ambiance and relatively inexpensive tickets to attract new audiences who wouldn't normally attend such events as well as more regular classical music lovers. Mostly Mozart will be especially interesting since so many of the venues have recently undergone massive refurbishment. Lincoln Center was always a dramatic place – indoors and out – but now the whole complex is being transformed into an even more dramatic, greener and more inviting place.

Feeling more sporty than musical? Then summer in the city is your time of year. I'd talk about baseball but wouldn't be equipped to compare and contrast it to what may or may not be its nearest British equivalent – cricket. This is largely due to my ongoing failure to understand cricket. And I've tried, believe me, I've tried. I just don't get it. There. I've said it. Can we move on, now? What about something we all understand, like tennis.

Two of the biggest tennis events in sports are annual summer in the city staples. Wimbledon and the US Open. Both are part of the Grand Slam. The top players in the world compete at both and you will be wildly overcharged for a bottle of water on the grounds of either event. But look beyond that and you see that they are worlds apart (and not just geographically). Wimbledon is grass court, US Open is hard court. Centre court is much bigger than Centre court. The winner of the US Open gets more money but the winner of Wimbledon gets more prestige.

Furthermore, Wimbledon is steeped in traditions while the US Open is – well, not. At Wimbledon, players' have a dress code – which seems to be getting darned flexible, if you don't mind my mentioning it. When Wimbledon is on, I begin to crave strawberries and cream (which to be honest, I crave most of the time). I don't have direct experience with Pimm's spritzers so I don't find myself craving them but I think of them in connection with Wimbledon because I think I am supposed to.



When I think of the US Open, I think of airplanes overhead – the venues sit directly under the flight paths of JFK and LaGuardia airports. I think of the final-set tiebreaks that make the US Open unique among Grand Slam tournaments and are the reason we couldn't have something like Isner vs Mahut (more's the pity). I don't think of any particular refreshments because frankly purchasing a simple bottle of water might require taking out a mortgage. I enjoy the US Open and go almost every year. But I have to admit that despite being a colorful and fun event, it lacks a certain elegance and charm I associate with Wimbledon. Am I viewing Wimbledon through long distance, rose-colored glasses? Yes, I suppose I am but you might recall, I do the same with the Tube.

Speaking of the Tube, let's talk about this whole non-air-conditioned thing for a minute. I love the Tube, [as I have said in the past](#), but good golly it gets hot down there! I understand why. World's oldest system, tunnels deeper than deep and the wrong width to boot, rolling stock of "a certain age," etc. I get that logistically it's the engineering equivalent of scaling Everest. But guess what? People *have* scaled Everest. Boris is constantly pointing out that London is home to the most innovative, clever, determined problem-solvers in the world – so go on, you lot. Solve it. Oh and when you figure out how to air-condition them and KEEP them air-conditioned, let us know. Sure, the NYC subway is air conditioned. Technically. In that there is an air conditioning system attached to the trains. Whether it works or not is another story – and not a pretty one. Additionally, the platforms are still only a few degrees cooler than Death Valley and I am not exaggerating when I say this daily summer grind was one of the driving factors behind my decision to go freelance.

Why is the air-conditioning system on the NYC subway so unreliable? One reason – not the only one but a significant one – is the now regularly occurring summer brownouts. No, not blackouts – though in the past we've had those too. Blackouts are when the power goes out entirely. Brownouts are a dip or drop in the power when demand outstrips outdated supply systems. Your lights stay on but they get dimmer. Some appliances will work, some won't. Your alarm clock won't shut off but your air conditioner won't turn on. Elevators? Forget it. The walk up the stairs will do you good. Air-conditioning in the subway? Frivolous luxury. You reach a point where you consider yourself lucky if your train has enough power to keep running.

It's no surprise that people flock out of the city when things get like this. Thank goodness for summer hours. Are summer hours – half days of every other summer Fridays off – a

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transatlantic phenomenon? I am often met with blank stares when I mention them to people from other parts of the US so I'm starting to think they are a NYC-centric thing. One thing definitely not 'New York only' and high on the list of both Londoners and New Yorkers this time of year is the day trip – often to the beach. In fact, if you're thinking of heading out for

a bit of sand and sun, 'This is London' has compiled a list of [the best beaches in the South East](#).

More summer fun? Some of the festivals and outdoor movies I mentioned previously are going on now or coming up soon but here are a few more:

- [Regent's Park Open Air Theatre](#)
- [Outdoor Movies at More London Free Festival](#)
- [The Royal Academy's Summer Exhibition is on until Aug 22](#)
- [Rude Britannia: British Comic Art at the Tate runs through Sept 5](#)
- [Notting Hill Carnival](#)

So yes, it's so hot you could fry an egg on the sidewalk (but don't – the gum is bad enough) but summer is also time when we are spoiled for choice when it comes things to do, enjoy and experience. If the dog days start to get you down, there's bound to be something fun, new or delicious (or even all three) happening near you.

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16 Comments

At 2010.07.15 18:21, Pericles said:



Be grateful, Gotham Girl, that your machinery — elevators &c. — stops altogether during a brown-out (I didn't know they had those in the cities) : in the country, because things like refrigerators and washing machines are not usually so protected and utilities just want to go on billing their customers even when they know it's dangerous to keep the supply on, the brown-out is a widespread cause of house fires.

In the U.K. the utilities are required not to allow the voltage to fall to the point at which a brown-out would occur ; they must cut the power to prevent it.

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At 2010.07.15 18:37, dmnyrc said:



In the U.K. the utilities are required not to allow the voltage to fall to the point at which a brown-out would occur ; they must cut the power to prevent it.

Interesting. So if they see the dials dipping down into problem levels, they cut the system entirely? Here, the plan seems to be "rolling" the power dip across the system until demand drops. In a way, that means Con Ed (the utility company) is creating brownouts on purpose. I mean, they don't send out a memo stating, "Dear residents of Carrol Gardens and Bushwick, we will be hitting you with a brown out later today" – but they do alert the transit authority and presumably a handful of other authorities that they will be rolling a brown out across a given area. Sometimes the transit authority even tells passengers BEFORE we get on the train. 😊

They say it's necessary because not enough people respond appropriately to the "robo calls" they send that ask people to turn off extra appliances etc. at problem time. That may be. It may not be. But it hasn't escaped anyone's notice that these brownouts are focused almost entirely on Brooklyn, Queen and Staten Island, almost never ever in Manhattan. Manhattan can't possibly be demanding less power mid-day than Staten Island. It's impossible.

The Bronx is spared such things for some reason due to their being connected to the mainland. Someone explained it to me once but was so hot and uncomfortable, I think I was ignoring them and dreaming of ski chalets in the Alps.