

# MAKING A PLAY FOR ART AND CULTURE IN LONDON



**I**t's true, many destinations can lay claim to cultural offerings that enhance -- even define -- travel agendas. But where else can they boast a native son like

Shakespeare, who after centuries still packs houses every night? London's thriving arts scene plays a prominent role in Britain's tourism industry, with theater its dazzling stronghold. By being a bit artful, travel professionals can convert this vital cultural market into successful, and profitable, business.

From Shaftsbury Avenue mega-hits to world-class art galleries, London's art scene is a major attraction that is largely supported by tourists. "American visitors are extremely valuable to London theater,"

BY MAURA HOGAN

said Robin Prestage, senior press relations executive of the British Tourist Authority, noting that nearly 28% of theater tickets purchased in London are purchased by American travelers.

This fact is readily acknowledged and exploited by local arts organizations, hotels, tour operators, and tourist offices, which sell special travel packages and offer incentives to the American market. Companies such as Keith Prowse, Edwards and Edwards, and Theatre Direct book individual and group



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tickets, making the performing arts easy to purchase. These agencies also provide regular updates detailing London's ever-changing offerings (more than 200 productions open each year in the West End). All offer commissions. (See database for phone numbers.)

## London Stagefair

As an illustration of how important performing arts are to British travel itineraries, West End theater organizations put on an annual showcase exclusively for the travel trade. The

**LONDON THEATER**



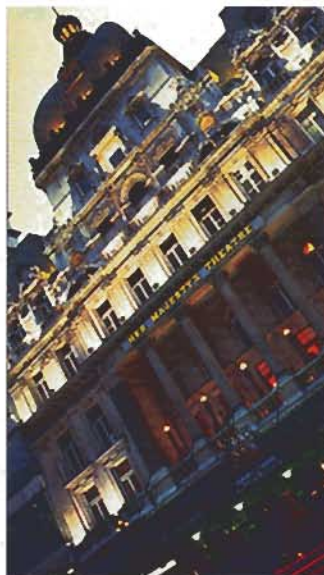
Super-concierge at the Athenaeum Hotel & Apartments, Donald Birrane gives us his not-so-short list of "must see" performances of London theater:

- *Amy's View* - a drama at the **Aldwych Theatre**
- *Art* - **Wydhams Theatre** (voted best play)
- *Ideal Husband* - an Oscar Wilde comedy at the **Gielgud Theatre**
- *Invention of Love* - with Tom Stoppard at the **Lyttleton**
- *Chicago* - the musical at the **Adelphi**
- *A Delicate Balance* - at the **Haymarket** starring Maggie Smith
- Coming in April at the **Playhouse** - *The Judas Kiss* - with Liam Neeson

London Stagefair, held every fall, provides tips on how to arrange theater packages for small groups. Here travel professionals can learn about the latest hotel packages, corporate hospitality, backstage tours, and exclusive events.

**Hotels in the Act**

Hotels are also playing a role in promoting theater-focused travel agendas. **Radisson Edwardian Hotels London** has developed a "Centre Stage" program at ten properties throughout the city. The Center Stage program offers a VIP welcome pack with theater tickets, dining discounts and other amenities. The five-star **Hampshire Hotel** and four-star **Pastoria** in Leicester Square, in the West End, are a stone's throw from the imminent Phantom of the Opera, and the four-star **Mountbatten** is almost opposite Les Miserables. Agents enrolled in Radisson's "Look to Book" program receive additional incentives for putting their clients into these hotels. For more information call **800-333-3333**. In other accommodations, the conveniently located, five-star **Athenaeum Hotel & Apartments** on Piccadilly, just a 10-minute walk from



most theaters, also caters to culture-seeking clientele with frequent theater packages and help from super-concierge, Donald Birrane (the only concierge ever mentioned by name in Fodor's Pocket London Guide), who is ever-ready with great theater tips and recommendations on how to see the best of London. (See sidebar for Birrane's "must see" theater picks.)

**Culture and Arts**

Special incentives and packages are not limited to performing arts. The new London White Card brings together acclaimed museums and galleries such as the Royal Academy of Arts, the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Courtald Gallery in a special discount card that can be purchased prior to arrival in London. The White Card offers three- and seven-day passes at a set fee, which gains admission to fifteen cultural establishments, commissionable to travel professionals. For more informa-

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tion of the White Card call the British Tourist Authority. (See database)

**Setting the Stage**

With the many resources available by phone or Internet, travel agents can easily become knowledgeable on the current arts scene. The British Tourist Authority publishes a monthly "London Planner," which details upcoming events in entertainment and the arts, including theater, ballet, dance and art exhibits. To receive this publication, call **800-462-2748**.

On the Internet, agents can find events listings of the London Tourist Board at [www.londontown.com](http://www.londontown.com). The Society of London Theatre can be accessed at [www.officiallondontheatre.co.uk](http://www.officiallondontheatre.co.uk). Those seeking in-depth information on current theater, and reviews of new productions, as well as nearby restaurants, can find it in London Theatre News, a newsletter available by phone at **800-779-0077**.

With London rated as one of the most popular destinations for American travelers there is a clear incentive for learning more about the city's diverse offerings. Don't limit your clients' bookings to air, hotel, car, and escorted tour. By adding theater and art to their vacation, you can immeasurably enhance their experience and your commissions. ☉

**DATABASE**

British Tourist Authority .....	800-462-2748
Edwards & Edwards .....	800-223-6108
Keith Prowse .....	800-669-8687
Theatre Direct .....	800-334-8457
London Theatre News .....	800-779-0077

**HOTELS**

Atheneum Hotel & Apartments .....	800-335-3300
Radisson Edwardian Hotels .....	800-333-3333

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SEE PAGE 7 FOR DETAILS!

# INSIGHT

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