

DOMINIQUE DIDINAL

Copywriter & Consultant

M: 07743 861 916 E: ddidinal@gmail.com W: www.dominiquedidinal.com

TRAVEL WRITING SAMPLES

Client and Brief

The Dictionary provides boutique budget accommodation in the heart of fashionable Shoreditch, East London. Relaunching their website they requested fun and quirky content that informed and entertained their target market of trendy twenty something travellers and brought the flavour and character of the local area to life.

WEB CONTENT (extract)

ART GALLERIES IN EAST LONDON

Do you like your art frozen, mounted and carved in two? Hanging off an ice block or served with a caramel latté on the side? With over 100 galleries on your doorstep you can take your pick of the very best in the capital's contemporary art scene without ever having to leave the area.

Here's our guide to the best of the bunch. (And most of them are admission free as well. Result!)

The Last Tuesday Society

For off the beaten track galleries why not pay a visit to the weird and wonderful world of Viktor Wynd? The Last Tuesday Society gallery is situated on 11 Mare Street and promises to "foster and develop the careers of both emerging and established artists, living, dead and yet to live."

The ground floor is a twilight zone of moustachioed Victoriana; an Aladdin's cave of strange taxidermy specimens and curios. Artwork is displayed on the first floor where they produce between ten and twelve shows a year.

BRICK LANE

Whether you're looking for the best curry this side of Bengal, dancing the night away on cheap cocktails or grabbing a bargain at the Sunday market get yourself over to Brick Lane. This is the beating pulse of London's East End and one of its most vibrant and colourful streets.

Today this tiny part of London, sandwiched between Aldgate East, Liverpool Street tube station and Shoreditch over ground, is a dazzling explosion of vintage clothing stores, fancy cocktail bars, Sunday market bric-a-brac, curry houses and chilled out beats. It's also home to London's largest Bangladeshi community hence Brick Lane's nickname - Bangla Town.

Fancy a Ruby? (Rhyming Slang for Curry!)

Get your Guy Ritchie on and brush up your cockney rhyming slang because we are right in the heart of the East end now and Brick Lane is the "Curry Capital" of London. Apparently chicken tikka masala has overtaken fish 'n' chips as Londoner's favourite food so make like a local and ask for a Ruby (Ruby Murray....rhymes with curry!) There are so many to choose from but we like Lahore Kebab house (more of a curry restaurant) or Tayyabs on Fieldchurch street. Bear in mind many curry houses offer a Bring Your Own alcohol policy and some do not serve alcohol on their premises for religious reasons.

Markets in East London

Looking for something a little bit different to do this weekend? East London is home to some of the most colourful and eclectic markets that the Capital has to offer. Like so much else in this city our markets are steeped in history, often dating back to Victorian times. These great buzzing hubs for the local community mingle the warmth and friendliness of a proper East end welcome with cheap as chips bargains and new exotic boutiques and culinary eating experiences to boot.

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From beautiful blooms that would make Eliza Doolittles' eye lashes curl to smoking designer clothes, fresh organic foodie treats and of course some bonafide bargains guvnor! You need look no further than the markets around Shoreditch and Brick Lane.

Broadway Market.

Broadway Market offers up a mouthwatering feast of "fresh from the farm" goodies that will transport foodies to gastronomic heaven. Within walking distance of Bethnal Green tube station and Haggerston Over ground – you'll find the market between London Fields and the Regent's Canal.

Established over a hundred years ago this is a market with a serious heritage. Locals come to pick up fresh organic meat, smoked salmon and oysters, along with crisp fruit and veg that match or better super market prices. Visitors enjoy wandering the multitude of cafes and eateries to pick up tasty, fresh pastries and pies, cakes or sweets and to browse the bookshops and clothing boutiques.

This market is open on a Sunday and as it's set close to parkland and the canal why not hire a Boris Bike and cycle around for the day as the canal towpaths run all the way from Islington to Canary Wharf.

Street Art in East London

Don't feel like queuing for museums or paying to get into exhibitions all weekend? Well why bother? When the very best of the contemporary London art scene is right on your door step!

There's no doubt about it, Shoreditch is the spiritual home of street art in London. So slip into your sneakers and get your camera at the ready and step outside for a free tour of London's hippest outdoor gallery space.

BLOG ARTICLES

Travelblog.org

As a passionate traveller and writer, I frequently blog about my experiences overseas. A recent review I wrote regarding my experience of the Genocide Museum and Killing Fields in Phnom Penh, Cambodia received great feedback from followers and supporters of the one of the world's leading TravelBlog sites:

"perfect, the single best blog about Pol Pot in Cambodia I've found. You put into words that I could not find, what really happened, and explained how it could and did happen."

"Thank you for this extensive view of the Killing Fields. I understand your ambivalence and applaud your sensitivity."

Extract

"...Under the Khmer Rouge all the strands of society that elevate and refine us as human beings - all love, passion, family, respect, etiquette, art, language, knowledge and faith were unravelled. To be seen indulging in any of them was to be "against Angkar." Families were split up and destroyed, Buddhist temples were smashed and monks killed, sexual unions banned. The delicate hierarchies of respect shown to elders in Cambodian society (one 22 year old I meet informs he will call me "older sister") are destroyed. Everyone is "comrade." Language is rewritten. Rural terminology such as "mae" for mother replaces the educated version "mak." The word "nostalgia" in reference to a time pre Angkar becomes "memory sickness." To speak of it is a crime punishable by death.

Like all of the most paranoid and oppressive regimes, knowledge was feared and abhorred. To have been to university, speak English, teach, or just wear glasses were crimes punishable by death.

This is ironic considering at S21 you also learn the background to the leaders of the Khmer Rouge. Pol Pot and his cronies, almost without exception, came from privileged backgrounds and had links to the royal family. They studied overseas in Parisian lycées, and some became professors.

Part of the lower exhibition concentrates on paintings of the torture methods used by the Khmer Rouge followed by the printed confessions of the inmates along with their mug shots. Row after row of mostly Cambodian faces stare out in black and white, sometimes insolent, mostly just empty eyed. But this was also an ethnic cleanse with Khmer seen as the purest "Aryan race" of the Asians. Chinese, Vietnamese and sometimes Cham minorities were purged as well. One of the shots I find most heartbreaking is of a Vietnamese prisoner. His lips are curled into a tentative smile, his eyes alight with hope. Unlike many of the other captives here, he hasn't yet realised that this is a prison where no one gets out alive..."

Blog Article

wanderlustparty.com (**Extract**)

Venice and How to Have a Romantic City Break.

There are some places you can do by yourself, there are some places you can go with your parents and there are some places you need to go with a beau. Some cities were made to be shared. Some cities were designed to be walked hand in hand. Venice is that city.

Live the Cliché

We embrace every single romantic cliché you can possibly imagine (as well as each other.) It's not cheap. But you are having a romantic city break in Venice. So why don't you...

Arrive by Private Speedboat

We ignore the public boats crammed with civilians (as Liz Hurley might say) and the road transport from the airport and take a private speedboat to our hotel. There is no more fabulous way to arrive and you can pretend you're James Bond. Hire one from the airport and they will take you directly to your hotel. Cost: €70-100.

Drink Bellinis

The Bellini was invented in Venice, therefore it would clearly be exceptionally rude not to consume it whenever possible. Tie in your quaffing of puréed white peach and Prosecco (Italian sparkling white wine) with some of the more favoured landmarks of the city and combine sight seeing and getting squiffy in one. What better way to see a city? Harry's Bar is where the Bellini was invented by owner Cipriani sometime in 1948. Its delicate blush pink colour reminded him of a saint's toga in a painting by Giovanni Bellini and thus a landmark cocktail was born. Hen nights would never be the same again.

The bar - once a haunt for famous patrons such as Ernest Hemingway and Orson Welles is located close to the water's edge near Saint Mark's square. The room is simply done with white linen table clothes and is pretty unassuming. The Bellinis and Martinis come in classy (or cheap depending on your point of view) short and long tumblers rather than elegant flutes and they add a good ten euros to the asking price to experience a little bit of their history. At 18 euros a drink you may want to tick this place off the bucket list or think it's a total rip off and go drink someplace cheaper. In which case...

Hotel Flora

What more authentic Italian experience than sipping your cocktail in the little courtyard garden of a hotel, rambling with vines and dripping with the lavender haze of wisteria. We chose Hotel Flora owned and run by the same family since the 1960s, it's a beautiful, art nouveau-ish hotel with traditional Venetian courtyard garden complete with stone statues and gushing fountain, and is situated just behind San Marco square. Speaking of which...

San Marco Square

You can't come to Venice and not take a stroll through the square. We stop at one of the many restaurants flanking the sides to drink (make mine a Bellini) and listen to the live music. However if you've already had your fill of cocktails then you can always do what the rows of tourists behind us did and just stand behind the seating area and listen to the live music for free.

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Go to the Opera.

We go to the Musica a Palazzo situated on the left bank of the Grand canal to see Verdi's La Traviata; a tale of doomed love between Violetta the high class courtesan and her courtly suitor Alfredo. The Palazzo is a stately 14th century Venetian/Gothic Italian palace that has been home to bishops, cardinals and two Doges - even a saint was born within its very rooms. The beautiful faded glamour of its interior features 12th century Byzantine friezes and 18th century oil paintings as well as showcasing some wonderful paint work on the ceilings.

The rooms are designed so you can sit in the audience but a few chairs are scattered to the sides of the set so that if you choose (as we do) you can sit practically on top of the performers (and according to my partner get eyed up by the second violinist on the left.) The opera singer playing Violetta is extraordinary and up close we can watch the fall and rise of her milky cleavage too. Her voice is full and rich with an incredible range. At the end of the famous toast in the first act "Libiamo ne' lieti calici" I expect her glass of Prosecco to shatter as she raises it to the audience. Tickets were purchased through the hotel and cost between €60-70.

And Finally Some Tips:

Cover Up:

I was banned entry on one or more of the large churches due to inappropriate attire. I'm used to carrying trousers and sleeves for the temples of South East Asia however wasn't prepared for the conservative dress code of these Catholic institutions. So make sure you have sleeves for your shoulders and wear jeans or shorts or a skirt that covers the knees.

And Enjoy:

I'm nothing but pleasantly delighted by this prettiest of cities. Standing on the Rialto bridge leaning on the worn wood over which thousands of hands have touched, staring out at the far off dome of the Santa Maria Della Salute, we really could be in any century.

There is no Macdonalds, no Starbucks and no incessant hum of the motorcar.

Every corner we turn is another picture perfect view of bridges arcing over the deep jewel - like glow of a canal lit up by the early sunshine and framed by the crumbling facade of the buildings. This city knows how to do shabby chic and she's a girl that looks good from every angle.

And if you do all that and don't have a romantic time, well then maybe it's time to rethink the company you keep...

END