



LONDON WELCOMES THE WORLD

Get to know the competing Olympic nations a little better this summer, with a visit to one of their 'national hospitality houses', set up to offer a taste of their global cultures. *By Jo Caird*

With more than seven million inhabitants speaking 300 different languages, London is one of the most multicultural cities in the world. Whether it's trying a new cuisine or exploring a little-known art form, visitors to the capital wishing to sample new cultures are never short of exciting options. This summer though, there's even more opportunity to get to know the world a little better with the 'national hospitality houses' set up by many countries competing in the **London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games**. These 'houses', located in historic buildings and fantastic settings across the capital, are hosting themed events, exhibitions and much more.

AFRICA HOUSE

All 53 African nations competing in the 2012 Games are coming together to celebrate African culture and sport in a temporary venue close to the Albert Memorial (p. 52-53) in **Kensington Gardens**. Africa House (from **27 Jul-12 Aug**) features a

stand for each of the nations involved and a photography exhibition about African Olympic legends. Daily 09.30-22.30. Free admission.

AUSTRIA HOUSE

Austria's HQ during the Games is a marquee outside **Trinity House**, the home of London's General Lighthouse Authority (Trinity Square, EC3. ☉ Tower Hill). A stone's throw from the Tower of London (p. 68), it is open to the public as a place to watch the Games and experience Austrian culture. Further details to be confirmed (TBC).

BELGIAN HOUSE

Fans of author Dan Brown will recognise **Inner Temple** (Crown Office Row, EC4. ☉ Blackfriars), as a location from the film of his book *The Da Vinci Code*. This 12th-century building is the first hospitality house in Belgium's Olympic history, and anticipates welcoming up to 11,000 guests during the Games. Further details TBC.

CASA BRASIL

Brazil takes over one of London's grandest venues, **Somerset House** (p. 63), to showcase Brazilian sport, culture and cuisine in advance of the Rio 2016 Games. Events include an exhibition of contemporary Brazilian art, which is open daily from 10.00-18.00. Further details TBC.

CASA ITALIA

Italophiles should make a beeline for the **Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre** (Broad Sanctuary, SW1. ☉ Westminster). A sports-themed art exhibition *Tradition And Innovation, The Italian Olympic Spirit* presents, paintings, photographs and ceramics from 28 Italian artists. Details TBC.

CZECH HOUSE

Islington is home to all things Czech this summer as the **Business Design Centre** (Upper Street, N1. ☉ Angel) is reimagined as Czech House. The events and exhibitions taking place (**27 Jul-12 Aug**) are the culmination of Czech Open 2012,

a six-month programme celebrating the nation's creative talent. Details TBC. ☑ czechhouse.co.uk

GERMAN HOUSE

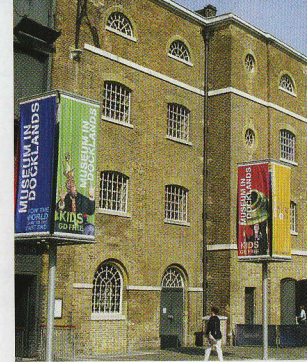
The **Museum of London Docklands** (p. 89) will be home to German House (**26 Jul-12 Aug**), with the *Deutsches Haus Fan Fest* letting visitors watch German bands and more. Daily 10.00-24.00. Details TBC.

HOLLAND HEINEKEN HOUSE

Located high on a hill at **Alexandra Palace** (**26 Jul-12 Aug**, Alexandra Palace Way, N22. ☉ Alexandra Palace), Holland's hospitality house takes the gold for best views. Expect a fantastic party atmosphere. Daily 10.30-01.30. Admission £12.50 (advance tickets only, via the website). ☑ hollandheinekenhouse.nl

HOUSE OF SWITZERLAND

Live demonstrations of traditional Swiss handicrafts, cheese tastings and film screenings are just some of the delights on offer to visitors at



Images clockwise, left to right: Somerset House; The Albert Memorial in Kensington Gardens; The Museum of London Docklands; Old Billingsgate.

Glaziers Hall near Borough Market (p. 98). Don't miss the *Bernese Games* on **4-5 Aug**, if you'd like to try out traditional Swiss sports. ☑ houseofswitzerland.org

IMAGINE DENMARK

From **27 Jul-12 Aug**, **St. Katherine Docks** in E1 will be home to Danish food and drink, a real Viking ship, fashion and design shows, plus live big screen action. Details TBC.

IRISH HOUSE

The Irish know how to party, so it's no surprise that the Emerald Isle's hospitality house is a trendy bar in King's Cross. The **Big Chill House** (**27 Jul-12 Aug**, 257-259 Pentonville Road, N1. ☉ King's Cross) is hosting Irish entertainment and showing Olympic action on big screens. Daily 10.00-02.00. ☑ irishhouse-london2012.com

LE CLUB FRANCE

Old Billingsgate, the Grade II-listed Victorian building (pictured) that was

once the home of Billingsgate Fish Market, has been transformed into **Le Club France** (**27 Jul-12 Aug**). With views of the River Thames, the French hospitality house will host debates, concerts and medal parties, as well as restaurants and shops selling a range of fancy French products. Daily 09.00-19.00. Admission £5. ☑ londres.franceolympique.com/londrescf

RUSSIA PARK

Close to **Kensington Palace** (p. 63) in Kensington Gardens, **Russia Park** (**27 Jul-12 Aug**) is a cultural centre where visitors can enjoy entertainment, sample Russian cuisine, see an exhibition celebrating 100 years of the Russian Olympic Committee, and learn information about the 2014 Winter Olympics in the Russian Federation region of Sochi. Further details TBC.

● For full details, go to ☑ visitlondon.com/london2012/national-hospitality-houses-for-london-2012