



HEAR YE: A guide in period clothes talks to visitors about Greenwich.

# Spending time in Greenwich

by Heather Campbell Hapeta

**G**REENWICH Park, surrounded by a fence in the 15th century to protect the Duke of Gloucester's hunting ground, is the oldest of London's royal parks.

Popular with visitors since 1838, when the railway allowed people to get there easily, it still attracts visitors from all over the world as well as locals – it's always the sign of a good venue when locals visit.

Reaching upwards from the Thames river, many walks take you past the Royal Naval College, (attended by both Prince Charles and his father) the National Maritime Museum, past the Queen's House, up Lovers walk and onto the Royal Observatory and planetarium. All are open for tourists to explore.

The planetarium, built by Christopher Wren, is where the telescope used to be, and is well worth the 42-step climb. For someone from down-under, it's really interesting to see the very different northern night sky.

The main gate is where many visitors have their photos taken to show the exact time they stood where zero longitude links the North and South Poles – the meridian line.

Guides, dressed in period clothes, explain the history of the area and buildings in an enjoyable and informative way.

It's really easy to spend a day or more exploring the buildings, treasures and gardens in this area – deer enclosure, ancient cedars, herb gardens, rose, azalea, rhododendron and flower gardens. It's so large you need a map of the area to ensure you are not going round and round and have to resort to eating the peanuts you had taken for the squirrels.

The village, too, is well worth spending time in. It has wonderful bookshops and a famous antique market.

The tea-clipper Cutty Sark (1869) and Sir Francis Chichester's ketch Gypsy Moth, in which he travelled around the world single-handed in 1965-66, are also available for you to view and explore.

To reach Greenwich park and village: leave from Charing Cross, Waterloo, London Bridge or Cannon St stations to Greenwich Station. Alternatively, use DLR (Docklands Light Railway) to Island Garden, on the north bank, then go under the Thames by the ancient Greenwich foot-tunnel, or travel by boat from Westminster.

## Communicating without words

**I** travel as a Kiwi-English speaker, basic Maori, with a residue of high-school French: this causes difficulties and laughter. Even in English-speaking countries my version of the language is frequently misunderstood.



By Heather Hapeta Campbell  
Reporter

"I'm sorry, what did you say your name was?"

"Heather"

"Pardon?"

"Heather"

"Sorry, I didn't get it".

"HEATHER!"

"Oh, Heather!"

That's what I said in the first place I mutter to myself. So how do we travel when we only have our mother tongue to communicate with?

Firstly, by thinking of communication in a wider sense than merely verbal. Gestures, pictures, and sounds – other than speech – are a way to start.

A month in Turkey, some five years ago, saw me using all the above to successfully, humorously, and strangely, communicate with locals.

In Safranbolu, home of the best lokum (Turkish delight) in Turkey, my daughter and I were rescued by a woman who gave us shelter from the unexpected rain. She spoke no English and our Turkish was confined to basic greetings. However we shared a lot of information: number of children, dead husbands, her grandparent status and my daughter's relationship to me. She also fed us. Later the same day we were again rain-rescued, by a male tailor. This time, in his little workshop, we just sat and smiled and nodded for 10 minutes. Neither were scintillating conversations but both imprinted in my mind as wonderful travel times.

The same country saw me making a bit of a fool of myself. My daughter needed medication for asthma and we walked into an off-the-tourist-trail Istanbul pharmacy.

A brief phrase, coupled with a smile, solves many communication problems

"Asthma?" I enquire, following up with dramatic wheezing and huffing, such as I imagine a severe attack sounds like. No response, so my display becomes even more dramatic and louder – working on the principle that if they don't understand, shouting and repetition must work. At last my improvised theatre is successful.

"Ah, Wentolin" he says.

How come I didn't think that many international-global-market products such as Ventolin would be the same word in Turkish as in English. My daughter has since dined out on demonstrations of her well-meaning-but-crazy mother trying to help her.

Dictionaries in the local language as well as English are very helpful for longer stays in a country. Many travel books have useful sections on language too, and for most of us this will be enough. A number of them have phonetic pronunciation guides, too, and can also be used to point to words in the local language.

Both Berlitz and Lonely Planet have wonderfully helpful phrasebooks. The European one by Berlitz has 14 key languages which cover some 25 countries, takes up little space or weight in your day-pack and is great when travelling to a number of places rather than needing a book for each country. Check out your bookstore.

If you are vegetarian, diabetic, or have a particular phrase you may need to use often, learn the words before you leave home. Tapes or classes would be useful for these needs.

People appreciate the attempts travellers make to speak their language – basic greetings; toilet, yes, no, and most importantly for me, no problem.

I have found that a brief phrase, coupled with a smile, solves many communication problems. Most people love to help a traveller in their country, and to hear "no problem" seems to make it their problem and they work really hard to solve the difficulty, or understand what I am trying to say.

It is obvious to me that accommodating tourists, wearing respectful clothes, being polite, and trying to twist our tongue around their language have the best experiences.

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