

BUSINESS TRAVEL

Docklands made easy

YVONNE GORDON looks at the best places to meet, eat and stay for executives doing business in the London Docklands.

Where to meet

The huge ExCel exhibitions and conventions centre on Royal Victoria Dock (excel.london), between London City Airport and Canary Wharf, has 100,000m² of space with two main halls, plus three sets of function rooms, eight hotels and 22 restaurants on site. It's less than a mile from London City Airport, is served by two DLR (Docklands Light Railway) stations and has 3,700 parking spaces on site.

The O2 (theo2.co.uk/hire-a-venue) can accommodate anything from 100 to 20,000 delegates for a conference, with meeting rooms, breakout areas, clubs, lounges and exhibition areas, chances to see artists in the Green Room, plus options for team-building activities such as a thrilling private climb at the venue.

For something special with a Thames-side setting, check out the historic Old Royal Naval College in Greenwich (venue-hire.ornc.org), an architectural masterpiece which is ideal for banquets, receptions and meetings, with options such as the Painted Hall, the Queen Mary or King William Undercroft or the Admiral's House.

Meet and stay

Luxury hotel the Intercontinental London (ihg.com) at The O2 has 20 meeting spaces covering more than 65,000sq ft, including a ballroom that can accommodate up to 3,000 delegates, plus 453 rooms and a spa.

The four-star Radisson Blu Edwardian at New Providence Wharf (radissonblu-edwardian.com) has 714.8m² of meeting space with 10 event spaces including a conference room for 250, the River Room for up to 50 with views of the O2, and six meeting rooms, plus 169 bedrooms with integral workspaces.

The trendy four-star Aloft London ExCel (aloftlondonexcel.com) has six meeting rooms plus 252 bedrooms and can organise group activities from cocktail classes to barbecues.

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Where to entertain

Boisdale at Canary Wharf (boisdale.co.uk) is a lively spot in Canary Wharf with live music and jazz evenings and a great view of the City of London skyline. It's also home to an oyster bar, whisky bar and cigar library, a terrace and there is also private dining available.

Celebrate the closing of a deal at Champagne & Fromage at Greenwich Church Street (champagneplusfromage.co.uk), which serves the best French bubbles with a selection of limited-production champagne from award-winning producers, along with around 50 different artisan French cheeses with cured meats, pâtés and preserves.

For informal dining, tuck into contemporary Japanese cuisine at Roka (rokarestaurant.com) in Canary Wharf. The house speciality is robata-yaki, where the chefs grill food at a barbecue in front of the customers (there is space for 14 at the counter) or try the 12-course tasting menu with sushi and sashimi.

Where to play

There's plenty to see and do in the London Docklands area, from river trips to events at the O2 Arena (theo2.co.uk) or a



trip across the Thames on the Emirates Air Line Cable Car which joins Greenwich Peninsula and Royal Docks. As well as exploring Greenwich, those interested in all things maritime can hop on board clipper ship the Cutty Sark at King William Walk (rmg.co.uk) and check out life below decks.

Or just a short walk from Canary Wharf, and set in early 19th-century warehouses on West India Quay, the Museum of London Docklands (museumoflondon.org.uk/docklands) tells the story of the River Thames from Roman Times and how the docklands developed. The exhibitions feature everything from machinery and models to boats moored outside and the building also

has corporate meeting and conference facilities.

On a sunny day or for a meeting break, check out the Crossrail Place Roof Garden at One Canada Square, which is around the same size as Trafalgar Square and has interconnecting paths, tropical gardens and a geometric roof, partially open to allow the elements in.

How to get there

From central London, the DLR (Docklands Light Railway) connects to the London Underground. For air travel, one way fares from Dublin to London City Airport with Cityjet start from €39 one way including taxes, charges and free checked baggage and corporate rates are available, see cityjet.com

THE SMART TRAVELLER

Get Private Jet smart

If you like to travel to business meetings in style but can't justify the budget to buy or charter a private jet, check out one of the services that offers spare seats on private jets around the globe, writes Yvonne Gordon.

JetSmarter connects members to idle jets and unused seats, so private jets are more easily accessible for both business and leisure travellers. Members can book a shared or private charter on more than 50 routes across three continents, including from Dublin Airport.

There are three categories of service – private charters, shared charters and JetShuttle, where seats on shuttle route can be booked up to two months in advance. A custom app allows customers to search, find and book flights. As well as seats on flights from multiple airports, JetSmarter's

regular shuttles operate from London City Airport to Paris, Geneva, Milan and Nice. See jetsmarter.com

Another company offering jet space is Surf Air, which started in the US and has an all-you-can-fly service to all the airline's European and US routes in return for a monthly membership fee of around £2,550 (around €2,900) and you can also purchase guest passes for colleagues or family. Flights are on small seven and eight-seater aircraft and current routes in Europe include London to Zurich, Ibiza and Cannes. Flights to Dublin, as well as Luxembourg, Munich, Frankfurt, Geneva, Barcelona, Berlin and Milan, are among the destinations to be added over the coming year.

Members can book flights on their smartphone and flights operate from private airport terminals. Corporate members

get 10 per cent off the standard monthly subscription fee and a discount on additional flight passes. See surfair.com

You can also book an empty leg flight with a private jet charter company such as FlyVictor or VistaJet. When a private jet is booked for a one-way flight, there is an empty leg for the return journey when the aircraft is returning to base. These flights can be booked in advance or at short notice, and daily schedules are released online, see flyvictor.com and vistajet.com.

As well as flexibility, short-notice bookings and bookings by app, one of the biggest advantages of using shared private jet services is that as the flights depart from private terminals, so you can avoid lengthy check-in and security queues and in some cases, you can arrive at the airport just 15 minutes before take-off. Bon voyage!



TRAVEL BRIEF

Track your bag

Delta Airlines is introducing a new bag-tracking service so customers can keep track of their checked bags via their mobile phones. Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) tags are put on checked luggage, so customers can get real-time updates on the bag's location. The service rolled out successfully in the US and started on flights London Heathrow to the

United States in February, with additional European hubs, Amsterdam and Paris, due to come online in the coming months and eventually all of Delta's 344 airports across the globe. See delta.com

A matter of etiquette

Do you know that gifts are given at business meetings in Japan, the UAE working week runs from Sunday to Thursday and that there's rigid protocol to follow for meetings in Germany? Or which countries encourage or discourage small talk at the start of a meeting? Expedia's new Etiquette guide is filled with dos and don'ts for both business and leisure travellers to 18 countries around the globe, so that travellers know the cultural norms and avoid giving offence whether at work or at play. The guide is online at expedia.co.uk/vc/c/etiquette-around-the-world

Cork to Dublin

Air France is launching a new Cork to Paris flight. The route from Cork Airport to Paris-Charles de Gaulle will begin on May 26 and run to the end of October. As well as linking to Paris itself, the new daily flight will connect travellers to the entire Air France route network with 180 destinations around the world including Buenos Aires, Cape Town, Dubai and Singapore. The Cork-Paris flights will carry up to 76 passengers and fares start from €59 one way, including tax and 12kg of hand luggage. See airfrance.ie

Business travel like a local

Localike New York has launched a personalised travel service to allow time-strapped business travellers to 'live like a local' in New York. The service creates personal itineraries using insider knowledge, which include unusual recommendations, exclusive access and opportunities to meet the people that make the city tick. Itineraries can be from one to 10 days in length and can include anything from secret restaurants to private tours. The itineraries start at \$79 (around €65) for one day. See localike-newyork.com

Yvonne Gordon