

My favourite things



Barbara Balletta moved to London 3 years ago, after several years in Surrey, Istanbul, Budapest and Paris. She is Italian and grew up in Rome where she has just returned for one year with her two sons – 12 and 15 years old – curious to see how life is in their own country.

Barbara worked in marketing for 16 years and founded a website (www.boutiquehotelitaly.com) to help travellers find places to feel at home in Italy. She speaks Italian, French, Spanish and a bit of Turkish. Her passion is seeing 'small' growing – children, hotels, start-ups or family businesses that she helps to become international.



Your best advice to someone just arriving in the UK?

Leave your partner working and help the whole family get the most out of the new adventure: this will be your new job at least for the first 6 months. If you are happy, the whole family will be.

Look for expat clubs near you and join their activities. At the beginning, say 'yes' anytime a social event comes up and feel free to ask for advice/help. Rest reassured that everyone feels a bit lost at the beginning.

Your preferred pub, bar and/or restaurant?

For a family brunch, we like pubs like the cosy Holly Bush in Hampstead on cold winter days or The Elgin in Maida Vale with high ceilings and large windows. For a girls' night out, Roka or Hakkasan in Fitzrovia are truly special. For the top Italian cuisine, the elegant Locanda Locatelli is ideal. The cosy Twist in Marylebone for an intimate dinner. Their courgette flowers filled with ricotta, mint and lemon are a real treat. We also like the Italian traditional cuisine of 'Il Macellaio' in South Kensington which specialises in Florentine T-bone steaks.

Your preferred West End show?

I loved *The Lion King* for the spectacular staging and music. Generally speaking, I prefer Walt Disney shows, always colourful and vibrant.

Your favourite flower shop?

I normally buy fresh flowers on my way home from the tube station. For plants, I go to Homebase near the O2 Centre on Saturday morning. They have lovely cheap trees and seasonal plants with deliveries every Friday.

Your favourite expression you have adopted since being here?

'It's freezing cold today' – it's not my favourite expression but the one I have been using more for the last seven years.

Your preferred mode of transport?

I like bus rides sitting on the top level. If I find a seat at the front I look outside, otherwise I would be checking my emails and social media.

Your favourite British food to eat in the UK?

A delicious Sunday roast with gravy and crispy chunks of sweet potatoes.

The ultimate gourmet for food or wine shop?

I like shopping at Giacobazzi, an Italian delicatessen near Hampstead Heath since 1927.

The best spot to people watch?

Selfridges offers a nice show of international people shopping: from Brits to Middle Eastern mum-daughter couples.

Your favourite museum or gallery?

London is truly amazing for art galleries and museums.

I love the Tate Modern, the Saatchi gallery and the small Freud museum. There is also the Royal Academy of Art and, as a member, you can eat at their private, delicious restaurant.

Your favourite park?

Regent's Park on Saturday morning, near the Hub. Many football clubs organise their matches there and the whole area becomes a huge pitch.

Best thing about London in the spring and summer in the UK?

There are a lot of fairs, from the Affordable Design Fair to the amazing Chelsea Flower Show. In addition, there are many local fairs in the neighbourhoods like those in Primrose Hill, St John's Wood and Hampstead Heath.

Your favourite place for a long week end away ?

We just returned from Bolton by Bowland, a little village near Manchester where a couple of friends opened a pub and a lovely hotel called the Coach and Horses. The countryside is stunning and the atmosphere is so different from London! On the way, we stopped at the amazing Science and Industry Museum in Manchester to see the roots of the industrial revolution, a great visit for adults and children.

