

A DIFFERENT WAY TO VISIT LONDON

(1) If you have, I'm sure you've already seen lots of blue plaques on your walks. These plaques celebrate famous people and the historic link they have with the building where you find them. The plaques help you get inside the history of the city, and the fascinating people who have lived there.

(2) But the organisation that awards them only gives them to somebody who has been dead for at least 20 years. The person doesn't need to be from Britain, and they can be famous for any reason. But the building where the blue plaque goes needs to be more or less in the same condition as when the person lived there.

(3) However, not all famous people begin their lives in luxury. A good example is Freddie Mercury, the singer in Queen. He arrived in London from Zanzibar (now Tanzania) in 1964 and lived in a modest terraced house on the outskirts of London which had no central heating. He was living in the house when he met guitarist Brian May and they formed a band. A plaque has been there since 2016.

(4) But one of the great things about the blue plaques is that they also celebrate the lives of heroes who are less well-known. Take Mary Seacole, for example. She was a Jamaican nurse who helped to save the lives of many soldiers during a

war in the 19th century by using herbal remedies. People forgot about her after her death, but now, perhaps thanks partly to her plaque, she has taken her place in history again.

(5) So it's no surprise that there are plaques for famous foreigners such as the artist

Vincent van Gogh. Van Gogh lived in London for a year when he was 20 years old. He hadn't started painting yet, but his visits to see the paintings in the National Gallery probably inspired some of his later works. And it's clear that London was a city close to his heart. One day he received a painting of Westminster Bridge and told his brother, 'When I saw this painting, I felt how much I love London.'

(6) They could be for world-famous singers like David Bowie or actors like Charlie Chaplin. Or they may be there to celebrate somebody you've never heard of before, like 'Luke Howard (1772–1864). Namer of clouds', the first person to use the words *cumulus*, *stratus*, *cirrus* and others to describe cloud shapes. And what about the plaque that has just appeared that says 'Jacob Von Hogflume, 1864–1909, Inventor of Time Travel, Lived here in 2189'? Don't worry. The plaque was a joke.

