

To the uninitiated, the events of this month-long London festival may appear disparate, but one unifying theme connects them all: the River Thames. Whether it's an art show or a cultural walk, a sporting race or a community day, you can be sure there's a river-related connection.

Centered on and around the waterfront and spanning the whole month of September, this annual festival has an eclectic line-up. So far this month, there have been bat walks and floating pub quizzes, a day devoted to all things Colombian (attended by the historic Colombian tall ship, the ARC Gloria) and a pop-up vintage market on the Cutty Sark gardens, an evening swim in the Thames and paddleboarding excursions. And that's just a few of many. It's cliché to say – though in this case it may just be true – that there really is something for everyone here.

Even though it's late in the month, Totally Thames isn't flagging. Many riverside activities are still ongoing, including the selection below, which includes just a few of our own favorites.



The Rising Tide

This festival has built up a reputation for delivering unique river art installations to unsuspecting Londoners. In 2014, commuters were shaken out of their routine stupor by the sight of a 69-foot-long wooden hippo floating down the Thames. This year, Totally Thames have commissioned an equally eye-catching work on the south bank near Nine Elms. The sculpture, titled "The Rising Tide," features four large stone stallions each with their own rider (two men, two children). At high tide, these amphibious sculptures are submerged, but when the tide rolls out, they are fully revealed, standing proud on the foreshore. The horses, which are visible from the walkway above, are best viewed from up to two hours either side of low tide; the Totally Thames website lists optimal times.



Creak - Immersive Theater

For those not content with being a bystander, this interactive, site-specific theater performance allows audiences to get stuck in. Participants will be transported back to the Victorian era as they wade into Deptford Creek in South London at low tide (waders will be provided), joining the “toshers” (Victorian sewer hunters) in scouring the dark and dangerous depths for treasures. After scavenging the creek, audiences can inspect Victorian-era maps, photos and memorabilia brought by the London Metropolitan Archives and examine some of the amazing artifacts that have been hauled up from the creek in the past.



A Mile in My Shoes

This intriguing project, the inaugural exhibit from the roving Empathy Museum, is making a famous idiom (“walk a mile in my shoes”) a reality. Visitors who want to give their empathy skills a workout will be fitted with a pair of someone else’s shoes before being sent off packing on a mile-long walk along the riverfront. As they stroll, they’ll be treated to tales from a stranger’s life courtesy of an audio narrative. The stories of those who live and work on the Thames are designed to kindle your emphatic potential.



Thames Boat Trip: Brunel's London

Sometimes the best way to see the Thames and all that surrounds it is by getting out onto the water itself. Riders on this river cruise, hosted by Robert Hulse, the curator of the Brunel Museum (an institution devoted to the renowned Brunel Engineers) can watch all those iconic London sights fly by. Cruisers will sail past the Houses of Parliament, the National Theatre and under three Brunel bridges – among them London’s most distinctive and postcard-worthy river crossing, Tower Bridge. Rounding off the trip is a journey down into the under-river Brunel’s Thames Tunnel, which – at the time of its construction – was considered a real marvel; it was even dubbed “the eighth wonder of the world.”



Greenwich Ghost Trip

London's an old city, so naturally, it has racked up its fair share of ghost stories over the years. This spooky evening tour, which has been taking place every Friday and Sunday in September, hones in on the scarier side of the leafy riverside borough Greenwich and all the dark water-related tales from its past. Tour-goers are invited to wander the darkened lanes and alleyways with a guide and hear stories about the fate that befell drunken sailors, and about the curse of Greenwich's famous Cutty Sark tea clipper. Though the vessel is now a popular tourist attraction, many sailors deemed it a "hellship" back when it still voyaged across the seas.



Culture Columnist
Joseph Reaney

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