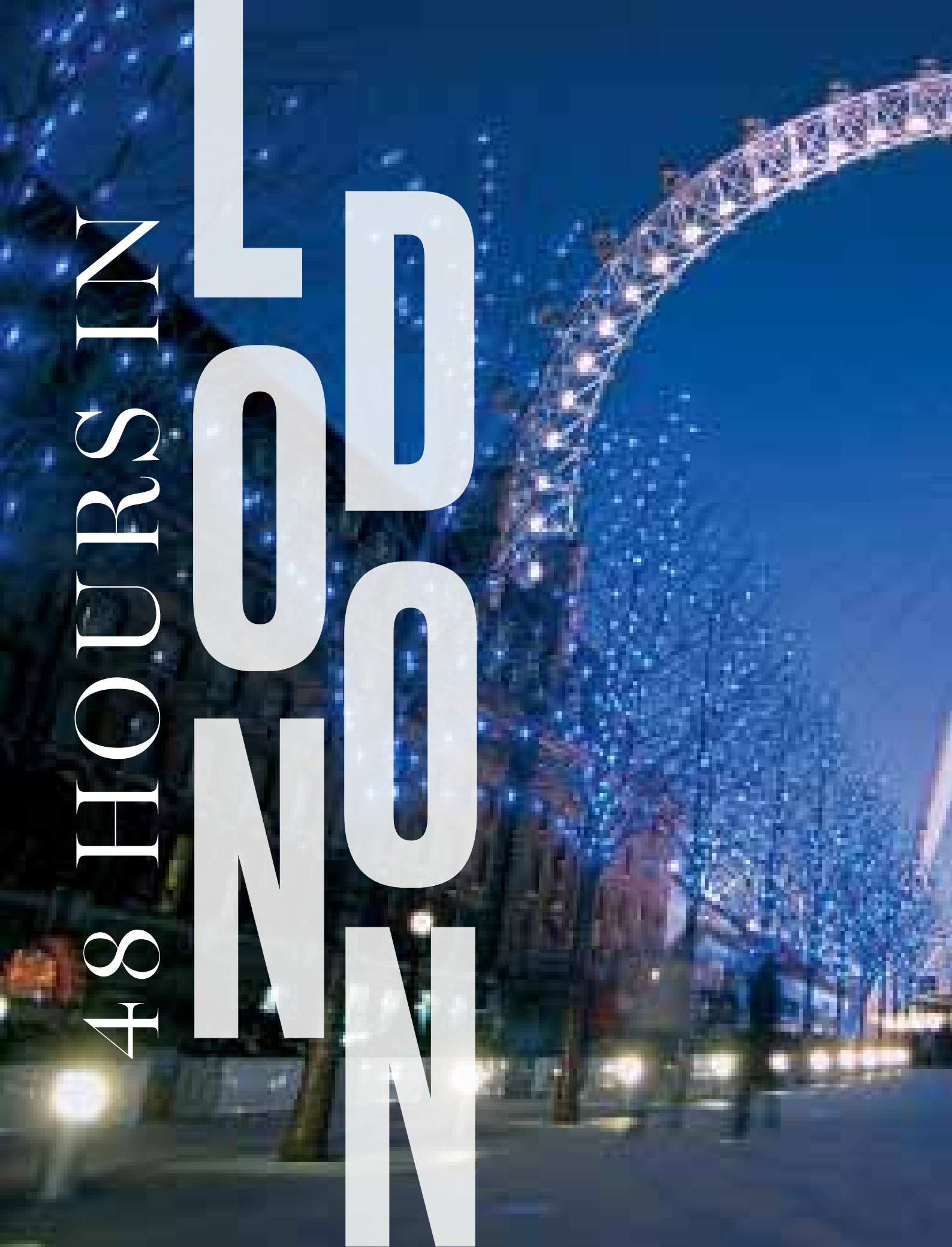


48 HOURS IN

NOON



A^s

a self-confessed royals addict, 2018 was the king of years in my lifetime. I binged on Diana documentaries, monitored Kate's baby bump online and, of course, counted down to the biggest international showbiz event of the year: Harry and Meghan's wedding. Imagine my utter delight when I learned the couple is expecting! In celebration, I gathered two girl pals and spent a weekend living it up in a way that HRH the Queen (or Lizzie, as I like to call her) would be proud of.

Our British correspondent, **JAMES WONG**, gets *festive in style* on a **JOLLY WEEKEND** in the *big* capital

travel

First to join me was Gabriella. On Friday evening, we checked into Regent Street's plush Hotel Café Royal, preparing ourselves for the magical array of Christmas delights that awaited. We were tempted to splash out on Revels In Hand, London's A-list private theatre entertainers, but resisting, we retreated to the hotel's Akasha Holistic Wellbeing Centre for 'We Relax' Aromatherapy Associates treatments, ordered room service from Laurent at Café Royal and stayed in our PJs for an early night.

We set our alarms for an early start – very early – because first stop was London's iconic skyscraper, The Shard. A Wheely car (a fancier Uber) drove us to the site. While most tourists go to enjoy its viewing gallery, we cleverly signed up for Yoga in The Shard, run by Yogasphere. We spent an hour holding poses while towering above frosty views.

Feeling energised, it was time to tackle Christmas shopping from 9am – and there was nowhere better to start than Selfridges, hailed as one of the best department stores in the world. I picked up Dr Bronner's organic soap products (Harry and Meg's faves) for my sister, a Briston timepiece for my brother-in-law, and a very snazzy pink Soda travel adapter for my globetrotting aunt. We skipped over to Avery Row down the road and I spoiled my mother with a £168 (about R3 200) bottle of Noisy Noisette from the Avery Perfume Gallery (which has to be the best smelling store in the world). Gifting over by noon, we strolled past Princess Diana's most iconic dresses on show at Kensington Palace. The venue was the late legend's home for more than 15 years, and seeing her clothes gave me Di-spiration for living it up while in the capital.

We wanted to enjoy the beauty of London during the holidays, and so went for a spin on the London Eye. It's worth upgrading to the fast-track Champagne experience to avoid the lines and raise a toast to Big Ben. Sightseeing worked up our appetite and I'm a firm believer in Christmas feasts. First, high tea at British favourite The Wolseley, followed by dinner at Italian institution Bocca di Lupo. Royal wedding guests George and Amal Clooney were once pictured at The London EDITION hotel in Soho, so we had to include it! There, I bade Gabriella goodbye over a Havana Moon cocktail, and was joined by Amie, an equally

fabulous girlfriend, for part two of this glittering adventure.

Amie and I began Saturday evening over Insta-worthy creations at the rooftop bar of the Sofitel London St James, a majestic little boudoir that Beatrice and Eugenie would totes love, and then stumbled over to MNKY LNGE at 10 Dover Street for some dancing to disco-funk old and new, including the latest Just Loud record. At midnight, we took a Wheely to our hotel, The Hoxton in Holborn – slap bang in the middle of everything. It was Saturday, and we wondered whether we'd ended our night too early. Sitting downstairs in Hubbard & Bell, we concluded that our energy must be saved for shopping. Priorities.

On Sunday morning we dragged ourselves out of our warm beds and through a couple of espressos until we were as perky as Pippa Middleton's behind. We visited the London Transport Museum in Covent Garden, but cut that short to make an early start on shopping.

Harrods is a rather magical place, not just because of its Christmas department, but because everything inside screams Buckingham Palace. We lunched in Chucs, a stunning restaurant situated within the store's Fine Watch Room. The lamb chops absolutely hit the spot, and our creative juices were flowing for an afternoon of candle-making at hipster hangout Carousel. There's nothing like a personalised gift, and candle-making was strangely therapeutic during a weekend of celebratory boozing. While the candle wax hardened, we rubbed wax shoulders with Will, Kate and co at Madame Tussauds Baker Street. If you

HARRODS IS A RATHER MAGICAL PLACE, BECAUSE EVERYTHING INSIDE SCREAMS BUCKINGHAM PALACE

can't meet royalty in real life, their waxwork is the next best thing.

City Social warmed us up at the close of Sunday and our frantic weekend of shopping in the capital was wrapped up. We unpacked our bags, laid everything out across the Hoxton's beds and, for just a moment, I panicked, considering returns. 'Have you lost your mind? It's Christmas... Besides, stress is for January and Camilla Parker Bowles,'

shrugged Amie while ripping off garment tags and tossing things into her already full Horizn suitcase.

'You're right; let's order room service. On me,' I responded. **mc**

James Wong contributes to Marie Claire UK.
Boxojames.com





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT
Hotel Café Royal in Regent Street; Akasha Holistic Wellbeing Centre; the Christmas Lobby inside Hotel Café Royal





**LONDON'S
FAB FOUR
INTERNATIONAL
EATS**

BOCCA DI LUPO

For more than a decade, this has been the city's go-to for incredible Italian. The atmosphere is buzzing and the flavours are tantalising.
Boccadilupo.com

CITY SOCIAL

This Michelin-starred modern British eatery from world-famous chef Jason Atherton has the juiciest steaks. There's an extensive wine list and sublime views.
Citysociallondon.com

MAM

Locals are raving about this Vietnamese BBQ in Notting Hill, situated on the famous All Saints Road. Try the skewers for your newest addiction.
Mamlondon.com

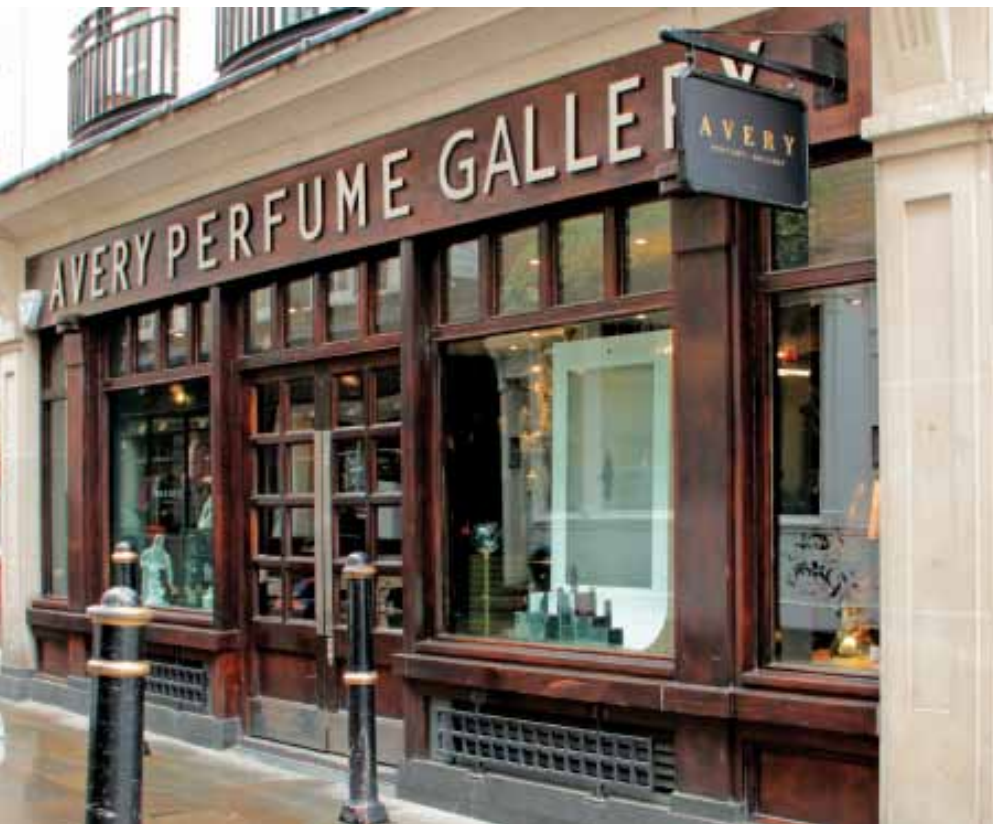
THE MEGARO EATERY

This European grill is the place to dine, brunch and be seen. Meat and fish are cooked on a wonderful Jospier grill, giving you a powerhouse of flavour.
Themegaro.co.uk/megaro-eatery-2



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP
The Hoxton in Holborn; a creation at the rooftop bar of the Sofitel London St James; fun times at The Megaro Eatery; delicious eats at Bocca di Lupo





LONDON'S FAB FOUR FASHION STORES

BURBERRY

The British luxury fashion house is renowned for its timeless trench coats. The flagship Regent Street store opposite Hotel Café Royal is epic.

Burberry.com

HOUSE OF HOLLAND

Fashion designer Henry Holland's pieces are adored by British stars from MIA to Cheryl Cole. This Christmas, they're personalising accessories.

Houseofholland.co.uk

TED BAKER

The first Ted store opened in 1988 and now there are almost 200 in the UK. As well as chic fashion, the brand has launched a Residence collection full of goodies for the home, including beautiful candles.

Tedbaker.com

VICTORIA BECKHAM

Our favourite Spice has a flagship store on Dover Street. We're in love with her latest eyewear range.

Victoriabeckham.com

LONDON'S FAB FOUR AFTERNOON TEAS



FROM TOP

Avery Perfume Gallery; afternoon tea at The Wolseley; Will and Kate waxworks at Madame Tussauds

CLARIDGE'S

Mayfair's glam gem serves delectable finger sandwiches and patisserie. Choose from 24 loose-leaf teas, including regional English.

Claridges.co.uk

THE LANESBOROUGH

Served daily in either the grand Céleste restaurant or Withdrawing Room, afternoon tea here is a treasured occasion.

Oetkercollection.com

SUNBORN LONDON

Feel like a mermaid princess at sea with afternoon tea in East London. You'll be treated to exquisite views of the financial district, Canary Wharf and The Docklands.

THE WOLSELEY

Their 'Best of British' set includes Victoria sponges, sherry trifles and fruit scones with home-made jam and clotted cream.

Thewolseley.com

