15 Fun-to-Know Facts about London

There is far more to the British capital than first appears, and there is always something new and wondrous to uncover about historical and modern-day London. Below, you'll find some obscure and fun facts about the city:

1. What is "Big Ben"? Most people have an impression that it's the name of the world famous clock, or perhaps the tower that houses it. Not true! The name actually refers to the 13 ton bell, while the tower is known as St. Stephen's Tower.
2. The Queen's official residence, Buckingham Palace, was built in 1702… on the site of a notorious brothel!
3. In 1870, thanks to the potato famines in Ireland, there were more Irish living in London than there were in Dublin. (At the time, there were also more Catholics living in London than there were in Rome.)
4. The Thames is the oldest place name in Britain, and the river is a combination of four other rivers.
5. The Great Fire of London in 1666 created substantial damage across the city and raged for days, causing parts of London to be rebuilt. However, only around eight lives were lost in the catastrophe.
6. The city that is presently known as London has gone through a variety of names during its history. At the time of the Roman Invasion, it was called Londinium. In Saxon times, it became known as Lundenwic. And during the kingdom of Alfred the Great, the city was known as Lundenburg.
7. About 25% of all people today living in London were born in another country.
8. A culturally diverse and multi-ethnic city, London is home to people speaking over 300 languages.
9. There are over 19,000 listed structures in the British capital.
10. Gaslight was introduced in London in 1807; prior to this, torchlight was used.
11. Her Majesty the Queen is not allowed to go into the House of Commons because she is not a commoner.
12. Rumour has it that Windsor Castle is haunted by a range of ghosts, including King Henry VIII, Queen Elizabeth I, Mad King George, and Charles I.
13. About 16% of the UK's restaurants are located in London, and there are more Michelin-rated restaurants in London than in any city except for Paris.
14. London's underground system, commonly called "the tube", was the first to be built anywhere, and it is one of the largest. Now, however, it is one of the most unreliable – and costliest.
15. Each week, the 409 escalators in the London subway cover an astonishing distance: The equivalent of several trips around the globe!