

BLACK CAB DRIVER GUIDES LAUNCH NEW VENTURE AT BVC

London Black Cab Sightseeing Tours' will be launched at the Britain and London Visitor Centre (BLVC) at 1 Regent Street during the week commencing 11th May 2009. This new venture will see a group of Qualified Taxi Driver Guides meeting and talking to tourists, members of the public and the media about their exciting new sightseeing option in London. With visual demonstrations of the Tours, the Guides will be supported by a special appearance of 'Arfur', who is 'half a cab'! All of the Driver Guides not only have 'The Knowledge' of course, but have also passed the 'Cab Guide Course' which is run by the 'Worshipful Company of Hackney Carriage Drivers' and accredited by City University.

Passengers on these tours will be transported in an iconic London Taxi, with a friendly knowledgeable driver who can answer their questions in more depth than on a coach or bus tour where there are far more people

in a group. The event will also see a selection of memorabilia from the 'Black Cab Collection' available for visitors to the British Visitor Centre to purchase. The Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, recently called on the world to 'come to London for the experience of a lifetime' as he announced a new £2million marketing campaign to boost overseas visitors to the capital – so, what better way for visitors to experience the sights and sounds of London than on a 'London Black Cab Sightseeing Tour'!

Any cab drivers who want to know more about the Guiding Course are welcome to call in and talk to the Taxi driver Guides about what to expect from the course. The event promises to be a great opportunity for tourists to learn more about the wonderful city they are visiting and it will also raise the profile of the cab trade with the many visitors who go to the BVC each day.

HOW WESTMINSTER COUNCIL IS MAKING IT EASIER FOR TAXI DRIVERS TO PARK AND USE PUBLIC TOILETS

We understand finding a suitable place to stop and use a toilet can be difficult for taxi drivers in central London so we are always looking for ways we can help. We have 33 bays specifically for taxi drivers with a special charge of just £1 per hour, compared with charges to other motorists of up to £4 an hour.

This is in addition to the 174 ranks in 130 streets across Westminster where there is space for 828 taxis and they can use one of the Public Carriage Office's 84 shelter ranks in seven locations near public conveniences and refreshment facilities.

NEW PARKING BAYS FOR CAB DRIVERS

In the last two years we've created six new parking bays just for taxi drivers and two more taxi-only paid parking places are on the way in Shepherd's Street near to the Piccolo Bar used by some drivers. Drivers can also use one of the 7,000 paid parking bays in Westminster if they pay the charge. In the January edition of the Westminster Reporter we asked road users to let us know of any locations where we might provide more parking bays and this request was repeated by myself on the James Whale Show on LBC radio on in February when I asked licensed taxi drivers to nominate places for either ranks or short term parking bays.

All licensed taxi drivers and private hire drivers know that they cannot abandon their vehicle anywhere in the street to answer the call of nature and we are doing our best to make life easier for them. Westminster City Council spends £3million a year maintaining its 53 council-run and leased



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toilet facilities, including 12 temporary units placed outside in the West End every Friday and Saturday night. There are now more public toilets in Westminster than any time in the last 20 years. And Westminster has more toilets winning awards from the British Toilet Association than any other English local authority.

SATLAV YOUR NEAREST LOO

In November 2007 the council launched SatLav, the UK's first loo search via text. The innovative system allows people in Westminster to text the word "toilet" to 80097 to receive details of their nearest public toilet.

Last month, (March 09) the council began extending the service by writing to 100 businesses mainly in the West End to invite them to register their toilets too. Some businesses including John Lewis, House of Fraser and Debenhams in Oxford Street as well as Cardinal Place shopping centre near Victoria have registered their toilets from the start of SatLav. The council hopes that other businesses will now follow their lead.

Martin Low
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Ed. Taxi drivers have been complaining to Taxi Globe for many months that they have problems finding somewhere to park and use toilet facilities. Not only is it difficult to find both at the same time, but then drivers having to pay for the convenience of parking need to use their credit card and mobile to pay for the privilege. Martin Low has written this article in response to a request by Taxi Globe and is always happy to receive communications from taxi drivers. You can write to him at Westminster City Council, 64 Victoria Street, London SW1E 6P.