CITY SOUL LONDON

BACK IN 2000, A PLAN WAS HATCHED TO divide the pavements on either side of Oxford Street into two lanes: one for fast pedestrians and one for dawdlers. Although it never came to pass, the fact that this was even considered tells you something about the iconic shopping thoroughfare: yup, it's packed every day with shoppers eagerly eyeing up the famous stories and chains such as Mass Bros, Selfridges, John Lewis, Debenhams and House of Fraser.

But slip off down one of the side streets and not only will you find yourself with enough room to swing a cat, but also surrounded by places that really show off the individuality and ingenuity that characterise London. Nowhere is this more so than on Carnaby Street. From the end of this year into 2010, Carnaby Street is celebrating the 50th anniversary of the 1960s, a decade when Brit fashion came into its own, showing a playful, creative and DIY side that captured the world's imagination.

The DIY aspect is alive and well today, especially at Year Zero **(SEE 7 ON MAP)**, a neon, day-glo, cyberpunk fashion outlet selling everything from Lego jewellery to the most out-there clothing you've ever seen. It's all designed and produced in-store by Rocky and Louise **(SEE CITY LIVES ON PAGE 58)** and seems to pile the fashion of every decade since the 1960s on top of one another to startling effect.

Yumchaa is a tea shop with a vendetta against the teabag

Customers are taking up DIY too. At Kingly Court, an extremely cute mall just off Carnaby Street, you can make your own jewellery at Claire Aristides (Level 2, Shop 2.11, Kingly Court, tel: +44 (0)20 7434 2161, www.clairearistidesjewelleryschool.co.uk). A one-day course costs £125 (€144), and guarantees that you leave with an impressive piece of handmade bling.

You can even apply the DIY theme to food. L'Atelier des Chefs **(13 ON MAP)** has hit upon an ingenious way of feeding customers: instead of simply choosing from the menu, guests are ushered into the kitchen and taught to make the dish of the day themselves, before admiring their work together (i.e. eating it) over a glass of wine. We did the half-hour Cook, Eat & Run course and our dish was a tiger prawn stir-fry. After the gory business of ripping the prawns' heads off and some fancy vegetable slicing, we sizzled up a lovely lunch for ourselves and smugly dined on our own work.

More personal creativity is on offer at So Restaurant (3–4 Warwick Street, tel: +44 (0)20 7292 0767, www.sorestaurant.com), one of London's top sushi venues. For some reason, sushi is shrouded in mystery, seemingly appearing by magic in those tidy little boxes. To demystify the process, the two-hour sushi courses available at So take place on Tuesdays and Saturdays from 3.30pm, and cost from £60 (€69) – perfect for a date, combining getting your hands a little dirty with eating dainty food. After the course, you genuinely feel you have acquired a very special skill – just make sure you keep it up at home!

But enough DIY, get other people to do stuff for you! Start the day off with a hearty full English breakfast at Zilli Café **(21 ON MAP)**, part of a series of venues curated by celebrity chef Aldo Zilli, who makes high-quality fish dishes using only sustainable fish. The fresh, crisp atmosphere is a perfect morning wake up call. Next door is Zilli Fish, a perfect lunch or dinner spot where you can enjoy the likes of seafood tapas and fish fresh from Billingsgate Market.

Your belly full, you are ready to tackle the bustle of Oxford Street. One famous venue also celebrating an anniversary is Selfridges (400 Oxford Street, www.selfridges.com). A staple of the London shopping scene, it's 100 years old this year.

In 1925 the megastore hosted the first ever public demonstration of the television. Today though, it's hosting cutting-edge treats from the subversive punks of the ice cream world: the Icecreamists. From 10 September until 1 November in the Ultralounge on the lower-ground floor, the brand will be offering its "sub-zero delights" in a pop-up boutique, along with an in-house band, dancing girls, and a menu with items such as The Sex Pistol (Viagra and absinthe ice cream cocktail served in a pink water pistol) and the Prince Harry (ice cream sandwich with ginger nuts)!

More subdued (and British) is a nice cup of tea. Yumchaa **(20 ON MAP)** is a newly opened tea shop with a vendetta against the teabag. Loose-leaf tea is the order of the day in this gorgeously laid-back little joint. As you order you are presented with a series of open jugs but, trust me, it is very hard to choose since they all smell like heaven. Eventually plumping for a raspberry, vanilla and ginseng blend, tasting it saw the rest of the world melt away for a few blissful moments.

Fed with your pause, head back into the fray by rolling down to Dean Street and Frith Street, home to all sorts of excitement. If you fancy giving your taste buds a bit of a rude awakening, Garlic & Shots **(17 ON MAP)** is one of the stranger venues you'll find in London. Established by the Swedish Olsson brothers, everything on the menu here contains garlic, and shots are the primary tipple. The Bloodshot (vodka, tomato, garlic and chilli) ought to jolt you awake pretty quickly, after which you can relieve your tongue with a cold beer. With rock and heavy metal blasting out of the sound system, and everyone smelling garlicky, there is something delightfully seedy about this dark little bar.

Right across the street is its diametric opposite, the organised sophistication of ▸

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King of cups

- Take herbal communion at tea mecca Yumchaa
- Shopping heaven and bright lights on Regent Street
- Funky Zilli Café
- L'Atelier des Chefs keeps you inspired and well fed

SLEEP IN STYLE

Aside from everything else, the Oxford Street/Soho area of London is literally sprinkled with an abundance of fabulously chic hotels, many of which are internationally famous to the point of going by a single name.

Claridge's **(6 ON MAP)**, has had so many royal visitors and connections that it is sometimes referred to as "the extension to Buckingham Palace". What the Queen would make of the language emanating from the kitchen is anyone's guess, as the room restaurant is run by Gordon "F**k Off" Ramsay. Now that's style!

At the other end of the aesthetic scale is the Sanderson **(1 ON MAP)**, which will break anyone's trendy in-meter. Refurbished in 2006 by Philippe Starck, the rooms feature eye-bulgingly overthe-furniture-like fantasia. Long live Cliff-wing and a Dirk-esque lobby.

The Connaught **(3 ON MAP)** has long been a player on the luxury London pad scene, and went into hibernation in 2007 for a fully refurbished kitchen reopening the very same year. It now boasts the ultra-stylish Coburg Bar and French super-chef Hélène Darroze.

With a selection like this, you really begin to understand why Mayfair is the most expensive square on the (British) Monopoly board!