

# Welcome to Europe's fastest growing holiday spot

# ILFORD



*Wish you were here!*

*Redbridge... a better place to holiday*

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Last year most families planned their holidays at beach-side resorts in Spain and France, but travel experts believe this year the place to be is much closer to home – which has raised more than a few eyebrows.

Ilford, our town situated between east London and Essex, has been named Europe's fastest growing popular holiday destination by travel website Trip Advisor, followed by little known French Mediterranean beach resort Valras-Plage.

The town's ease of access for the Olympic Games is thought to be behind the surge in popularity, with the stadium a 15-minute train journey away from the town centre.

With 41 restaurants, 16 pubs, a cinema, theatre and plenty of night life, Ilford could be seen as having something to offer for all ages.

But as residents tried to make sense of the surprise news, social network site Twitter was alive with comments – some praising the town, but others expressing their confusion.

User DavidYule tweeted: "Nothing to see in Ilford very boring town", but after the Recorder invited people to highlight the best bits many hailed Valentines Mansion and Park as

their favourites. One cited Pakwaan, Sri Rathiga and Jalalabad as the "best Indian restaurants in the world".

The man at the forefront of making Ilford town centre more appealing to shoppers, and encouraging business growth, town centre manager, Neil Davis, said he and his team were hard at work to make sure visitors come away from the town having had a positive experience.

### Footballers

"It's important from our point of view that everybody who goes through Ilford during the Olympics feels safe, welcomed and feel the area is distinctive," he said.

"It's a really family-friendly place, and the news of that is starting to spread. Ilford is no doubt becoming more popular because of the Olympics and the TV series *Great British Bake Off* (set in Valentines Mansion), but also because we've been working hard at making people feel safer than ever."

Plans in the pipeline for the town centre team during next year's London games include a big screen in the town centre showing the events, increased security and more family-friendly activities.

But Ilford's popularity does not stop at summer 2012. A short drive

away in Cranbrook Road, Gants Hill, nightclub Faces is a regular celebrity haunt, boasting stars such as JLS and Premier League footballers.

Trade has already picked up for hotels, with Holiday Inn Express in Eastern Avenue, Newbury Park, unavailable for bookings during the games, due to Olympics committee LOCOG taking over the hotel.

And Cranbrook Hotel in Coventry Road has reportedly taken 50 per cent more bookings than last year.

Cllr Ian Bond, Redbridge Council's deputy leader said: "Even my mum said she wants to come and stay during the Games. We're working hard on making the borough really stand out to visitors. We are hoping this will really put the town on the map."

## People are not going to Vegas or New York, they're coming here

Political leaders reacted with delight to the town's top billing as a tourist destination.

Speaking on the day the news broke at an all-faiths meeting at the Ilford Community Centre, MPs Lee Scott and Mike

Gapes and council leader Keith Prince gave the thumbs-up to Ilford's growing popularity.

Mr Scott, the Conservative MP for Ilford North, said: "People are not going to Las Vegas, they're not going to New York,

they're coming to Ilford." Mr Gapes, Labour MP for Ilford South, said: "People come to Ilford as tourists because they are coming to visit their friends and families. Ilford is the centre of the world."

Cllr Prince said the borough's diversity was a key reason for Ilford being such a attractive destination. He said: "You can visit bridge and visit the world in one day."