



MADAME TUSSAUDS: 200 YEARS OF FAME

Millions and millions of people have flocked through the doors of Madame Tussauds since they first opened over 200 years ago and it remains just as popular as it ever was. There are many reasons for this enduring success, but at the heart of it all is good, old-fashioned curiosity. Today's visitors are sent on a unique, emotionally-charged journey through the realms of the powerful and famous. The museum-style ropes and poles have gone so guests can truly get up, close and personal with A-list celebrities, sporting legends, political heavyweights and historical icons, reliving the times, events and moments that made the world talk about them....

From France to Britain...

The attraction's history is a rich and fascinating one, with roots dating back to the Paris of 1770. It was here that Madame Tussaud learnt to model wax likenesses under the tutelage of her mentor, Dr Philippe Curtius. At the age of 17, she became art tutor to King Louis XVI's sister at the Palace Of Versailles and then, during the French Revolution, was hastily forced to prove her allegiance to the feudalistic nobles by making the death masks of executed aristocrats. Madame Tussaud came to Britain in the early 19th century alongside a travelling exhibition of revolutionary relics and effigies of public heroes and rogues.

Bringing the news to life...

At a time when news was communicated largely by word of mouth, Madame Tussauds' exhibition was a kind of travelling newspaper, providing insight into global events and bringing the ordinary public face-to-face with the people in the headlines. Priceless artefacts from the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars brought to vividly life events in Europe which had a direct bearing on everyday lives. Figures of leading statesmen and, in the Chamber of Horrors, notorious villains put faces to the names on everyone's lips and captured the public imagination. In 1835, Madame Tussauds' exhibition established a permanent base in London as the Baker Street Bazaar - visitors paid 'sixpence' for the chance to meet the biggest names of the day. The attraction moved to its present site in Marylebone Road come 1884.

Blending history and celebrity...

In the 20th Century Madame Tussauds' role began to change. Thanks to the rapid growth of both popular tabloid press and public literacy, information about current events was easily acquired. The attraction gradually, therefore, became less a source of direct news, than a commentary on popular celebrity. It also came through some major upheavals, surviving near destruction by fire (1925), earthquake (1931) and World War II 'Blitz' bombing (1940.) Today, Madame Tussauds is bigger and better than ever, combining its diverse history with the relentless glamour, intrigue and infamy of 21st century celebrity.

Some of Madame Tussauds' original work and earliest relics are still on display in London, including the death masks she was forced to make during the French Revolution and the Guillotine that beheaded Marie Antoinette. Guests can also marvel at probably the earliest example of animatronics – 'Sleeping Beauty', a breathing likeness of Louis XV's sleeping mistress Madame du Barry sculpted in 1763, is the attraction's oldest figure on display.

And then there are the more contemporary, more interactive stars. From Brad Pitt, with his squeezable bum, to Kate Moss, alongside whom you can pose for the cover of a glossy fashion mag, the biggest names in entertainment, sport and politics are all dazzlingly represented; authentic down to the very last eye lash....

Finger on the pulse...

Madame Tussauds continues regularly to add figures that reflect contemporary public opinion and celebrity popularity – Bollywood kings like Shah Rukh Khan; Hollywood sirens such as Nicole Kidman; pop idols Timberlake and Minogue. The attraction also continues to expand globally with established international branches in New York, Hong Kong, Las Vegas, Shanghai, Amsterdam and Washington DC recently joined by a new outlet in Berlin (July 2008) and soon to welcome one in Hollywood (2009) – all with the same rich mix of interaction, authenticity and local appeal.

A visit to Madame Tussauds is essential – where else can you savour two centuries of fame and notoriety, and tell the great and good exactly what you think of them? It'll be your most famous day out ever!

For further information please contact:

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Visit our website: www.madametussauds.com/london

Editors' Notes:

- Madame Tussauds Studios London has been making wax figures for over 150 years. Each masterpiece takes four months, and a team of 20 dedicated sculptors, to create. Over 500 precise body measurements are referenced, real head hairs are inserted one by one, and countless layers of paints and tints are applied to build up skin tones - all to achieve the kind of astonishing realism that has kept Madame Tussauds world renowned for over two centuries.
- Madame Tussauds has attractions in London, New York, Las Vegas, Washington D.C., Amsterdam, Berlin, Hong Kong and Shanghai with interactive figures and experiences built around fame and celebrity. In London, guests can get up, close and personal with incredibly lifelike replicas of 21st century stars like Kate Moss, Johnny Depp and Kylie Minogue, brave the scariest Chamber Of Horrors yet, complete with actors as bloodthirsty serial killers, take a time-travelling taxi ride through 400 years of amazing London history, and soak up the iconic Stardome, featuring out-of-this world 360-degree animation by Oscar-winning movie-makers Aardman.
- Merlin Entertainments Group is the leading name in location based, family entertainment, and has seen the most successful and dynamic growth of any company in the sector over the last five years. The world's No 2 visitor attraction operator, Merlin aims to deliver memorable and rewarding experiences to its 30 million visitors worldwide, through its iconic global and local brands, and the commitment and passion of its managers and 13000 employees.

Bigger than Universal and second only to Disney, Merlin Entertainments brings together LEGOLAND, Madame Tussauds, The London Eye, London Aquarium, SEA LIFE, Gardaland, Dungeons – as well as national brands such as Alton Towers, Thorpe Park, Warwick Castle, Heide Park and Chessington World of Adventures. All brands which are distinctive, challenging and innovative – and which have great potential for growth in the future.