

# 10 Cool Things About the TOWER OF LONDON

BY C.M. TOMLIN

As a palace, the **Tower of London** was a great place to live. As a prison, it wasn't so nice—especially since so many **prisoners** lost their heads! The place has been a lot of things in its nearly **1,000-year-old** history. Today **tourists** can explore the Tower, in England, in the United Kingdom. Here are **ten reasons** why the Tower was—and still is—a **cool place** to be (as long as you weren't a prisoner, that is).

**1** Ravens are like local superheroes. Well, sort of. Legend says if the **ravens** that live on the Tower grounds ever leave, the Tower will crumble and a **disaster** will befall England. No one knows when the ravens first showed up, but **Charles II** took the legend so seriously that in the **1670s** he decreed that six ravens be kept there all the time. Today there are still always six—plus a couple of **spares**, just in case.

**2** You might have lived at a zoo. In 1204, **King John** kept a collection of animals, including **lions**, leopards, and elephants. About 50 years later, King Henry III received a **polar bear**. The bear was kept on a leash so it could fish from the **Thames River** that flows by the Tower.

**3** If you lived at the Tower today, your mom or dad might be in charge. The **35 Yeoman Warders** and their families are among the few still allowed to live at the **Tower**. Established in 1509 as **bodyguards** for the king, today they give tours and manage the day-to-day details of the Tower. They're called "**beefeaters**," possibly because their job once allowed them to eat beef from the **king's table**.

**4** You need a secret password at night. Called the "**Word**," the password changes every **24 hours** and is a **must-have** to enter the Tower after hours. It's **written** on a piece of paper and delivered to the **Yeoman** on duty for the night.

**5** You might see a ghost. Queen Anne Boleyn, who was **executed** on orders from her husband, **King Henry VIII**, is said to wander the grounds without her **head**. One building is believed to be so **haunted** that dogs refuse to enter.

**6** You could've been rich. During Henry VIII's reign, the Tower housed the **Royal Mint**, which produced England's **silver coins**. It's said the staff was worked so hard that when one **employee** finally got a break, he **slept** for 15 days straight.

**7** You'd have lots of bling. England's **crown jewels** are still guarded in the Tower's **Jewel House**, a dazzling display of crowns, **robes**, jewelry, and scepters that goes back hundreds of years. More than **23,500 diamonds**, sapphires, rubies, and other gems adorn the **royal collection**.

**8** You might have met a celebrity. In the 1400s, King Henry VI hosted huge, noisy tournaments, in which **knights** with long lances jousted on **horses**. The more lances a knight could break while knocking his **opponent** from the saddle, the more **famous** he became.

**9** You could find buried gold. In 1662, a **goldsmith** named John Barkstead supposedly hid more than **\$40,000** worth of stolen **gold** somewhere on Tower grounds. Many have **searched** for the loot, but it has never been found.

**10** You'd never have to worry about a prison break. The Tower was so secure only a few **escape attempts** succeeded. In 1716, one man sneaked out dressed in **women's clothing**. In 1100, a prisoner threw such a wild **party** for guards they didn't notice him climbing over the wall to meet a waiting **boat**!

