



# IN THE WOOD

*Why Colliers Wood is the forgotten gem of south west London*

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**O**ften overshadowed by Wandsworth and Lambeth, the London Borough of Merton is not to be overlooked. Property in Colliers Wood is a cunning investment for first-time buyers or for those in need of extra bedrooms (do we hear the pitter patter of tiny feet?) – and, given the advent of the night tube, it has become even easier to commute and to maintain a busy social life from a base in this no longer untrendy corner of SW19.

Financial and practical

considerations aside, it's a great place to be. Geographically, it's nestled between the vibrant foodie mecca that Tooting has rapidly become, and the well-heeled Wimbledon Village. It's just a stone's throw from Earlsfield, and hardly a trek to go for brunch in Clapham or Battersea.

There's plenty of that enviable green space that south west London is famed for too, with not one but three parks – there's the Green Flag recreation ground, complete with tennis courts, paddling pool, football pitches and

children's play area; the National Trust-owned Wandle Park; and the Wandle Meadow Nature Park. On the Wandle Trail, wildlife enthusiasts can observe wetland plants and animals including chaser dragonflies, bullfinches, whitethroats, reed buntings, and newts. It's not far to Morden Hall Park for a change of scene, and you can also connect with nature at urban community farm Deen City Farm, which has a riding school too.

Before heading off on a leisurely weekend stroll, locals get



The Colour House theatre is located in a Grade II-listed building



The Wandle Trail features everything from whitethroats to bullfinches

their caffeine fix at Coffee in the Wood, an excellent family-run coffee shop with cakes, traybakes and various other creations from local artisan bakery Leila's Place. Treats like the gluten-free chocolate sponge and summery lemon and blueberry cake are also available at Bliss in nearby South Wimbledon, which also has great coffee and is just next to the Polka Theatre. While the Polka is dedicated exclusively to shows and workshops for children, there's also the Grade II-listed Colour House theatre, complete with a

comedy offering. For something a little different, on Deer Park Road you can have a shot at the 'Mystery Cube Mission' – an immersive (and addictive) mystery-solving challenge.

Another excellent facility for young families in Colliers Wood is Eddie Catz, an award-winning play centre available for parties, gatherings and playdates. There's a padded play area and baby sensory classes with music and movement for toddlers, while older kids can benefit from a giant adventure play frame, air hockey, a disco room

and sports arena, as well as after school and holiday activities from football to ballet. For grown-ups, thankfully, there's fresh roasted coffee and Wi-Fi in the café and lounge. If you're not entirely weary of playdates, there's also the Wacky Warehouse, another mega play zone that often offers arts and crafts sessions in addition.

Speaking of which, crafty adults and kids alike should head to the picturesque Merton Abbey Mills on the riverside, a former silk printing works that hosts a craft market each weekend with

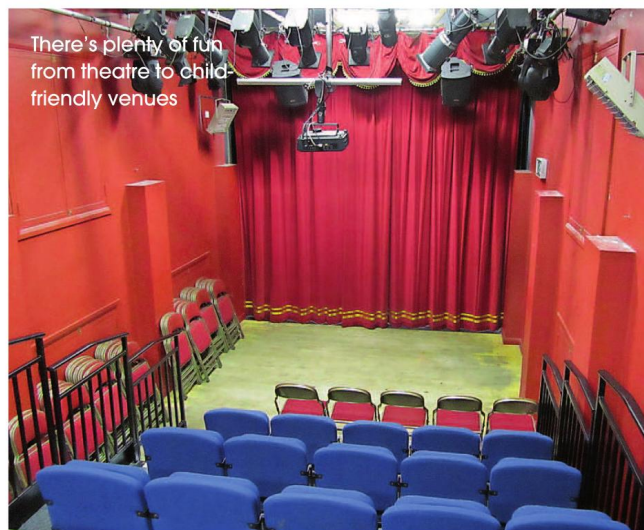


jewellery, hat makers, wood carvings, and furnishings galore. Would-be potters can take to the wheel at The Wheelhouse, and you can eat and drink while you're there at an incredibly eclectic selection of eateries. Try Ban Yai Thai (authentic Thai cuisine), The Belgian Brasserie (where there's also jazz nights on the last Friday of every month), the Rock Star Sushi Bar, The Merton Apprentice (serving regionally brewed beer and ale) and the fantastic Tattooed Bakers, Eddie Lebeau and Richard Amon, who have elevated the humble act of cake baking into an expressive art form. You can, of course, also drink the local Graveney Gin, distilled in Tooting in batches of just 30 bottles. Make sure to take

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some home, along with cheese and cured meats from the deli, Cut & Cure.

Elsewhere in the area for dinner, the Corleone Restaurant is a rustic, familiar Italian restaurant that never fails to please with its homely atmosphere. The homemade, in-house pasta, antipasti, gnocchi, and pizza are all beautifully presented. The local boozier is the Charles Holden, a traditional pub with British food, ales and good wine, a spacious beer garden, sport screenings and a Sunday night quiz for whiling away the hours after an indulgent Sunday roast. It's both dog and family-friendly, which is handy for those popping in for a pint after a walk through Wandale Park. What's not to love? **R**



There's plenty of fun from theatre to child-friendly venues



Merton Abbey Mills is a mecca for arts and crafts