DRIVING MISS DAISY

Tootling about England’s capital with the smallcarBIGCITY bunch in a restored Mini Cooper with “leading lady” Sam Sherratt or one of her equally lively cohorts at the wheel is enormous fun.

Sam can spin that little vehicle on a six-pence. She knows all the best byroads and detours and can somehow spot a potential traffic snarl a mile away. It’s not so much a matter of the mind as finding the gap. Design your own itinerary, take a themed tour or, as we do, zoom off from Covent Garden for a quick look at a specific district. The fleet of smallcarBIGCITY’s Mini Coopers, all girls apparently, have names such as Betty, Lulu and Dot. But ours this fair April morning is Daisy, as pretty and pale as early springtime; she’s a white 1992 Rover Mini Cooper with a black top and “full-length Webasto sunroof”, comments Sam, as proudly as a new mum.

We bustle in and out of the huffingly huge fresh produce palace of Borough Market in Southwark, pausing for what Sam calls “Aus-sie-strength” flat whites from Monmouth Coffee Co and a remarkable donut dripping with sea salt caramel from Bread Ahead. We are in NW3 and Tucker calls the district London’s “penthouse” with good reason. With a stout walking stick that would do Gandalf proud, and a booming, actorly voice, he strides from Hampstead Tube Station on our Hampstead Heath and Villages walk and I scurry to keep pace, including across a picturesque little parkland heath, which covers a great green ridge of about 320ha.

The elevations from many points, such as along Holly Mount, are among the highest in strict London’s “penthouse” with good reason. With a stout walking stick that would do Gandalf proud, and a booming, actorly voice, he strides from Hampstead Tube Station on our Hampstead Heath and Villages walk and I scurry to keep pace, including across a picturesque little parkland heath, which covers a great green ridge of about 320ha.

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Our escort is US-born architecture and literature lover David Tucker who has long been a UK-born travel writer and is the keenest of advocates for his adopted city. With a stout walking stick that would do Gandalf proud, and a booming, actorly voice, he strides from Hampstead Tube Station on our Hampstead Heath and Villages walk and I scurry to keep pace, including across a picturesque little parkland heath, which covers a great green ridge of about 320ha.

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FROM MAY 1 TO OCTOBER 31 EACH YEAR, WITH THE PASS OF QUANTA, you can explore London at your leisure, with unrestricted travel on the Tube, trains and buses, and with 50 per cent off Thames riverboats. Prices vary according to time of day and city zones.

If you are going to be moving about every day, then a seven-day Travelcard allows unlimited travel across the public transport network, including Docklands light railway, with no restrictions; £64.50 for 16 years and over, and £32.50 for 11 to 15 years; under 11s, free. One-day Travelcards are also available, priced according to zones. If including Heathrow transfers, buy Zone 1-6; £34.50/£17.50.

The London Pass covers the capital’s top attractions, such as the Tower of London and Kew Gardens, with options from one to six days, and the viewing platform at The Shard is latest to the mix. The pass is valid for hop-on and hop-off sightseeing buses. One day is £39.50 for 16 years and over, and £23, three to 15; under 11s enter free at most attractions. Best value is a three-day pass, £210/£155.

All London travel passes, plus heritage, BritRail and sightseeing passes across Britain, can be pre-purchased in Australian dollars at VisitBritain’s online shop. VisitBritain.com/australia