

TRAFFIC LIGHT TREE

Heron Quays Roundabout, E14

Transport Canary Wharf tube or Heron Quays DLR

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**Modern art
to madden
motorists**

As you exit Canary Wharf tube, the shiny high-rise office blocks crowned with the neon logos of investment banks create a disorienting impression of a very different London – a futuristic economic powerhouse, quite unlike the rest of the rough-and-ready city seeped in history. Walk down Heron Quay towards the Isle of Dogs and you might spot a distant glow of lights, flashing green, red and amber among the grey steel and polished glass. In the middle of an otherwise nondescript roundabout, at the junction of Heron Quay Bank, Marsh Wall and Westferry Road, stands a 26-foot tangle of 75 traffic lights that flash on and off at random. Installed in 1998, French artist Pierre Vivant’s Traffic Light Tree replaced one of three plane trees on the roundabout that was being choked to death by the constant flow of traffic. Vivant’s sculpture is shaped like a tree, its branches a blur of blinking lights. According to the artist, “the changing pattern of the lights reflects the never ending rhythm of the surrounding domestic, financial and commercial activities.” It may cause alarm in drivers, but for pedestrians who take the time to stop and stare, its rhythmic play of light has a strangely soothing effect amid the restless activity that surrounds it.

The Isle of Dogs was open countryside until 1800. In the 17th century, several hundred Chinese sailors married local women, creating London’s first Chinatown in the area bordered by Limehouse, Pennyfields, and West India Dock Road. With its opium dens and brothels, the neighbourhood soon became a no-go zone for salubrious Londoners. In the 1920s, local residents closed down the access roads to the Isle of Dogs in protest at their slum dwellings, and declared independence from the rest of London.

SIGHTS NEARBY**MUDCHUTE FARM**

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Amid 31 acres of parkland on what was once a derelict plot beside Millwall docks, is London’s largest urban farm. As well as horse riding lessons, kids can interact with dozens of farm animals and a more exotic family of llamas. The café does fantastic English breakfasts and homemade lemonade. Open daily 9.30am-4.30pm. www.mudchute.org. Mudchute or Island Gardens DLR.

