

Here are some wonderful things to see and do in London and beyond. I wrote up some stuff to see for friends going there a few years ago.

This will be way too much for you to see/do, but it gives an overview of what there is so you can decide.

Books

I am a big fan of the Dorling-Kindersley Eyewitness Travel guides. Great maps, easy to follow and well-organized.

Also fun are the Rick Steve's guides. He has some great personal tours in the books.

They make both books for London and also all of the UK. If you are going to spend a lot of time in London, then get at least one specialized one (RS) and one generic one (DK).

Choosing Your Hotel

Twice I have stayed north of Hyde Park. Once was right across from the park near Lancaster Gate Underground stop. The hotel is in a huge old cream house and was very posh. The other time I was closer to Paddington Station, which is a few blocks north from there. That was another converted mansion, but our accommodations were much, much smaller (and cheaper). It is a very neat area to stay. The second hotel was on Sussex Gardens (a street). The whole row of houses were converted to hotels. Ours was the Olympic or Olympia.

Once I stayed near Russell Square, which was blocks from the British Museum. Quite possibly the Hotel Russell. It was OK, and breakfast was included, which was nice. The room decor was old and there was a weird bathroom thing going on with a bidet in a closet or something.

Priceline got me a night in Southwark just below the Tower Bridge at a Hilton. That was the biggest and most modern of the hotels. But really for business travelers and not near anything cool except the dungeon museum, which isn't that cool. Not a night life area.

One time I stayed outside of town at a B&B in Hither Green, which is a suburb. Very close to main train lines. But far enough that you should probably try and stay at Paddington or Russell Square instead.

Tips

Don't even begin to think of driving a car in London. They have a "Congestion Zone" in the central part of the city. If you drive in this Congestion Zone, you are liable for a fine. We didn't know about it and ended up paying \$80 in fines due to late charges! Anyway, stick to the Underground. Rent your car after leaving the city.

The Underground

The **Underground** is the way to go. You can probably get a voucher here for a discount, multi-day pass. Check now because you can't get a discount one when you get there!

They now have something called an Oyster card. That is a pay-as-you-go card. Works great if you live there, but if you are only there for a day or two, get a day pass (unless they phased that out!). That way you won't lose the extra money you put into the Oyster card. The tickets work on the busses too, although good luck figuring out the bus routes. Busses are also subject to traffic. We never figured out the buses, but if you're in a nice

area, it might be cool to get on one and ride around to see the city. Some underground lines run quite deep (the dark blue Piccadilly line comes to mind) so if you miss the lift, DON'T try the stairs. You are really deep. The lifts move quickly anyway and there isn't a long wait. The Underground is usually very clean and safe. But beware of pickpockets in any case. Mind the gap at platforms that are curved. It will be quite a gap!

When you see street signs for a **Subway**, don't be fooled into thinking you're going to catch a train. Subways in England are underground tunnels to get you safely across busy intersections. Look for the red and blue sign to indicate the Underground, where the trains run.

Money

The exchange rate is not in our favor. 1 pound = \$1.50ish. This is the best I've seen since I was there in 1997! That means when you go to McDonalds and see a Big Mac meal for 3.80 pounds, you're really paying over \$5.70 for greasy food. The cost of living is higher in the UK too, so things often cost more even without the exchange rate.

Wear a traveler's money belt. It is worn under your shirt/pants and can hold your passport, credit cards, cash, etc. I usually carry a dummy wallet with just some cash in it, and maybe my underground pass. The rest of my valuables I keep in the belt. Don't trust the hotel either, unless you can put things in a safe.

Don't bother with a lot of traveler's checks. Use an ATM to take out cash. You won't get the transfer fees that Thomas Cook will slap on you. Also check your credit cards. They each charge something for currency conversion. If you have multiple cards find out which charges the least for conversion and use that one. They can tell you the rates if you call the credit card company.

Death Avoidance

Look right when you cross the street. The people in London drive very fast, within INCHES of the curb. Don't think you have that ½ foot of leeway that we get here in the states. The cars drive very quickly and will run over your foot. OK, I've never seen it happen, but watch out.

Dining

Beware, kitchens in pubs close early, so if you want your bangers, beans and mash, don't go at 7 PM. Eat early! Otherwise you'll end up in a Burger King or KFC. Sometimes you're better off seeking non-British food. There are a LOT of non-British food places. A lot of Indian. And Italian. Regular restaurants are open later. **Garfunkels** is a chain, like Applebees. We ate in one at Trafalgar Square. Meh. The **Duke of Wellington's** is a pub type chain, I believe. I had steak and kidney pie there in 1997. I ate at another place near Russell Square. Had a Hollywood theme. I don't recommend it.

Londontown (old city) closes up at night. Safe to walk, but there is NOTHING going in. Try Southwark for food and dinner. Near Charing Cross Station is a bridge that leads to

the new music hall. There are places to eat near there. Also near there is a Sherlock Holmes pub which we ate in last time. The atmosphere was cool downstairs, but upstairs the service was slow and the food only OK.

Public Houses: Some are owned by one brewery, so all they'll sell there is Courage or Whitebread. Others sell all sorts of drinks. North side of Kensington Garden is the Swan. That looks really cool but I never got to drink there. We walked through last time, but didn't like their menu so we went elsewhere.

If you want to buy a **Milky Way** bar, buy the one that says **Mars** instead. They taste like Milky Ways. The one labeled Milky Way is very different (although tasty). Lion bars are good too.

In 2007 we were in Paddington. Near there is **Edgware Road**, right above **Marble Arch** station on Hyde Park. It has a lot of ethnic restaurants. Definitely a middle-eastern feel. Laurie isn't an adventurous eater so we had a nice pizza. Oh, they love putting **Rocket** on pizza. It is what we usually call Arugula and is a big leafy green thing.

We ate at a great pub called the Fountains Abby Pub near Paddington station this last trip.

Oh, don't be surprised if most of your wait staff in London are not British. There are a lot of eastern European immigrants these days.

Things To Do and See In London

One of my favorite things to do in London is take a guided walk.

<http://www.walks.com/>

There are walking ranging from Jack the Ripper Tour, Ghosts of the West End, to Winnie-the-Pooh, Shakespeare's London, and Charles Dickens's London. These tours are well-priced and the guides we had were excellent. They are a lot of fun, and run different on every morning, afternoon, and evening. I did the first two I mentioned (I liked the Ghost tour the best but my traveling companion liked the Jack the Ripper tour better.) Both ended up in pubs, but you don't need to stay there with the tour guide.

I really, really recommend these tours. They are well worth it. Oh, and if nothing else, be sure to go to the site and print out the PDF of walking tours.

See a Show: We went to the Cheap Tickets booth on Leicester Square (described in the Rick Steves book) and got cheap tickets to see Phantom, 3rd row orchestra. Which was cool. If you like shows and don't mind having limited availability (whatever is available for that night is what you get) try this out. I only saw a show once though because I reasoned that I could just as easily go to Broadway to see a show there, and New York does not have things that are cool like the Tower of London. This last trip we saw an Agatha Christy play called The Mousetrap. British murder mystery – a lot of fun. Longest running play production ever!

The Tower of London: A medieval monstrosity in downtown London! Built by William the Conqueror circa 1066 this is landmark of London landmarks. I really like the tower

and have gladly toured it each of the first three times I was in London. It can be pricy, but is worth it. Take the Beefeater's tour, which is free, and very entertaining. I especially liked the reconstructed throne room of Edward I, with the refurbished coronation chair (which you can see the original of in Westminster Abbey.)

Tower Bridge: You can walk across the top of it for a nice view, and go inside to see the machines that raise and lower the bridge. This was a little expensive, but if you are into architecture and bridge construction the exhibit they had up top was pretty cool.

Southwark Cathedral: Nice people there, but this wasn't the best of the cathedrals. They seemed starved for visitors in 1999. Oh, Southwark is pronounced "Suthick."

Shakespeare's Globe: If there is no play on, and you like Elizabethan England (I do, but I majored in English literature and history) try to take a tour. I only got to see this once, though due to play schedules. We saw Othello there last time. Great show. Had Tim McInerney (from Blackadder) in it as Iago. They do other things besides Shakespeare. Beware that it is open to the elements, so bring a jacket. Pay the extra couple pounds and get a seat cushion or back support. Really.

London Dungeon Museum: A tourist trap if there ever was one. We didn't go in. But our second hotel was down the street from it. People were lined up for blocks to get in.

Klink Museum: Went to this instead in 1999. Not worth the 4 pounds we paid admission, but it had real candles to illuminate it. Don't bother with it. The stuff in the Tower was a better exhibit on dungeons anyway.

Royal War Museum: My dad did this while I was in the Globe. Laurie did it too, and both were impressed with it.

London Eye: Huge Ferris Wheel on Southwark. It overlooks Westminster, so it is a bit of a walk from the Globe. A bit pricy, but still very cool. Get tickets early, and then come back later to ride it. Maybe go to Westminster in between. We went in the evening when it was twilight - you could still see the buildings, but they were starting to light up.

Westminster is actually the rest of the city, outside of the ancient boundaries of London Town. So if you look on street signs you'll see City of Westminster almost everywhere, unless you are near the Tower.

Westminster Abbey: I really like this old abbey. It is wonderful inside, and chock full of living and dead people. Many, many ornate tombs are crammed in here. You can see the remains of Henry V, Mary Queen O' Scots, Elizabeth, Edward the Confessor, and oodles of other people. Plus poets and musicians corner where there are tributes to great English writers and artists. The Rick Steve's guide has a nice walking tour in it that is interesting to read and follow. It has info not on the Audio Tour, which you should also get. Westminster Abbey is really cool. I highly recommend this one. **Oh, no tours on Sundays.**

Westminster Palace AKA Houses of Parliament: OK, you'll have to pass this to get to the abbey. There is inevitably the longest wait here. The Rick Steve's book has a number to call to get free, time-stamped tickets to tour it. We discovered that while waiting in line for 2 hours. The building is impressive, there is tons of security, and it is probably not worth 2 hours wait. But if you get those free tickets... Unless you're really interested in it, I would skip the houses of Parliament.

Buckingham Palace and the Changing of the Guards: You won't get into the palace unless the Queen is somewhere else. I haven't been in. Except for that time I was knighted. The guards changing is basically a bunch of men, with a band, marching past, saluting, and then marching back. It gets VERY crowded and people cut in front of us to see it, so I am a bit sour on that.

Tate Gallery: The Tate Gallery comes in two flavors: Tate Modern on the south side of the Thames and the Original, on the other side. The Modern is in a redone power plant. I haven't been inside. The original is in a neat old building. They have a wonderful collection of Turners! Also incredible pre-Raphaelite paintings (Lady of Shalott, Ophelia, that sort of thing). This is another gallery where I have not spent enough time.

Churchill's War Rooms: Literally left alone for over 60 years after the war ended. Like a WWII time capsule. This was really neat. Everyone I know who toured this really liked it. The preserved bomb-proof rooms that Churchill used during the Battle of Britain. You can see his bed, desk, phone, etc.

St. James Park: Very nice park with a lake with many birds. We picnicked here.

Whitehall Palace: Never been in it, but I hear it is very nice. I did walk past it on the way up to Trafalgar Square

Trafalgar Square: While not a destination in itself, it is near a lot of cool things. Take a photo of Nelson on this column. On the square are:

St. Martin-in-the-Fields: Nice church. Try and catch a concert here from the famous academy of the same name. In the crypts downstairs they have an excellent café! No bones about it, this was a tasty lunch. Take it easy on the custard though. What is really fun about this is the Brass Rubbing Centre inside. We did a great brass rubbing which is based on a tomb relief in Essex. It is inexpensive and fun. We picked a husband and wife one, since we did it together on our honeymoon.

National Gallery: Also on Trafalgar Square. Also FREE. Incredible collection of art. It has some of my favorite Turners here. Many, many famous pieces of art are in this gallery. Speaking of Turner, if you like art, try and check out the Tate Gallery (Mentioned elsewhere). That's a little bit out of the circle I was making (look at a map, I've been going clockwise from the Tower in my descriptions.)

Next door is the **National Portrait Gallery**. Laurie said that she likes that place, but I haven't been.

Leicester Square: Funky Square where you can get cheap tickets to theater shows. The "Cheap TKTs" booth is the best. The square is pronounced "Lester" I think.

Covent Garden: A short walk from Leicester Square. We hit a small street on the way there with just bookstores on it that was cool. There's no garden in Covent Garden, but instead a fabulous Victorian marketplace. Plus this is where Eliza Dolittle meets Henry Higgins in *My Fair Lady*. Only that was a sound stage.

Soho: Sort of above and between Trafalgar and Covent Garden. Cool restaurants. We wandered through but didn't stay.

London Transit Museum: More for little kids. You can see a photo of me in front of the Omnibus there. The museum was disappointing to me.

British Museum: Mummies, Rosetta Stone, Elgin Marbles, remains of bog men, Roman Britain, and many things I never really got to see. I've never satisfactorily toured this FREE gallery. It is HUGE! They have nice bathrooms inside the lower level of the grand court though.

British Library: Near King's Cross Station. This is a new building, and the collection was formerly held in the British Museum. Wonderful illuminated manuscripts. Original Beatles scores, and Beethoven's tuning fork. Illuminated manuscripts? Gutenberg bibles? They got it there. RS has a nice walkthrough, which is slightly outdated. Well worth seeing, if you like books and documents.

City of London Museum: Located near an old gate in the London Wall. Maybe Oldgate? I can't remember. This was an incredible museum that I really liked. But I like history, and London, so it fascinated me. My friend Janet liked it but not as much. Chris roller-skated through he was done so fast. But then he did that at the British museum and National Gallery too. Unless you really like local (London) history, skip this gem.

St. Paul's Cathedral: Designed by Sir Christopher Wren in the wake of the great fire in the 1600s. We toured this in 2007 with the audio guide. You can climb to the top of the dome, which affords a great view of central London. Closes early.

Greenwich: SE of central London. Here you can stand on the Prime Meridian! And see an old observatory. Plus a nice park. Also here is the Queens House, designed by Inigo Jones. And the Maritime Museum, if you like ships, this is huge. Getting there you can walk UNDER the Thames in a tunnel, which is cool. Be sure to take the lift up. While this is all nice, since you only have a few days, I'd skip this.

Harrod's: near where you're staying. Even if you don't buy anything, this is excellent to walk through. Be sure to see the kitchen room with its famous murals on the ceiling. Or

are they frescos? Maybe they are mosaic. Anyway, very pretty. Also there is a memorial to Princess Di and Dodi Al Fayid, who's pop owns the store. This place is VERY expensive to shop in. They have nice bathrooms though. I know you'll like nice places to shop, so definitely check it out! The prices are high, but the building is incredibly decorated inside, with themed rooms and everything.

A few blocks to the north of you is Hyde Park. Very Big Park. Not landscaped as much as other parks. But adjoining that is Kensington Garden.

Kensington Garden: The gardens are near the south and west parts of the park and are quite nice. The Kensington Palace is on the west side of the park. They have a nice sunken garden there too. I have photos of this. If you choose to sit in a lawn chair, near the Round Pond, they charge you 2 pounds. The Prince Albert Memorial is near here too. Recently restored.

Hyde Park: As far as I can tell, the two are pretty much the same thing. The Peter Pan statue is on the left side of the Serpentine. That has some nice landscaping, and a palace, where Princess Di lived. The Long Water and Serpentine (a lake thing where Olympic swimming was held) separate the two. South and West of the park is Knightsbridge and Kensington. Fancy shopping there, if I recall. Harrods is a few blocks south of the park.

Marble Arch: A tube stop, and also a great marble arch, on the NE corner of the park. I think it was originally in front of Buckingham palace, but was relocated here.

Baker Street: Sherlock Holmes's hangout, if he was real. Which he wasn't. But there is enough Holmes stuff here to make you think he was real.

Regent's Park: A few blocks NE of there is Regent's Park. English parks are something to behold and enjoy! This one is no exception. It is beautifully landscaped. In the center is the Queen's Garden that rose-lovers would love - they have hundreds of different kinds of roses! Worth an afternoon stroll if you don't want to see museums, etc. The zoo is at the north end of the park, but I haven't seen it. Also they do outdoor plays in the park, which I hear are excellent.

Madam Tussauds: The original wax museum. This is the king/queen of wax museums. It can be quite crowded at times with an entry line. I have seen it twice and it is a lot of fun. My mom has her photo next to Mel Gibson (in an ugly blue suit). When I went back they had the same statue, but had updated his clothes! They also have exhibits on how the figures are made. I have never seen the planetarium there since we have one here in Philly. It is pricy, but very well done. Includes death masks of Marie Antoinette, so that is what she really looked like! A fun, touristy thing to do. The end part is a ride celebrating Britain, which is kinda cheesy.

All Flutes Plus: I happened on this shop near the Baker Street station. Really great flute store! The address I have is 5 Dorset St. W1H 3FE. I think the website has it different. <http://www.allflutesplus.co.uk/>

I think they moved to 60-61 Warren St. which not near Baker Street that I can see. Closer to the British Museum. Definitely worth seeing if you like flutes and are in the area. It is still near Regent's Park, but over further than I remember.

Royal Albert Hall: Famous music hall built with Victoria's husband's money or something. It is round. The Beatles played here. Also was part of wonderful films such as Hitchcock's "The Man Who Knew Too Much" and "Spice World." OK, I didn't see the Spice Girls movie, but I saw the commercial where at the end they go to the Albert Hall. That was enough.

The Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A): We spent a day there. Collection of interesting decorating items. They always show a life size toy tiger eating a British soldier. It growls too when you wind it. Surprisingly interesting museum.

Science Museum: I'm guessing this is like the science museum in NYC, Philly, or DC. I haven't been in, although I've driven past. Don't eat the hot dogs they sell in the garden outside.

That's my double-spiral loop of London.

Day Trips from London via the Rails

Hampton Court Palace: Really cool place with hedge maze and Tudor kitchens and great hall. The part where Henry VIII lived was knocked down and redone by Inigo Jones to look like Versailles. The audio tour is great! Only ½ hour from London. I spent the whole day here and wasn't disappointed.

Windsor Castle: Very cool castle nearby. The queen hangs out here. Their family name is from this castle. (They conveniently dropped the German name of Sax-Coberg during WWI when the Germans were the bad guys. But don't let that fool you. The royalty is of German decent, starting with George I.) The restoration of the great hall is quite cool, and there was a great exhibit on the fire there in 1997. We skipped the audio tour, but should have gotten it. The town was a cool place to stroll and shop. Legoland is nearby, but we didn't see that.

Leeds Castle: Not actually in Leeds, but close to London. Hear it is good.

Cambridge: I hear it is an excellent day trip. RS probably says that too. I've never been, though.

Canterbury: HUGE cathedral that is the center of Church of England. I needed to spend more time here than my tour would allow.

Stratford-Upon-Avon: Shakespeare's birth and death spots. Touristy but fun if you like Shakespeare.

Bath: Has a very good exhibit with excellent Roman ruins. The town is a gem to walk through and is architecturally interesting. We spent a day there last trip.

Advice

So out of that what do I suggest seeing? Depends on your interests.

1. Check out the London Walks website. Print out the form and make note of any tours that are offered on the two days you have free, or possibly a free evening.
2. See a museum in the morning, get lunch, walk around to another museum. Aim for the National Gallery (art) and the British Museum (antiquities) or V&A. Check out the library if you're near the British Museum or check out St. Martin-in-the-fields if you are at the National Gallery.
3. Take a day trip to Hampton Court or Windsor Castle via train.
4. Return to London after the day trip and do an evening walking tour, like Jack the Ripper or a ghost tour.
5. If you don't take a day trip, hit the tower of London in the morning, Westminster Abbey in the afternoon. Oh, the Globe is pretty close to the Tower, only on the other side of the river. Then shop at Harrods after dinner. They are open later I believe, so do that in the evening after museums and galleries have closed.
6. Take a river cruise. We're doing that this time. James Bond did it.

Lots of people like to see Broadway shows in London. But if you really want British stuff, I recommend skipping the play and seeing it in NY and instead doing something you can only see in England. Same goes for the wax museum as they have those here. Although is the best I've seen!

England

That was all stuff for London-based trips. If you are going elsewhere I'll tell you what I've seen and done.

Salisbury

Salisbury cathedral is very famous since it has the tallest spire in England. You can take a spire tour (Andy Sinclair did) but I didn't have time. The whole town around it is all medieval. I would go back there. Old Sarum is a pre-medieval settlement that people evacuated to form Salisbury. Could be something to see there too.

Stonehenge is nearby. Also very cool if you like megalithic stuff. I liked the tour there. Avebury is like a mini-stonehenge but without the hype. I've not been there, but it may be worth checking out if you're in the area.

Glastonbury

Home to the claimed resting place of King Arthur (later proved to be a medieval hoax, but they won't admit to it there.) The ruins of a great abbey are here. It was destroyed by Henry VIII when he changed the religion and disbanded the monasteries. Worth touring and seeing! Now also a big hippy music festival because lay lines converge there or

something. You can climb Glastonbury Tor (hill) but I didn't have time to do that. The tor is thought to be legendary Avalon from the Arthur legends since the lowlands used to regularly flood. Worth walking through town and especially the abbey grounds. You can buy sacred well water here too.

Wells

Has a cathedral with a famous staircase. I haven't been there yet.

Bristol

Much nicer than Bristol, PA. Once a famous seaport. Still a big town. I just stayed overnight, so not sure what else there is to do.

Cheddar

Yeah, the place where they invented cheddar cheese. There is a gorge there. And presumably cheese. The gorge was pretty when we drove through it in 1997.

Portsmouth

Maritime stuff. You can see Nelson's flagship and learn what it was like to be in the British Navy in 1806.

St. Ives

In Cornwall. Neat seaside town. Artsy. Sort of like New Hope with a seaside theme. An old coworker told me they have documented gay seagulls there. Not sure why they would research that...

Cornwall is home to the Pasty: a pastry filled with meat, potatoes and onions. Miners would use them for lunch back in the day. You can get them in London to at various stalls, such as in Charing Cross station. Worth a taste. You can get a greater variety in Cornwall.

Brighton

Victorian seaside resort. The beach is made of rocks (smoothed, but still rocks). The water is cold. Don't expect to swim in the sea. The prince regent has his massive eastern-themed "pavilion" there which I've seen on TV. If you want to relax by the sea in a place like Cape May, this may be a good spot.