

# LONDON

## TRAVEL GUIDE

### The Complete 2026 Visitor's Handbook

Getting There • Getting Around • Local Navigation

Must-See Attractions • Things To Do • Day Trips

What To Wear • Safety Tips • Guide for Every Age

## Big Ben | The Thames | The Tube

Culture | History | Food | Fashion | Entertainment

Your Ultimate Guide to the World's Greatest City

2026 Edition | Updated & Expanded

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## Chapter 1

# Getting to London

London is one of the world's most connected cities, with links to virtually every corner of the globe. Whether you're crossing the Atlantic, the Channel, or travelling within Europe, there's a route that suits your budget and schedule.

## By Air

London is served by six airports, making it one of the most accessible cities on earth. Heathrow (LHR) is the largest and most central, with direct Tube links to the city. Gatwick (LGW) is popular for budget carriers and offers fast train connections. Stansted (STN) and Luton (LTN) serve low-cost airlines with coach and rail links. London City Airport (LCY) is ideal for business travellers — just minutes from Canary Wharf — while Southend (SEN) is a smaller option to the east.

★ **LOCAL TIP:** Always compare the total journey time including transit to central London. Heathrow's Tube access often makes it faster end-to-end than a cheaper flight into Stansted.

Airport	Code	To Central London	Approx. Time
Heathrow	LHR	Tube (Piccadilly Line) / Elizabeth Line	35–60 min
Gatwick	LGW	Gatwick Express / Thameslink	30–45 min
Stansted	STN	Stansted Express	45–55 min
Luton	LTN	Train + Shuttle	45–70 min
London City	LCY	Elizabeth Line / DLR	20–30 min

## By Rail — The Eurostar

Travelling from Paris, Brussels, or Amsterdam? The Eurostar train is a spectacular way to arrive in London, whisking you through the Channel Tunnel in style. The journey from Paris takes around 2 hours 15 minutes, arriving directly at St Pancras International — one of London's most beautiful Victorian railway stations. Book in advance for the best fares, and note that UK border checks happen before boarding.

★ **LOCAL TIP:** St Pancras has excellent food options — treat yourself to a Champagne bar toast on arrival. It's a uniquely London experience before you've even left the station.

## By Sea

Several ferry routes connect England to France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Ireland. From Dover, the crossing to Calais takes just 90 minutes. Harwich connects to Hook of Holland and Esbjerg, and Hull serves Rotterdam and Zeebrugge. While slower than flying, ferry crossings can be a relaxed and cost-effective option, especially if you're bringing a vehicle.

## Entry Requirements

Since Brexit, the UK operates its own immigration system. Most nationalities require a valid passport (not just a national ID card). US, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand, and EU citizens can visit visa-free for up to 6 months. Many nationalities need an Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) from 2025 onwards — check the UK government website before you travel. Always ensure your passport has at least 6 months validity.

■ **WATCH OUT:** Non-EU/EEA travellers: The UK introduced the ETA (Electronic Travel Authorisation) scheme. Check [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) to see if you need one before booking flights.

## Chapter 2

# Navigating London

London's public transport network is vast, frequent, and — once you understand it — remarkably easy to use. The key is getting an Oyster card or contactless bank card and forgetting about paper tickets entirely.

## The Underground — The Tube

The London Underground (affectionately called 'the Tube') is the backbone of city travel. With 11 lines and 272 stations covering most of central and suburban London, it runs from around 5am to midnight (with Night Tube services on Fridays and Saturdays on select lines). Download the TfL Go app for real-time updates, or use Citymapper for journey planning.

★ **LOCAL TIP:** Always tap in AND out with your Oyster or contactless card, or you'll be charged the maximum fare. Contactless bank cards work just like Oyster and cap your daily spending automatically.

### Key Tube Lines to Know

- Jubilee Line — Fast connections: Westminster, London Bridge, Canary Wharf
- Central Line — Oxford Street, Notting Hill Gate, St Paul's Cathedral
- Piccadilly Line — Heathrow Airport direct to central London
- Elizabeth Line — Fast east-west route: Paddington to Liverpool Street
- Northern Line — Camden Town, Leicester Square, London Bridge
- District Line — Victoria, Sloane Square, Kensington

## Buses & Overground

London's iconic red double-decker buses are not just for tourists — they're a practical, cheap way to see the city while getting around. Cash is not accepted; tap your card or Oyster. Routes 11, 23, and RV1 offer scenic routes past major landmarks. The London Overground (orange lines) fills in the gaps the Tube misses, especially south London.

★ **LOCAL TIP:** Sit on the top deck of a double-decker near the front for the best views — it's one of London's great free pleasures. Route 15 passes the Tower of London and St Paul's Cathedral.

## Black Cabs & Rideshares

London's black cabs are iconic and the drivers must pass 'The Knowledge' — memorising thousands of streets. They're safe, metered, and can be hailed on the street. More expensive than the Tube, but perfect for late nights or heavy luggage. Uber, Bolt, and Free Now also operate widely. Avoid unlicensed minicabs (touts) who approach you — always book through an app or a reputable firm.

■ **WATCH OUT:** Never accept a ride from someone who approaches you at airports or train stations offering 'cheap' fares. Always use licensed black cabs or booked apps.

## Walking & Cycling

Central London is surprisingly walkable. Many top attractions are closer than they appear on the Tube map — for example, Covent Garden to Leicester Square is barely a 5-minute walk. Santander Cycles ('Boris Bikes') are available across the city from docking stations; the first 30 minutes are free with a day pass. Dedicated cycling lanes have expanded dramatically in recent years.

## Chapter 3

# Must-See Attractions

London rewards the curious. Beyond the bucket-list icons lie hidden courtyards, secret gardens, and centuries of layered history. Here's where to begin.

## Historic Landmarks

### Tower of London

A 1,000-year-old fortress housing the Crown Jewels. Book tickets in advance and allow at least 2–3 hours. The Yeoman Warder (Beefeater) tours are exceptional.

### Tower Bridge

One of the world's most recognisable bridges. Walk across the glass-floored walkway for vertiginous views — the Tower Bridge Exhibition ticket includes the engine rooms.

### Westminster & Big Ben

The Palace of Westminster and Elizabeth Tower (Big Ben) are best photographed from Westminster Bridge at dawn. Public tours of Parliament available when in recess.

### Buckingham Palace

The Changing of the Guard ceremony is free and takes place most days at 11am. The State Rooms open to visitors in late summer each year.

### St Paul's Cathedral

Wren's masterpiece. Climb to the Whispering Gallery and the Golden Gallery for panoramic views. Free entry to worship; admission for full access.

## Museums & Galleries — Mostly Free!

One of London's greatest gifts to visitors: the majority of its world-class museums are completely free to enter.

Museum	Highlights	Area
British Museum	Rosetta Stone, Elgin Marbles, Egyptian Mummies	Bloomsbury
Natural History Museum	Dinosaur skeletons, Blue Whale, Darwin Centre	South Kensington
Victoria & Albert Museum	Fashion, jewellery, furniture, textiles from world cultures	South Kensington
Tate Modern	Modern & contemporary art; Turbine Hall installations	Bankside
National Gallery	Van Gogh, da Vinci, Turner, Monet — all free	Trafalgar Square
Science Museum	Space, IMAX, computing history — excellent for kids	South Kensington
Museum of London	Relocated to West Smithfield — London's 2,000-year history	City of London

## Parks & Green Spaces

London has more green space per person than almost any major city. The Royal Parks are magnificent and free to enter. Hyde Park offers Speakers' Corner and the Serpentine Gallery. Regent's Park hosts the open-air theatre and boating lake. Greenwich Park has the Prime Meridian and stunning views over Canary Wharf. In summer, Hampstead Heath's ponds offer wild swimming — a true London tradition.

## Chapter 4

# Things to Do

## Theatre & Entertainment

London's West End rivals Broadway as the world's premier theatre destination. From long-running musicals like *The Phantom of the Opera* and *Les Misérables* to cutting-edge drama at the National Theatre and the Royal Court, there's something for every taste. The TKTS booth on Leicester Square sells same-day and advance tickets at up to 50% off. Shakespeare's Globe offers standing 'groundling' tickets for just £5.

★ **LOCAL TIP:** Book National Theatre and Barbican tickets well in advance for the best shows. The NT offers 'Entry Pass' deals for under-26s — just £7.50 per ticket.

## Markets & Shopping

- Borough Market (London Bridge) — Artisan food, street eats, and atmosphere. Best on Thursday–Saturday.
- Portobello Road (Notting Hill) — Antiques, vintage clothing, and eclectic stalls. Saturdays are busiest.
- Columbia Road Flower Market — Sunday mornings only; impossibly photogenic and fragrant.
- Old Spitalfields Market — Vintage, street food, and independent fashion. Every day, best at weekends.
- Camden Market — Alternative fashion, street food from around the world, live music. Young and buzzy.
- Leadenhall Market — Stunning Victorian architecture; featured in Harry Potter films.

## Food & Drink

Modern London is a food lover's paradise. The days of bland British cuisine are long gone. Explore Dishoom for legendary Indian food (arrive early — queues are long but worth it). Try Maltby Street Market for artisan treats. Head to Soho for dim sum, or Brixton Market for Caribbean food. For a classic pub lunch, the Churchill Arms in Kensington or the Prospect of Whitby in Wapping offer genuine atmosphere.

★ **LOCAL TIP:** Pret a Manger, Greggs, and Eat are brilliant for budget breakfasts and lunches. A Greggs sausage roll is practically a London rite of passage.

## Day Trips from London

**Windsor** — 45 min from Paddington — Windsor Castle, Long Walk, charming town centre.

**Bath** — 75 min from Paddington — Roman baths, Georgian architecture, thermal spa.

**Oxford** — 60 min from Paddington — University colleges, Bodleian Library, Ashmolean Museum.

**Cambridge** — 50 min from King's Cross — Punting on the Cam, King's College Chapel.

**Brighton** — 55 min from Victoria — Seaside fun, the Royal Pavilion, The Lanes.

**Stonehenge** — 90 min by coach from London Victoria — Ancient mystery on Salisbury Plain.

## Chapter 5

# Things to Avoid

London is generally very safe and visitor-friendly, but like any major city it has its pitfalls. Being informed is the best protection.

## Tourist Traps

- Overpriced cafés and restaurants around major tourist sites — walk two streets away for far better value.
- The 'free' CD or bracelet trick near Oxford Street — people hand you something, then demand payment.
- Official-looking 'City Sightseeing' tours sold on the street — buy directly from operators or online.
- Madame Tussauds without a booking — queues can be 2+ hours. Book online for significant savings.
- Eating at Leicester Square restaurants — almost universally overpriced and underwhelming.
- Currency exchange kiosks in tourist areas — use a fee-free card (Wise, Revolut, Starling) instead.
- Buying an Oyster card souvenir — the £7 deposit is refundable, but many visitors forget to claim it.

## Common Scams

■ **WATCH OUT:** Phone snatching from hands is increasingly common — keep your phone low and be aware when using it on the street or near tube station exits.

- Fake 'charity' collectors on busy shopping streets — registered charities don't cold-collect this way.
- Three-card monte and shell games near tourist areas — they always win.
- Pickpockets on crowded Tube lines — keep bags in front, zip pockets, and be aware in tourist crowds.
- Fake police officers asking to 'inspect' your wallet — real officers never do this.

## Neighbourhoods & Practical Cautions

London is very safe by global standards. That said, as with any city, it pays to be aware. Areas like Peckham, Brixton, and Hackney have been gentrified significantly and are thriving cultural hubs, but can feel unfamiliar to visitors at night. The West End and tourist zones are well-policed. Avoid poorly lit side streets late at night, and trust your instincts. If lost, ask a shop worker or step into a pub — Londoners are more helpful than their reputation suggests.

## Chapter 6

# How to Dress in London

Londoners have a reputation for effortless, eclectic style. The city's fashion scene is one of the world's most diverse — you'll see everything from pinstripe city suits to avant-garde streetwear. There's no single 'right' way to dress, but a few principles will help you blend in and stay comfortable.

## The Golden Rule: Layers

London's weather is famously unpredictable. Even in summer, a warm morning can turn grey and rainy by afternoon. The locals know this — which is why layering is non-negotiable. A lightweight waterproof jacket (packable is best) is the single most useful item you can bring, year-round. Umbrellas are widely available, but a hood is often more practical in London's drizzle.

★ **LOCAL TIP:** Don't pack a giant golf umbrella — it marks you instantly as a tourist and is antisocial on crowded pavements. A compact folding umbrella fits any bag.

## Seasonal Guide

Season	Typical Weather	What to Wear
Spring (Mar–May)	Cool to mild, 8–16°C Showers common	Light layers, waterproof jacket, light scarf, comfortable shoes
Summer (Jun–Aug)	Warm to hot, 18–28°C Sunny but changeable	T-shirts, light dresses, shorts + compact rain layer
Autumn (Sep–Nov)	Cool and increasingly wet, 8–16°C	Jeans, knitwear, waterproof, light boots
Winter (Dec–Feb)	Cold, 2–8°C Rarely snows	Warm coat, scarf, gloves, waterproof shoes

## Blending In — Style Tips

- Smart casual is the London default — neither overly formal nor scruffy.
- Trainers (sneakers) are completely acceptable everywhere, including good restaurants.
- Avoid loud tourist logos or 'I Love London' merchandise — it signals inexperience.
- Dark colours (navy, grey, black) are the city's unofficial palette — always appropriate.
- A good pair of comfortable, waterproof walking shoes is essential — cobblestones are everywhere.
- Londoners rarely wear shorts even in warm weather — light trousers are more typical.
- Smart jacket or blazer for evenings — most restaurants and bars have no formal dress code but appreciate effort.

## Dress Codes for Specific Venues

Most London restaurants are relaxed about dress. However, smart bars in Mayfair and the City, members' clubs, and certain restaurants do expect 'smart casual' or better. If you're visiting the theatre, most people dress up slightly — a step above everyday casual. Royal events and garden parties have formal dress codes (morning dress or smart formal).

## Chapter 7

# London by Age Group

London brilliantly serves every age and travel style. Whether you're herding toddlers or seeking a peaceful cultural escape, the city has something extraordinary in store.

## Families with Young Children

### Top Picks for Families

- Natural History Museum — free entry, dinosaurs, and a giant blue whale. Kids are mesmerised.
- Science Museum — interactive exhibits, IMAX cinema, and the excellent Launch Pad gallery.
- London Zoo (Regent's Park) — a full day out with over 750 species.
- Diana Memorial Playground (Hyde Park) — a pirate ship and adventure playground.
- Warner Bros. Studio Tour — The Making of Harry Potter (Watford, 20 min from Euston).
- Thames River Cruise — affordable, scenic, and children love boats.
- Changing of the Guard at Buckingham Palace — free and spectacular.

★ **LOCAL TIP:** Most museums have free buggy/pushchair storage and baby-changing facilities. The Tube has limited step-free access — use the TfL step-free map and plan ahead.

## Teenagers & Young Adults (13–25)

### Top Picks for Teens & Young Adults

- Camden Market — music, fashion, food, and an irresistible energy.
- Shoreditch & Brick Lane — street art, vintage shops, and the city's coolest street food.
- Sky Garden (free with booking) — stunning 360-degree views from the top of the Walkie Talkie building.
- Arcade at Funland Trocadero — retro gaming in the heart of the West End.
- Borough Market food crawl — try everything from Korean BBQ to Ethiopian injera.
- Street art walking tour of East London — Banksy, Stik, and countless others.
- Electric Ballroom (Camden) or Fabric (Farringdon) — legendary nightlife venues.

## Adults (26–60)

### Top Picks for Adults

- West End theatre — book in advance for the best shows; TKTS booth for same-day deals.
- Tate Modern & Tate Britain — world-class modern and British art, both free.
- Columbia Road Flower Market (Sunday mornings) — quintessentially London.
- Food tour of Borough Market or Maltby Street Market.
- A proper afternoon tea — Fortnum & Mason, Claridge's, or The Ritz (book weeks ahead).
- National Portrait Gallery (recently reopened, newly restored) — magnificent collection.
- A walk along the Southbank — Tate Modern, Globe Theatre, food stalls, river views.
- Pub crawl through historic City of London pubs: The Lamb, The Eagle, The Black Friar.

## Senior Travellers (60+)

### Top Picks for Seniors

- Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew — 326 acres of stunning gardens; UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- Wallace Collection — an extraordinary private art collection in a beautiful Mayfair mansion (free).
- Chelsea Physic Garden — London's oldest botanical garden, peaceful and fascinating.
- Hampton Court Palace — Henry VIII's stunning Tudor palace with famous maze.
- A cruise on the Thames — relax while the city's history drifts past.
- Victoria & Albert Museum — world's greatest decorative arts collection, easy to pace yourself.
- National Theatre matinée performances — excellent sightlines and accessible facilities.
- Afternoon tea at Fortnum & Mason — a timeless London experience.

★ **LOCAL TIP:** Many London attractions offer concession pricing for over-60s with valid ID. The Freedom Pass (for London residents over 60) is not available to visitors, but railcards offer significant discounts on train travel.

## Chapter 8

# Practical Tips & Essentials

## Money & Payments

London is largely cashless. Contactless payment is accepted almost everywhere — from buses and the Tube to market stalls and pubs. Bring a fee-free travel card (Wise, Revolut, or Starling are popular) to avoid currency conversion fees. ATMs are abundant; use those attached to banks rather than standalone machines, which often charge high fees. The pound sterling (GBP, £) is the only currency accepted.

## Tipping

- Restaurants: 10–12.5% is standard (check if service charge already added — it often is).
- Taxis: Round up or add 10% — never expected but always appreciated.
- Pubs: Tipping is not standard at the bar; you can offer 'one for yourself' to the barman.
- Hotels: £1–2 per bag for porters; not obligatory but kind.
- Tour guides: £5–10 depending on the tour; tip individually if you found them excellent.

## Safety

London is consistently ranked among the safest major cities in the world. The Metropolitan Police are visible in tourist areas. Emergency services: dial 999 for police, fire, or ambulance. For non-emergencies, call 101 for the police. NHS walk-in centres are free for urgent (non-emergency) medical care. EU and many other nationals have reciprocal health agreements; US visitors should have travel insurance.

## British Etiquette

- Queue — always, and without complaint. Jumping a queue is a serious social offence.
- Stand on the right on escalators; walk on the left. This is non-negotiable on the Tube.
- Say 'sorry' when bumping into someone — even if it wasn't your fault. It's just how it works.
- Talking loudly on public transport is frowned upon — keep conversations at low volume.
- Don't sit next to someone if there are empty seats further apart — give space where possible.
- Hold the door open for the person behind you — always acknowledge with a nod or 'cheers'.
- 'Cheers' means thanks. You'll hear it constantly.
- In a pub, you order at the bar — no table service in traditional pubs.

## Useful Apps

App	Use
Citymapper	Best journey planner for London — Tube, bus, walking, cycling
TfL Go	Official TfL app for real-time status updates
Google Maps	Walking directions and local search

Fever / Eventbrite	Events, experiences, and last-minute tickets
OpenTable / Resy	Restaurant booking
Airbnb / Booking.com	Accommodation
Wise / Revolut	Fee-free currency conversion
NHS App	Healthcare guidance and GP registration

## Quick Emergency Reference

- Emergency (police/fire/ambulance): 999
- Non-emergency police: 101
- NHS non-emergency medical advice: 111
- US Embassy London: +44 20 7499 9000
- Transport for London (TfL) helpline: 0343 222 1234
- Lost property (Tube): TfL Lost Property Office, 200 Baker Street

# Safe Travels & Welcome to London

London is a city that rewards the curious, the adventurous, and the unhurried. It can be overwhelming, expensive, and infuriating — and absolutely, irreplaceably magnificent.

There is no other city on earth quite like it.

From the echoing grandeur of Westminster Abbey to the smell of a Saturday morning at Borough Market; from the rumble of the Tube beneath your feet to a pint of bitter in a 300-year-old pub —

London is a city that lives in your memory long after you've left.

**Enjoy every moment.**