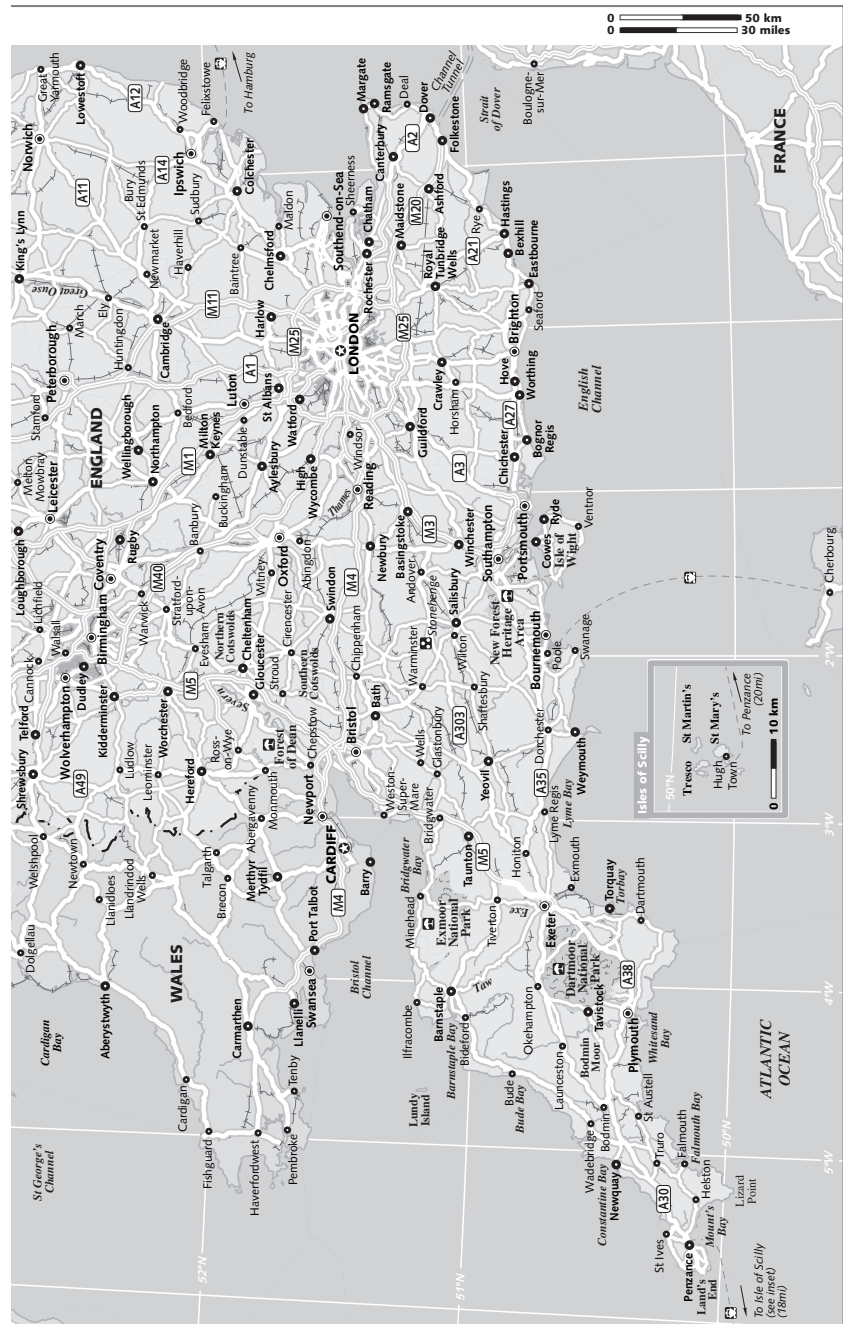
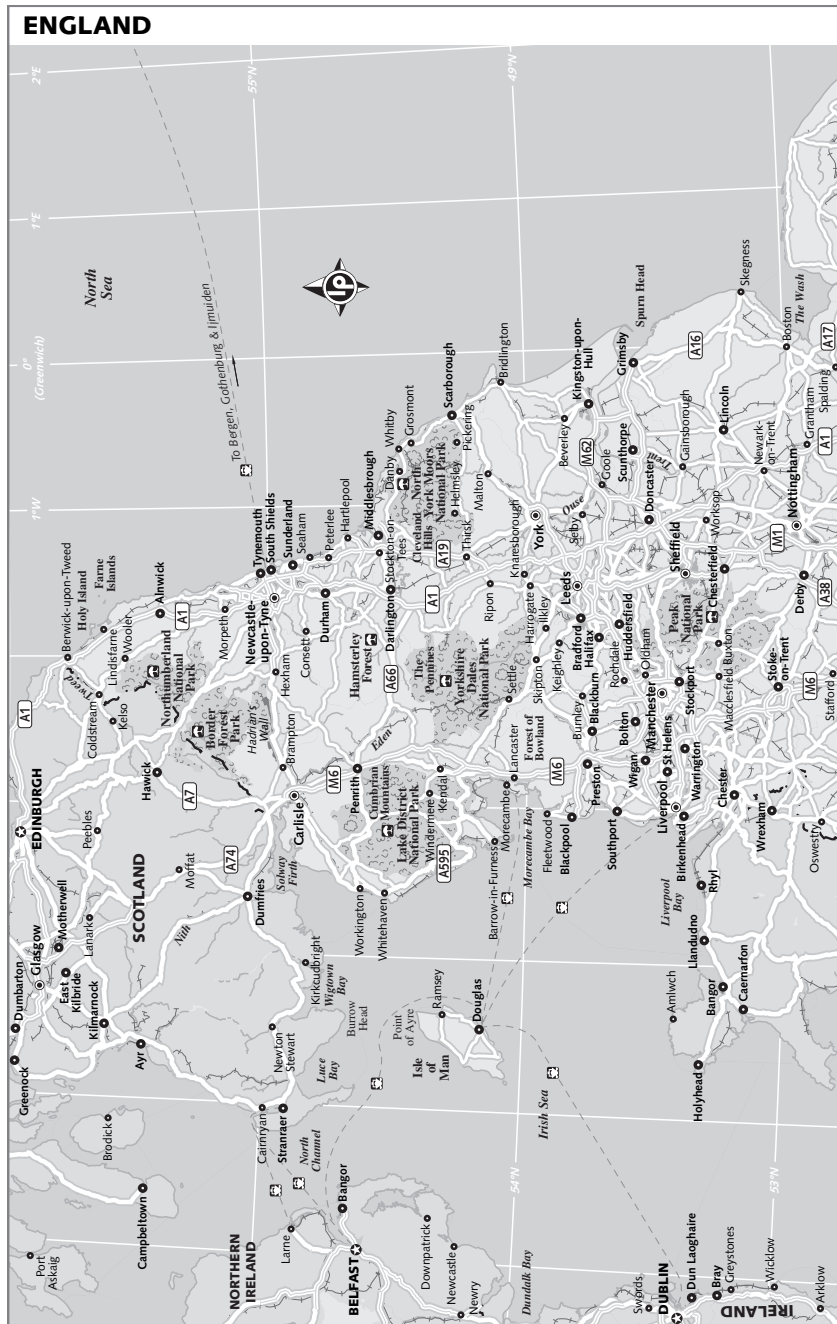


England





London



London has a buzz unlike any other European city. It's fashion forward, ethnically diverse and artistically pioneering, while its unique geographical position between Continental Europe and the USA gives it the best of both cultural worlds. Hollywood stars are queuing up to tread the West End boards yet cheap flights link the capital easily to European cities and beer still runs on tap. Londoners are a proud lot, and rightly so.

With gastropubs, dim-sum joints and gourmet-burger places continuing to propagate, a multitude of cuisines on your plate and a raft of celebrity chefs dishing up, the restaurant scene is five-star. For night-owls there's excellent comedy, theatre, superclubs, DJ bars, and a growing number of 'activity venues' where you can bowl, skate or sing while you drink. Shopaholics can get their fix here with internationally respected home-grown designers, affordable catwalk copies, tantalising food halls and Aladdin's cave markets. The museums are first-rate, with vast, fascinating galleries you could lose yourself in and world-class exhibitions. Glittering modern architecture continues to enhance the skyline with the Swiss Re building and City Hall.

Yes, the city is eye-bogglingly huge and teeming with people but its vibrant multiculturalism is a vital part of London's identity. With so many different communities and neighbourhoods, as comic Jimmy Carr says, 'even a local can feel like a tourist'.

Having won the 2012 Olympics bid and largely survived acts of terrorism, London is sailing high on a wave of determination, optimism and glee. Lucky you, coming along for the ride.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Enjoying a bird's-eye view from a glass pod on the **London Eye** (p145)
- Spotting famous faces at the **National Portrait Gallery** (p135)
- Soaking up the atmosphere at **Columbia Road Flower Market** (p177) on a Sunday
- Travelling back in time at the **Tower of London** (p142)
- Watching the sun rise over the city from **Parliament Hill** (p149)
- Absorbing the hushed magic of the **Inns of Court** (p140)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 020

■ POPULATION: 7.43 MILLION

■ AREA: 607 SQ MILES

HISTORY

Celts first established themselves around a ford across the River Thames. However, it was the Romans who developed the 'square mile' now known as the City of London (which lies within today's Greater London city – note the small 'c') with a crossing, near today's London Bridge, that served as the hub of their road system. By the end of the 3rd century AD 'Londinium' was almost as multicultural as it is today with 30,000 people of various ethnic groups (albeit all Roman citizens, of course) and temples dedicated to a large number of cults. Parts of London like Aldgate and Ludgate get their names from the gates of the original city walls built by the Romans. Internal strife and relentless barbarian attacks took their toll on the Romans, who abandoned Britain in the 5th century, reducing the conurbation to a sparsely populated backwater.

The Saxons then moved in to the area, establishing farmsteads and villages, and their 'Lundenwic' prospered, becoming a large, well-organised town divided into 20 different wards. As the city grew in importance, it caught the eye of Danish Vikings who launched many invasions and razed the city in the 9th century. The Saxons held on until, finally beaten down in 1016, they were forced to accept the Danish leader Knut (Canute) as King of England, after which London replaced Winchester as the capital. In 1042 the throne reverted to the Saxon Edward the Confessor, whose main contribution to the city was the building of Westminster Abbey.

A dispute over his successor led to what's known as the Norman Conquest (Normans broadly being Vikings with shorter beards). When William the Conqueror won the watershed Battle of Hastings in 1066, he and his forces marched into London where he was crowned king. He built the White Tower (the core of the Tower of London), negotiated taxes with the merchants, and affirmed the city's independence and right to self-government.

The throne passed through various houses in the millennium or so since (the House of Windsor has warmed its cushion since 1910), but royal power has been concentrated in London since the 12th century.

From the 12th century to the late 15th century, London politics was largely taken up by a three-way power struggle between the monarchy, the church and city guilds.

The greatest threat to the burgeoning city was that of disease caused by unsanitary living conditions and impure drinking water. In 1348 rats on ships from Europe brought the bubonic plague, which wiped out a third of London's population of 100,000 over the following year.

Violence became commonplace in the hard times that followed. In 1381, miscalculating or just disregarding the mood of the nation, the king tried to impose a poll tax on everyone in the realm. Tens of thousands of peasants marched on London. Several ministers were murdered and many buildings razed before the so-called Peasants' Revolt ran its course. The ringleaders were executed, but there was no more mention of a poll tax (until Margaret Thatcher, not heeding the lessons of history, tried to introduce it in the 1980s).

Despite these setbacks, London was consolidated as the seat of law and government in the kingdom during the 14th century. An uneasy political compromise was reached between the factions, and the city expanded rapidly under the House of Tudor. The first recorded map of London was published in 1558, and John Stow produced the first comprehensive history of the capital in 1598.

The 'Great Plague' struck in 1665 and 100,000 Londoners perished by the time the winter cold arrested the epidemic. Just as the population considered a sigh of relief, another disaster struck.

The mother of all blazes, the Great Fire of 1666, virtually razed the place, destroying most of its medieval, Tudor and Jacobean architecture. One plus was that it created a blank canvas upon which master architect Christopher Wren could build his magnificent churches.

London's growth continued unabated and by 1700 it was Europe's largest city with 600,000 people. An influx of foreign workers brought expansion to the east and south, while those who could afford it headed to the more salubrious environs of the north and west, divisions that still largely shape London today.

Georgian London saw a surge in creativity in architecture, music and art with the likes of Dr Johnson, Handel, Gainsborough and Reynolds enriching the city's culture while Georgian architects fashioned an elegant new metropolis. At the same time the gap between the rich and poor grew ever wider, and lawlessness was rife.

LONDON IN...

Two Days

Start off in **Trafalgar Square** (p134) with a visit to the **National Gallery** (p134) and/or **National Portrait Gallery** (p135). Follow the Mall to the **Institute for Contemporary Arts** (p136), where art goes 20th century and you can refuel. Next stop is a photo or tour of **Buckingham Palace** (p137). Wander through **Green Park** (p137) for tea at the **Ritz** (p156) and a **West End show** (p171). On day two, delve into history at the **Tower of London** (p142) then meander over **Tower Bridge** (p143) for lunch riverside. Finish with **Shakespeare's Globe Theatre** (p144) and the **Tate Modern** (p144) before a dusk turn on the **London Eye** (p145) and dinner at the **Oxo Tower** (p163).

Four Days

Expand your mind at the **Victoria & Albert** (p146), **Science** (p146) and **Natural History Museums** (p146) and contract your wallet at **Harrods** (p176). Take in the **British Museum** (p139), nose around **Covent Garden** (p138) and **Soho** (p138) then hit the high notes at **Lucky Voice** (p173). Taste political might in **Westminster** (p135) before relaxing in **Hyde Park** (p147), boating on the Serpentine and dining in **Notting Hill** (p164). Head east to the **Geffrye Museum** (p149), grab an open-air bite in **Hoxton Square** (p162) then dance off your dinner at the **clubs** (p171) nearby.

One Week

A week gives you a great chance to explore the capital. Spend a Sunday in the East End with brunch at **Canteen** (p162) and a rifle through **Spitalfields Market** (p177), **Sunday (Up)market** (p177) and **Brick Lane Market** (p177). Visit the **Imperial War Museum** (p145) then follow the river to the **South Bank** (p144), **HMS Belfast** (p144), **Borough Market** (p177), **London Dungeon** (p144) and **City Hall** (p143). Spend an evening in **Bermondsey Street** (p169) and a night out in **Hoxton** and **Shoreditch** (p169). Head to Westminster for the **Houses of Parliament** (p136) and **Westminster Abbey** (p135) then explore the **City** (p141) and **St Paul's Cathedral** (p141). Take a boat to **Greenwich** (p150) for maritime history and time travel. Make the journey north for a tour around **Highgate Cemetery** (p149) and the welcome fresh air of **Hampstead Heath** (p149).

In 1837 the 18-year-old Victoria ascended the throne. During her long reign (1837–1901), London became the fulcrum of the expanding British Empire, which covered a quarter of the earth's surface. The Industrial Revolution saw the building of new docks and railways (including the first Underground line in 1863), while the Great Exhibition of 1851 showcased London to the world. The city's population mushroomed from just over two million to 6.6 million during Victoria's reign.

Road transport was revolutionised in the early 20th century when the first motor buses were introduced and replaced the horse-drawn versions that had trotted their trade since 1829.

Although London suffered relatively minor damage during WWI, it was devastated by the Luftwaffe in WWII when huge swaths of the centre and East End were totally flattened and 32,000 people were killed. Ugly housing and low-cost developments were hastily erected in postwar London, and immigrants

from around the world flocked to the city and changed its character forever.

The latest major disaster to beset the capital was the great smog on 6 December 1952, when a lethal combination of fog, smoke and pollution descended on the city and killed some 4000 people.

Prosperity gradually returned, and the creative energy that had been bottled up in the postwar years was suddenly unleashed. London became the capital of cool in fashion and music in the 'swinging '60s'.

The party didn't last long, however, and London returned to the doldrums in the harsh economic climate of the 1970s. Recovery began – for business at least – under the iron fist of Margaret Thatcher, elected Britain's first woman prime minister in 1979. Her monetarist policy and determination to crush socialism sent unemployment skyrocketing and her term was marked by civil unrest.

London got its first true mayor in 2000 when feisty 'Red' Ken Livingstone swept to

victory. In a bid to improve transport, he introduced the controversial (but ultimately successful) congestion charge, and got the buses running on time. His axing of the much-loved Routemaster buses in 2005 has remained a much less popular move.

July 2005 was a roller-coaster month for London. Snatching victory from the jaws of Paris (the favourites), the city won its bid to host the 2012 Olympic Games and celebrated with a frenzy of parties and flag-waving. The following day, joy turned to horror as suicide bombers struck on the tube and a bus, killing 56 people. Only two weeks later a second terrorist attack was thankfully foiled. But Londoners are not easily beaten and they immediately returned to the tube, defiant. As ever, the city now has its face firmly turned towards the future.

ORIENTATION

The city's main geographical feature is the murky Thames, a river that was sufficiently deep (for anchorage) and narrow (for bridging) to attract the Romans here in the first place. It divides the city roughly into north and south.

The 'square mile' of the City of London – the capital's financial district – is counted as one of London's 33 council-run boroughs and is referred to simply as 'the City' (look for the capital 'C'). The M25 ring road encompasses the 1572 sq km that is broadly regarded as Greater London.

London's Underground railway ('the tube') makes this enormous city relatively accessible. Most of the important sights, theatres and restaurants lie within the tube's Circle Line (colour-coded yellow), which encircles central London just north of the river.

Londoners commonly refer to areas by their postcode. The letters correspond to compass directions from the centre of London, approximately St Paul's Cathedral. EC means East Central, W means West and so on. The numbering system after the letters is less helpful.

Maps

The *London A-Z* series is a range of excellent maps and hand-held street atlases. Lonely Planet also publishes a *London City Map*.

INFORMATION Bookshops

Books for Cooks (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7221 1992; 4 Blenheim Cres W11; ☎ Ladbroke Grove) Does what it says on the tin.

Borders (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7292 1600; 203 Oxford St W1; ☎ Oxford Circus) Flagship of the huge chain.

Forbidden Planet (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7836 4179; 179 Shaftesbury Ave WC2; ☎ Leicester Sq or Covent Garden) A trove of comics, sci-fi, horror and fantasy literature.

Foyle's (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7437 5660; 113-119 Charing Cross Rd WC2; ☎ Tottenham Court Rd) Venerable and respected independent store with a broad range, including Silver Moon, the women's literature specialist, and Ray's Jazz café.

Gay's the Word (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7278 7654; 66 Marchmont St WC1; ☎ Russell Sq) Everything from advice on coming out, to gay and lesbian literature.

Grant & Cutler (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7734 2012; 55-57 Great Marlborough St W1; ☎ Oxford Circus) The best foreign-language store in town.

Helter Skelter (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7836 1151; 4 Denmark St WC2; ☎ Oxford Circus) Biographies, fanzines and rock literature.

Stanfords (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7836 1321; 12-14 Long Acre WC2; ☎ Covent Garden) The granddaddy of travel bookstores.

Travel Bookshop (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7229 5260; 13 Blenheim Cres W11; ☎ Ladbroke Grove) The latest guidebooks, travel literature and antiquarian gems.

Waterstone's (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7851 2400; 203-206 Piccadilly W1; ☎ Piccadilly Circus) The best of this book-purveying giant with 5th View bar on the 5th floor (obviously).

Cultural Centres

Alliance Française (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7723 6439; 1 Dorset Sq NW1; ☎ Marylebone) Organises French-language classes, and social and cultural events.

British Council (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7930 8466; 10 Spring Gardens SW1; ☎ Charing Cross) Can advise foreign students on educational opportunities in Britain.

Emergency

Police/Fire/Ambulance (☎ 999)

Rape & Sexual Abuse Support Centre (☎ 8683 3300)

Samaritans (☎ 08457 909 090)

Internet Access

Cyberia (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7209 0984; 39 Whitfield St W1; ☎ Goudge St)

easyInternetcafé (Map pp130-1; www.easy.com; 9-16 Tottenham Court Rd W1; ☎ Tottenham Court Rd) Branches throughout central London.

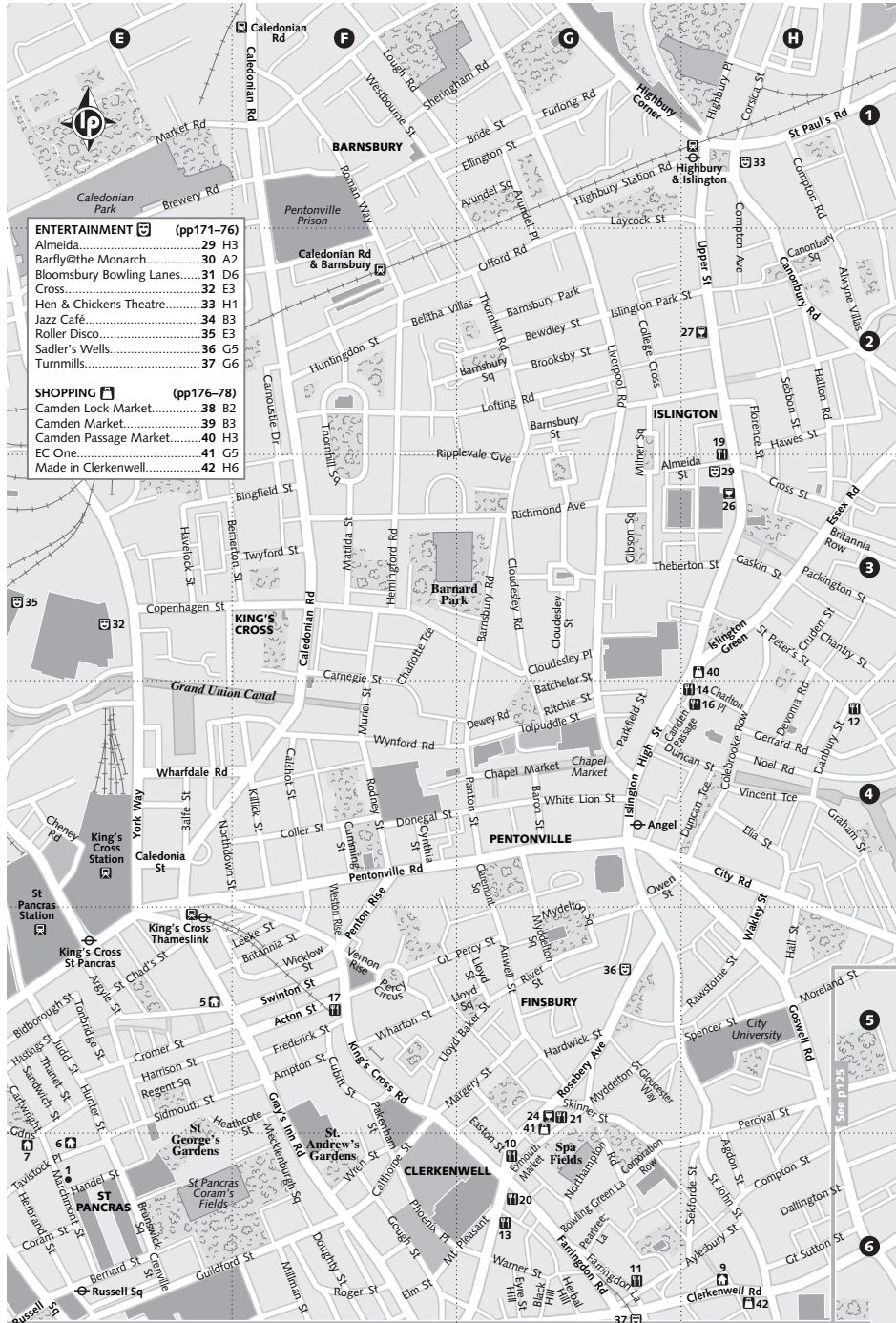
Internet Lounge (Map pp126-7; ☎ 7370 1734; 24A Earl's Court Gardens SW5; ☎ Earl's Court) Also in Hammersmith and Tottenham Court Rd.



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Internet Resources

The Lonely Planet website (www.lonelyplanet.com) links speedily to many of London's websites. You can also try the following: **BBC London** (www.bbc.co.uk/London/whereyoulive) **Evening Standard** (www.thisislondon.co.uk) **Time Out** (www.timeout.com) **View London** (www.viewlondon.co.uk)

Media

The only paper produced solely for Londoners, the *Evening Standard* tabloid, comes out in early and late editions throughout the day. *Metro* is a morning freebie from the same stable, while *Time Out* (£2.50) is the local listing guide *par excellence*, published every Tuesday.

Medical Services

To find a local doctor or hospital, consult the local telephone directory or call ☎ 100 (toll free). There is always one local chemist that opens 24 hours (see local newspapers or notices in chemist windows).

Hospitals with 24-hour accident and emergency units include: **Guy's Hospital** (Map p125; ☎ 7188 7188; St Thomas St SE1; ☎ London Bridge) There's also a dental A&E here. **Royal Free Hospital** (Map pp116-17; ☎ 7794 0500; Pond St NW3; ☎ Belsize Park) **University College Hospital** (Map pp118-19; ☎ 0845 155 5000; Grafton Way WC1; ☎ Euston Sq)

Money

Banks and ATMs are two-a-penny in central London. You can change cash easily at banks, bureaux de change and travel agents. If you use bureaux de change, check commission rates and exchange rates; some can be extortionate.

There are 24-hour bureaux in Heathrow Terminals 1, 3 and 4 (the one in Terminal 2 opens 6am to 11pm), in Gatwick's South and North Terminals, and at Stansted. The airport bureaux are good value, charging about 1.5% of the transaction value, with a £3 minimum. The following are reliable bureaux (both have many outlets):

American Express (Amex; Map pp130-1; ☎ 7484 9610; 30-31 Haymarket SW1; currency exchange ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun; ☎ Piccadilly Circus) **Thomas Cook** (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7853 6400; 30 St James's St SW1; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, 10am-5.30pm Wed; ☎ Green Park)

Post

London post offices usually open from 8.30am or 9am to 5pm or 5.30pm Monday to Friday. Some main ones also open 9am to noon or 1pm on Saturdays. The **Trafalgar Square post office** (Map pp130-1; GPO/Poste Restante), actually on William IV St, opens 8.30am to 6.30pm Monday to Friday, and 9am to 5.30pm Saturday.

Telephone

Call centres offer booths where you can dial internationally for less than the standard British Telecom (BT) rate. These can be found on most high streets. If you've brought your mobile, it's a good idea to buy a local SIM card. The **Link** (☎ 0870 154 5540; www.thelink.co.uk) and **Carphone Warehouse** (☎ 0870 168 2002; www.carphone-warehouse.com) have branches all over the city. If you'd rather rent a mobile try: **Cellhire** (☎ 0870 561 0610; www.cellhire.com; delivery £18) **Mobell** (☎ 0800 243 524; www.mobell.com; delivery free)

Tourist Information

For a list of all tourist information centres in London and around Britain see www.visitmap.info/tic.

Britain & London Visitor Centre (Map pp130-1; www.visitbritain.com; 1 Regent St SW1; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm Mon, 9am-6.30pm Tue-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun; ☎ Piccadilly Circus) Walk-in inquiries only. A comprehensive information centre that can book accommodation, theatre and transport tickets, and offers a bureau de change, international telephones and computer terminals for accessing tourist information on the web. It's open longer hours (9am to 5pm) on Saturday from June to September.

Corporation of London information centre (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7332 1456; www.cityoflondon.gov.uk; ☎ 9.30am-5pm daily Apr-Sep, 9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-noon Sat rest of year; ☎ St Paul's In St Paul's Churchyard EC4, opposite St Paul's Cathedral. **London Line** (☎ 09068 663344; per min 60p) A telephone service that will give you the lowdown on events and attractions.

Travel Agencies

STA Travel (☎ 0870 160 6070; www.statravel.co.uk) Victoria (Map p128; ☎ 0870 166 2642; 52 Grosvenor Gardens SW1; ☎ 9.30am-7pm Mon-Thu, 10am-6pm Fri, 11am-6pm Sat, noon-5pm Sun; ☎ Victoria); Euston Rd (Map pp118-19; ☎ 0870 166 2603; 117 Euston Rd NW1; ☎ Euston) Long-standing and reliable with several branches in London.

Trailfinders (Map pp120-1; worldwide travel ☎ 0845 058 5858, 1st & business class ☎ 0845 054 6666; www.trailfinders.com; 194 & 215 Kensington High St W8; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat, 10am-6pm Sun; ☎ High St Kensington) A visa and passport service (☎ 0845 05 05 905), immunisation centre (☎ 7938 3999) and information centre (☎ 7938 3303). Branches in Covent Garden, Piccadilly, the City and Canary Wharf.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Considering its size and the disparities in wealth, London is remarkably safe. That said, keep your wits about you and don't flash your cash unnecessarily.

Take particular care at night. When travelling by tube, choose a carriage with other people in it and avoid deserted suburban stations. Following reports of sexual attacks, solo women travellers should avoid unlicensed minicabs.

Scams

Unfortunately tourists are always a target for scamsters. At the time of research, card-cloning through tampered ATMs was a concern. So guard your PIN details carefully and don't use an ATM that looks unusual.

Hotel and hostel touts descend on backpackers at popular tube and main-line stations. Only accept a lift if you know exactly where you're headed.

Some Soho strip clubs and hostess bars are dodgy, and people should be especially wary of those that tout for business on the street.

SIGHTS

London is big and attacking the sights is best done by area. Start in the tourist heart, the West End, with Soho, Covent Garden and Bloomsbury. Here are many of London's finest galleries and museums, its mainstream entertainment and funkiest shopping. West of here is old-money London, incorporating the frightfully well-heeled neighbourhoods of Mayfair, St James's and Kensington – home to royalty, the wealthy and some great museums. To the north, Marylebone and Notting Hill are groovier while southwards lie Westminster, Whitehall and the cradle of British democracy.

Across the river from the West End, the regenerated South Bank is home to some of London's most popular attractions, including the London Eye and the Tate Modern. Heading anticlockwise over the river again is Britain's financial cockpit, the City – St Paul's

Cathedral is the main draw here. Continuing the loop you'll hit Hoxton and Shoreditch, new centres of London cool, and then Camden and Islington, the ones they replaced.

Trafalgar Square

Trafalgar Sq is the public heart of London, hosting great rallies, marches and feverish New Year's festivities. Londoners congregate here to celebrate anything from football victories to the ousting of political leaders. Formerly ringed by gnarling traffic, the square's been tidied up and is now one of the world's grandest public places. Don't miss Marc Quin's beautiful marble statue of a pregnant **Alison Lapper** (2005) in the northeast corner.

The square is flanked by splendid buildings: the National Gallery, the National Portrait Gallery and the church of St Martin-in-the-Fields. The ceremonial **Pall Mall** runs southwest from the top of the square. Further south stands **Admiralty Arch** (Map pp130-1; built in honour of Queen Victoria in 1910), beyond which the Mall leads to Buckingham Palace. Nelson surveys his fleet from the 43.5m-high **Nelson's Column** (Map pp130-1), erected in 1843 to commemorate Nelson's 1805 victory over Napoleon off Cape Trafalgar in Spain.

NATIONAL GALLERY

Following a two-year building project the fantastic **National Gallery** (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7747 2885; www.nationalgallery.org.uk; Trafalgar Sq WC2; admission free, temporary exhibition prices vary; ☎ 10am-6pm Thu-Tue, to 9pm Wed; ☎ Charing Cross) is looking better than ever, with bright and airy internal spaces, a cleaned-up entrance complete with beautiful dome, a highlights gallery and the popular **National Dining Rooms** restaurant. And there are still the 2300-plus Western European paintings spanning 1250 to 1900 to draw the four million annual visitors.

Highlights include Turner's *The Fighting Temeraire* (voted the nation's favourite painting in 2005), Botticelli's *Venus and Mars* and Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* but audio tours cover the lot. Free one-hour guided tours leave at 11.30am and 2.30pm weekdays and at 11.30am, 12.30pm, 2.30pm and 3.30pm Saturday (additional tours at 6pm and 6.30pm on Wednesday). If you prefer, you can devise and print off your own tour with the flashy computer screens of **Art Start**.

Visit on Wednesday evenings for live music, the licensed bar and free talks.

WHO'S WHO AT THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

Highlights of today's faces include a very pink portrait of Darcy Bussell, a full-length picture of Judi Dench, an amazing 3-D depiction of JK Rowling, Richard Branson's mug made up of postcards of Dame Laura Knight (self-portraits) collaged together, and 67 minutes of David Beckham sleeping (which is probably as close as any of us will get to him in that position). Dame AS Byatt's portrait/splash of primary colours is reminiscent of a toddler's effort, but apparently she likes it.

NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

This **gallery** (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7306 0055; www.npg.org.uk; St Martin's Cres WC2; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm Sat-Wed, to 9pm Thu & Fri; ☎ Charing Cross) is so much better than the rather dry name suggests. Founded in 1856, the permanent collection (around 10,000 works) displays famous people from the 15th century right through to the present day, starting with the early Tudors on the top floor and descending to contemporary figures on the ground floor.

An audio guide for £2 will lead you through the gallery's most famous pictures. Look out for the temporary exhibitions – from June to September the gallery hosts the prestigious National Portrait Award.

Whitehall

Whitehall is the administrative heart of the country and is best explored on foot (see the Whitehall Walking Tour, p152).

BANQUETING HOUSE

The beautiful, classical design of the **Banqueting House** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7930 4179; www.hrp.org.uk; Whitehall SW1; adult/child £4.50/3; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat; ☎ Charing Cross) was daringly conceived by Inigo Jones for James I in 1622. It's the only surviving part of the palace after the Tudor bit burnt down in 1698. The key attraction of the house is the Main Hall's ceiling, which was painted by Rubens in 1635 at the behest of Charles I. Sadly he didn't get to enjoy it for long as in 1649 he was frogmarched out of the 1st-floor balcony to lose his head for treason. A bust outside commemorates the king. Audio guides are available for £4.50 per adult.

CHURCHILL MUSEUM & CABINET WAR ROOMS

The **Cabinet War Rooms** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7930 6961; www.iwm.org.uk; King Charles St SW1; adult/child under 16yr £11/free; ☎ 9.30am-6pm, last entry 5pm; ☎ Westminster) were Churchill's underground military HQ during WWII. Now a wonderfully evocative and atmospheric museum, the restored and preserved rooms (including Churchill's bedroom) capture the drama of the time. The new **Churchill Museum** is the first national museum dedicated to the prime minister and an intriguing exposé of the public and private faces of the man.

Westminster & Pimlico

Westminster has been the centre of political power for over a millennium and most of its interesting places are linked with the monarchy, parliament or the Church of England. The area is a remarkable spectacle, a picture of rare architectural cohesion and an awesome display of power, gravitas and historical import. Pimlico, by contrast, is pretty mind-numbing except for the Tate Britain.

WESTMINSTER ABBEY

One of the most sacred and symbolic sites in England is **Westminster Abbey** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7654 4900; www.westminster-abbey.org; Dean's Yard SW1; adult/child £10/6; ☎ 9.30am-3.45pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, 9.30am-6pm Wed, 9am-1.45pm Sat; ☎ Westminster). With the exception of Edward V and Edward VIII, every sovereign has been crowned here since William the Conqueror, and most of the monarchs from Henry III (died 1272) to George II (1760) are also buried here.

The abbey is a magnificent and arresting sight. Though a mixture of architectural styles, it is considered the finest example of Early English Gothic (1180-1280) in existence. The original church was built in the 11th century, during the Dark Ages, by the King (later Saint) Edward the Confessor, who is buried in the chapel behind the main altar. Henry III (r 1216-72) began work on the new building but didn't complete it; the French Gothic nave was finished in 1388. Henry VII's huge and magnificent chapel was consecrated in 1519 after 16 years of construction. Unlike St Paul's, Westminster Abbey has never been a cathedral. It is what is called a 'royal peculiar' and is administered directly by the Crown.

The interior is less impressive than the exterior but there are many highlights, including

the incongruously ordinary-looking **Coronation Chair**, the late perpendicular-style **Henry VII Chapel**, the **Royal Air Force (RAF) Chapel**, the octagonal **Chapter House** (admission with abbey ticket or separately for a donation; closes 1 hour before the abbey), the **Pyx Chamber** (admission as Chapter House) and the **Abbey Museum** with death masks of generations of royalty.

Free concerts are held from 12.30pm to 2pm once a week from the end of July through August in the 900-year-old **College Garden** (☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Thu Apr-Sep, to 4pm Tue-Thu Oct-Mar).

Sign up for a guided tour (£4) at the information desk or take an audio tour (£3). Even-song is at 6.30pm weekdays, 3pm weekends; Sunday Eucharist is at 11.15am.

Next door to the abbey is the smaller **St Margaret's Church** (admission free), the House of Commons' place of worship since 1614. There are windows commemorating churchgoers Caxton and Milton, and Sir Walter Raleigh is buried by the altar.

HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT

Comprising the House of Commons (where Members of Parliament discuss legislation) and the House of Lords (home of the peers), the **Houses of Parliament** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7219 4272; www.parliament.uk; Parliament Sq SW1; ☉ Westminster) are in the Palace of Westminster, built by Sir Charles Barry and Augustus Pugin in 1840 when neo-Gothic style was in vogue.

The most famous feature is the clock tower **Big Ben** (Map pp122-3). Ben is actually the 13-ton bell, named after Benjamin Hall, who was commissioner of works when the tower was completed in 1858. The best view of the whole complex is from the eastern side of Lambeth Bridge.

When Parliament is in session, visitors are admitted to the **House of Commons Visitors' Gallery**. Expect to queue for at least an hour if you haven't already organised a ticket through your local British embassy. Note that parliamentary recesses (ie holidays) last for three months over the summer, and a couple of weeks over Easter and Christmas. The **House of Lords Visitors' Gallery** (☎ 7219 3107; admission free; ☎ from 2.30pm Mon & Tue, from 3pm Wed & Thu, from 11am some Fridays) is also open to outsiders.

The roof of **Westminster Hall**, added between 1394 and 1401, is the earliest known example of a hammer-beam roof and has been described as 'the greatest surviving achievement of medieval English carpentry'.

When parliament is in recess, there are guided **summer tours** (☎ 0870 906 3773; www.parliament.uk; from St Stephen's Entrance, St Margaret St; 75min tours adult/child £7/5; telephone for times) of both chambers and other historic buildings.

WESTMINSTER CATHEDRAL

Completed in 1903, **Westminster Cathedral** (Map p128; ☎ 7798 9064; Victoria St SW1; admission free; ☎ 7am-7pm; ☉ Victoria) is the headquarters of the Roman Catholic Church in Britain and the only good example of neo-Byzantine architecture in London. Its distinctive candy-striped redbrick and white-stone tower features prominently on the west London skyline.

The interior is part splendid marble and mosaic and part bare brick due to lack of funds. It features the highly regarded stone carvings of the 14 **Stations of the Cross** (1918) by Eric Gill. For £3 you can take a lift up to the 83m tower of the **Campanile Bell** for splendid views of London, or call to book a tour (£2.50).

TATE BRITAIN

The place to see, appreciate and interpret British art from the 16th century to the present, **Tate Britain** (Map pp116-17; ☎ 7887 8008; www.tate.org.uk; Millbank SW1; admission free; ☎ 10am-5.50pm; ☉ Pimlico) features works by notables such as William Blake, the Hogarths, Gainsborough, Whistler and Spencer, as well as the controversial annual Turner Prize. The quirky **Clare Gallery** holds the bulk of JMW Turner's paintings.

There are free one-hour guided tours running from 11am to 3pm. The immensely popular **Tate Restaurant** (☎ 7887 8825; mains £14.95), with an impressive Rex Whistler mural, is open for lunch and afternoon tea.

St James's & Mayfair

Monopoly wasn't lying – high-society Mayfair is the most expensive place in London. St James's is a mixture of exclusive gentlemen's clubs, historic shops and elegant buildings; indeed, there are some 150 historically noteworthy buildings within its 36 hectares.

INSTITUTE FOR CONTEMPORARY ARTS

A one-stop contemporary art bonanza, the exciting programme at the **Institute for Contemporary Arts** (ICA; Map pp122-3; ☎ 7930 3647; www.ica.org.uk; The Mall SW1; admission varies; ☎ noon-11pm Mon, to 1am Tue-Sat, to 10.30pm Sun; ☉ Charing Cross) includes film, photography, theatre, installations, talks, performance art, DJs, digital art and book

readings. Stroll around the galleries, watch a film, browse the bookshop then head to the bar for a late beer (open till 1am).

ST JAMES'S PARK & ST JAMES'S PALACE

The nearest of London's royal parks, **St James's Park** (Map pp122-3; The Mall SW1; ☉ St James's Park) has the best view, spanning Westminster, Buckingham Palace and St James's Palace. The flowerbeds are spectacular, but it's the lake and waterfowl that really pop.

The striking Tudor gatehouse of St James's Palace, initiated by the palace-mad Henry VIII in 1530, is best approached from St James's St to the north of the park. This was the residence of Prince Charles and his sons until they shifted next door to the former residence of the Queen Mother, **Clarence House** (1828), after she died in 2002 (and the future king spent £4.6 million reshaping the house to his own design).

SPENCER HOUSE

The ancestral home of Princess Diana's family, **Spencer House** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7499 8620; www.spencerhouse.co.uk; 27 St James's Pl SW1; adult/child £9/7; ☎ 10.30am-5.30pm Sun Feb-Jul & Sep-Dec; ☉ Green Park) was built in the Palladian style between 1756 and 1766. Although the Spencers moved out in 1927 and the house became offices, an £18 million restoration project returned it to its former glory in the 1980s. Visits through eight state rooms of the house are by guided tour only (last tour 4.45pm). The restored gardens (£3.50) are opened just a few days each summer.

BUCKINGHAM PALACE

The official residence of Queen Elizabeth II, **Buckingham Palace** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7830 4832; www.royalcollection.org.uk; adult/child £14/8; ☎ 9.45am-3.45pm 26 July-24 Sep; ☉ St James's Park) is at the southwestern end of the Mall. Built in 1803 for the Duke of Buckingham, it replaced St James's Palace as the royal family's London home in 1837. Nineteen lavishly furnished staterooms, used by the royals to meet and greet, are open to visitors when HRH takes her holidays in Scotland. The tour includes **Queen Victoria's Picture Gallery** (76.5m long, with works by Rembrandt, Van Dyck, Canaletto, Poussin and Vermeer) and the **Throne Room**, with his-and-her pink chairs initialised 'ER' and 'P'.

Changing of the Guard

London's quintessential tourist attraction takes place when the old guard (Foot Guards of the

Household Regiment) comes off duty to be replaced by the new guard in the forecourt of Buckingham Palace. If you arrive early, you can gape at the soldiers' bright-red uniforms and bearskin hats as they shout and march in one of the world's most famous displays of pageantry. Otherwise, the backs of heads will be your view. The **ceremony** takes place at 11.30am daily from April until the end of July and on alternate days for the rest of the year, weather permitting.

Queen's Gallery

This **gallery** (Map pp122-3; adult/child £7.50/4; ☎ 10am-5.30pm) houses displays from the extensive Royal Collection of art and treasures. Originally designed by John Nash as a conservatory, it was smashed by the Luftwaffe in 1940 before being reopened as a gallery in 1962. Following a £20 million renovation and expansion, it reopened for the Queen's Golden Jubilee in 2002.

Royal Mews

Sheltering immaculately groomed royal horses, the **Royal Mews** (Map pp122-3; Buckingham Palace Rd SW1; adult/child £6.50/4; ☎ 10am-5pm 25 Jul-24 Sep, 11am-4pm 25 Mar-24 Jul & 25 Sep-29 Oct; ☉ Victoria) also houses opulent royal vehicles, including the stunning gold coach of 1762, which has been used for every coronation since George III, and the 1910 Glass Coach, used for royal weddings.

HANDEL HOUSE MUSEUM

George Frideric Handel's pad from 1723 to his death in 1759 is now a **museum** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7399 1953; www.handelhouse.org; 25 Brook St W1; adult/child £5/2; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue, Wed, Fri & Sat, 10am-8pm Thu, noon-6pm Sun; ☉ Bond St) dedicated to his life and 18th-century culture. Handel wrote some of his greatest works, including *Messiah*, here and music still fills the house at live recitals (see the website for details).

Many years and genres later, Jimi Hendrix lived at number 23 so there's also a small collection of photographs taken in his flat.

GREEN PARK

Green Park is less manicured than the adjoining St James's Park. It was once a duelling ground and served as a vegetable garden during WWII.

West End – Soho to the Strand

The West End is more a cultural term than a geographical one, but it basically takes in Piccadilly Circus and Trafalgar Sq to the south,

Oxford St and Tottenham Court Rd to the north, Regent St to the west and Covent Garden and the Strand to the east. A heady mixture of consumerism and culture, outstanding museums, galleries, historic buildings and entertainment venues jostle with tacky tourist traps.

PICCADILLY CIRCUS

Named after the stiff collars ('picadils') that were the sartorial staple of a 17th-century tailor who lived nearby, Piccadilly Circus is home to the popular landmark the **Eros statue** (Map pp130-1). It's a thronging hub charged with neon and choking fumes and the reliable Virgin Megastore.

London Trocadero

The green flags of the **Trocadero** (Map pp130-1; ☎ 0906 888 1100; www.troc.co.uk; 1 Piccadilly Circus W1; 🕒 10am-midnight Sun-Thu, to 1am Fri & Sat; 🚶 Covent Garden) will try and lure you into this supposed pleasure park of cinema, virtual reality rides etc. But once you're inside this torturous temple to tack you'll be screaming to be released.

PICCADILLY

Piccadilly is home to the quintessential London icons the Ritz hotel and Fortnum & Mason department store.

Royal Academy of Arts

Britain's first art school, the wonderful **Royal Academy of Arts** (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7300 8000; www.royalacademy.org.uk; Burlington House, Piccadilly W1; admission varies; 🕒 10am-6pm Sat-Thu, to 10pm Fri; 🚶 Green Park) has created a storm in recent years, with perfectly pitched shows ranging from China: the Three Emperors to its popular Summer Exhibitions showcasing the work of contemporary British artists.

Burlington Arcade

The well-to-do **Burlington Arcade** (Map pp130-1; 51 Piccadilly W1; 🚶 Green Park), built in 1819, is most famous for the Burlington Berties, uniformed guards who patrol the area keeping an eye out for punishable offences such as running, chewing gum or whatever else might lower the shopping arcade's tone.

REGENT STREET

Distinguished by elegant shop fronts, Regent St is home to Hamley's, London's premier toy and game store, and the upmarket department store Liberty (p176).

OXFORD STREET

Oxford St is the zenith of high-street shopping, a must or a miss depending on your retail persuasion. West towards Marble Arch you'll find many famous department stores including the stupendous Selfridges (p176).

SOHO

A decade ago this lively area was known mostly for strip clubs and peepshows. The sleaze is still there but these days it blends with some of London's trendiest clubs, bars and restaurants. West of Soho proper is **Carnaby Street**, the epicentre of London's 'swinging '60s', whose tourist tack is getting trendy neighbours.

LEICESTER SQUARE

Pedestrianised Leicester (*les-ter*) Sq is usually heaving with tourists – and inevitably buskers. Dominated by large cinemas, it often hosts star-studded premieres.

CHINATOWN

Lisle and Gerrard Sts form the heart of Chinatown (Map pp130-1), which is full of verve and unfairly hip Japanese youngsters. Street signs are bilingual and the streets themselves are lined with Asian restaurants. If you're in town in late January or early February, don't miss the sparkles and crackles of Chinese New Year.

COVENT GARDEN

This elegant **piazza** (Map pp130-1; 🚶 Covent Garden), London's first planned square, is a tourist mecca where chain restaurants, souvenir shops, balconied bars and street entertainers vie for the punters' pound. It positively heaves in summer, especially weekends.

In the 1630s Inigo Jones converted the former vegetable field into a graceful square that at first housed the fruit and vegetable market immortalised in the film *My Fair Lady*. The area slumped and became home to brothels and coffee houses, but the market was shifted in the 1980s and Covent Garden was transformed into one of the city's grooviest hubs.

Photographers' Gallery

For photography fans, this small **gallery** (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7831 1772; www.photonet.org.uk; 5 & 8 Great Newport St WC2; admission free; 🕒 11am-6pm Mon-Sat except Thu 11am-8pm, noon-6pm Sun; 🚶 Leicester Sq) showcasing UK and international talent is worth a peep. At number 8 is the exhibition space and bookshop; at number 5 is a café and print sales gallery.

London Transport Museum

At the time of writing, this excellent **museum** (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7379 6344; www.ltmuseum.co.uk; Covent Garden Piazza WC2; 🚶 Covent Garden) was closed for an £18.6-million refurbishment. When it reopens (spring 2007) it promises even better displays on the city's transport in the past, present and future (spaceships in the capital? Flying cars?).

Theatre Museum

This **museum** (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7943 4700; Russell St WC2; admission free; 🕒 10am-6pm Tue-Sun; 🚶 Covent Garden) is a branch of the Victoria & Albert Museum (p146) and displays costumes, artefacts and curiosities relating to the history of British theatre.

THE STRAND

Described by Benjamin Disraeli in the 19th century as Europe's finest street, this 'beach' of the Thames – which was built to connect Westminster (the seat of political power) and the City (the commercial centre) – still boasts a few classy hotels but has lost much of its lustre.

Somerset House

The first Tudor **Somerset House** (Map pp130-1; www.somerset-house.org.uk; Strand WC2; 🚶 Temple) was built for the Duke of Somerset in 1551. For two centuries it played host to wild masked balls, peace treaties, the Parliamentary army during the Civil War, Oliver Cromwell's wake, royals and foreign diplomats. Having fallen into disrepair it was pulled down in 1775 and rebuilt to designs by William Chambers. It went on to house among other weighty organisations the Royal Academy of the Arts, the Society of Antiquaries, the Navy Board and that most popular of institutions the Inland Revenue.

LONDON FOR FREE

Tell your bank manager to back off. Many of London's sights are absolutely free (hurrah) including the following: the British Museum, National Gallery, National Portrait Gallery, Photographers' Gallery, Guildhall, Museum of London, Tate Modern, Bank of England Museum, Imperial War Museum, Victoria & Albert (V&A) Museum, National History Museum, Science Museum and the Wallace Collection.

It's now home to three fascinating galleries surrounding a fantastic courtyard of dancing fountains with summer open-air events and a winter ice-rink. Out the back there's a wonderful terrace, restaurant and café overlooking the Thames.

The **Courtauld Gallery** (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7848 2526; adult/child £5/free, admission free 10am-2pm Mon; 🕒 10am-6pm) displays a wealth of 14th- to 20th-century works, including a roomful of Rubens and impressionist and postimpressionist works by Van Gogh, Renoir and Toulouse-Lautrec.

The **Gilbert Collection** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7420 9400; adult/child £5/free; 🕒 10am-6pm) includes such treasures as European silverware, gold snuffboxes and Italian mosaics bequeathed to the nation by London-born American businessman Arthur Gilbert.

The **Hermitage Rooms** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7845 4630; adult/child £6/free; 🕒 10am-6pm) display diverse and rotating exhibitions from St Petersburg's renowned (and underfunded) State Hermitage Museum, to which goes a slice of your admission fee.

Bloomsbury

Bloomsbury is a genteel blend of the University of London, beautiful Georgian squares, the British Museum and literary history. **Russell Square**, its very heart, was laid out in 1800 and is London's largest square.

Between the world wars these pleasant streets were colonised by a group of artists and intellectuals known collectively as the Bloomsbury Group, which included the novelists Virginia Woolf and EM Forster, and the economist John Maynard Keynes.

BRITISH MUSEUM

London's most visited attraction, the **British Museum** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7636 1555; www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk; Great Russell St WC1; admission free; 🕒 10am-5.30pm Mon-Wed, Sat & Sun, to 8.30pm Thu & Fri; 🚶 Tottenham Court Rd or Russell Sq) is the largest in the country and one of the oldest and finest in the world, boasting vast Egyptian, Etruscan, Greek, Oriental and Roman galleries among many others.

Before you get to the galleries you'll be blown away by the **Great Court**, which was restored and augmented by Norman Foster in 2000. The courtyard now boasts a spectacular glass-and-steel roof and somehow manages to be more luminous than outside – it's one of the most impressive architectural spaces in the capital. In the centre is the **Reading Room**, with

BRITAIN & GREECE SQUABBLE OVER MARBLES

Wonderful though it is, the British Museum can sometimes feel like one vast repository for stolen booty. Much of what's on display wasn't just 'picked up' along the way by Victorian travellers and explorers, but stolen, or purchased under dubious circumstances.

Restive foreign governments occasionally pop their heads over the parapet to demand the return of their property. The British Museum says 'no' and the problem goes away until the next time. Not the Greeks, however. They have been kicking up a stink demanding the return of the so-called Elgin Marbles, the ancient marble sculptures that once adorned the Parthenon. The British Museum, and successive British governments, steadfastly refuse to hand over the priceless works that were removed from the Parthenon and shipped to England by the British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, the Lord Elgin, between 1801 and 1805. (When Elgin blew all his dough, he sold the marbles to the government.) The diplomatic spat continues. Only time will tell who blinks first.

stunning blue and gold domed ceiling where Karl Marx wrote *The Communist Manifesto*. Off to the right is the **Enlightenment Gallery**, the oldest and grandest gallery in the museum, the first section of the redesigned museum to be built in 1823.

The enthralling exhibits began in 1753 with a 'cabinet of curiosities' bequeathed by Sir Hans Sloane to the nation on his death; this has mushroomed over the years partly through the plundering of the empire (see boxed text, above).

Among the many must-sees are the **Rosetta Stone**, discovered in 1799 and the key to deciphering Egyptian hieroglyphics; the controversial **Parthenon Sculptures**, which once adorned the walls of the Parthenon in Athens; the stunning **Oxus Treasure** of 7th- to 4th-century BC Persian gold; and the Anglo-Saxon **Sutton Hoo Ship Burial** site. Along with the Great Court, the most recent additions to the museum are the **Sainsbury African Galleries**, the restored **King's Library** and the new **Wellcome Gallery of Ethnography**.

You'll need multiple visits to savour even the highlights here; happily there are nine 50-minute free 'eye opener' tours, from 11am to 3.30pm daily except Friday (till 3pm), focusing on different world cultures. Other tours include the 90-minute highlights tour, at 10.30am, 1pm and 3pm daily (adult/child £8/5), and a range of audio guides (£3.50). Given the museum's mind-boggling size and scope, an initial tour is highly recommended.

Holborn & Clerkenwell

Holborn's most distinctive features are the wonderful Sir John Soane's Museum and the atmospheric Inns of Court, built here to sym-

bolise the law's role as mediator in the traditional power struggle between Westminster and the City. The little pocket of Clerkenwell was for most of the 19th and 20th centuries a dilapidated, working-class area of no interest to anyone but its inhabitants. In the 1980s property developers moved in and Clerkenwell has been transformed into an appealing and trendy corner of the capital, replete with new pubs, restaurants and clubs.

SIR JOHN SOANE'S MUSEUM

One of the most charming London sights, this tragically undervisited **museum** (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7405 2107; www.soane.org; 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields WC2; admission free, tour 2.30pm Sat £3; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 6-9pm 1st Tue of month; 🚶 Holborn) represents the taste of celebrated architect and collector extraordinaire Sir John Soane (1753-1837).

The house is largely as it was when Sir John was taken out in a box. Among his eclectic acquisitions are an Egyptian sarcophagus, ancient vases and works of art, and the original *Rake's Progress*, William Hogarth's set of cartoon caricatures of late-18th-century London lowlife.

INNS OF COURT

Clustered around Holborn to the south of Fleet St are the Inns of Court (Map pp122-3), the alleys, atmosphere and open spaces of which provide an urban oasis. All London barristers work from within one of the four Inns, and a roll call of former members would include the likes of Oliver Cromwell and Charles Dickens to Mahatma Gandhi and Margaret Thatcher. It would take a lifetime working here to grasp the intricacies of the arcane protocols of the Inns - they're similar

to the Freemasons, and both are 13th-century creations. It's best just to soak up the dreamy atmosphere, relax, and thank your lucky stars you're not one of the bewigged and deadly serious barristers scurrying about.

Lincoln's Inn (☎ 7405 1393; Lincoln's Inn Fields WC2; 🕒 grounds 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, chapel 12-2.30pm Mon-Fri; 🚶 Holborn), largely intact with several original 15th-century buildings, is the most attractive of the bunch with a chapel and pretty landscaped gardens. **Gray's Inn** (☎ 7458 7800; Gray's Inn Rd WC1; 🕒 grounds 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, chapel 10am-6pm Mon-Fri; 🚶 Chancery Lane) was largely rebuilt after the Luftwaffe levelled it. **Middle Temple** (☎ 7427 4800; Middle Temple Lane EC4; 🕒 10-11.30am & 3-4pm Mon-Fri; 🚶 Temple) and **Inner Temple** (☎ 7797 8250; King's Bench Walk EC4; 🕒 10am-4pm Mon-Fri; 🚶 Temple) both sit between Fleet St and Victoria Embankment - the former is the best preserved while the latter is home to the *Da Vinci Code*'s Temple Church.

The City

The City of London, the commercial heart of the capital, is the 'square mile' on the northern bank of the Thames where the Romans first built their walled community two millennia ago. Its boundaries have changed little since, and you can always tell when you're within them because the Corporation of London's coat of arms appears on the street signs. As well as atmospheric winding alleyways, St Paul's Cathedral and the Tower of London attract visitors.

Less than 10,000 people actually live here, although some 300,000 descend on it each week-end, where they generate almost three-quarters of Britain's entire GDP before heading home.

FLEET STREET

As 20th-century London's 'Street of Shame', **Fleet Street** (Map pp122-3; 🚶 Blackfriars) was synonymous with the UK's scurrilous tabloids until the mid-1980s when the press barons embraced computer technology, ditched a load of staff and largely relocated to the Docklands.

DR JOHNSON'S HOUSE

Where Samuel Johnson and his assistants compiled the first English dictionary between 1748 and 1759, **Dr Johnson's House** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7353 3745; www.drjohnsonshouse.org; 17 Gough Sq EC4; admission £4.50; 🕒 11am-5.30pm Mon-Sat May-Sep, to 5pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr; 🚶 Chancery Lane) is a well-preserved Georgian building. It's full of prints and portraits of friends and intimates, includ-

ing Johnson's Jamaican servant, to whom he bequeathed the house in his will.

ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL

Dominating the City with a dome second in size only to St Peter's in Rome, **St Paul's Cathedral** (Map p125; ☎ 7236 4128; www.stpauls.co.uk; adult/child £9.50/3.50; 🕒 8.30am-4pm; 🚶 St Paul's) was built between 1675 and 1710 by Sir Christopher Wren after the Great Fire of 1666. Four other cathedrals on this site, the first dating from 604, preceded it.

The dome is renowned for somehow dodging the bombs during the Blitz of WWII and became an icon of the resilience shown in the capital during the crisis. Outside the cathedral, to the north, is a **monument to the people of London**, a simple and elegant memorial to the 32,000 Londoners who weren't so lucky.

Inside, some 30m above the main paved area, is the first of three domes (actually a dome inside a cone, inside a dome) supported by eight huge columns. The walkway round its base is called the **Whispering Gallery**, because if you talk close to the wall your words will carry to the opposite side 32m away.

This, the **Stone Gallery** and the **Golden Gallery** can be reached by a staircase on the western side of the southern transept. It is 530 lung-busting steps to the Golden Gallery at the very top, and an unforgettable view of London. If that's too much, you still get terrific vistas from the lower galleries.

The **Crypt** has memorials to up to 300 military demigods, including Wellington, Kitchener and Nelson, whose body lies below the dome. But the most poignant memorial is to Sir Christopher Wren himself. On a simple slab bearing his name a Latin inscription translates as: 'If you seek his memorial, look about you'.

Audio tours lasting 45 minutes are available for £3.50. Guided tours (adult/child £3/1) leave the tour desk at 11am, 11.30am, 1.30pm and 2pm (90 minutes). There are organ concerts at St Paul's at 5pm most Sundays. Even-song takes place at 5pm most weekdays and at 3.15pm on Sunday.

GUILDHALL

Plum in the middle of the 'square mile', the **Guildhall** (Map p125; ☎ 7606 3030; Basinghall St EC2; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sun May-Sep; 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr; 🚶 Bank) has been the seat of the City's local government for eight centuries. The present building dates from the early 15th century.

Visitors can see the **Great Hall** where the mayor is 'sworn in' and where important chaps like the Tsar of Russia and the Prince Regent celebrated beating Napoleon. It's a vast, impressive space with the shields and banners of London's 12 principal livery companies; carved galleries, the west of which is protected by slightly disturbing statues of giants Gog and Magog; and a beautiful oak-panelled roof. Beneath it is London's largest **medieval crypt** (☎ 7606 3030, ext 1463; visited by free guided tour only) with 19 stained-glass windows showing the livery companies' coats of arms.

The **Guildhall Clock Museum** (admission free; ☎ 9.30am-4.45pm Mon-Fri) charts 500 years of timekeeping with over 700 ticking exhibits, and the **Guildhall Art Gallery** (☎ 7332 3708; admission £2.50) displays around 250 artworks, the most significant of which is John Singleton Copley's masterpiece *The Defeat of the Floating Batteries at Gibraltar; September 1782*.

BARBICAN

Like Marmite, you either love or hate the concrete **Barbican** (Map p125; ☎ 7638 4141; Silk St EC2; ☎ Barbican or Moorgate). It's true that it is extraordinarily ugly in many ways, with forbidding high-rise tower blocks (romantically named Shakespeare, Cromwell and Lauderdale), gloomy raised walkways and tunnels, and apartment blocks that valiant window boxes attempt to prettify. But at the time, this vast complex of offices and residences with an arts centre at its heart was revolutionary, designed to fill the WWII bomb-splattered space with democratic modern housing by disciples of Le Corbusier, Chamberlain, Powell and Bon. Sadly this democratic dream never really materialised, and today around 80% of the flats are privately owned. It's been fashionable to loath the Barbican in the past, but in 2001 the complex became listed, so its detractors will just have to live with it.

The Barbican Centre (p174) is the home of the London Symphony Orchestra. It also houses the Museum of London and the wonderful **Barbican Art Gallery** (☎ 7638 8891; admission £8.50; ☎ 11am-8pm Mon, Wed, Fri-Sun, to 6pm Tue & Thu) on Level 3, with some of the best photographic exhibits in London. The programmes are generally first-rate, as long as you can find them. There's also a free gallery on Level 0 called the **Curve Gallery**.

MUSEUM OF LONDON

Explore the tunnels of the Barbican heading for gate 7 to reach the fascinating **Museum of**

London (Map p125; ☎ 0870 444 3851; www.museumoflondon.org.uk; London Wall EC2; admission free; ☎ 10am-5.50pm Mon-Sat, noon-5.50pm Sun; ☎ Barbican) and a journey through London's history from the big bang to broadband. Its ever-expanding exhibitions include the new Medieval Galleries and a life-size, slightly pongy Anglo-Saxon long house – for health and safety reasons they had to use fermented straw instead of dung to get an authentic whiffiness. The downstairs will be undergoing a complete redesign between 2007 and 2009 but the Roman, Medieval and pre-historic collections will remain open.

TOWER OF LONDON

One of the most essential sights to see in London, the **Tower of London** (Map p125; ☎ 7680 9004; www.hrp.org.uk; Tower Hill EC3; adult/child £15/9.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Sun & Mon, 9am-5pm Tue-Sat; ☎ Tower Hill) is a window into a gruesome, fascinating history. It is also one of the city's three World Heritage Sites (joining Westminster Abbey and Maritime Greenwich).

To help get your bearings, take the hugely entertaining and free guided tour with any of the Tudor-garbed Beefeaters. Hour-long tours leave every 30 minutes from the Middle Tower between 9am and 3pm Tuesday to Saturday and from 10am Sunday and Monday.

In 1078 William the Conqueror laid the first stone of the White Tower to replace the timber-and-earth castle he'd already built here. By 1285 two walls with towers and a moat were built around it and the medieval defences have barely been altered since. A former royal residence, treasury, mint and arsenal, it became most famous as a prison when Henry VIII moved to Whitehall Palace in 1529 and started dishing out his preferred brand of punishment.

The most striking building is the huge **White Tower**, with its solid Romanesque architecture and four turrets, which today houses a collection from the Royal Armouries. On the 2nd floor is the **Chapel of St John the Evangelist**, dating from 1080 and therefore the oldest church in London.

On the small green in front of the church stood Henry VIII's **scaffold**, where seven people were beheaded, including Anne Boleyn and her cousin Catherine Howard (his second and fifth wives).

To the north is the **Waterloo Barracks**, which now contains the Crown Jewels. On the far side of the White Tower is the **Bloody Tower**, where the 12-year-old Edward V and his little

brother were held 'for their own safety' and later murdered, probably by their uncle, the future Richard III. Sir Walter Raleigh did a 13-year stretch here, when he wrote his *History of the World*, a copy of which is on display.

On the patch of green between the Wakefield and White Towers you'll find the latest in the tower's long line of famous ravens, which legend says could cause the White Tower to collapse should they leave. Their wings are clipped in case they get any ideas.

TOWER BRIDGE

London was still a thriving port in 1894 when Tower Bridge was designed to rise and allow ships to pass through. It is raised electronically these days but you can still see the original steam engines. There are excellent views from the walkways.

For the **Tower Bridge Experience** (Map p125; ☎ 7940 3984; www.towerbridge.org.uk; adult/child £5.50/3; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-5pm Oct-Mar; ☎ Tower Hill), a lift takes you up from the modern visitors' facility in the northern tower where the story of its building is recounted with videos and animatronics. If you're coming from the Tower you'll pass through Dead Man's Hole where corpses were retrieved from the Thames after they'd been chucked from the prison.

ST KATHARINE DOCKS

A centre of trade and commerce for 1000 years, **St Katharine Docks** (Map p125) is now a buzzing waterside area of boats and eateries. **Ivory House** (built 1854) used to store ivory, perfume and other precious goods; the façade of **International House** (built 1983) is a replica of the original warehouse; **Dickens Inn** has its original 18th-century timber framework and is a popular boozery. There are free concerts on **Marble Quay** at lunchtimes or you can just mooch around looking at the historic vessels and snazzy yachts.

BANK OF ENGLAND MUSEUM

Guardian of the country's financial system, the Bank of England was established in 1694 when the government needed to raise some cash to support a war with France. It was moved here in 1734 and largely renovated by Sir John Soane. The **museum** (Map p125; ☎ 7601 5545; www.bankofengland.co.uk; Bartholomew Lane EC2; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri; ☎ Bank) traces the history of the bank and banknotes with various interactive technology, and isn't quite as dry as it sounds.

THE MONUMENT

Designed by Christopher Wren to commemorate the Great Fire of 1666, the **Monument** (Map p125; ☎ 7626 2717; Monument St EC3; adult/child £2/1; ☎ 9.30am-5pm; ☎ Monument) is 60.6m high, the exact distance from its base to the bakery on Pudding Lane where the blaze began. Climb the 311 tight spiral steps (not advised for claustrophobics) for an eye-watering view from beneath the symbolic vase of flames.

South of the Thames

The southern part of central London used to be the city's forgotten underside – run-down and offering little for foreign visitors. But there are now pockets of refurbishment and revitalisation, as exemplified by the Design Museum, up-and-coming Bermondsey St and enticing Bermondsey Market (see p177).

BERMONDSEY

Design Museum

The whiter-than-white **Design Museum** (Map pp116-17; ☎ 0870 833 9955; www.designmuseum.org; 28 Shad Thames SE1; adult £7; ☎ 10am-5.45pm; ☎ Tower Hill) is a must for anyone interested in the evolution of design and all its applications. The permanent collection Designing Modern Britain has varying displays and there are a number of temporary exhibitions including Designer of the Year, for which the prize is an impressive £25,000. Feeling inspired?

SOUTHWARK

An important thoroughfare during the Middle Ages, Southwark (suth-erk) has almost lost its working-class gritty edge in the wake of sights and attractions such as the magnificent Tate Modern, and the modern More London site, home to offices, open-air exhibitions and dazzling City Hall.

City Hall

The Norman Foster-designed, wonky-egg-shaped **City Hall** (Map p125; ☎ 7983 4000; www.london.gov.uk; The Queen's Walk SE1; admission free; ☎ 9am-6pm) is an architectural feast of glass, and home to the mayor, the London Assembly and the Greater London Assembly (GLA). Visitors can see the mayor's meeting **chamber** and attend **debates** (see website for timings). On one Saturday a month the 9th floor is opened for an even better view, accessed via a glass winding ramp similar to the one in Berlin's Reichstag.

HMS Belfast

Launched in 1938, the **HMS Belfast** (Map p125; ☎ 7407 6328; Morgan's Lane, Tooley St SE1; adult/child £8.50/free; 🕒 10am-6pm Mar-Oct, to 5pm Nov-Feb; 🚶 London Bridge) took part in the D-day landings and saw action in Korea. Explore the nine decks and see the engine room, gun decks, galley, chapel, punishment cells, canteen and dental surgery.

London Dungeon

Kids love the **London Dungeon** (Map p125; ☎ 7403 7221; www.thedungeons.com; 28-34 Tooley St SE1; adult/child £14.95/11; 🕒 9.30/10/10.30am-5/5.30pm depending on school holidays; 🚶 London Bridge). It's all spooky music, ghostly boat rides, fake blood and actors dressed up as gory criminals or torturers – beware the interactive bits.

Britain at War Experience

You can pop down to the London Underground air-raid shelter, look at gas masks and ration books, stroll around Southwark during the Blitz and learn about the battle on the home front at the **Britain at War Experience** (Map p125; ☎ 7403 3171; www.britainatwar.co.uk; 64-66 Tooley St SE1; adult/child £9.50/4.85; 🕒 10am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, to 4.30pm Oct-Mar). This place is crammed with fascinating memorabilia from London during WWII.

Old Operating Theatre Museum & Herb Garret

One of London's most genuinely gruesome attractions is the **Old Operating Theatre Museum** (Map p125; ☎ 7955 4791; www.thegarret.org.uk; 9A St Thomas St SE1; adult/child £4.95/2.95; 🕒 10.30am-4.45pm; 🚶 London Bridge). The primitive surgical tools of the 19th century are terrifying. Check out the recently added animal medicine section.

There's also an apothecary where medicinal herbs were stored; it now houses a medical museum hung with bunches of herbs.

Southwark Cathedral

Although the central tower dates from 1520 and the choir from the 13th century, **Southwark Cathedral** (Map p125; ☎ 7367 6722; Montague Close SE1; admission by donation; 🕒 8am-6pm; 🚶 London Bridge) is largely Victorian. It's been scrubbed up in recent years and has a new visitor centre. Inside are monuments and details galore, including a Shakespeare memorial, and it's worth picking up one of the small guides. Catch evensong at 5.30pm Tuesday and Friday, 4pm Saturday and 3pm Sunday.

Shakespeare's Globe & Exhibition

Originally built in 1599, **Shakespeare's Globe** (Map p125; ☎ 7401 9919; www.shakespeares-globe.org; 21 New Globe Walk SE1; adult/child £9/5.50; 🕒 10am-6.30pm (last entry 5pm), 10am-5pm Oct-Apr; 🚶 London Bridge) burned down in 1613 and was immediately rebuilt. The Puritans, who regarded theatres as dreadful dens of iniquity, eventually closed it in 1642. American actor and director Sam Wanamaker fought to rebuild it last century, sadly dying before the opening night in 1997.

A visit includes a tour of the theatre, where you learn interesting snippets like where the audience used to go to the loo in the absence of lavatories (take a wild guess) and what theatre was like in Shakespeare's time, plus a fascinating exhibition on Elizabethan London and the rebuilding of the theatre.

Plays are still performed in this faithful replica with thatched open roof, and actors wear traditional costumes (made by painstaking traditional methods). See the website for upcoming performances. During summer matinee performances the guided tour visits the nearby site of Rose, Bankside's first theatre.

Tate Modern

This former power station is home to the tremendous **Tate Modern** (Map p125; ☎ information7887 8008; www.tate.org.uk; Queen's Walk SE1; admission free; 🕒 10am-6pm Sun-Thu, to 10pm Fri & Sat; ♿; 🚶 Southwark), Europe's most successful contemporary art gallery and one of the South Bank's most exciting attractions.

Following the Tate's first re-hang since opening in 2000, the permanent collection is now organised by period so you can stroll through cubism, futurism and vorticism; surrealism and surrealist tendencies; abstract expressionism and European informal art; and minimalism. The vast Turbine Hall is as dramatic as it's always been and a real highlight of any visit; and the temporary exhibitions are still enticing.

Another attraction is the view from the top-floor restaurant and café. The audio guides (£2) are worthwhile for their descriptions of selected works. There are free daily guided tours of the collection's highlights at 11am and 3pm (meet on Level 3).

SOUTH BANK

The 20th-century South Bank may not be blessed with good looks, but new glass extensions are giving the cultural and arts venues – the Royal National Theatre and the National

Film Theatre – a make-over, and the London Eye remains a popular sight.

Hayward Gallery

No permanent exhibition here, but the **Hayward Gallery** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7921 0813; www.hayward-gallery.org.uk; Belvedere Rd SE1; admission prices vary; 🚶 Waterloo) showcases leading names in modern art through their video, installations, photography, collage, painting etc.

London Eye

Perched on the bank of the Thames, the British Airways' **London Eye** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 0870 5000 600; www.ba-londoneye.com; adult/child £13/6.50, discover flight £15/7.50; 🕒 10am-8pm Jan-May & Oct-Dec, to 9pm Jun-Sep; 🚶 Waterloo) is the world's largest sightseeing wheel. (For all sorts of technical reasons it can't be called a Ferris wheel.) It was originally destined to be a temporary structure, but Londoners took the wheel to their hearts and it's now a permanent addition to the cityscape.

The 135m-tall wheel takes 30 minutes to rotate completely and it's best experienced at dusk. Discovery flights include a guide who can point out the points of interest on the 25-mile view.

This attraction is so popular that it's advisable to book your ticket online to beat the queues (you also get a 10% discount).

The London Eye also runs a 40-minute **River Cruise** (adult/child £10/5), which takes in sights like the Houses of Parliament, Tower of London and St Paul's Cathedral and has multilingual commentary. Joint tickets for the London Eye and cruise are available.

London Aquarium

One of the largest in Europe, the **London Aquarium** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7967 8000; www.londonaquarium.co.uk; County Hall, Westminster Bridge Rd SE1; adult/child £11.75/8.25; 🕒 10am-6pm; 🚶 Westminster or Waterloo) has three levels of fish organised by geographical origin, but you may be peering over schoolchildren's excited heads in school holidays. Check the website for shark feeding times.

Dalí Universe

Europe's largest collection of famous artworks by the surrealist master, **Dalí Universe** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 0870 744 7485; www.dalíuniverse.com; County Hall Gallery SE1; adult/child £11/6.50; 🕒 10am-5.30pm; ♿; 🚶 Westminster or Waterloo) takes you through his work by theme: Sensuality & Femininity, Religion & Mythology, Dreams & Fantasy. **Picasso: Art of**

TATE-A-TATE

To get between London's Tate galleries in style, the **Tate-to-Tate ferries** – one of which sports a Damien Hirst dot painting – will whisk you from the Millennium Pier at Tate Britain to the Bankside Pier at Tate Modern, stopping en route at the London Eye. Services run 10am to 6pm daily at 40-minute intervals. A River Roamer hop-on hop-off ticket (purchased on board) costs £7.30 (discounts available).

a **Genius**, featuring 100 rare or unseen works, is on show here too. Tickets get you into both exhibitions.

LAMBETH

Lambeth is the district just south of Westminster Bridge, home to a few interesting museums and Lambeth Palace, the official residence of successive archbishops of Canterbury since the 12th century.

Imperial War Museum

You don't have to be a little boy to appreciate the **Imperial War Museum** (Map pp116-17; ☎ 7416 5000; www.iwm.org.uk; Lambeth Rd SE1; admission free; 🕒 10am-6pm; 🚶 Lambeth North) and its spectacular atrium with spitfires hanging from the ceiling, rockets (including the massive German V2), field-guns, missiles, submarines, tanks, torpedoes and other military hardware. Providing a telling lesson in modern history, highlights include a re-created WWI trench and WWII bomb shelter as well as a **Holocaust Exhibition**.

Florence Nightingale Museum

The thoughtful **Florence Nightingale Museum** (Map pp116-17; ☎ 7620 0374; www.florence-nightingale.co.uk; 2 Lambeth Palace Rd SE1; adult/child £5.80/4.80; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 4.30pm Sat & Sun, last admission 1hr before closing; ♿; 🚶 Westminster or Waterloo) recounts the story of 'the lady with the lamp' who led a team of nurses during the Crimean War, and who established a training school for nurses at St Thomas's Hospital in 1859.

Chelsea, South Kensington & Earl's Court

The residents of Kensington and Chelsea have the highest incomes of any London borough (shops and restaurants will presume you do too) and the area, like the Chelsea football team, is thoroughly cosmopolitan chic. Thanks

to the 1851 Great Exhibition, South Kensington is first and foremost museum land, boasting the Natural History, Science and Victoria & Albert Museums all on one road.

Further west, Earl's Court is lively and cosmopolitan, although less prosperous. It's particularly popular with travelling antipodeans and was once known as Kangaroo Valley.

VICTORIA & ALBERT MUSEUM

A vast, rambling and wonderful museum of decorative art and design, the **Victoria & Albert (V&A) Museum** (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7942 2000; www.vam.ac.uk; Cromwell Rd SW7; admission free; ☞ 10am-5.45pm Thu-Tue, to 10pm Wed; ☉ South Kensington) is part of Prince Albert's legacy to Londoners in the wake of the successful Great Exhibition of 1851.

It's a bit like the nation's attic, comprising four million objects collected over the years from Britain and around the globe. Spread over nearly 150 galleries, it houses the world's greatest collection of decorative arts, including ancient Chinese ceramics, modernist architectural drawings, Korean bronze and Japanese swords, samples from William Morris' 19th-century Arts and Crafts movement, cartoons by Raphael, spellbinding Asian and Islamic art, Rodin sculptures, Elizabethan gowns and dresses straight from this year's Paris fashion shows, ancient jewellery, a 1930s' wireless set, an all-wooden Frank Lloyd Wright study, and a pair of Doc Martens. Yes, you'll need to plan.

NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

Kids – and most adults – will lose their minds at this **museum** (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7942 5725; www.nhm.ac.uk; Cromwell Rd SW7; admission free; ☞ 10am-5.50pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5.50pm Sun; ☉ South Kensington), where the main collections are divided between adjoining Life and Earth Galleries. Where once the former was full of dusty glass cases of butterflies and stick insects, there are now wonderful interactive displays on themes such as Human Biology and Creepy Crawlies. Plus there's the crowd-pulling exhibition on mammals and dinosaurs, which includes animatronic movers and shakers such as the 4m-high Tyrannosaurus Rex. The Earth Galleries are equally impressive. An escalator slithers up and into a hollowed-out globe where two main exhibits – Earthquake and the Restless Surface – explain how wind, water, ice, gravity and life itself impact on the earth.

The **Darwin Centre**, a vast education centre, houses some 22 million zoological exhibits, which can be visited by tour.

SCIENCE MUSEUM

With seven floors of interactive and educational exhibits, the **Science Museum** (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7942 4455; www.sciencemuseum.org.uk; Exhibition Rd SW7; admission free; ☞ 10am-6pm; ☉ South Kensington) helps you discover everything from the history of the Industrial Revolution to the exploration of space. There is something for all ages, from vintage cars, old trains and antique aeroplanes to labour-saving devices for the home, a wind tunnel and flight simulator. The even more hi-tech extension, the **Wellcome Wing**, focuses on contemporary science and makes presentations on recent breakthroughs. There's also a 450-seat **IMAX cinema**.

CHELSEA PHYSIC GARDEN

Established in 1673 to provide a means for students to study medicinal plants and healing, this peaceful **garden** (Map pp126-7; ☎ 7352 5646; www.chelseaphysicgarden.co.uk; 66 Royal Hospital Rd SW3; admission £5; ☞ noon-5pm Wed & Sun Apr-Oct, noon-5pm Tue & Thur Jul-Sep; ☉ Sloane Sq) is one of the oldest botanical gardens in Europe and contains many rare trees and plants.

ROYAL HOSPITAL CHELSEA

Designed by Christopher Wren, the **Royal Hospital Chelsea** (Map p128; ☎ 7881 5204; Royal Hospital Rd SW3; admission free; ☞ 10am-noon & 2-4pm Mon-Sat, 2-4pm Sun; ☉ Sloane Sq) was built in 1692 to provide shelter for ex-servicemen. Today it houses hundreds of war veterans known as Chelsea Pensioners, who are fondly regarded as a national treasure. As you wander around the grounds or inspect the elegant chapel you may see them in their winter blue coats or summer reds. The Chelsea Flower Show takes place in the hospital grounds in May.

Knightsbridge & Kensington

These are among London's poshest precincts and of particular interest to shoppers. Knightsbridge is where you'll find some of London's best-known department stores, including Harrods and Harvey Nichols, while Kensington High St has a lively mix of chains and boutiques.

KENSINGTON PALACE

Dating from 1605, **Kensington Palace** (Map pp120-1; ☎ 0870 751 5170; www.hrp.org.uk; Kensington Gardens W8; adult/child £11.50/7.50; ☞ 10am-6pm Mar-Oct, to 5pm Nov-Feb; ☉ High St Kensington) was the birthplace of Queen Victoria in 1819 but is best known today as the

last home of Princess Diana. Hour-long tours take you around the surprisingly small **State-rooms**. A collection of Princess Di's dresses is on permanent display along with frocks and ceremonial gowns from HRH and her predecessors. There's an audio tour, included in the entry fee, if you want to explore on your own.

KENSINGTON GARDENS

Blending in with Hyde Park, these **royal gardens** (Map pp120-1; ☞ dawn till dusk) are part of Kensington Palace. There's a splendid, contemporary art space, the **Serpentine Gallery** (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7402 6075; www.serpentinegallery.org; admission free; ☞ 10am-6pm; ☉ Knightsbridge or Lancaster Gate), south of the lake. The **Sunken Garden**, near the palace, is at its prettiest in summer, while tea in the **Orangery** (Map pp120-1) is a treat. For canine lovers there's a **Dog's Cemetery** tucked away.

On the southern edge of the gardens, opposite the Royal Albert Hall, is the restored **Albert Memorial** (Map pp120-1; ☉ South Kensington or Gloucester Rd), as over-the-top as the subject, Queen Victoria's German husband Albert (1819-61), was purportedly humble. It was designed by George Gilbert Scott in 1872.

On the far side of the gardens is **Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Playground** (Map pp120-1) for kids.

Notting Hill

The status of the Notting Hill Carnival (in late August) reflects the multicultural appeal of this part of west London, into which West Indian immigrants moved in the 1950s. After decades of exploitation and strife, the community took off in the 1980s and the area is now a thriving, vibrant corner of central London that is retaining its charm despite steady gentrification.

Bayswater, to the east, was neglected for centuries, but is now mainly a fairly well-to-do residential area with Queensway as its main thoroughfare.

Hyde Park

At 145 hectares, **Hyde Park** (Map pp120-1; ☞ 5.30am-midnight) is central London's largest open space. Henry VIII expropriated it from the Church in 1536, when it became a hunting ground and later a venue for duels, executions and horse racing. The 1851 Great Exhibition was held here and during WWII the park became an enormous potato field. These days it serves as an occasional concert venue and a full-time green space for fun and frolics. There's boating

on the Serpentine for the physically energetic or, near Marble Arch, there's **Speaker's Corner** (Map pp120-1) for oratorical acrobats. These days it's largely nutters and religious fanatics who maintain the tradition begun in 1872 as a response to rioting.

A plaque on the traffic island at Marble Arch indicates the spot where the infamous Tyburn Tree, a three-legged gallows, once stood. It is estimated that up to 50,000 people were executed here between 1300 and 1783, many having been dragged from the Tower of London.

A more soothing structure, in memory of Princess Diana – a meandering stream that splits at the top, flows gently downhill and reassembles in a pool at the bottom – was unveiled here in mid-2004 with inevitable debate over matters of taste and gravitas.

MARBLE ARCH

London's grandest bedsit – with a one-room flat inside – **Marble Arch** (Map pp120-1; ☉ Marble Arch) was designed by John Nash in 1827 as the entrance to Buckingham Palace. It was moved here in 1851.

Marylebone

Increasingly hip Marylebone is home to several attractions, from London's primo tourist haunt Madame Tussauds to the oft-overlooked artistic treasure Wallace Collection.

WALLACE COLLECTION

Housed in a beautiful, opulent Italianate mansion, the **Wallace Collection** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7563 9500; www.wallacecollection.org; Hertford House, Manchester Sq W1; admission free, audio guide £3; ☞ 10am-5pm; ☉ Bond St) is a treasure-trove of exquisite 18th-century French furniture, Sèvres porcelain, arms, armour and art by masters such as Rubens, Titian, Rembrandt and Gainsborough. The lovely glassed-in courtyard restaurant is popular with an older crowd. Past temporary exhibitions have included Great British Watercolours; check the website for the current schedule.

MADAME TUSSAUDS

You'll probably have to queue for **Madame Tussauds** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 0870 999 0046; www.madame-tussauds.com; Marylebone Rd NW1; prices vary according to time of year & entry, admission including Chamber Live adult/child £24/20; ☞ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat & Sun; ☉ Baker St), you'll pay through the nose and really, how interesting is looking at celebrities made out of wax, taking part in a

TOP FIVE PLACES TO POTTER

- Portobello Rd (Map pp120–1)
- Marylebone High St (Map pp122–3)
- Brick Lane (Map p125)
- Exmouth Market (Map pp118–19)
- Hampstead (Map pp116–17)

wax X-factor or hanging out with wax serial killers? Kids seem to like it though, so if they insist, drop them off and go for a mosey down Marylebone High St.

LONDON PLANETARIUM

Attached to Madame Tussauds (and included in the admission charge), the **London Planetarium** (Map pp122–3; www.london-planetarium.com; admission £3; ☎ 9.30am–5.30pm Mon–Fri, 9am–6pm Sat & Sun) presents a 15-minute star show projected onto the dome ceiling.

Regent's Park

A former royal hunting ground, **Regent's Park** (Map pp118–19; ☎ Baker St or Regent's Park) was designed by John Nash early in the 19th century, although what was actually laid out is only a fraction of the celebrated architect's grand plan. Nevertheless, it's a lovely space in the middle of the city – at once lively and serene, cosmopolitan and local – with football pitches, tennis courts and a boating lake. **Queen Mary's Gardens**, towards the south of the park, are the prettiest part of the gardens with spectacular roses in summer when the **open-air theatre** (☎ 7486 7905) hosts performances of Shakespeare.

LONDON ZOO

Established in 1828 and one of the world's oldest, **London Zoo** (Map pp118–19; ☎ 7722 3333; www.londonzoo.co.uk; Regent's Park NW1; adult/child £14.50/11.50; ☎ 10am–5.30pm Mar–Oct, to 4pm Nov–Feb; ☎ Camden Town) got into hot water because its historical buildings weren't conducive to animal comforts. Smarting from the criticism, it embarked on a 10-year, £21-million project focusing on conservation, education and breeding programmes. Still, you'll find this zoo as thrilling or upsetting as any other. Feeding times, reptile handling and the petting zoo are always popular.

North London

The northern reaches of central London stretch in a broad arc from St John's Wood in the west

to Islington in the east. Camden Market and Hampstead Heath are among north London's most popular attractions, while Islington is awash with lively pubs and eateries, and Upper St, in particular, is worth a wander.

EUSTON & KING'S CROSS

These aren't especially inviting areas and will be most familiar to users of the tube and anyone taking a train to the north of England. The area around King's Cross is a bit of a building site as the new Eurostar terminal and surrounding entertainment and residential complexes take shape.

British Library

Colin St John's new **British Library** (Map pp118–19; ☎ 7412 7332; www.bl.uk; 96 Euston Rd NW1; admission free; ☎ 9.30am–6pm Mon & Wed–Fri, 9.30am–8pm Tue, 9.30am–5pm Sat, 11am–5pm Sun; ☎ King's Cross St Pancras), which opened in 1998, has copped some flak for its red-brick façade, but the interior is superb. You need to be a 'reader' (ie member) to use the collection of every British publication in print, but historical documents, including the Magna Carta, are on public display.

ST JOHN'S WOOD

Posh St John's Wood is where you'll find Lord's, the home of world cricket; and 3 Abbey Rd NW8, where the Beatles recorded most of their albums, including *Abbey Road* (1969) itself, with its cover shot taken on the **zebra crossing** (Map pp116–17) outside.

MCC Museum & Lord's Tour

The next best thing to watching a test at **Lord's Cricket Ground** (Map pp116–17; ☎ 7616 8595; www.lords.org; St John's Wood Rd NW8; adult/child £8/5; tours 10am, noon & 2pm Apr–Sep, noon & 2pm Oct–Mar when there's no play; ☎ St John's Wood) is the absorbingly anecdotal 90-minute tour of the ground and facilities, which takes in the famous (members only) Long Room and a museum featuring evocative memorabilia.

CAMDEN

Technicolour hairstyles, facial furniture, heavy tattoos and ambitious platform shoes are the look du jour in Camden, the popularity of which is largely fuelled by Camden Market (see p177), London's most popular 'unticketed' tourist attraction with an estimated 10 million visitors a year. This was a working-class Irish and Greek enclave just two decades ago but has been largely gentrified since.

HAMPSTEAD & HIGHGATE

These quaint and well-heeled villages, perched on hills above central London, are home to an inordinate number of celebrities and intellectuals. The villages are largely as they were laid out in the 18th century and boast close proximity to the vast Hampstead Heath.

Hampstead Heath

With its rolling woodlands and meadows, **Hampstead Heath** (Map pp116–17; ☎ Hampstead, Gospel Oak or Hampstead Heath main-line station) is a million miles away – well, approximately four – from central London. A walk up **Parliament Hill** affords one of the most spectacular views of the city.

Kenwood House (Map pp116–17; ☎ 8348 1286; Hampstead Lane NW3; admission free; ☎ 11am–5pm Apr–end Oct, 11am–4pm rest of year; ☎ Archway or Golders Green) is a magnificent neoclassical mansion on the northern side of the heath, and houses a small collection of paintings by European masters. From the station catch bus 210.

The Heath also has several swimming ponds – for the strong and hardy – with separate ponds for single-sex and mixed bathing. Once you've worked up a thirst (that's *after* your swim) there are several good pubs nearby (see p171).

Highgate Cemetery

The Victorian symbols – shrouded urns, obelisks, upturned torches (life extinguished) and broken columns (life cut short) – along with the eerily overgrown graves and the twisting paths of the western side of **Highgate Cemetery** (Map pp116–17; ☎ 8340 1834; Swain's Lane N6; ☎ Archway) weave a creepy kind of magic. From Archway station walk up Highgate Hill to Waterlow Park on the left. Stroll through the park; the gates to the cemetery are opposite the exit.

Admission to this part of the cemetery is by tour only (adult/child £3/1; 2pm Monday to Friday, on the hour 11am to 4pm Saturday and Sunday). On the other, less atmospheric side you can visit other **graves** (admission £2; ☎ 10am–4.30pm Mon–Fri, 11am–4.30pm Sat & Sun Apr–Oct, till 3.30pm rest of yr), including those of Karl Marx and George Eliot.

Keats House

This elegant Regency **house** (Map pp116–17; ☎ 7435 2062; Wentworth Pl, Keats Grove NW3; adult/child £3.50/free; ☎ 1–5pm Tue–Sun; ☎ Hampstead) was Keats' home from 1818 to 1820, until he left for sunnier Rome to help his tuberculosis. Here he wrote

TOP FIVE GREEN SPACES

- Hampstead Heath (left)
- Hyde Park (p147)
- Kew Gardens (p151)
- Regent's Park (opposite)
- St James's Park (p137)

Ode to a Nightingale and fell in love with his neighbour Fanny Brawne. Among the personal mementos are Fanny's engagement ring, love letters and old manuscripts.

Freud Museum

After fleeing Nazi-occupied Vienna in 1938, Sigmund Freud came to this house where he lived the last 18 months of his life. The **Freud Museum** (Map pp116–17; ☎ 7435 2002; www.freud.org.uk; 20 Maresfield Gardens NW3; adult £5; ☎ noon–5pm Wed–Sun) contains the psychoanalyst's original couch, his books and his Greek and Asian artefacts.

East London

The eastern reaches of central London are taken up by the East End – the London of Christmas pantomimes and old Hollywood films – and the sprawl of the Docklands, where the brand new sits alongside the old and decaying.

EAST END

The East End districts of Shoreditch, Hoxton, Spitalfields and Whitechapel were traditionally working-class London, settled by waves of immigrants all of whom have left their mark. Run-down and neglected by the 1980s, pockets of it are now highly cool. There are no major attractions here, but it's a good place to experience modern, multicultural London.

Geffrye Museum

The only museum in the UK to specialise in historic domestic interiors, the **Geffrye Museum** (Map pp116–17; ☎ 7739 9893; www.geffrye-museum.org.uk; 136 Kingsland Rd E2; admission free; ☎ 10am–5pm Tue–Sat, noon–5pm Sun; ☎ Old St, then bus 243) is a lot more interesting than it sounds, and if you like poking around other people's houses it's positively orgasmic. You'll see oriental-inspired wallpaper and tiles in the Aesthetic style room; bright colours and carved side chairs in the Victorian room; exotic woods, brass mounts and inlays in the Regency room; Arts and Crafts-style furniture in the Edwardian room;

the gramophone and Moderne style of the 1930s; an early '60s living room complete with sideboard that looks suspiciously like ones you can buy in Habitat on Tottenham Court Rd; and the rather boring-looking style of the 1990s IKEA generation. And on top of all that interiors porn, there's a lovely walled herb garden, a design centre, shop and restaurant.

White Cube

In an industrial building with impressive glazed roof extension, **White Cube** (Map p125; ☎ 7930 5373; www.whitecube.com; 48 Hoxton Sq N1; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sat; ☎ Old St) has an appealing programme of contemporary-art exhibitions from sculptures to video, installations and painting.

DOCKLANDS

The Port of London was once the world's greatest port, the hub of the British Empire and its enormous global trade. Since being pummelled by the Luftwaffe in WWII its fortunes have been topsy-turvy, but new development and infrastructure have seen people and tenants return in recent years.

The **Museum in Docklands** (Map p132; ☎ 7515 1162; www.museumindocklands.org.uk; Hertsmere Rd, West India Quay E17; adult/child £5/free; ☎ 10am-5.50pm Mon-Sat, noon-5.50pm Sun; ☎ Canary Wharf), housed in a heritage-listed warehouse, uses artefacts and multimedia to chart the history of the Docklands from Roman trading to its renewal in the twilight of the 20th century. It's a fascinating look through the Docklands' window into Britain's past.

South London

Glamorous Greenwich is the main attraction south of London's centre but you will also have fun exploring Brixton's colourful market or visiting the excellent Horniman Museum in Forest Hill.

GREENWICH

Quaint and villagelike, delightful Greenwich (*gren-itch*) has a recharging sense of space, splendid architecture and strong connections with the sea, science, sovereigns and time. It has earned its place as a Unesco World Heritage Site and you should allow a full day to do your visit justice. All the great architects of the Enlightenment made their mark here, largely due to royal patronage, and there's an extraordinary cluster of classical buildings to explore.

The **tourist office** (Map p132; ☎ 0870 608 2000; fax 8853 4607; 2 Cutty Sark Gardens SE10; ☎ 10am-5pm;

Docklands Light Rail (DLR) Cutty Sark) has all the information you need on the area.

Cutty Sark

A famous Greenwich landmark, this **dipper** (Map p132; ☎ 8858 3445; www.cuttrysark.org.uk; King William Walk SW10; admission £5; ☎ 10am-5pm) was the fastest ship in the world when launched in 1869. It's now undergoing major restoration work (till April 2009) but you can book a hard-hat tour to meet the architects and learn about the project.

Old Royal Naval College

Walk south along King William Walk and you'll see the **Old Royal Naval College** (Map p132; ☎ 8269 4747; www.greenwichfoundation.org.uk), designed by Wren and a magnificent example of monumental classical architecture. Now used by the University of Greenwich, you can still view the **chapel** and the stunning **Painted Hall** (adult/child £5/free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat), which took artist Sir James Thornhill 19 years of hard graft to complete.

National Maritime Museum

Further south along King William Walk you'll come to the **National Maritime Museum** (Map p132; ☎ 8312 6565; www.nmm.ac.uk; Romney Rd SE10; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm), a magnificent neoclassical building by Inigo Jones, which houses a massive collection of marine paraphernalia recounting Britain's seafaring history. Exhibits range from interactive displays to old-fashioned humdingers like Nelson's tunic complete with a hole from the bullet that killed him.

Queen's House

Attached to the National Maritime Museum on its eastern side, the **Palladian Queen's House** (Map p132; ☎ 8858 4422; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm) has been restored to something like Inigo Jones' intention when he designed this place in 1616. It is a stunning exhibition venue, focusing on illustrious seafarers and historic Greenwich.

Royal Observatory

Charles II had the **Royal Observatory** (Map p132; ☎ 8858 4422; www.rog.nmm.ac.uk; Greenwich Park; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm) built here in 1675 to help solve the riddle of longitude. Success was confirmed in 1884 when Greenwich was designated as the prime meridian of the world, and Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) became the universal measurement of standard time. On this spot you can stand with your feet straddling the western and eastern hemispheres.

If you arrive just before lunchtime, you will see a bright-red ball climb the observatory's northeast turret at 12.58pm and drop at 1pm – as it has every day since 1833, when it was introduced to allow the ships on the Thames to set their clocks. If you arrive just after lunchtime, you can console yourself with superb views across London or a visit to the atmospheric preserved rooms containing the actual timepieces described in Dava Sobel's *Longitude*, the bestselling book about the fascinating quest to measure longitude.

Fan Museum

Greenwich also provides the engaging **Fan Museum** (Map p132; ☎ 8305 1441; www.fan-museum.org; 12 Groom's Hill SE10; admission £3.50; ☎ 11am-5pm Tue-Sat, noon-5pm Sun; DLR Greenwich), housed in an 18th-century Georgian house and one of only two of its kind in the world. A fraction of the hand-held folding fans, collected from around the world and dating back to the 17th century, are on display at any one time.

Getting There & Away

Greenwich is most easily reached on the DLR; Cutty Sark is the station closest to the tourist office and most of the sights. There are fast, cheap trains from Charing Cross to Greenwich station (preferably Maze Hill) about every 15 minutes.

Alternatively come by boat. **Thames River Services** (☎ 7930 4097; www.westminsterpier.co.uk) departs half-hourly from both Westminster Pier (Map pp122-3) and Greenwich, and the trip takes approximately an hour (return £9).

AROUND GREENWICH

Millennium Dome

The public never took to the famously costly **dome** (Map p132), the centrepiece of Britain's millennium celebrations. It's now being transformed into a 20,000-seat sports and entertainment arena surrounded by shops, restaurants and affordable housing. The complex formed part of the Olympics bid, and is due to be completed by the time you read this. Maybe Londoners will like it more in its new incarnation.

FOREST HILL

Horniman Museum

Set in an Art Nouveau building with a clock tower and mosaics, **Horniman Museum** (☎ 8699 1872; www.horniman.ac.uk; 100 London Rd SE23; admission free; ☎ 10.30am-5.30pm; ☎ Forest Hill) has a collection of

African art and sculpture, including Africa's largest mask, and a fab collection of musical instruments, which were collected by the Victorian tea-merchant Frederick John Horniman.

Turn left out of Forest Hill station along Devonshire Rd, then right along London Rd, and you'll see the Horniman on your right.

West London

KEW GARDENS

In 1759 botanists began rummaging around the world's gardens for specimens they could plant in the 3-hectare plot known as the **Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew** (☎ 8332 5655; www.rbgekew.org.uk; Kew Rd, Kew; adult/child £11.75/free; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-7pm Sat & Sun, earlier closing in winter; ☎ Kew Gardens). They never stopped collecting, and the gardens, which have bloomed to 120 hectares, provide the most comprehensive botanical collection on earth (including the world's largest collection of orchids) as well as a delightful pleasure garden.

First-time visitors should board the **Kew Explorer** (adult/child £3.50/1), a hop-on hop-off road train that leaves from Victoria Gate – where you will enter from if you get the tube – and takes you around the gardens' main sights.

Kew has all sorts of charms within its borders. Highlights include the enormous **Palm House**, a hothouse of metal and curved sheets of glass; the stunning **Princess of Wales Conservatory**; the red-brick, 1631 **Kew Palace** (adult/child £5/3.50; ☎ 10am-6pm 27 Apr-30 Sep), formerly King George III's country retreat and now open following a £6.6-million restoration project; the celebrated **Great Pagoda** designed by William Chambers in 1762; and the **Temperate House**, which is the world's largest ornamental glass-house and home to its biggest indoor plant, the 18m-high Chilean Wine Palm.

The gardens are easily reached by tube but you might prefer to cadge a lift on a riverboat from the **Westminster Passenger Services Association** (☎ 7930 2062; www.wpsa.co.uk), which runs boats several times daily departing from Westminster Pier from April to September (return adult/child £16.50/5.25).

HAMPTON COURT PALACE

Built by Cardinal Thomas Wolsey in 1514, but coaxed out of him by Henry VIII just before the chancellor fell from favour, **Hampton Court Palace** (☎ 8781 9500; www.hrp.org.uk; adult/child £12.30/8; ☎ 10am-6pm mid-Mar–Oct, 10am-4.30pm Nov–mid-Mar; Hampton Court station) is the largest

and grandest Tudor structure in England. It was already one of the most sophisticated palaces in Europe when, in the 17th century, Christopher Wren was commissioned to build an extension. The result is a beautiful blend of Tudor and 'restrained baroque' architecture.

Take a themed tour led by costumed historians, or if you're in a rush visit the highlights: **Henry VIII's State Apartments**, including the Great Hall with its spectacular hammer-beamed roof; the **Tudor Kitchens**, staffed by 'servants'; and the **Renaissance Picture Gallery**. Spend some time in the 60 acres of riverside gardens and get lost in the 300-year-old **maze**.

Hampton Court Palace is 13 miles south-west of central London and is easily reached by train from Waterloo station via Hampton Court station. Alternatively, you can take the 3½-hour riverboat journey from Westminster Pier (see p151).

RICHMOND PARK

London's wildest park spans more than 1000 hectares and is home to all sorts of wildlife, notably herds of red and fallow deer. It's terrific for bird-watching, rambling and cycling.

To get there from the Richmond tube station, turn left along George St, then left at the fork that leads up Richmond Hill until you come to the main entrance of Richmond Gate.

WHITEHALL WALKING TOUR

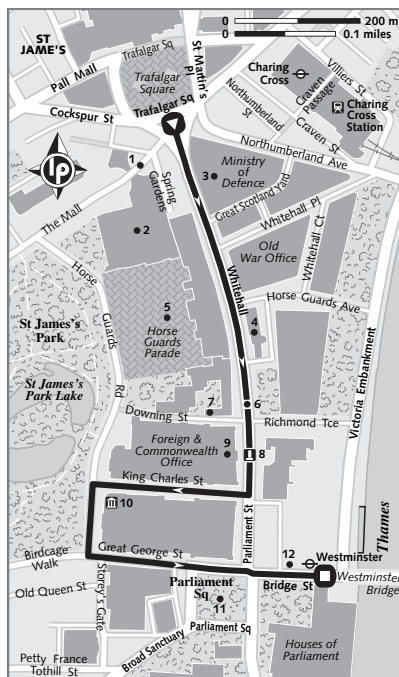
Lined with government buildings, statues, monuments and other historical sights, Whitehall (☞ Charing Cross or Westminster), and its extension, Parliament St, is the wide avenue that links Trafalgar Sq with Parliament Sq. Whitehall was once the administrative heart of the British Empire and is still the focal point for British government.

The best way to take it all in is with the following short and leisurely stroll.

Start at the statue of King Charles, on a traffic island at the southern end of Trafalgar Sq. In front of you, you'll see the Houses of Parliament at the end of Whitehall and to your right is the 1910 **Admiralty Arch (1)**; p134).

Walk south down Whitehall and you'll see the **Old Admiralty (2)** on your right. Further along on the left is the **Ministry of Defence (3)**, on the far side of which you'll find the **Banqueting House (4)**; p135).

On the other side of Whitehall is **Horse Guards Parade (5)**; ☞ parades 11am Mon-Sat, 10am Sun), where the mounted troopers of the Queens



WALK FACTS

Start: King Charles statue, Trafalgar Sq
Finish: New Parliament Building
Distance: 0.5 miles
Duration: 40 minutes

Life Guard are changed in a ceremony you'll find more accessible than the one outside Buckingham Palace. The guards have been here for 200 years. Have your picture taken next to one, but don't expect them to smile – they're on duty.

Carrying on, you'll soon see the bold **Women of World War II (6)** sculpture in the middle of the road. Unveiled on 9 July 2005 by the Queen, it commemorates the work of over seven million women in WW II. Further down on your right is **Downing Street (7)**, site of the British prime minister's official residence since 1732, when George II presented number 10 to Robert Walpole. Tony Blair and his family actually live in the larger apartments at number 11.

Whitehall becomes Parliament St and on your left you'll see the **Centotaph (8)** – Greek for

'empty tomb' – a memorial to Commonwealth citizens killed during the two world wars.

On your right is the **Foreign & Commonwealth Office (9)**, built in 1872 and restored by Sir George Gilbert Scott and Matthew Digby Wyatt. A right turn down King Charles St will bring you to the **Churchill Museum & Cabinet War Rooms (10)**; p135).

Whitehall ends at **Parliament Square (11)**, watched over by statues of past prime ministers. Left along Bridge St is the ultramodern **New Parliament Building (12)**.

LONDON FOR CHILDREN

London has tons on offer for younger visitors. Apart from the obvious destinations like the London Dungeon (p144), London Zoo (p148), Madame Tussauds (p147), the Science Museum (p146), Tower of London (p142), the aquarium (p145) and the London Eye (p145), there are many playgrounds throughout the centre, a number of city farms (see www.london-footprints.co.uk/visitfarms.htm) and children are widely welcomed and catered for everywhere except pubs.

All top-range hotels offer in-house babysitting service. Prices vary enormously from hotel to hotel, so ask the concierge about hourly rates. Alternatively try www.babysitter.co.uk; membership costs £12.75 for three months, then sitters cost as little as £5.50 per hour.

TOURS

If you're short on time and big on company, the **Original London Sightseeing Tour** (☞ 8877 1722) and the **Big Bus Company** (☞ 7233 9533) offer tours of the main sights on hop-on hop-off, double-decker buses, which you'll see trundling through town. They cost adult/child £20/10 for the day, but are only worth getting if you're in town for a short stopover.

Citisights (☞ 8806 3742; www.chr.org.uk/cswalks.htm), **Historical Tours** (☞ 8668 4019), **London Walks** (☞ 7624 3978; www.walks.com) and **Mystery Tours** (☞ 07957 388 280; mysterywalks@hotmail.com) offer a variety of themed walking tours.

More imaginative and rewarding tours include the following:

Black Taxi Tours of London (☞ 7935 9363; www.blacktaxitours.co.uk; 8am-6pm £80, 6pm-midnight £85) Takes you on a two-hour spin past the major sights with a chatty cabbie as your guide.

Cabair Helicopters (☞ 8236 2400; www.cabair.com; Elstree Aerodrome, Borehamwood, Herts; tours £149) Offers 30-minute helicopter 'flight-seeing' tours over London every Sunday.

City Cruises (☞ 7740 0400; www.citycruises.com; Westminster Pier SW1; cruises £9.50; ☞ 10am-4.30pm, later Jun-Aug, fewer sailings Nov-Mar) Operates a year-round ferry service from Westminster Pier to Tower Pier and Tower Pier to Greenwich in a continuous loop that allows passengers to jump on and off at various stops.

London Bicycle Tour Company (☞ 7928 6838; www.londonbicycle.com; 1A Gabriel's Wharf, 56 Upper Ground SE1; tour incl bike £16.95) Offers themed cycle tours of the 'East' and 'Royal West'.

London Duck Tours (Map pp122-3; ☞ 7928 3132; www.londonducktours.co.uk; departing from County Hall; adult/child £17.50/12; ☞ 10am-6pm) Uses the same sort of amphibious landing craft used on D-Day in WWII. You cruise the streets of central London before making a dramatic plunge into the Thames.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Although not renowned as a festival city, London has a few events that might influence your plans.

London Art Fair (www.londonartfair.co.uk; ☞ tickets 0870 739 9500; Business Design Centre, Islington; unlimited access £12.50) Held in January, this fair sees over 100 major galleries participating in what is now one of the largest contemporary art fairs in Europe.

Chinese New Year (www.chinatown-online.co.uk; Chinatown) Late January or early February sees Chinatown snap, crackle and pop with a colourful street parade and eating aplenty.

Chelsea Flower Show (www.rhs.org.uk; Royal Hospital Chelsea) Held in May, this is the world's most renowned horticultural show and attracts green fingers from near and far.

Royal Academy Summer Exhibition (www.royalacademy.org.uk; Royal Academy of Arts) Beginning in June and running through August, this is an annual showcase of works submitted by artists from all over Britain, mercifully distilled to a thousand or so pieces.

Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Championships Held at the end of June, the world's most splendid tennis event is as much about strawberries, cream and tradition as smashing balls.

Pride (www.pridelondon.org) Concerts and parties rock the capital's popular gay and lesbian festival, culminating in a technicolour parade and rally in June/July.

Notting Hill Carnival (www.thecarnival.tv) Held in August, this is Europe's largest and London's most vibrant outdoor carnival, which celebrates its Caribbean community with music, dancing and costumes over the summer bank-holiday weekend.

SLEEPING

Accommodation in London can put a serious dent in your budget. Anything below £80 for a double is pretty much 'budget' in London.

Earl's Court and Victoria are best for cheaper beds while Bloomsbury has some good mid-range deals. The West End has a predictable number of top-end places, and some seriously deluxe options. Most hotels now have internet access and many have rooms equipped for disabled guests.

If you're visiting in July and August consider booking at least a couple of nights in advance.

West End – Soho to the Strand

You can't get more central than this so, naturally, accommodation here comes at a price. The area specialises in deluxe hotels, many of which are tourist attractions in their own right.

BUDGET

Oxford St YHA (Map pp130-1; ☎ 0870 770 5984; oxfordst@yha.org.uk; 14 Noel St W1; 3- or 4-bed dm £22.60, tw per person £24.60; ☒; ☎ Oxford Circus) It's a good idea to book this popular, supercentral hostel two weeks before arriving. There's a kitchen, TV room, balcony, laundry and PC. Since the 76 beds (31 rooms of two, three or four beds) are spread over the 4th and 5th floors of this building the views are pretty good – you can even see the London Eye from some back rooms.

MIDRANGE

Regent Palace Hotel (Map pp130-1; ☎ 0870 400 8703; fax 7734 6435; Piccadilly Circus, cnr Glasshouse St W1; s without bathroom/d with bathroom from £69/120; ☎ Piccadilly) This is a practical rather than personal choice. The sights are on your doorstep but then so are an uninspiring café, Irish bar and souvenir shop in the lobby – ignore these and enjoy the delights of Soho.

Fielding Hotel (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7836 8305; www.the-fielding-hotel.co.uk; 4 Broad Ct, Bow St WC2; s/d from £80/100; ☎ Covent Garden) On a quiet pedestrianised street a block away from the Royal Opera House. Space is at a premium and the décor is shop-bought but the central location is a winner.

TOP END

Hazlitt's (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7434 1771; www.hazlittshotel.com; 6 Frith St W1; d from £205, ste £300; ☒; ☎ Tottenham Court Rd) Staying in this charming Georgian house, the former abode of author William Hazlitt, is a trip back in time. Each of the 23 rooms is packed with antiques and named after a personage connected with the house. There's no bar and only a small sitting room containing books signed by famous guests. Truly special.

Covent Garden Hotel (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7806 1000; www.coventgardenhotel.co.uk; 10 Monmouth St WC2; d/ste £220/350; ☒; ☎ wi-fi; ☎ Covent Garden) Think antiques successfully mixed with vibrant reds, pinks and leopard print and you'll have a vision of this welcoming hotel. The colourful but cosy 1st-floor library with honesty bar is perfect for a pause and the individually designed bedrooms and marble bathrooms offer respite from busy Covent Garden. Very friendly staff too.

Courthouse Hotel Kempinski (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7297 5555; www.courthouse-hotel.com; 19-21 Great Marlborough St W1; r from £270; ☒; ☎ wi-fi; ☎ Leicester Sq) This is a unique opportunity to stay in an Old Magistrates Court. In the bar you can sip your G&T in a holding cell, and the Silk Thai/Indian fusion restaurant still has the witness box and judge's bench, although a Buddha now presides instead of a be-wigged old fellow. The rooms boast Italian bathrooms and comfortable fittings (and no bars on the windows). The health spa has a pool, gym and treatments.

Westminster & Victoria

Victoria may not be particularly attractive but there's a good pick of budget accommodation and the transport links are handy.

BUDGET

Astor Victoria Hostel (Map p128; ☎ 7834 3077; 71 Belgrave Rd SW1; dm from £16.50, d £25; ☒; ☎ Victoria) This cheap and cheerful hostel has 20 mixed dorms (four- to eight-bed), eight women-only dorms (four- and six-bed), one twin room with bunk beds and only one double room so book early if you want privacy *en couple*. There are two comfortable lounges with PCs, a fully equipped kitchen and weekly dinners where you can meet other travellers over grub.

Luna & Simone Hotel (Map p128; ☎ 7834 5897; www.lunasimonehotel.com; 47-49 Belgrave Rd SW1; s/d incl breakfast from £35/70; ☒; ☎ wi-fi; ☎ Victoria) The hotel ensign of Luna (the moon) and Simone (the owner) is etched into the glass porch and this personal touch continues inside with the friendly service. The blue and yellow rooms are clean and calming; the ones at the back are quieter. There's a full English breakfast and there are free storage facilities if you want to leave bags while travelling.

Hamilton House Hotel (Map p128; ☎ 7821 7113; www.hamiltonhousehotel.com; 60 Warwick Way SW1; s/d £50/60; ☒; ☎ wi-fi; ☎ Victoria) Following a major refurbishment, everything in this hotel is shiny and new.

BOOKING SERVICES

It's possible to make same-day accommodation bookings for free at most tourist offices, and **Visit London** (☎ 08456 443 010; www.visitlondonoffers.com) also has good deals.

At Home in London (☎ 8748 1943; www.athomeinlondon.co.uk) Can arrange B&B accommodation and charges percentage booking fees.

British Hotel Reservation Centre (☎ 7340 1616; www.bhrconline.com; free online booking)

Lastminute (www.lastminute.com) There are kiosks at the Britain & London Visitor Centre and Victoria station.

London Homestead Services (☎ 7286 5115; www.lhs.london.com) Charges 5% booking fee.

Uptown Reservations (☎ 7937 2001; www.uptownres.co.uk) Has centrally located self-catering apartments and B&Bs on its books.

Youth Hostels Association (YHA; ☎ 0870 870 8808; lonres@yha.org.uk) Operates its own central reservations service provided you can give them at least two weeks' notice.

The bathrooms feature lovely large showers and the compact rooms (all with en suite) are nicely decorated and contain 51cm LCD tell-ies. Basement rooms are a little dark.

Morgan House (Map p128; ☎ 7730 2384; www.morganhouse.co.uk; 120 Ebury St SW1; s/d/tr with bathroom £82/92/110, without bathroom £52/72/92, all incl breakfast; ☎ Victoria) From the minute you enter this Georgian house you feel at home. Romantic iron beds, chandeliers, period fireplaces, a sunny little garden, sparkling bathrooms and a full English breakfast top it off.

MIDRANGE

B&B Belgravia (Map p128; ☎ 7259 8570; www.bb-belgravia.com; 64-66 Ebury St SW1; s/d from £94/99; ☒; ☎ Victoria) This small hotel's unassuming façade belies a chic, contemporary interior comprising fireplace with flaming pebbles, chandelier with flying light bulbs, white Formica chairs and tables in an eat-in kitchen connected to the lounge via a glass bridge, innovative bathroom design, floor-to-ceiling dark wood cupboards etc. The only design blip is the easyJet-style orange staff uniform. Outside, the pretty courtyard garden is a suntrap.

Bloomsbury & Fitzrovia

Bloomsbury and Fitzrovia are very convenient, especially for the West End and the British Museum. Tucked away in Georgian crescent Cartwright Gardens to the north of Russell Sq, you'll find some of London's best-value hotels.

BUDGET

Generator (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7388 7666; www.the-generator.co.uk; Compton Pl, 37 Tavistock Pl WC1; dm £12.50-17, s £35, all incl breakfast; ☒; ☎; ☎ Russell Sq) Imagine lashings of primary colours and shiny metal and

you'll get an idea of this futuristic but fun hostel designed to resemble a generator. This former police barracks has long corridors housing 850 beds; a bar that stays open until 2am and hosts quizzes, pool competitions, karaoke and DJs; 24-hour internet access; safe-deposit boxes; and a large eating area but no kitchen.

Ashlee House (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7833 9400; www.ashleehouse.co.uk; 261-265 Gray's Inn Rd WC1; dm from £14, s £35-37, tw £23-25; ☎ King's Cross) This hostel is a cheery surprise in a rather gritty but central location. There's a large tube map and sheepskin bench in reception, green dice tables in the small lounge, purple paint on the walls of the compact rooms, and stripy duvets on the blue bunk beds. Nearby, its sister hostel in a converted courthouse (complete with cells) was a building site at the time of writing but should be open by the time you read this; call Ashlee House if you fancy a turn behind bars.

Arran House Hotel (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7636 2186; www.arranhotel-london.com; 77-79 Gower St WC1; dm from £18.50, s/d from £45/72; ☒; ☎ wi-fi; ☎ Goodge St) Period features such as corning and fireplaces, a pretty pergola-decked back garden and a comfy lounge with PCs and TV lift this hotel from the average to the attractive. Slightly squashed en suite bathrooms are a small letdown (literally).

Hotel Cavendish (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7636 9079; www.hotelcavendish.com; 75 Gower St WC1; s/d from £50/65; ☒; ☎ wi-fi; ☎ Goodge St) Following a complete refurbishment in 2006, bedrooms have a contemporary look with flat-screen LCD TVs, and all are equipped with compact en suite shower rooms (some have pretty mosaic tiles and bumper mirrors). The breakfast room is relieved of basement dinginess by a bright white lick of paint. The two gardens at the back seem to have missed out on the refurb, but are still a good place to catch some rays.

SWANK IT UP

Brown's Hotel (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7493 6020; www.roccofortehotels.com; 30 Albemarle St W1; d from £295; ☑ wi-fi; ☉ Green Park) Following an 18-month refit, Brown's Hotel has a chic new look. Stay here and you're in good company – Rudyard Kipling penned many of his works here, and Kate Moss has been known to pop into the spa.

One Aldwych (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7300 1000; www.onealdwych.com; 1 Aldwych WC2; d/ste from £345/550; ☑ wi-fi; ☉ Covent Garden) Granite bathrooms, long swimming pool with underwater music, US and UK electricity sockets, majestic bar and restaurant, modern art, and a lift that changes colour to literally lift your mood – this hotel has all luxuries and services covered.

Claridges (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7629 8860; www.savoy-group.co.uk/claridges; Brook St W1; d from £370; ☑ wi-fi; ☉ Bond St) One of the greatest of London's five-star hotels and a leftover from a bygone era with original Art Deco features.

Ritz (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7493 8181; www.theritzlondon.com; 150 Piccadilly W1; d/ste from £400/600; ☑; ☉ Green Park) London's most celebrated hotel, with opulent rooms that are popular with royalty and the cultural elite.

Ridgmount Hotel (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7636 1141; www.ridgmounthotel.co.uk; 65-67 Gower St WC1; d with/without bathroom from £68/52; ☉ Goodge St) This old-fashioned, slightly chintzy place has been in the same family for 40 years and has a comfortable, welcoming feel.

MIDRANGE

Jenkins Hotel (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7387 2067; www.jenkins.hotel.demon.co.uk; 45 Cartwright Gardens WC1; s £52, s/d with bathroom from £72/85; ☉ Russell Sq) This attractive hotel has featured in the TV series of Agatha Christie's *Poirot*. Rooms are on the small side but the hotel has charm.

St Margaret's Hotel (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7636 4277; www.stmargarethotel.co.uk; 26 Bedford Pl WC1; d with/without bath-room £97/67.50; ☑ wi-fi; ☉ Russell Sq) This light and airy hotel comprises four conjoined Georgian town houses; with four staircases it's easy to get lost, so keep your bearings. Many rooms used to be piano rooms and have lovely high ceilings (for better acoustics). The décor wouldn't look out of place in your granny's house, but the natural light and space are big pluses and the family who own it are welcoming.

Harlingford Hotel (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7387 1551; www.harlingfordhotel.com; 61-63 Cartwright Gardens WC1; d from £99, f £115; wi-fi; ☉ Russell Sq) This family-run hotel sports refreshing, upbeat décor – bright-green mosaic-tiled bathrooms (with trendy bowl sinks), fuchsia bedspreads and colourful paintings. With lots of stairs and no lift, consider requesting a 1st-floor room.

TOP END

Charlotte Street Hotel (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7806 2000; www.firmdale.com; 15 Charlotte St W1; d from £230; wi-fi; ☉ Goodge

St) A favourite with media types, this place, designed with a 'Bloomsbury Set' theme, comes up with the goods: great service, stylish quarters, relaxing lounge with honesty bar, popular bar and restaurant, small gym, and screening room showing Sunday-night movies.

Clerkenwell

The availability of accommodation hasn't kept pace with Clerkenwell's revival but this is still a great area to stay in.

MIDRANGE

Zetter Hotel (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7324 4455; www.thezetter.com; 86-88 Clerkenwell Rd EC1; d from £140; ☑ wi-fi; ☉ Farringdon) A slick 21st-century conversion of a Victorian warehouse. The furnishings are an enticing blend of old and new, and the facilities cutting edge – you can even choose the colour of your room's lighting (how about pink this evening?).

Malmaison (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7012 3700; www.mal.maison.com; 18-21 Charterhouse Sq EC1; d from £195, weekend rates from £125; wi-fi; ☉ Farringdon) The *Alice in Wonderland* lobby of chessboard carpet, black seats that look like pawns, endless *Veuve Cliquot* and oversized chairs is a quirky surprise. The rooms look more classic with contemporary fittings in neutral shades, flat-screen TVs, DVD and CD players etc. The aubergine walls are designed to quieten guests in the halls (more wonderland magic), but they look good too. A well-located hotel with a touch of pizzazz.

TOP END

Rookery (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7336 0931; www.rookeryhotel.com; Peter's Lane, Cowcross St EC1; s/d from £215/245; wi-fi;

☉ Farringdon) Smithfield used to be an inner-city slum reportedly home to the original Fagin and Bill Sykes as well as hookers banned from the City. These seedy spots were known as rookeries, and although signs of the past remain with the butcher's name above the windows and period features inside, this discreet luxury hotel made up of six 18th- to 19th-century houses has come a long way from those smutty times. For a bird's-eye view of St Paul's and the Old Bailey book the Rook's Nest.

The City

The centrally located City is schizophrenic: manic during the week and deathly quiet at weekends, when you can often pick up good deals.

BUDGET

City of London YHA (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7236 4965; city@yha.org.uk; 36 Carter Lane EC4; dm £17.20-32; ☑ wi-fi; ☉ St Paul's) This former St Paul's Cathedral Choir Boys School is in a lovely building just notes away from the cathedral itself. It's an excellent facility with 190 beds in three- to 15-bed dorms; there's a licensed cafeteria but no kitchen.

Barbican YMCA (Map p125; ☎ 7628 0697; city.reception@cityymca.org; 2 Fann St EC2; s/d £33.95/31.95; ☉ Barbican) No bar, no dorms, no internet but there is a gym, the rooms are mega cheap and you get to stay in a classic Barbican tower block – yes, its appeal is more architectural than aesthetic.

TOP END

Threadneedles (Map p125; ☎ 7657 8080; www.theetnoncollection.com; 5 Threadneedle St EC2; d from £260 weekdays, from £110 weekends; wi-fi; ☉ Liverpool St) The incredible stained-glass dome in the lobby points to its former status as the City Bank HQ. Today the bar and restaurant are still popular with suits, but the atmosphere is chic. At weekends this top-end spot is an absolute bargain.

Borough & Southwark

Just south of the river is good if you want to immerse yourself in workaday London, still be central and get a reasonably priced hotel.

BUDGET

Dover Castle Hostel (Map pp116-17; ☎ 7403 7773; www.dovercastlehostel.com; 6a Great Dover St SE1; dm £10-16; ☑ wi-fi; ☉ Borough) This is a fairly standard hostel with kitchen, lockers (downstairs rather than in the

dorm) and TV room, but it does have its own pub with a pool table and DJs till 3am, and the dorms have lots of natural light.

St Christopher's Village (Map p125; ☎ 7407 1856; www.st-christophers.co.uk; 163 Borough High St SE1; dm £16-24; ☑; ☉ Borough) This bright and breezy hostel has a club that opens till 4am on Friday and Saturday (with karaoke, comedy and cheap drinks), a slightly dark chill-out room with big screen, table football and PCs, Belushi's restaurant and bar next door, and 172 beds, but the *pièce de résistance* is undoubtedly the roof terrace with BBQ, sauna and hot tub. Twin rooms are available. The chain has two other hostels on this street and in Camden, Shepherd's Bush and Greenwich.

MIDRANGE

Southwark Rose Hotel (Map p125; ☎ 7015 1480; www.southwarkrosehotel.co.uk; 47 Southwark Bridge Rd SE1; d weekdays £125, weekends £75, ste £190; ☑ wi-fi; ☉ Borough) Popular with business travellers and with great rates for weekenders, this hotel manages to be minimalist and colourful. Neutral en suite shower rooms and metallic beds are given a boost of colour with mauve leather headboards and chairs. The suites with double room plus sofa-bed and kitchenette are a good family option. Concealed lighting in the rooms and photographs by Mayumi add a touch of style.

Chelsea, South Kensington & Knightsbridge

Classy Chelsea and 'South Ken' offer easy access to the museums and fashion retailers. The prices are reasonable for the neighbourhood and there's a relaxing villagey vibe.

BUDGET

Holland Park (Map pp120-1; ☎ 0870 770 5866; holland.park@yha.org.uk; Holland Walk W8; dm incl breakfast £17.20; ☑; ☉ High St Kensington) With 200 beds, it's built into the Jacobean wing of Holland House and overlooks Holland Park. Though large, very busy and rather institutional, the position can't be beaten. There's a café and kitchen.

MIDRANGE

L'Hotel (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7589 6286; www.lhotel.co.uk; 28 Basil St SW3; d from £155; wi-fi; ☉ Knightsbridge) Given its enviable proximity to Harrods and Harvey Nichols (p176) it's no wonder this boutique hotel is a hit with the ladies, although the mainly female staff can take some credit too.

There are 12 rooms including three deluxe and one suite, and guests can use the health spa of Carlton Towers next door – if you prefer to exercise outdoors a jogging partner will drag you around Hyde Park. Le Metro brasserie serves breakfast, lunch, tea and dinner.

TOP END

Gore (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7584 6601; www.gorehotel.com; 189 Queen's Gate SW7; s/d from £130/190; ☑ wi-fi; ➔ High St Kensington or Gloucester Rd) Features include lots of polished mahogany, Turkish carpets, antique-style bathrooms, aspidistra plants, thousands of portraits and prints, and a great bar.

myhotel Chelsea (Map pp126-7; ☎ 7225 7500; www.myhotels.com; 35 Lxworth Pl SW3; d from £206; ☑ wi-fi; ➔ South Kensington) Just around the corner from Bibendum and the shops of Fulham Rd, this hotel's location is as fabulous as its purple bar with funky chairs and bright and airy library-conservatory. The rooms sit lower down the fabulousness scale but the soft pink and grey décor is attractive and the en suite bathrooms are spacious. There's also a small gym and treatment room. If you like shopping, check out the dress agencies on Elystan St.

Earl's Court

Earl's Court is not awash with sights but it does have inexpensive digs and an infectious holiday atmosphere.

BUDGET

Barmy Badger Backpackers (Map pp126-7; ☎ 7370 5213; www.barmybadger.com; 17 Longridge Rd SW5; dm incl breakfast from £16; ➔ Earl's Court) A basic hostel with dorm beds. There's a big kitchen and safe-deposit boxes. (There's also a YHA hostel nearby.)

easyHotel (Map pp126-7; www.easyHotel.com; 14 Lexham Gardens W8; d from £30; ➔ Earl's Court) Much like the airline, this orange hotel operates on a no-frills basis and you have to book your room online. The rooms (all with double beds) are very compact and the en suites are only about twice as big as a plane loo, but there is a flat-screen TV. As you'd expect, there's no lounge, bar or kitchen.

MIDRANGE

Philbeach Hotel (Map pp126-7; ☎ 7373 1244; www.philbeachhotel.co.uk; 30-31 Philbeach Gardens SW5; s/d £58.50/81; ☑ wi-fi; ➔ Earl's Court) In a pleasant, quiet side street, this is one of London's few gay hotels, and its interiors are predictably stylish and unique. The Thai restaurant and

bar are both popular with the local gay crowd and there's a lovely garden.

base2stay (Map pp126-7; ☎ 0845 262 8000; www.base2stay.com; 25 Courtfield Gardens SW5; s/d £80/99; ☑ wi-fi ☑; ➔ Earl's Court) This boutique hotel is excellent value. With smart décor of chocolate-brown carpets, light olive-green walls, oak wardrobes and limestone bathrooms, as well as power showers, flat-screen TV with internet access and artfully concealed kitchenettes, it feels like a four-star hotel at two-star prices.

Notting Hill, Bayswater & Paddington

Bayswater is an extremely convenient location but parts west of Queensway are shady. Scruffy Paddington has lots of cheap hotels and is a handy transit point. Notting Hill is expensive in comparison, but has lots of good bars and restaurants.

BUDGET

Wake up! London (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7262 4471; www.wakeuplondon.co.uk; 1 Queen's Gardens W2; dm with/without bathroom £16/15, s £25/22.50, d £35/30; ☑; ➔ Paddington) This Australian hostel has an obsession with exclamation marks preceded by the word up: the facilities are described as cook up! (kitchen), wash up! (laundry), hook up! (24-hour internet), call up! (phones), lock up! (lockers) etc. The hiccup! bar is a little on the small side considering how spacious the other communal areas are, but if the punctuation doesn't give you a headache this is a good budget option.

Stylotel (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7723 1026; www.stylotel.com; 160-162 Sussex Gardens W2; s/d incl breakfast £50/72; wi-fi; ➔ Paddington) If you don't like modern design, look away now. Rooms feature glass and steel illuminated furniture, floor-to-ceiling mirrors and walls clad in aluminium. The breakfast area (full English breakfast) is a jagged comb of booths while the lounge has bright-blue sofas. You get lots of design-bang for your buck here as well as a practical location round the corner from Paddington station.

MIDRANGE

Pavilion Hotel (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7262 0905; www.pavilionhotels.com; 34-36 Sussex Gardens W2; d from £100; ➔ Paddington) This hotel is so cluttered with animal-print chairs, velvet drapes, portraits and knick-knacks that it's amazing to think there are 30 rooms inside. Each one is themed: Casablanca Nights has a leopard-print bedspread, red Moroccan chairs and golden lanterns. It's a lot of fun if you overlook the diminutive en suite bathrooms.

TOP END

Portobello Hotel (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7727 2777; www.portobello-hotel.co.uk; 22 Stanley Gardens W11; d from £180; ☑ wi-fi; ➔ Notting Hill Gate) Imagine a wealthy aunt has invited you to stay in her London town house stuffed with antique furniture and a 24-hour bar. Other guests might include movie or music stars who love the homely but luxurious rooms and their gorgeous four-poster beds, large TVs, vintage clawfoot baths and sumptuous fabrics. If it's available, request room number 16, whose round bed with fairy-tale canopy has seen action from the likes of Johnny Depp and Kate Moss.

Hempel (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7298 9000; www.the-hempel.co.uk; 31-35 Craven Hill Gardens W2; d from £275; ☑ wi-fi; ➔ Bayswater) As soon as you enter the expansive all-white lobby with sunken seating areas, supermodern fireplaces, and dramatic pole and orchid ceiling-grazing flower arrangement, you know you're in for something special. It's created by Anouska Hempel and every detail is a feat of superb design, from the Zen garden to the minimalist but luxurious guestrooms and the suite with suspended caged bed.

Marylebone

Increasingly hip Marylebone has graceful Georgian squares and bustling high streets. It's within walking distance of Hyde Park and staggering distance of West End nightlife.

MIDRANGE

Edward Lear Hotel (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7402 5401; www.edlear.com; 28-30 Seymour St W1; d with/without bathroom from £89/66.50; ☑; ➔ Marble Arch) This former home of Edward Lear has a fantastic location mere winking distance from Oxford St. The décor is a little uninspired but welcoming enough, and the staff are smiley.

Bryanston Court Hotel (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7262 3141; www.bryanstonhotel.com; 56-60 Great Cumberland Pl W1; d from £99; ➔ Marble Arch) Open fireplaces, leather armchairs, creaky floors and oil paintings give this hotel a hushed and traditional English atmosphere. There are 60 pleasantly furnished rooms here, although the ones at the back are quieter and brighter. If this hotel is full, you'll sleep in the Concorde Hotel located next door.

Outside Central London

Staying outside the centre and commuting can be a drag, but these places are handy for great attractions on the outskirts.

BUDGET

Palmers Lodge (Map pp116-17; ☎ 7483 8470; www.palmerslodge.co.uk; 40 College Cres NW3; dm from £14, d & tw with/without bathroom £48/44, all incl breakfast; ☑ wi-fi ☑; ➔ Swiss Cottage) Reminiscent of a period murder mystery (in a good way), this former nursing home has bags of character. Listed by English Heritage, who even chose the plants that flank the drive, it's stuffed with cornicing, moulded ceilings, original fireplaces and imposing wooden panelling. Ceilings are high, rooms are spacious, there's a chapel bar with pews, a kitchen with continental breakfast and a roomy lounge with flat-screen telly and free internet access.

Rotherhithe YHA (Map pp116-17; ☎ 0870 770 6010; rotherhithe@yha.org.uk; 20 Salter Rd SE16; dm/tw incl breakfast £15/55; ☑ ☑; ➔ Rotherhithe) YHA's flagship London hostel is right by the River Thames and the perfect choice for anyone who's keen on Greenwich and doesn't mind being a little isolated. There are 320 rooms including 22 en suite doubles (four of them adapted for disabled visitors). There's a bar and restaurant, as well as kitchen facilities and a laundry.

MIDRANGE

Hampstead Village Guesthouse (☎ 7435 8679; www.hampsteadguesthouse.com; 2 Kemplay Rd NW3; s/d with bathroom £70/90, without £60/75; ➔ Hampstead) Only 20 minutes by tube to the centre of London, it has rustic, antique décor and furnishings, comfy beds and a delightful back garden in which you can enjoy a cooked breakfast (if you pay the extra £7). There's also a studio flat, which can accommodate up to five people.

EATING

Dining out in London has become so fashionable that you can hardly open a menu without banging into some celebrity chef or restaurateur. Unfortunately, this doesn't automatically guarantee quality – food can be

SERVICED APARTMENTS

Aston's Apartments (Map pp126-7; ☎ 7590 6000; www.astons-apartments.com; 31 Rosary Gardens SW7; ➔ Gloucester Rd)

Holiday Serviced Apartments (☎ 0845 060 4477; reservations@holidayapartments.co.uk)

Vancouver Studios (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7243 1270; www.vancouverstudios.co.uk; 30 Prince's Sq W2; ➔ Bayswater)

hit-and-miss regardless of price tag. In this section, we steer you towards restaurants and cafés distinguished by their location, value for money, unique features, original settings and, of course, good food.

Opening hours vary. Many restaurants in Soho close Sunday, those in the City for the whole weekend. We've tried to note where places stray from the standard 'open daily for lunch and dinner' (standard business hours are outlined on p953), but it's always safest to call and check.

Vegetarians needn't worry. London has a host of dedicated meat-free joints, while most other restaurants offer vegetarian options.

West End – Soho to the Strand

Soho is the gastronomic heart of London, with stacks of restaurants and cuisines to choose from. The liveliest streets are Greek, Frith, Old Compton and Dean Sts. Gerrard and Lisle Sts are chock-a-block with Chinese eateries.

BUDGET

Breakfast Club Café (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7434 2571; 33 D'Arbury St W1; toasties/jacket potatoes from £2/3.50, healthy brekkie £4.95; ☎; ☎ Oxford Circus) Fans of the film will immediately clock this place, and if the name doesn't jog your memory the bright-yellow façade will get your attention. It's much less confronting inside with distressed floorboards, newspapers, computers with free internet access and battered signs on the walls – a chilled-out spot for a Fair Trade coffee or a snack.

Hummus Bros (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7734 1311; 88 Wardour St W1; meals £2.50-6; ☎ wi-fi; ☎ Leicester Sq) This relaxed café is hummus heaven. The scrummy stuff comes in small or regular bowls with a choice of meat and veggie toppings and a side of pitta bread. You can read about the founder's hummus obsession in the loo.

Food for Thought (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7836 0239; 31 Neal St W2; mains from £3.20; ☎ Covent Garden) A classic old vegetarian joint that's big on sociability and flavour but small on price and space. Food ranges from soups to traditional Indian *thalis* (all-you-can-eat mixed plates).

Neals Yard Salad Bar (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7836 3233; Neal's Yard WC2; salads £3.50-4; ☎ Covent Garden) Occupying both sides of the courtyard, this bright-orange salad bar serves fresh leafy meals and moist cakes.

Café in the Crypt (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7839 8362; St Martin-in-the-Fields, Duncannon St WC2; mains £6-7.50; ☎; ☎ closed Sun; ☎ Charing Cross) An atmospheric crypt complete

with tombstones underfoot and top nosh on your plate. Lunchtime is frantic.

Abeno Too (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7379 1160; 47 Great Newport St WC2; *okonomi-yaki* £7; ☎ Leicester Sq) Specialists in *okonomi-yaki*, which is cooked in front of you on a hotplate and looks a bit like omelette. Sit at the bar or by the window and feast. Japanese noodle dishes are also available.

MIDRANGE

Yauatcha (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7494 8888; 15 Broadwick St W1; dim sum £3-24; ☎ Oxford Circus or Piccadilly Circus) Restaurants don't come much cooler than this. The glass-fronted exterior has just enough transparent sections to tempt you in without revealing anything. With a starlight ceiling, multicoloured tea-lights in the brick-lined walls, low green seating and the out-of-this-world fish-tank bar you could be forgiven for mistaking the dim-sum restaurant downstairs for a Tokyo nightclub. The menu is fantastic – try the Cheung Fun. Upstairs the chilled-out teahouse serves pretty cakes.

Imli (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7287 4243; 167-169 Wardour St W1; dishes £4-5.25; ☎ Oxford Circus) This baby of Mayfair's Tamarind does a good job of Asian street food. The helpful staff recommend you order two or three dishes each to have a full meal. There's a lot of orange going on in the décor but it works.

Mildreds (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7494 1634; 45 Lexington St W1; mains £5.50-7.50; ☎ Piccadilly Circus) Even dedicated carnivores will love the wholesome vegetarian fare served up here. You can't book, so turn up early and don't be afraid to share a table.

Sarastro (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7836 0101; 126 Drury Lane WC2; mains £7.50-15.50; ☎ Covent Garden) This Mediterranean restaurant is gaudy and kitsch and loads of fun. The opera theme – with gold everywhere (even the ceiling), crushed velvet and myriad lamps – is totally over the top but the balcony tables are a scream. Good for pre- and post-theatre meals.

Wolsley (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7499 6996; 160 Piccadilly W1; mains £7.50-18.50; ☎ Piccadilly) Most customers here are checking to see if their co-diners are as impressive as the building. And the Grade-II listed former showroom for Wolsley cars is certainly stunning but the food and service do not always live up to their price tag. We advise coming for a drink and light bite, to soak up the ambience and pose.

Kettners (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7734 6112; 29 Romilly St W1; mains £8.25-19.50; ☎ Leicester Sq) A gem, serving mouthwatering pizzas and burgers, which

you can wash down with champagne while soaking in the gently fading grandeur and tinkling piano.

Spiga (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7734 3444; 84-86 Wardour St W1; mains from £8.50, set menu 2/3 courses £15.50/19.50; ☎ Tottenham Court Rd) With Italian movie posters on the walls, warm, colourful décor and a tasty menu of pastas, pizzas, fish and meat dishes, this popular restaurant is a winner.

Ping Pong (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7851 6969; 45 Great Marlborough St W1; mains £8.50-15.50; ☎ Covent Garden) Prepare to queue outside this chic but cheery dim-sum joint (you can't book). Grab a table or perch at the semicircular bars and mark up your dim-sum menu (a novel but effective ordering approach). It's all good but the Char Sui Bun and the Har Gau are particularly tasty and the jasmine tea has an exploding flower. The loos take the sleek look to a new level with a touch-in touch-out system.

Joe Allen (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7836 0651; 13 Exeter St W1; mains £8.50-15.50; ☎ Covent Garden) This favourite with theatregoers and thespians has a daily menu of modern American dishes, photos of performers plastering the brick-lined walls, a piano-player in the evenings, jazz on Sunday and buckets of atmosphere. Burgers aren't on the menu but they serve them if you ask.

Gay Hussar (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7437 0973; 2 Greek St W1; mains £9.50-16.50; ☎ Tottenham Court Rd) Founded in 1953 and looking pretty much as it did then, this old-style Hungarian eatery is a Soho institution. It's popular with politicians, and the walls are covered with cartoons of famous bods who've dined here. The rich, authentic, meaty dishes are colossal. Try the veal goulash or the crispy roast duck.

TOP END

Bentley's Oyster Bar & Grill (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7734 4756; 11-15 Swallow St W1; oysters £9.50-26, mains £13.50-29.50; ☎ Leicester Sq) Bentley's has been here since 1916 but the new owner, award-winning chef Richard Corrigan, has gutted and refurbished it to give it a new lease of life. The oyster bar's look is classic with a modern twist: wood panelling is painted charcoal grey, punters perch on high red leather chairs by the marble-topped bar, and stripy seats cluster around low wood tables. It's fun and inviting. There's a more formal dining room upstairs.

Sketch (Map pp130-1; ☎ 0870 777 4488; 9 Conduit St W1; Gallery mains from £12, Lecture Room mains £50-75; ☎ Oxford Circus) A design enthusiast's wet dream with shimmering white rooms, designer Louis

MEAL COSTS

Our pricing categories for London are per person for a two-course dinner and a drink. You'll pay much less for lunch.

- Budget – under £15
- Midrange – £15 to £40
- Top End – over £40

XIV chairs and toilet cubicles shaped like eggs. And that's just the downstairs video art gallery, which becomes a buzzy restaurant at night, then a funky club after midnight. There's also the Glade daytime restaurant, a ground-floor Parlour tearoom and the Lecture Room upstairs which has a six-course tasting menu for £90.

Floridita (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7314 4000; 100 Wardour St W1; mains £13.50-27.50; ☎ Leicester Sq) Cuban cuisine, Latin beats, sexy black mirrored walls, cream leather seating, cigar girls... Floridita brings a glossy Havana to Soho. If the Cuban bands and DJs don't make you hit the dance floor, the cocktails will. For those who just want to salsa, entry is free before 10pm. Cuban lobster (flown over in blocks of ice to be kept alive but sleepy) is the restaurant's signature dish.

Rules (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7836 5314; 35 Maiden Lane WC2; mains £16-20; ☎ Covent Garden) Established in 1798, this is London's oldest restaurant and specialises in classic game cookery, serving some 18,000 birds a year. Despite the history, it's not a museum piece and its sustained vitality attracts locals as well as the tourist masses.

Westminster, Pimlico & St James's

There's very little action around these parts at night, although the following restaurants are worth a short detour in themselves.

BUDGET

Chocolate Society (Map p128; ☎ 7259 9222; 36 Elizabeth St SW1; mains £5-7; ☎ Victoria) Now we're not suggesting woman (or man) can survive on chocolate alone, but this supercharming Parisian-style café tests the theory with mounds of the stuff in glass jars, ribbon-tied bags and cute tins. A hot chocolate will set you back £3.50 but knowing they support traditional production methods and ethical farming makes it taste all the sweeter.

Jenny Lo's Tea House (Map p128; ☎ 7259 0399; 14 Eccleston St SW1; noodle dishes £6.50-8; ☎ Victoria) A

TOP FIVE BRUNCH SPOTS

- Al's Bar & Café (p165)
- Canteen (right)
- Hoxton Square Bar & Kitchen (opposite)
- Providores (p165)
- Wolseley (p160)

simple, popular Asian place that serves soups and rice dishes, but specialises in noodles and other wok-based specials.

MIDRANGE

Thomas Cubitt (Map p128; ☎ 7730 6060; 44 Elizabeth St SW1W; bar meals £6-12.50; ☎ Victoria) Named after the area's prolific architect Mr Cubitt, this boozer has gone posh in a delightfully unfussy way, with smart National Trust-type paint on the panelling and a beautiful glazed front which opens up in summer. Try the slow-cooked pork belly on toast. Upstairs the menu gets pricey.

TOP END

Tamarind (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7629 3561; 20 Queen St W1; mains £13-24, 2-/3-course set lunch £17/19; ☎ Green Park) London's only Michelin-starred Indian restaurant serves up mouthwatering spicy classics in a simple, chic dining room.

Luciano (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7408 1440; 72-73 St James's St SW1; mains £8-21.50; ☎ St James) On the site of Madame Prunier's early-20th-century fashionable fish restaurant, Marco Pierre White goes back to his roots with classic Italian dishes at this spacious dining room with Art Deco touches. The portions are as generous as the space, so it's probably best to skip breakfast (and lunch if you're coming in the evening).

Cinnamon Club (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7222 2555; Old Westminster Library, 30 Great Smith St W1; mains from £20; ☎ St James's Park) The domed skylights, high ceilings, parquet flooring and book-lined mezzanine evoke the Westminster Library this restaurant used to be. Head downstairs and the vibe is altogether funkier, with rubber floor, leather chairs and Indian films projected on the walls. Enjoy a drink before dining on elegant Indian cuisine.

Hoxton, Shoreditch & the City

From the hit-and-miss Indian and Bangladeshi restaurants of Brick Lane to the trendy eateries of Hoxton and Shoreditch, the East End has finally made it onto London's culi-

nary map. City restaurants that stay open late are harder to find.

BUDGET

Brick Lane Beigel Bake (Map pp116-17; ☎ 7729 0616; 159 Brick Lane E2; most bagels less than £1; ☎ 24hr; ☎ Liverpool St) A relic of London's Jewish East End, it's more of a takeaway than a café and sells the cheapest bagels anywhere in London. You only get what you pay for, but they're a good snack on a bellyful of booze.

Leon (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7489 1580; Ludgate Circus EC4; big dishes £4.90-5.70; ☎ wi-fi; ☎ St Pauls) Voted best new restaurant, takeaway and bar by the *Observer* panel (which included culinary kings Gordon Ramsay and Rick Stein), this self-proclaimed natural fast-food joint serves delights from the Med such as Moorish Vegetable Tagine. Choose between red metal chairs, sink-in-me sofas or silver bar stools and dig into your cardboard box...

Story Deli (Map p125; ☎ 7247 3137; 3 Dray Walk E1; pizzas £6.50-9; ☎ Liverpool St) This organic café with mismatched cutlery poking out of jam jars, vintage mirrors leaning haphazardly against walls, high ceilings and solid wooden furniture (mismatched of course) is justifiably popular with the trendy workers of the Truman Brewery. The salmon and mascarpone pizza is to die for. It also serves burgers, sandwiches, pies and puddings.

Le Taj (Map p125; ☎ 7247 4210; 134 Brick Lane E1; mains £6.50-9.50; ☎ Liverpool St) Among the hordes of curry houses on Brick Lane, this purple-fronted Bangladeshi restaurant is a good choice. The three-course lunch for £6.95 is a bargain.

MIDRANGE

Real Greek (Map p125; ☎ 7739 8212; 14-15 Hoxton Market N1; mezedes £1.75-6.25, mains £14.50-16.55; ☎ Old St) Set in Hoxton Market, this popular restaurant is split into Mezedopolio – whose memorial tablets on the wall reveal its previous life as a mission, and which serves *mezedes* (small meze) – and a restaurant specialising in innovative Greek cuisine. Go for Hellenic Happy Hour between 3pm and 6pm and bag an outdoor table. If the place looks familiar, you're thinking of the fight scene from the film *Bridget Jones's Diary*.

Canteen (Map p125; ☎ 0845 686 1122; 2 Crispin Pl E1; mains £7-12.50; ☎ Liverpool St) This hip new joint by Spitalfields Market has a modern British seasonal menu with additive-free meat, fresh fish and lip-smacking pies, modernist wooden

tables and benches (as the name suggests), a charmingly effervescent manager, perfect people-watching windows and outdoor tables. Try the eggs Benedict – it's divine.

Hoxton Apprentice (Map p125; ☎ 7749 2828; 16 Hoxton Sq N1; mains £7-17, set lunch 1/2 courses £7/10; ☎ Old St) Set up by charity Training for Life to give unemployed people a vocation, this restaurant in a Victorian Grade-II listed former primary school is staffed by professionals and apprentices. The delicious modern fusion dishes, devised by Prue Leith, are served in a stylish dining room overlooked by a glassed-in mezzanine. Outdoor tables make prime people-spotting territory.

Hoxton Square Bar & Kitchen (Map p125; ☎ 7613 0709; 2/4 Hoxton Sq N1; mains £7.50-14; ☎ Old St) The grey concrete interior gives this place a cool, chilled-out vibe and the outdoor tables are fab year-round thanks to the heaters. While it's happening in the evening, with people coming for bevies, a bite or a gig, this is a top brunch spot too.

TOP END

Fifteen (Map p125; ☎ 0871 330 1515; 15 Westland Pl N1; mains £11-26; ☎ booking line 9.30am-9pm; ☎ Old St) It can only be a matter of time before Jamie becomes Sir Jamie, and Fifteen was where all his culinary philanthropy started. It was set up to give unemployed young people a shot at a career; disadvantaged kids are trained on the job and all profits go to the Fifteen foundation. Book a table and if he's not cooking for an A-list friend in Hollywood, you may even glimpse the cheeky chappy himself.

Southwark, Bermondsey & Lambeth

This part of south London has a surprising number of good-value eateries.

BUDGET

Stoney Street Café (Map p125; ☎ 7407 6221; 8 Stoney St SE1; most dishes around £4; ☎ London Bridge) This quirky café in a converted garage opposite Borough Market serves up fresh comfort food such as fish finger in a roll, burgers, soup, salad and heaps of different sausages. You can also buy homemade pickles and preserves from Scotland and a book by the scriptwriter for radio classic *The Archers*.

Mesón Don Felipe (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7928 3237; 53 The Cut SE1; tapas £2-5.25; ☎ Waterloo) Tops for tapas and authentic Spanish atmosphere, helped along by classical Spanish guitar in the evenings.

There are about half a dozen vegetarian options, more than you would get in Spain.

Konditor & Cook (Map p125; ☎ 7407 5100; 10 Stoney St SE1; most dishes around £5; ☎ London Bridge) The original location of arguably the best bakery in London, serving excellent hot and cold lunches. There's not much space but everything is yours to take away. There's a larger branch in the Curzon Soho (p175).

MIDRANGE

Tas (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7928 1444; 33 The Cut SE1; casseroles £8.75; ☎ Southwark) This restaurant is an outstanding Turkish place with plush surroundings, tasty kebabs and an impressive range of vegetarian fare. Order a casserole and you'll see a *tas* first-hand – it's the Anatolian cooking pot used to stew this tasty dish.

Delfina (Map pp116-17; ☎ 7357 0244; 50 Bermondsey St SE1; mains £10-15; ☎ noon-3pm Mon-Fri; ☎ London Bridge) This restaurant-cum-art-gallery in a converted Victorian chocolate factory serves delicious modern cuisine with an Asian twist, to a backdrop of contemporary canvases. Studios upstairs house artists, and there's an exhibition space downstairs showing more works.

Livebait (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7928 7211; 43 The Cut SE1; mains £10-21; ☎ Southwark) The old fishmongers décor with brick tiles, wooden floors and dark wood tables sets an authentic, relaxed tone in this popular seafood bar and fish restaurant. You can get a special lunch for £7.75 and there's a pretheatre menu for £14.50 (two courses) or £18.50 (three courses). All the fishy dishes are yummy; for a good taster order the classic platter with crab, crevettes, prawns, oysters, cockles, whelks and mussels.

Blue Print Café (Map pp116-17; ☎ 7378 7031; Design Museum, Butlers Wharf, Shad Thames SE1; mains £12.50-21.50; ☎ Tower Hill) With spectacular views of the river and an ever-changing menu of modern European cuisine, this restaurant by Sir Terence Conran is perfect for a bite before or after visiting the Design Museum.

TOP END

Oxo Tower Restaurant & Brasserie (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7803 3888; Barge House St SE1; mains £9-14.75; ☎ Waterloo) Offers good grub – a bit Mediterranean, a bit French, some Pacific Rim – and is all about special-event dining. There are splendid views over the Thames and St Paul's Cathedral. This price guide is for the slightly cheaper brasserie. If you're not hungry but fancy checking out the view, head to the bar.

Chelsea, South Kensington & Knightsbridge

The menus tip towards the pricey end in these three gastronomic areas but you can find budget eats if you're not in the market for Michelin stars.

BUDGET

New Culture Revolution (Map pp126-7; ☎ 7352 9281; 305 King's Rd SW3; mains around £7; ☎ Sloane Sq) This is a trendy, good-value dumpling and noodle bar.

Jakobs (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7581 9292; 20 Gloucester Rd SW7; meals around £10; ☎ Gloucester Rd) A charismatic café-delicatessen serving a mixture of Armenian, Persian and Mediterranean dishes, including salads, falafel and quiches, that treat your palate without upsetting your purse.

MIDRANGE

Nozomi (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7838 1500; 15 Beauchamp Pl SW3; yakitori £3.50-14.50, tempura £6.20-29; ☎ Knightsbridge) On the distinctly well-heeled Beauchamp Pl, Nozomi's visitors ascend marble steps under a black awning to enter this minimalist restaurant serving tasty Japanese cuisine.

Made in Italy (Map pp126-7; ☎ 7352 1880; 249 King's Rd SW3; pizzas £5.70-10.50; ☎ Sloane Sq) Family-run and convivial, with the best pizzas for miles, Made in Italy is as close as you'll get to southern Italy without needing your passport.

Wódka (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7937 6513; 12 St Alban's Grove W8; mains £12.50-15.50; ☎ High St Kensington) Authentic Polish and Eastern European cuisine in Kensington Palace's old dairy. The menu changes monthly and there are daily specials. In the winter try the warming Polish hunter's stew and wash it down with vodka (obviously) fresh from the deep freeze.

Boxwood Café (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7235 1010; Berkeley Hotel, Wilton Pl SW1; mains £13-18; ☎ Knightsbridge) A New York-style café set up by superchef Gordon Ramsay in a valiant attempt to kick back with young folk and make fine dining in

London 'a little bit more relaxed'. The décor is a little dreary but the food first-rate.

TOP END

Nobu (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7447 4747; Metropolitan Hotel, 19 Old Park Lane W1; mains £5-28; ☎ Hyde Park Corner) Very popular with celebrities wearing black, this place feels like a London designer's idea of a Japanese restaurant. It's nonetheless a strong contender for the best Asian food in town. Comfortably minimalist, anonymously efficient and out of this world when it comes to exquisitely prepared and presented sushi and sashimi.

Bibendum (Map pp126-7; ☎ 7581 5817; 81 Fulham Rd SW3; mains £10.50-28.50; ☎ South Kensington) Another Sir Terence Conran establishment, it's in one of London's finest settings for a restaurant – the Art Nouveau Michelin House (1911). The popular Bibendum Oyster Bar (£9.50 to £10 for half a dozen) is on the ground floor at the heart of the architectural finery. Upstairs is lighter and brighter.

Awana (Map pp126-7; ☎ 7584 8880; 85 Sloane Ave SW3; mains £12.50-24.50; ☎ South Kensington) This wood-clad Malaysian restaurant has a small satay bar (£7 to £9.50), a varied menu offering grills, curries and stir-fries, and a cool bar area with marble tables and red leather stools.

Tom Aikens (Map pp126-7; ☎ 7584 2003; 43 Elystan St SW3; set lunch menu £29; à la carte without drinks £60; ☎ South Kensington) Tom Aikens is the name of the notorious kitchen firebrand who runs this wonderful modern European restaurant where the setting is handsome and the food delish.

Gordon Ramsay (Map pp126-7; ☎ 7352 4441; 68-69 Royal Hospital Rd SW3; set lunch/dinner £40/90; ☎ Sloane Sq) One of Britain's finest restaurants and the only one in the capital with three Michelin stars. The food is, of course, blissful and perfect for a luxurious treat. The only quibble is that you don't get time to linger. Bookings are made in specific eat-it-and-beat-it time slots and, if you've seen the chef on TV, you won't argue.

Notting Hill, Bayswater & Marylebone

Notting Hill teems with good places to eat, from cheap takeaways to atmospheric pubs and restaurants worthy of the fine-dining tag.

BUDGET

Sausage & Mash Café (Map pp120-1; ☎ 8968 8898; 268 Portobello Rd W10; mains £5.75-8; ☎ Ladbroke Grove) Takes the British favourite of bangers and mash to new levels. There is not just a choice of different sausages, as you'd expect, but also

variations of creamy mounds of mash and even gravy in this S&M club that won't give your wallet a spanking.

Geales (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7727 7528; 2 Farmer St W8; fish & chips £10; ☎ Notting Hill Gate) A popular fish restaurant that's more expensive than your average chippy (prices vary according to weight and season), but worth every penny.

MIDRANGE

Providores (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7935 6175; 109 Marylebone High St W1; tapa room £2.80-13.60; ☎ Baker St or Bond St) Named after the Pacific ceremonial cloth hanging on the wall, the tapa room downstairs is a sociable place with leather bench seats and excellent coffee. Try French toast stuffed with banana and pecans with grilled smoked streaky bacon and vanilla verjus syrup for Sunday brunch. Upstairs the dining room serves exquisite New Zealand treats at higher prices.

La Fromagerie Café (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7935 0341; 2-4 Moxon St W1; mains £6-12.40; ☎ Baker St) This place is just like food writer and owner Patricia Michelson's own kitchen, with bowls of delectable salads, antipasto and peppers scattered about the long communal table. Huge slabs of bread invite you to tuck in, and all the while the heavenly waft from the cheese room beckons. Sensational food, smiley service, sensible prices.

Electric Brasserie (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7908 9696; 191 Portobello Rd W11; mains £9-28; ☎ Notting Hill Gate) The leather and cream look is suitably cool for the brasserie that's attached to the Electric Cinema. And the food's very good too; head to the back area for a darker, moodier dinner.

Food at the Muse (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7792 1111; 269 Portobello Rd W11; mains £12-15; ☎ Notting Hill Gate). Developed 'for artists by artists', this smart, small restaurant uses its bright, white walls as the perfect blank canvas for the art that graces them. Enjoy succulent dishes like soy and honey Barbary duck breast and wait for inspiration to strike.

Villandry (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7631 3131; 170 Great Portland St W1; mains £12.50-19.50; ☎ Great Portland St) Resist the foodstore's tempting cheese, ham, Spanish tortas, pickles and other goodies (for the moment anyway) and enter a simple, attractive dining room at the back with a tasty modern European menu that changes daily.

TOP END

E&O (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7229 5454; 14 Blenheim Cres W11; dim sum £3-8.50, mains £6-13.50; ☎ Notting Hill Gate or Ladbroke Grove) This Asian bar and restaurant is a

Notting Hill favourite. The black of the façade continues inside with lots of dark wood and brown leather stools – it's sleek and stylish. Dim sum at the bar or dine in the white tablecloth dining room. Evenings get rammed.

Beach Blanket Babylon (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7229 2907; 45 Ledbury Rd W11; mains £14.50-25.50; ☎ Notting Hill Gate) BBB, with its French-chateau-meets-Gaudi décor of extravagant chandeliers, distressed bar, statues, brick walls, red velvet and gilt chairs, and gargoyle fireplace, has been around for a while but is still fabulous. Request a table in the chapel for a memorable dining experience.

Fitzrovia & Clerkenwell

Fitzrovia is a hidden gem for restaurants, while Clerkenwell has a happening dining scene.

BUDGET

Greenery (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7490 4870; 5 Cowcross St EC1; light meals from £1.50; ☎ Farringdon) A salt-of-the-earth veggie café, offering such tantalizing juice cocktails as Beetroot Blast (carrot, beetroot, apple and ginger). There's always a lunchtime queue of workers needing their superfoods.

Planet Organic (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7436 1929; 22 Torrington Pl WC1; hot food & salads from £2.25; ☎ Goodge St) As the name suggests, everything in this café-supermarket is organic. Fresh veggies are sourced (where possible) directly from British farms. For healthy beauty ingest the skin tonic superjuice of wheatgrass, apple, celery, mixed greens and aloe vera or buy skin-care of the slap-it-on variety.

ICCo (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7580 9688; 46 Goodge St W1; pizzas from £3; ☎ Goodge St) The Italian Coffee Company does a great turn in cheap and tasty pizzas. It also offers a free croissant with every hot drink before midday, which makes good breakfast sense. It's the building on the corner decked out in the colours of the Italian flag.

Little Bay (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7278 1234; 171 Farringdon Rd EC1; mains £6-8 ☎ Farringdon) The crushed-velvet ceiling, handmade twisted lamps that improve around the room (as the artist got better) and elaborately painted bar and tables showing nymphs frolicking is bonkers but fun. The tasty food is good value.

Al's Bar & Café (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7837 4821; 11-13 Exmouth Market EC1; mains £6-8; ☎ Farringdon) Al's is a bit like a pair of novelty slippers but without the embarrassment – cheerful, comfortable and perfect for resting your feet. The café's red awnings are as chirpy as the staff and the food (try the goat's cheese bruschetta). Outdoor

TOP FIVE ALMOST ALTRUISTIC EXPERIENCES

- Chocolate Society (p161)
- Fifteen (p163)
- Hoxton Apprentice (p163)
- Made in Clerkenwell (p178)
- Planet Organic (opposite)

tables get busy in summer, especially during happy hour (4pm to 7pm).

St John (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7251 0848; 26 St John St EC1; mains £12.80-21.50; ☎ Farringdon) Bright white-washed brick walls, high ceilings and simple wooden furniture keep diners free to concentrate on ye olde English staples such as offal, ox tongue and devilled kidneys. The bar menu includes oysters and Welsh rarebit (if the kidneys didn't do it for you).

MIDRANGE

dim t (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7637 1122; 32 Charlotte St W1; dim sum from £2.50, noodle bar £7.65; ☎ Goodge St) Follow the pink neon sign to this lip-smacking dim-sum and noodle restaurant. Choose your meat, fish or tofu, then your noodle type, and top it off with a sauce: spicy, Thai, Hong Kong, etc. If you're a low-carb customer, the Vietnamese duck and pomegranate salad is scrummy (and packed with antioxidants). And the dim sum is great too (yes, we really like it here).

Salt Yard (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7637 0657; 54 Goodge St W1; tapas £2.75-8.50; ☎ Goodge St) Named after the place where cold meats are cured, this buzzing local joint serves delicious Spanish and Italian tapas. The smart navy awning, low lighting, terracotta walls and intimate tables surrounded by happy eaters draw you in. Try the tiger prawns char-grilled with rosemary and chilli or flex your palate with fennel and parmesan gratin.

Eagle Bar Diner (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7637 1418; 3-5 Rathbone Pl W1; mains £4-13; ☎ open till 1am Sat; ☎ Tottenham Court Rd) The burgers here are sensational and with 15 speciality types as well as the classic (with a selection of cheeses of course), you're spoilt for choice. Cosy down in the leather booths, enjoy the DJ's funky electro jazz or house, and sip a peanut butter martini (the signature cocktail).

Smiths of Smithfield (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7251 7950; 67-77 Charterhouse St EC1; mains £5-18; ☎ Farringdon) This converted meat-packing warehouse is one of our favourite spots out east. Hit the ground-floor café for brunch, follow the silver-clad pipe-work upstairs to find a sexy champagne and cocktail bar, or climb again for a brasserie and smarter dining room.

Rasa Samudra (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7637 0222; 5 Charlotte St W1; mains £6.25-13; ☎ Goodge St) The hot-pink exterior of this restaurant specialising in seafood and vegetarian cuisine from Kerala sets an upbeat tone that continues inside. The goddess Parvati greets you, gold elephant furniture hangs on the walls, a purple sari adorns the

ceiling and a lit lamp nods to the gods. Try the Kerala seafood feast for £30.

Bleeding Heart Restaurant & Bistro (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7242 8238; Bleeding Heart Yard; bistro mains £7.45-14.95, restaurant mains £11.95-21.50; ☎ Farringdon) Locals have taken this place tucked in the corner of Bleeding Heart Yard to their hearts. Choose from formal dining in the downstairs restaurant or more relaxed meals in the buzzy bistro – wherever, the French food is divine.

Easton (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7278 7608; 22 Easton St WC1; mains £9-13; ☎ until 1am Fri & Sat; ☎ Farringdon) This comfortable, spacious gastropub serves up reliably good grub. There's a DJ on Friday nights when tapas replace the full menu. Staff get a bit twitzy with noisy leavers – and don't ever dance on the outside tables (they come from Bali apparently).

Medcalf (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7833 3533; 40 Exmouth Market EC1; mains £10.50-16.50; ☎ Farringdon) The façade tells you this used to be a butcher's but the meat hooks now sport large light bulbs and the walls are festooned with changing art exhibitions rather than beef. The meat market's loss is our gain – come here for delicious British fare, good wine and a chilled-out vibe.

Dans le Noir (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7253 1100; 30-31 Clerkenwell Green EC1; surprise meal 2/3 courses £29/37; ☎ Farringdon) If you've often felt in the dark about food, eating in the pitch black might suit you. A waiter guides you to your table, plate and cutlery. Then it's up to you to guess what you're eating and enjoy the anonymous conviviality of the dark...

TOP END

Hakkasan (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7907 1888; 8 Hanway Pl W1; mains £7.50-38; ☎ Tottenham Court Rd) Hidden down a lane like all fashionable haunts need to be, the first Chinese restaurant to get a Michelin star combines celebrity status, a stunning design, persuasive cocktails and surprisingly sophisticated Chinese food. If you're feeling flash why not order the whole duck, 30g Royal Beluga caviar and baby cucumber (24 hours notice required) for a tidy £140.

Camden & Islington

There are plenty of decent places to eat on and around Camden High St and Upper St in Islington.

BUDGET

Le Mercury (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7354 4088; 140A Upper St N1; mains £6, specials £7-12; ☎ Highbury or Islington) A

cosy Gaelic haunt ideal for a romantic tête-à-tête. Sunday lunch by the open fire upstairs is a treat although you'll have to book.

Tupelo Honey (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7284 2989; 27 Parkway NW1; mains £8; ☎ Camden Town) Toasted sandwiches, hot meals and salad are on offer in this sweet-like-honey café with old wooden furniture, squishy sofas upstairs and an inviting roof terrace.

MIDRANGE

Lansdowne (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7483 0409; 90 Gloucester Ave NW1; mains £5-16; ☎ Chalk Farm) Very popular with locals (both celeb and nonceleb), this relaxed gastropub serves mean pizzas and a selection of tasty pub grub.

Duke of Cambridge (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7359 3066; 30 St Peter's St N1; mains £5-16; ☎ Chalk Farm) Tucked away from busy Upper St, this organic gastropub is a feast of tasty but overpriced rustic British cuisine, real ale and gentrified boozing.

Konstam at the Prince Albert (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7833 5040; 2 Acton St WC1; mains £10.50-15.50; ☎ King's Cross) How's this for a kooky idea? Chef Oliver Rowe sources all his ingredients from within the London tube map. He has to cheat on a few (tea, coffee, spices) but not enough to stop the BBC2 crowning him 'The Urban Chef' in a TV series that attracted viewers even during the football World Cup (which in England is really saying something). Book a table below the draping metallic ceiling and watch your dish take shape in the open kitchen.

Elk in the Woods (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7226 3535; 39 Camden Passage N1; mains £11-15; ☎ Angel) This intriguing restaurant with brick tiles, a metal bar, eclectic mirrors and a stuffed elk's head dishes up lip-smacking stews, game and other warming plates.

Engineer (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7722 0950; 65 Gloucester Ave NW1; mains £11.75-16.75; ☎ Chalk Farm) One of London's original gastropubs serving up consistently good international cuisine to hip north Londoners. There's a good selection of wines and beers, and a splendid garden.

TOP END

Frederick's (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7359 3902; Camden Passage N1; mains £11.50-19.50; ☎ Angel) Civilised and sophisticated with excellent European food, Frederick's has fine dining in the conservatory and a comprehensive drinks list in the bar, which spills outside in summer. Pretheatre and lunch menus are available.

Outside Central London

If you're visiting the sights in Hampstead or Kew, consider a meal at the following restaurants and save yourself having to bolt back to the centre of town.

HAMPSTEAD

Jin Kichi (Map pp116-17; ☎ 7794 6158; 73 Heath St NW3; mains £4.30-12.80; ☎ Hampstead) One of the best Japanese restaurants in north London. It's small and slightly shabby but so popular with London's Japanese that you won't be able to enjoy its grilled meats and other Asian flavours unless you book.

KEW

Glasshouse (☎ 8940 6777; 14 Station Parade W9; set lunch/dinner £23.50/35; ☎ Kew Gardens) Virtually next to the tube station, it specialises in modern British cuisine and is a pleasant way to round off a visit to the gardens. The menus are set but the choice is large.

DRINKING

The pub is the social focus of London life and savouring pub life is a pleasure of any visit. From ancient atmospheric taverns to slick DJ bars, London has a lot to offer the discerning tippler no matter how hard the themed and chain bars try to take over.

West End – Soho to the Strand

W Sens (Map pp130-1; 12 Waterloo Pl SW1; ☎ 11am-1am Mon-Sat, 5pm-midnight Sun; ☎ Piccadilly) London outpost of French Compagnie des Comptoirs bar/restaurant group, W Sens has a chilled, sophisticated vibe. The amber-lit bar hugged by chocolate snakeskin stools, matching silver-backed Louis XIV chairs, huge suspended spherical lamp and silver curtains was designed by Philippe Starck pupil Imad Ramouni. The brother of Jean-Marc Challe (of Buddha Bar fame) DJs periodically; on other nights you'll hear similar Asian loungey sounds.

Absolut Ice Bar (Map pp130-1; 31-33 Heddon St W1; ☎ 12.30pm-midnight; entry Thu, Fri & Sat evenings £15, lunchtimes & other evenings £12; ☎ Piccadilly) At -6°C this is literally the coolest bar in London. Entry is limited to 40 minutes in this bar made entirely of ice, and your ticket includes a vodka cocktail served in ice glasses imported from Sweden. The compulsory futuristic silver polyester cape is to protect the bar from your body heat not the other way around so wear

warm togs. It's a gimmick, but it makes a fun change from the norm and is perfect if you need to chill (sorry).

Queen Mary (Map pp130-1; Waterloo Pier WC2; ☉ Temple) Ignore the rather tacky signage outside and climb aboard this steamer for a welcoming publike bar with great views of the London Eye and the South Bank. In summer there's a fish shop on deck. On Fridays and Saturdays the Hornblowers Nightclub pumps with house and dance music.

Gordon's Wine Bar (Map pp130-1; 47 Villiers St WC2; ☉ Charing Cross) What's not to love about this cavernous wine cellar lit by candles and practically unchanged over the last 100 years? Choose between wines, sherries, ports and Madeiras accompanied by warming home-cooked grub. Duck your head to settle in.

Coach & Horses (Map pp130-1; 29 Greek St W1; ☉ Leicester Sq) This Soho institution was made famous by writer and newspaper columnist Jeffrey Bernard who, more or less, drank himself to death here. It was also patronised by Sigmund Freud, Francis Bacon, Dylan Thomas, Peter Cooke and Peter O'Toole. At the time of writing the new owner was planning a 50-cover restaurant upstairs serving traditional English pies.

Heights (Map pp122-3; 15th fl, St George's Hotel, Langham Pl W1; ☉ Oxford St) Take the lift up to this understated bar with leather seats, contemporary lighting and huge windows: spot the BT Tower, the Gherkin (Swiss Re building), Canary Wharf and Battersea Power Station while you tuck into tapas and sip your cocktail.

Lamb & Flag (Map pp130-1; 33 Rose St WC2; ☉ Covent Garden) A popular historic pub and everyone's Covent Garden 'find' so it's often jammed. It was built in 1623 and was formerly called the 'Bucket of Blood'.

Westminster & Pimlico

Red Lion (Map pp122-3; 48 Parliament St SW1; ☉ Westminster) This classic, late-19th-century pub with polished mahogany, etched glassware, dark-red curtains and carved ceiling has a cosy feel. Keep your eyes peeled for MPs popping out for a pint.

Westminster Arms (Map pp122-3; 9 Storey's Gate SW1; ☉ Westminster) It's mainly standing room only on the ground floor of this pleasant pub but head downstairs to the wine bar and you can just imagine the politicians plotting in the discreet booths.

Bloomsbury, Fitzrovia, Holborn & Clerkenwell

Café Kick (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7739 8700; 43 Exmouth Market EC1; ☉ till midnight Fri & Sat; ☉ Farringdon) This former French bar has been happily overtaken by Latin flags, football scarves, Mediterranean food and mojitos. With an unusually high table-football-to-floor-space ratio, drinkers often spill out onto Exmouth Market. During happy hour (4pm to 7pm) cocktails are a tidy £4.

Cock Tavern (Map pp122-3; East Poultry Ave EC1; ☉ Farringdon) This pub is legendary, despite its rather bland interior, for serving booze with breakfast from 6.30am; it's understandably popular with the workers from Smithfield Market who've done a day's work while most of us are still getting our beauty sleep.

Deux Beers (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7405 9777; 3 Hatton Wall EC1; ☉ till midnight Fri & Sat; ☉ Farringdon) Within twinkling distance of the diamond district (hence the name), this smallish bar has a wall-bound wheel of shots – a sort of tequila roulette. Too many of these and you'll be dancing on the bar (mind your head on the groovy tentacular chandeliers).

Jerusalem Tavern (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7490 4281; 55 Britton St EC1; ☉ Farringdon) Pick a wood-panelled cubbyhole at this gorgeous former 18th-century coffee-shop-turned-inn, and choose from a selection of St Peter's beers such as cinnamon and apple, lemon and ginger, or good old-fashioned ale (if you're not feeling fruity).

Jerusalem (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7255 1120; 33/34 Rathbone Pl; ☉ till 1am Thu, Fri & Sat, till midnight Tue & Wed; ☉ Tottenham Court Rd) This uncomplicated bar-restaurant has been drawing a media crowd for a decade and is still going strong. The chunky wooden tables shift for dancers moving to the DJ's pop, chart and house on Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

Princess Louise (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7405 8816; 208 High Holborn WC1; ☉ Holborn) This late-19th-century Victorian boozier was voted London's most beautiful pub by *London Tonight* news programme and we have to agree – it's an absolute stunner. Spectacularly decorated with a riot of fine tiles, etched mirrors, plasterwork and a gorgeous central horseshoe bar, the pub gets packed with the after-work crowd so get there early if you want a seat.

Museum Tavern (Map pp130-1; 49 Great Russell St WC1; ☉ Tottenham Court Rd) Where Karl Marx used to retire to for a sup after a hard day in the British Museum Reading Room. If it was good enough for him...

Hoxton, Shoreditch & the City

Bar Music Hall (Map p125; ☎ 7613 5951; 134 Curtain Rd EC2; ☉ 10am-midnight Mon-Thu, 11am-2am Fri & Sat, 11am-midnight Sun; ☉ Old St) Keeping the old East End music-hall tradition alive but with a modern twist, this roomy space with central bar and bags of squishy seats amuses the friendly punters with DJs and live bands. Music runs the gamut from punk to jazz to rock and roll and disco.

Cantaloupe (Map p125; 35-43 Charlotte Rd EC2; ☉ 11am-midnight Mon-Fri, noon-midnight Sat, noon-11.30pm Sun; ☉ Old St) This founding member of the Shoreditch warehouse conversion scene may not be as achingly trendy as the newer kids on the block but it's still a favourite.

Grapeshots (Map p125; 2/3 Artillery Passage E1; ☉ Liverpool St) Half the fun of this wine bar is walking down the Dickensian passage, complete with old street-lamps, that leads to it. Once inside, it's the perfect spot for a glass of old-fashioned chilled vino.

Ten Bells (Map p125; cnr Commercial & Fournier Sts E1; ☉ Liverpool St) The most famous Jack the Ripper pub, patronised by his victims before their grisly ends, and possibly the slayer himself. Admire the wonderful 18th-century tiles and ponder the past over a pint.

Loungelover (Map p125; ☎ 7012 1234; 1 Whitby St E1; ☉ 6pm-midnight Tue-Thu, 6pm-1am Fri, 4-10.30pm Sun; ☉ Liverpool St) Book a table, check your coat and bag in at the door and feel like a movie star. This eclectically decorated lounge, loosely divided into different areas – red, the cage, baroque and the front – could almost be a film set, or the shoot of a supercool interiors magazine. Sip a cocktail and admire the Louis XIV chairs, the oversized wine glasses acting as vases, the huge hippo head, the cage-turned-living room, the neon twirling stools and the loopy chandeliers. Utterly fabulous.

T Bar (Map p125; ☎ 7729 2973; 56 Shoreditch High St E1; ☉ 9am-midnight Tue & Wed, 9am-1am Thu, 9am-2am Fri, 8pm-2am Sat, 5pm-midnight Sun; ☉ Liverpool St) This student-union-style cavernous bar is very 'now'. DJs spin a range of sounds from hard house to old rock like Johnny Cash. An illuminated clock outside counts down the seconds to last orders so there's no excuse for wasting any (seconds or orders).

Drunken Monkey (Map p125; 222 Shoreditch High St E1; ☉ noon-midnight; ☉ Liverpool St) This hip bar-cum-dim sum house is a nice surprise. Orange Chinese lanterns cast a warm glow over the red walls to a soundtrack of electro-funk and

TOP FIVE PLACES TO DRINK IN THE SUN

- Café Kick (opposite)
- Flask (p171)
- George Inn (below)
- Queen Mary (opposite)
- Windsor Castle (p170)

jazz, the bar has a friendly, buzzing vibe, and the food is tasty (particularly the crab and pork dumplings). During happy hour (5pm to 7pm weekdays, 6pm to 7.30pm on Saturday) cocktails slip down for £4.50 each.

Old Blue Last (Map p125; ☎ 7739 7033; 39 Great Eastern St EC2; ☉ noon-midnight Mon-Wed, noon-1am Thu & Sun, noon-2am Fri & Sat; ☉ Old St) A bright-pink neon sign saying VICE declares this grungy pub's owners (*Vice* magazine) and the crowd hugging the horseshoe bar certainly get down to the rockin' tunes from DJs or the jukebox.

Sosho (Map p125; ☎ 7920 0701; 2 Tabernacle St EC2; ☉ noon-10pm Mon, noon-midnight Tue, noon-1am Wed & Thu, noon-3am Fri, 7pm-4am Sat, 9pm-4am Sun; ☉ Moor-gate) Sexy, glamorous and off limits if you're not feeling either of the above, although the cocktails could soon get you in the mood.

Jamaica Wine House (Map p125; 12 St Michael's Alley EC3; ☉ Bank) London's first coffee house is now a Victorian pub attractively divided into wood-panelled areas and popular with City-boys who work nearby.

Vertigo 42 (Map p125; Tower 42, Old Broad St EC2; ☉ Liverpool St) Book a two-hour slot at a table in this bar with expansive views that stretch across all of London. The views bounce off the mirrors as well as through the windows making it a truly vertiginous experience.

Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese (Map pp122-3; Wine Office Ct EC4; ☉ Blackfriars) Rebuilt six years after the Great Fire, this place was popular with Dr Johnson, Thackeray, Dickens and the visiting Mark Twain. Touristy but always atmospheric and enjoyable for a pub meal.

Borough, Southwark & Bermondsey

Anchor (Map p125; 34 Park St SE1; ☉ London Bridge) An 18th-century boozier just east of the Globe Theatre, it has a terrace offering superb views over the Thames. Dr Johnson is said to have written some of his dictionary here.

George Inn (Map p125; Talbot Yard, 77 Borough High St SE1; ☉ London Bridge or Borough) Tucked away in a

cobbled courtyard near Borough Market is London's last surviving galleried coaching inn, dating from 1677 and now belonging to the National Trust. Charles Dickens and Shakespeare used to prop up the bar here (but not together, obviously). There are great outdoor tables for sunny days.

Garrison Public House (Map pp116-17; 99-101 Bermondsey St SE1; ☎ London Bridge) Stepping into this French country-kitchen-style pub is like slipping on a cashmere sweater – you feel comforted and more attractive immediately. Choose between modern grey flannel seats, secluded booths and high window tables perching beneath the dried flowers and watched over by a stag's head. Settle in for breakfast (try French toast with banana, bacon and maple syrup), a gastro-meal or just a warming drink.

Village East (Map pp116-17; 171 Bermondsey St; ☎ noon-1.30am Thu, Fri & Sat, to 10.30pm Sun, to midnight Mon-Wed; ☎ London Bridge) Sitting with one half in a modern glass apartment block and the other in a converted, listed cloth factory doesn't seem to have given this bar schizophrenia. In fact the exposed brick goes very well with soft bespoke lights, dark wood, metal bar stools and retro furniture. There's a lounge bar, a cocktail bar and two dining rooms, one with visible kitchen.

Chelsea, South Kensington & Knightsbridge

Grenadier (Map pp122-3; 18 Wilton Row SW1; ☎ Hyde Park Corner) In summer, drinkers pile down the steps of this tiny pub, settling in the sentry box or standing outside. It's not easy to find, nestling down a pretty mews, but the welcoming, panell interior is worth the journey.

King's Head & Eight Bells (Map pp126-7; 50 Cheyne Walk SW3; ☎ Sloane Sq) An attractive corner pub pleasantly hung with flower baskets in summer. It was a favourite of the painter Whistler and the writer Carlyle.

Notting Hill, Bayswater & Marylebone

Trailer Happiness (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7727 2700; 177 Portobello Rd W11; ☎ Notting Hill Gate) Think shag-pile carpets, '60s California kitsch and trashy trailer-park glamour. Try the genuine Tiki cocktails and share a flaming volcano bowl of Zombie with a friend to ensure your evening goes with a bang. If you get peckish there are reasonably priced snack platters like Dr Jay's Green Chilli Fireballs and Trailer Happiness Smokin' Sausage salsa. With a soundtrack

that's as loungey as the ambience, a night at Trailer H is truly groovy.

Cow (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7221 5400; 89 Westbourne Park Rd W2; ☎ Westbourne Park or Royal Oak) A superb gastropub with outstanding food and a jovial pub-is-a-pub atmosphere. Seafood is a speciality and the staff are much friendlier than you'd expect from somewhere so perpetually hip.

Churchill Arms (Map pp120-1; 119 Kensington Church St W8; ☎ Notting Hill Gate) A lovely, traditional tavern with tankards and casks dangling from the ceiling, Winston memorabilia and bric-a-brac. There's an excellent Thai restaurant (mains £6) in the pleasant conservatory out the back.

Windsor Castle (Map pp120-1; 114 Campden Hill Rd W11; ☎ Notting Hill Gate) A memorable pub with oak partitions separating the original bars. The panels have tiny doors so big drinkers will have trouble getting past the front bar. It also has one of the loveliest walled gardens (with heaters in winter) of any pub in London.

Camden & Islington

Keston Lodge (Map pp118-19; 131 Upper St N1; ☎ Angel) A chilled-out, trendy-leather-sofa and distressed-wood type place with DJs on Friday and Saturday, good pies and table service.

Crown & Goose (Map pp118-19; 100 Arlington Rd NW1; ☎ Camden Town) One of our favourite London pubs. The square room has a central wooden bar between British racing green walls studded with gilt-framed mirrors and illuminated by big shuttered windows. More importantly, it combines a good-looking crowd, good beer, easy conviviality and top tucker.

Bar Vinyl (Map pp118-19; 6 Inverness St NW1; ☎ Camden Town) With loud music and groovy clientele, it's an earful of the Camden scene. There's a record shop in the basement.

Medicine Bar (Map pp118-19; 181 Upper St N1; ☎ Highbury or Islington) Coolly unpretentious, it plays good music from funk to disco and stays open until 2am at the weekend. It also has a sister bar in Shoreditch.

Pembroke Castle (Map pp118-19; 150 Gloucester Ave NW1; ☎ Chalk Farm) A light, airy retro place with beer garden, where you can feel just as comfortable sipping wine as ale.

Outside Central London

GREENWICH

Trafalgar Tavern (Map p132; Park Row SE10; DLR Cutty Sark) A Regency-style pub that was built in 1837 and stands above the site of the old Placentia

Palace where Henry VIII was born. It's the former drinking den of Dickens, Gladstone and Disraeli.

HAMPSTEAD & HIGHGATE

Hollybush (22 Holly Mount NW3; ☎ Hampstead) A beautiful pub that makes you envy the privileged residents of Hampstead. It has an antique Victorian interior, a lovely secluded hill-top location, open fires in winter and a knack for making you stay longer than you had intended any time of the year. It's above Heath St, reached via Holly Bush Steps.

Flask (77 Highgate West Hill N6; ☎ Highgate) Charming candlelit nooks and crannies, an old circular bar complete with pumps (don't knock yourself when you sit down) and a lovely beer garden make this the perfect place for a pint after visiting Highgate Cemetery (p149). If the bar queues are awful head into Highgate village for other pleasant pubs.

Spaniard's Inn (Spaniard's Rd NW3; ☎ Hampstead, then bus 21) A marvellous tavern that dates from 1585. Dick Turpin, the dandy highwayman, was born here and used it as a hang-out in his later years, while more savoury sorts like Dickens, Shelley, Keats and Byron also availed themselves of its charms. There's a big, blissful garden and good food.

ENTERTAINMENT

You've done the sights and supped and drank your fill – you're ready to take on London's thriving entertainment scene. From cutting-edge clubs and international bands to Hollywood stars doing theatre turns – you'd need a lifetime to exhaust the opportunities for fun. This list only scratches the surface; make sure to check the listings (see p133) for what's going on.

Theatre

London is a world capital for theatre and there's a lot more than mammoth musicals to tempt you into the West End. The term 'West End' – as with Broadway – generally refers to the big-money productions like musicals, but also includes such heavyweights as the **Royal Court** (Map p128; ☎ 7565 5000; Sloane Sq SW1; ☎ Sloane Sq), the patron of new British writing; the **Royal National Theatre** (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7452 3000; South Bank SE1; ☎ Waterloo), which has three auditoriums and showcases classics and new plays from some of the world's best companies; and the **Royal Shakespeare Company** (RSC; ☎ 0870 609 1110),

with productions of the Bard's classics and stuff he might have been interested in.

On performance days you can buy half-price tickets for West End productions (cash only) from the **Leicester Square Half-Price Ticket Booth** (Map pp130-1; Leicester Sq; ☎ noon-6.30pm; ☎ Leicester Sq), on the south side of Leicester Sq. The booth is the one with the clock tower – beware of touts selling dodgy tickets.

Off West End – where you'll generally find the most original works – includes venues such as the **Almeida** (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7359 4404; www.almeida.co.uk; Almeida St N1; ☎ Highbury & Islington), **Battersea Arts Centre** (Map pp116-17; Lavender Hill SW1; ☎ Chapham Junction) and the **Young Vic** (Map pp122-3; 66 The Cut, Waterloo Rd SE1; ☎ Waterloo). The next rung down is known as the fringe and these shows take place anywhere there's a stage (and can be very good).

For a comprehensive look at what's being staged where, consult *Time Out* or visit www.officiallondontheatre.co.uk.

Nightclubs

If you like clubbing, you've come to the right place. From cabaret to superclub, the city has a mind-boggling number of venues pumping music from disco, to R&B, garage or house. Some clubs have several different rooms, while others change the tempo according to the night. Admission prices vary from £3 to £10 Sunday to Thursday, but on Friday and Saturday can be as much as £20.

Astoria (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7434 9592; www.g-a-y.co.uk; 157-165 Charing Cross Rd WC2 ☎ Tottenham Court Rd) This dark, sweaty and atmospheric club has the famous G-A-Y night Saturday with live shows

GAY & LESBIAN LONDON

London has a fabulous gay scene. It is rare to encounter any problems with couples sharing rooms or holding hands on the street. In the gay venues listed – see Astoria (above), Heaven (p172), Too2Much (p172), the Ghetto (p172), Madame Jo Jo's (p172), Gay's the Word (p115) and the Philbeach Hotel (p158) – you should find the political *Pink Paper* (free) or, for listings, *Gay Times* (£3.25), *Boyz* (free) or the lesbian *Diva* (£3.15). The gay sections of *Time Out* and the *Evening Standard's Metro Life* are useful, as is www.rainbownetwork.com for men and www.gingerbeer.co.uk for women.

from stars like Madonna and Shayne Ward, a cheap Pink Pounder Monday, a disco-oriented Camp Attack Friday and other attractions such as Porn Idol, an amateur strip night. Popular with young out-of-towners.

Guanabara (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7242 8600; cnr Parker St & Drury Lane W1; admission £5-8; ☉ Covent Garden) Brazil comes to London in this hot club with live music seven nights a week. On Wednesdays enjoy an authentic Roda de Samba played by the sons of the founding fathers of samba. Tuck into Brazilian snacks and Caipirinha and shake your booty. Admission is free before 8.30pm.

Herbal (Map p125; ☎ 7613 4462; 14 Kingsland Rd E2; ☎ 9pm-2am Tue-Thu & Sun, 9pm-3am Fri & Sat; admission £3-10, free Tue-Thu; ☉ Old St) With two dance floors and a smashing roof terrace, it's no wonder Herbal remains popular. Music weaves through drum 'n' bass, disco, hip-hop, break beats, garage and house.

Fabric (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7336 8898; 77A Charterhouse St EC1; admission £10-15; ☉ Farringdon) Voted the world's best club by 600 international DJs in *DJ* magazine (March 2006), Fabric, with its three dance floors set in a converted meat cold-store is riding high. Fridays offer drum 'n' bass, break beats, hip-hop and live bands, Saturdays see house, techno and electro while Sunday holds gay night DTPM.

Ghetto (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7287 3726; 5-6 Falconberg Ct W1; ☉ Tottenham Court Rd) Home to the celebrity-attended, mixed-evening Nag, Nag, Nag on Wednesday, and Friday's electro/pop the Cock, among others, this is London's friendliest, least pretentious gay club, with cheap drinks and alternative music. It's small and can get a bit sweaty, but that's just all the more reason to take your shirt off, right?

Bar Rumba (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7287 2715; 36 Shaftesbury Ave W1; ☉ Piccadilly Circus) Along a Soho backstreet,

it's a small club with a big reputation. There's a different style each night – from Latin and jazz to deep house and garage – but everyone's a winner.

Cargo (Map p125; ☎ 7739 3440; 83 Rivington St EC2; admission £5-10; ☉ Old St) A hugely popular club with local and international DJs and a courtyard where you can simultaneously enjoy big sounds and the great outdoors. The music policy is particularly innovative, but you can usually rely on Latin house, nu-jazz and rare grooves.

Cross (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7837 0828; Goods Way Depot, York Way N1; ☉ King's Cross St Pancras) A little out of the way, in the King's Cross wastelands, but it's one of London's leading clubs serving up a Continental-style beat to a convivial crowd.

Turnmills (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7250 3409; 63b Clerkenwell Rd EC1; admission £12-15; ☉ Farringdon) House-music fans should head to this industrial-style club with wacky silver, red and yellow inflatable stars and myriad mirror balls. Fridays is progressive house and trance, Saturdays is funky house and the Sunday after-party offers more house, this time of the electro variety.

Heaven (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7930 2022; The Arches, Villiers St WC2; admission £5-15; ☉ Charing Cross) One of the world's best-known gay clubs. It has three rooms; some nights are mixed but it positively fizzles with party boys on Saturday night, while there are cheap drinks and no pretension at Monday's Popcorn.

Madame Jo Jo's (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7734 3040; 8 Brewer St W1; ☉ Piccadilly Circus) A renowned transvestite cabaret, which is sleazy, fun and kitsch. It gives way to a deep house/nu-jazz club night on Saturday and a 'Deep Funk' night on Friday.

Ministry of Sound (Map pp116-17; www.ministryofsound.co.uk; 103 Gaunt St SE1; admission £12-15; ☎ until 8am; ☉ Elephant & Castle) Where the global brand started. It lost a little of its edge over time, but sharpened up with a major refurbishment in late 2003. It's London's most famous club and still packs in a diverse crew with big local and international names.

Notting Hill Arts Club (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7460 4459; 21 Notting Hill Gate W1; admission £5-8; ☎ until 2am, 1am Sun; ☉ Notting Hill Gate) A laid-back, funky basement club that attracts an eclectic crowd and has art exhibitions plus music ranging from global to hip-hop and jazz.

Too2Much (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7734 0377; Walker's Ct W1; ☉ Piccadilly Circus) Elton John and David Furnish held their stag party here, and the club with

NOVEL NIGHTS OUT

It seems some people have had enough of going clubbing, listening to a band or propping up a bar with a pint. To plant your finger on the party pulse, check out some of these activity-based night-haunts.

Bloomsbury Bowling Lanes (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7691 2652; cnr Bedford Way & Tavistock Sq WC1; ☎ noon-2am Mon-Wed, to 3am Thu-Sat, to midnight Sun; ☉ Russell Sq) With eight 10-pin bowling lanes, a complete diner and details down to the carpet all dating from the 1950s and shipped in from America, this place is the real deal. And the fun doesn't stop with dubious footwear and a burger, there's also two private karaoke rooms, a cinema screening independent movies, DJs playing tunes from '50s rock to '60s anthems and the latest numbers, plus up-and-coming live bands. With beer a snip at £3, this car park-turned-retro fun-park equals a top night out. And you could be in celebrity company – if the curtain's drawn around lane number 8 Kevin Spacey might be playing...

Lucky Voice (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7439 3660; 52 Poland St W1; booth per person per hr £5-10; ☎ 5.30pm-1am Mon-Fri, 3pm-1am Sat; ☉ Tottenham Court Rd) Moulded on the private karaoke bars of Tokyo, super-stylish Lucky Voice is a low-lit maze of dark walls with hidden doors revealing snug leather-clad soundproofed booths for your secret sing-along. Select one of 50,000 songs from a touch screen to display the lyrics on a 32cm, pick up a microphone and choose your voice function: reverb, rapper, stadium feel, etc. In the Super Lucky rooms you've got wigs and blow-up guitars to enhance your performance. Drinks and bento boxes are ordered by the touch of a button and if you need Dutch courage to warm up, sip a delicious Lucky Destiny cocktail in the bar.

Roller Disco (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7630 6625; www.rollerdisco.info; Canvas – Bagley's Studios, King's Cross Freight Depot, York Way N1; admission incl skate hire £10; ☎ 8pm-midnight Thu, to 2am Fri; ☉ King's Cross) Remember those adolescent roller discos you used to go to? Well, this is your chance to dust off your skating skills and roll around the three arenas to a changing soundtrack of disco, funk, House, garage and R&B. To get really into the spirit dress up in '70s or '80s gear. If you're lucky maybe you'll make out with that guy/babe you've been eyeing up for ages (oh sorry we're not actually back at school, are we?) This is a popular night, so book in advance.

piano bar on one side, cabaret stage on the other (linked by a bridge over the alley) is a rampant riot of crushed velvet and retro styling. Popular with the gay fash-pack.

333 (Map p125; ☎ 7739 5949; 333 Old St EC1; ☎ 10pm-5am Fri & Sat, to 4am Sun; ☉ Old St) A Hoxton old-timer with three shambling levels of electro, indie, rock and live acts.

Live Music ROCK & JAZZ

London's live-music scene is fantastic, and any night of the week you can catch bands and performances that would be the envy of any gig-goer around the world.

Barfly@the Monarch (Map pp118-19; ☎ 0870 907 0999; www.barflyclub.com; Monarch Pub, 49 Chalk Farm Rd NW1; ☉ Chalk Farm) Pleasantly grungy, and the place to see the best upcoming bands.

Borderline (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7734 5547; www.borderline.co.uk; Orange Yard W1; ☉ Tottenham Court Rd) A small, relaxed venue, hosting bands on the verge of the mainstream. It's also your best bet to see big-name acts performing under pseudonyms.

Brixton Academy (Map pp116-17; ☎ 7771 3000; www.brixton-academy.co.uk; 211 Stockwell Rd SW9; ☉ Brixton) This Grade-II listed Art Deco venue is always winning awards for 'best live venue' and has hosted top names like the Clash, Madonna and Bob Dylan.

Forum (Map pp116-17; ☎ 0870 154 40 40; 9-17 Highgate Rd NWS; ☉ Kentish Town) A grand old theatre and one of London's best large venues.

Hackney Ocean (Map pp116-17; ☎ 8986 5336; 270 Mare St E8; ☉ Bethnal Green) Has sensational acoustics and hosts the usual headliners, but adds a strong line in world music, reflecting the multiculturalism of Hackney.

Jazz Café (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7534 6955; 5 Parkway NW1; ☉ Camden Town) A rather swanky restaurant venue. While you don't have to eat, it's better to book a table for the big names.

Ronnie Scott's (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7439 0747; 47 Frith St W1; ☉ Leicester Sq) Familiar to aficionados as the best jazz club in London. The food, atmosphere and acts are always spot-on.

Shepherd's Bush Empire (Map pp116-17; ☎ 8354 3300; www.shepherds-bush-empire.co.uk; Shepherd's Bush Green W12; ☉ Shepherd's Bush) A slightly dishevelled,

CROW'S NEST COCKTAILS

There's nothing like surveying the city with a drink in hand. Take the lift to some of these beauties:

5th View (see Waterstone's, p115)

Heights (p168)

Oxo Tower (p163)

Vertigo 42 (p169)

Windows Restaurant & Bar (Map pp122-3;

☎ 7493 8000; Hilton, 22 Park Lane W1; ☉ Hyde Park Corner)

BURLESQUE IS BACK

Basques, suspenders, cinched waists, circle skirts, tweed, top hats, trilbies, spats, feathers, foxtrot, lindy hop, divas, mime artists and of course cabaret – burlesque's retro sexy sophistication sizzles. Revived by Immodesty Blaize in Blighty and Dita von Teese stateside, there's no hotter trend for night owls. Here are the most decadently divine nights: don't forget to dress up and adopt an air of languid panache.

Baroness Ball (www.baronessaball.com)

Flash Monkey (www.theflashmonkey.biz)

Immodesty Blaize (www.immodestyblaize.com)

Jack and Ginger (www.myspace.com/jack_and_ginger)

Jitterbugs (www.jitterbugs.co.uk/home.asp)

Lady Luck (www.ladyluckclub.co.uk)

Modern Times Club (www.themoderntimesclub.co.uk/)

Viva Cake (www.myspace.com/vivacakebitches)

Volupté (www.volupte-lounge.com/inside.php)

Whoopee (www.thewhoopclub.com)

midsize theatre that hosts some terrific bands watched by laid-back punters.

100 Club (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7636 0933; 100 Oxford St W1; ☎ Oxford Circus) This legendary London venue once showcased the Stones and was at the centre of the punk revolution. It now divides its time between jazz, rock and even a little swing.

CLASSICAL

With four world-class symphony orchestras, two opera companies, various smaller ensembles, brilliant venues, reasonable prices and high standards of performance, London is a classical capital.

South Bank Centre (☎ 08703 800 400; South Bank SE1; ☎ Embankment) Home to the London Philharmonic Orchestra and the Philharmonia Orchestra, this centre has three premier venues in the Royal Festival Hall (Map pp122-3; under refurbishment until 2007) and the smaller Queen Elizabeth Hall (Map pp122-3) and Purcell Room (Map pp122-3), which host classical, opera, jazz and choral music. As part of an improvement plan to bring the centre into the 21st century, it has recently added an attractive riverside people-watching mecca of glassed-in shops and restaurants. Check out the free recitals in the foyer.

Barbican Centre (Map p125; ☎ 0845 120 7500; www.barbican.org.uk; Silk St EC2; ☎; ☎ Barbican) At the time of writing, the centre was undergoing a much-needed refurbishment to make the rather ugly entrances more attractive. The hulking complex has a full programme of film, music, theatre, art and dance, including loads of concerts from the London Symphony Orchestra, which is based here.

Royal Albert Hall (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7589 8212; www.royalalberthall.com; Kensington Gore SW7; ☎ South Kensington) A splendid Victorian arena that often hosts classical concerts, but is best known as the venue for the Proms.

Opera & Dance

Royal Opera House (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7304 4000; www.royaloperahouse.org; Royal Opera House, Bow St WC2; tickets £4-180; ☎ Covent Garden) The once starchy and now gleaming Royal Opera House has been attracting a young, wealthy audience since its £213-million millennium redevelopment, which seems to have breathed new life into programming. The Royal Ballet, the best classical-ballet company in the land, is based here.

Sadler's Wells (Map pp118-19; ☎ 0870 737 7737; www.sadlers-wells.com; Rosebery Ave EC1; tickets £10-35; ☎ Angel) A glittering modern venue that was in fact first established in the 17th century. It has been given much credit for bringing modern dance to the mainstream. There are several independent dance companies in London too.

Coliseum (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7632 8300; St Martin's Lane WC1; ☎ Leicester Sq) The home of the progressive English National Opera.

Comedy

The thought of coming to London and not seeing some stand-up is laughable. With so many men and women tickling our funny bone, it's no wonder that there are numerous venues to choose from, and many pubs getting in on the act. As ever, *Time Out* has more details, but here are a couple to whet your appetite.

Comedy Store (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7344 4444; Haymarket House, 1a Oxendon St SW1; ☎ Piccadilly Circus) One of the first comedy clubs in London, featuring the capital's most famous improvisers, the Comedy Store Players, on Wednesday and Saturday.

Comedy Café (Map p125; ☎ 7739 5706; 66-68 Rivington St EC2; ☎ Old St) Have dinner and watch some comedy; take to the stage on Wednesday if you fancy a turn.

Cinemas

Glitzy British premieres usually take place in Leicester Sq at one of the mega multiplexes. You don't have to be a movie star to catch a flick here and they do show the blockbusters, but for a more local experience try a **Curzon** (☎ 0870 756 4621; www.curzoncinemas.com; Mayfair Map pp122-3; 38 Curzon St W1; Soho Map pp130-1; 99 Shaftesbury Ave W1), which show less mainstream releases too. There are also a clutch of independent cinemas spread out over the capital that make the cinema experience a particular treat. Check listings in *Time Out* for details.

National Film Theatre (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7928 3232; South Bank Centre SE1; ☎ Waterloo) A film-lover's dream, it screens some 2000 flicks a year, ranging from vintage classics to foreign art house. There's also an informal drop-in cinema, viewing stations where you can select what you want to watch, a film shop and exhibition space.

Electric (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7908 9696; www.the-electric.co.uk; 191 Portobello Rd W11; ☎ Ladbroke Grove) Grab a glass of wine from the bar and wander inside

to your leather sofa to snuggle down for a good movie, or a Sunday double-bill. Tickets are cheapest on Mondays. All cinemas should be like this.

London IMAX (Map pp122-3; ☎ 0870 787 2525; www.bfi.org.uk/imax; Waterloo SE1; ☎ Waterloo) Watch 3-D movies and cinema releases on the UK's biggest screen at 20m high (nearly five double-decker buses) and 26m wide.

Sport

As the capital of a sports-mad nation, you can expect London to be brimming over with sporting spectacles throughout the year. As always, the entertainment weekly *Time Out* is the best source of information on fixtures, times, venues and ticket prices.

FOOTBALL

Tickets for Premier League football matches are ridiculously hard to come by for casual fans these days, and London's top-flight clubs play to full stadiums most weeks. But if you

JIMMY CARR'S LONDON

Award-winning stand-up comic, TV and radio presenter, star of the film *Confetti*, and author of *The Naked Jape*, Jimmy Carr has called North London's Islington home for the last four years. We met him to chat about this bustling, smoky city.

'London has the strongest stand-up comedy scene in the world. There are so many clubs and places to play and there's a real tradition for live acts, which probably goes back to the days of music hall.' Like a comic's version of a cabbie's 'Knowledge' (see p181), Jimmy can tell you the nearest restaurant, bar and bus/tube stop to pretty much every comedy venue in London. For those not blessed with his encyclopaedic knowledge he recommends www.chortle.co.uk for info on the comedy scene.

Despite finding his first gig 'petrifying' and believing 'there's something generally wrong with comics – they're the only people in the room facing the wrong way', he's continued to master his own brand of hilariously transgressive humour. We asked him what made the British sense of humour special and he explained 'word play is at the heart of it – because of the richness of the English language there's so much you can say', concluding 'everything that's British can be summed up in a neat little joke'. As he points out, the Brits take pride in laughing at themselves and 'to say that someone can't take a joke is very scathing'.

Jimmy loves London's 'variety – the little villages, communities and neighbourhoods that are all so different', and the fact that 'there's always so much going on and even a local can feel like a tourist, discovering new places'. He gets his inspiration 'from everyday life' and tests his material in small venues like the **Hen & Chickens Theatre** (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7704 2001; 109 St Paul's Rd N1; ☎ Highbury & Islington).

For Jimmy, London is ripe with potential gags. 'A shop has recently opened up round the corner from my house called the Duke of Yuke selling ukuleles only. It's common in London to find shops named after bad puns – I know a 'Lunatic Fringe' hairdressers too – and/or selling a highly specific (if not particularly useful) item. Every time I pass the Duke of Yuke on my way home, I phone my girlfriend to say 'I'm just by the Duke of Yuke, do you need anything?'. And that's what's so great about London.'

To check out Jimmy's next gig, see www.jimmycarr.com.

want to try your luck, the telephone numbers for some Premiership clubs are listed here:

Arsenal (☎ 7704 4040)

Charlton (☎ 0871 226 1905)

Chelsea (☎ 0870 300 2322)

Fulham (☎ 0870 442 1234)

Tottenham Hotspur (☎ 0870 420 5000)

West Ham United (☎ 0870 112 2700)

RUGBY

Twickenham (☎ 8892 2000; Rugby Rd, Twickenham; tickets around £40, more for internationals; ☎ Hounslow East, then bus 281 or Twickenham main-line station) is the home of English rugby union, but as with football, tickets for internationals are difficult to get unless you have contacts. The ground also boasts the state-of-the-art **Museum of Rugby** (☎ 0870 405 2001; admission incl stadium tour £9; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun).

CRICKET

After a blinding triumph in the 2005 Ashes followed by a bitter defeat the following year, cricket still rouses people's passions in the land of its origin. Test matches take place at two venerable grounds: **Lord's Cricket Ground** (Map pp116-17; ☎ 7432 1066; St John's Wood Rd NW8; ☎ St John's Wood) and the **Brit Oval** (Map pp116-17; ☎ 7582 7764; Kennington Oval SE11; ☎ Oval). Tickets are from £15 to £50, but if you're a fan it's worth it.

SHOPPING

From world-famous department stores to quirky backstreet retail revelations, London is a mecca for shoppers with an eye for style and a card to exercise. If you're looking for something distinctly 'British', eschew the Union Jack-embellished kitsch of the tourist thoroughfares and fill your bags with Burberry accessories, Paul Smith shirts, Royal Doulton china and Marmite. Or you could just visit some of the stores listed here...

Department Stores

It's hard to resist the lure of London's famous department stores, even if you don't intend to spend up.

Harrods (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7730 1234; 87 Brompton Rd SW1; ☎ Knightsbridge) Like a theme park for fans of the British establishment, Harrods is always crowded with slow tourists.

Harvey Nichols (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7235 5000; 109-125 Knightsbridge SW1; ☎ Knightsbridge) Harvey Nicks is London's temple of high fashion. The jewellery and perfume departments are divine.

Fortnum & Mason (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7734 8040; 181 Piccadilly W1; ☎ Piccadilly Circus) The byword for quality and service from a bygone area, steeped as it is in 300 years of tradition. It is especially noted for its old-world ground-floor food hall where Britain's elite come for their cornflakes and bananas.

Selfridges (Map pp122-3; ☎ 0870 837 7377; 400 Oxford St W1; ☎ Bond St) The funkiest and most vital of London's one-stop shops, where fashion runs the gamut from street to formal. The food hall is unparalleled and the cosmetics hall the largest in Europe.

Liberty (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7734 1234; 214-220 Regent St W1; ☎ Oxford Circus) An irresistible blend of contemporary styles in an old-fashioned atmosphere. And you can't leave London without some 'Liberty Florals' (printed fabrics).

Fashion

If there's a label worth having, you'll find it in central London. Oxford St is the place for high-street fashion, while the chains of Regent St crank it up a notch. Kensington High St has a nice mix of chains and boutiques, while the Covent Garden area is crammed with groovy labels – try Monmouth St for vintage fashion and the risqué Coco de Mer. South Molton St is a must for shoes. Bond St has designers galore, while Knightsbridge draws the hordes with quintessentially English department stores. Savile Row has bespoke tailoring, and Jermyn St is the place for sir to buy his smart togs (particularly shirts). Look out for dress agencies which sell secondhand designer clothes, bags and shoes – there are particularly rich pickings in the wealthier parts of town.

Burberry (Map pp130-1; ☎ ; 21-23 New Bond St W1; ☎ Bond St) Friend of Kate Moss and Sienna Miller, British designer Christopher Bailey is making Burberry cool again.

Cath Kidston (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7935 6555; 51 Marylebone High St W1; ☎ Baker St) A feast of vintage-style floral prints and polka dots on just about every kind of accessory.

Giles by Giles Deacon (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7629 1234; Selfridges, 400 Oxford St W1; ☎ Bond St) London's favourite designer dresses women in saucy but sophisticated style.

Paul Smith Sale Shop (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7493 1287; 23 Avery Row W1; ☎ Bond St) Classic Paul Smith big-print shirts and other delights by London's most commercially successful designer, at a discounted price.

Mulberry (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7493 2546; 11-12 Gees Ct W1; ☎ Oxford Circus) Spend your return air fare on the 'it' bag of the moment.

Coco Ribbon (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7730 8555; 21 Kensington Park Rd W11; ☎ 7229 4904; ☎ Ladbroke Grove) A shabby-chic emporium selling delicious girly loveliness like honeymoon bikinis proclaiming your new status, beauty books and feathery negligees.

Start (Map p125; ☎ 7629 1234; 42-44 Rivington St EC2; ☎ Old St) The place to purchase designer jeans.

Primark (Map pp116-17 ☎ 8748 7119; Kings Mall, King St W6; ☎ Hammersmith) Also known as 'Primarni' by the fashion editors who shop here. Brilliant for catwalk copies at a fraction of the price, but be prepared – you may have to fight for them.

TK Maxx (Map pp116-17; ☎ 8563 9200; 57 King St W6; ☎ Hammersmith) Up to 60% off designer fashion.

Top Shop Oxford Circus (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7629 1234; 216 Oxford St W1; ☎ Oxford Circus) Billed as the 'world's largest fashion store', Top Shop is a must for any budding fashionista. So hip

TO MARKET, TO MARKET

London has more than 350 markets selling everything from antiques and curios to flowers and fish. Some, such as Camden and Portobello Rd, are well known to tourists, while others exist just for the locals and have everything from dinner to underwear for sale in the stalls. Here's a sample.

Bermondsey Market (Map pp116-17; Bermondsey Sq SE1; 🕒 4am-3pm Fri; ☎ Borough) The place to come if you're after old opera glasses, bowling balls, hatpins, costume jewellery, porcelain or other curios. The main market is outdoors on the square, although adjacent warehouses shelter the more vulnerable furnishings and bric-a-brac.

Borough Market (Map p125; cnr Borough High & Stoney Sts SE1; 🕒 noon-6pm Fri, 9am-4pm Sat; ☎ London Bridge) A farmers market sometimes called London's Larder, it has been here in some form since the 13th century. It's a wonderfully atmospheric food market, where you'll find everything from organic falafel to a boar's head.

Brick Lane Market (Map p125; Brick Lane E1; 🕒 early-2pm Sun; ☎ Aldgate East) This is an East End pearl, a sprawling bazaar featuring everything from fruit and veggies to paintings and bric-a-brac.

Brixton Market (Map pp116-17; Electric Ave & Granville Arcade SW9; 🕒 10am-dusk Mon-Sat, closes 1pm Wed; ☎ Brixton) A cosmopolitan treat that mixes everything from the Body Shop and reggae to slick Muslim preachers, South American butcher shops and exotic fruits. On Electric Ave and in the covered Granville Arcade you can buy wigs, unusual foods and spices, and homeopathic root cures.

Camden Market (Map pp118-19; Camden High St NW1; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm; ☎ Camden Town) One of London's most popular tourist attractions although it stopped being cutting edge a long time ago. It's positively mobbed at the weekend.

Camden Lock Market (Map pp118-19; Camden Lock Pl NW1; 🕒 10am-6pm; ☎ Camden Town) Jewellery, bags, holistic therapies, gifts, posters, fashion and cafés for a post-retail cuppa.

Camden Passage Market (Map pp118-19; Camden Passage N1; 🕒 10am-2pm Wed, 10am-5pm Sat; ☎ Angel) Get your fill of antiques and trinkets galore. Not in Camden (despite the name).

Columbia Road Flower Market (Map p125; Columbia Rd E2; 🕒 8am-2pm Sun; ☎ Old St) An unbeatably beguiling mix of East End barrow boys selling bouquets and locals scouring the surrounding antiques, jewellery, perfume and porcelain shops with their hands full of foliage.

Petticoat Lane Market (Map p125; Wentworth St & Middlesex St E1; 🕒 9am-2pm Mon-Fri & Sun; ☎ Aldgate, Aldgate East or Liverpool St) A cherished East End institution overflowing with cheap consumer durables of little interest to tourists (although you'll see a hell of a lot of them).

Portobello Road Market (Map pp120-1; Portobello Rd W10; 🕒 8am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, closes 1pm Thu; ☎ Notting Hill Gate, Ladbroke Grove or Westbourne Park) One of London's most famous (and crowded) street markets. New and vintage clothes are its main attraction.

Spitalfields Market (Map p125; Commercial St E1; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm Sun, organic market 9.30am-5pm Fri; ☎ Liverpool St) In a Victorian warehouse, with a great mix of arts and crafts, clothes, books, food and fun.

Sunday (Up)market (Map p125; Old Truman Brewery, Brick Lane E1; 🕒 10am-5pm Sun; ☎ Liverpool St) A relatively recent addition to the East End market scene, Upmarket has handmade handbags, jewellery, new and vintage clothes and shoes, plus food if you need refuelling.

it shows at London Fashion Week and the Parisians have been crying out for their own branch (they've now got one). Where London leads...

Butler & Wilson (Map pp126-7; ☎ 7352 8255; 189 Fulham Rd SW3; ☉ South Kensington) Beautiful costume jewellery, antique baubles and vintage clothing.

ECOne (Map pp118-19; ☎ 7713 6185; 41 Exmouth Market EC1; ☉ Farringdon) Husband-and-wife team Jos and Alison Skeates sell beautiful contemporary collections by British and international jewellery designers.

Rigby & Peller (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7491 2200; 22A Conduit St W1; ☉ Oxford Circus) Revamp your lingerie with a trip to the Queen's corsetière.

Antiques

Curios, baubles and period pieces abound along Camden Passage, Bermondsey Market, the Saturday market at Portobello and along Islington's Upper St from Angel towards Highbury Corner (see p177 for market details).

Antiquarius Antiques Centre (Map pp126-7; ☎ 7969 1500; 131 King's Rd SW3; ☉ Sloane Sq) Packed with 120 stalls and dealers selling everything from top hats and corkscrews to old luggage and jewellery.

London Silver Vaults (Map pp122-3; ☎ 7242 3844; 53-63 Chancery Lane WC2; ☉ Chancery Lane) Has 72 subterranean shops forming the world's largest collection of silver under one roof.

Music

If it's been recorded, you can buy it in London. For the biggest general collections of CDs and tapes, take on the West End giants of **Virgin Megastore** (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7439 2500; 1 Piccadilly Circus W1; ☎ until 11pm Mon-Sat; ☉ Piccadilly Circus) and **HMV** (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7631 3423; 150 Oxford St W1; ☎ until 8.30pm Mon-Sat, until 9pm Thu; ☉ Oxford Circus), which both have many central branches.

For personality, visit the following:

Rough Trade Neal's Yard (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7240 0105; 16 Neal's Yard WC2; ☉ Covent Garden); **Talbot Rd** (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7229 8541; 130 Talbot Rd W11; ☉ Ladbroke Grove) In the Covent Garden basement of Slam City Skates, it's the most central outlet of this famous store that was at the forefront of the punk explosion in the 1970s. This – and its original store in Notting Hill – is the best place to come for underground specials, vintage rarities and pretty much anything of an indie or alternative bent.

Ray's Jazz Shop (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7437 5660; Foyle's, 113-119 Charing Cross Rd WC2; ☉ Tottenham Court Rd) Where aficionados will find those elusive back catalogues from their favourite jazz and blues artists.

BM Soho (Map pp130-1; ☎ 7437 0478; 25 D'Arbury St W1; ☉ Oxford Circus) Your best bet for dance, and if they haven't got what you're after, they'll know who has.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

London is the major gateway to Britain, so further transport information can be found in the main Transport chapter.

Air

For information on flying to/from London see p965.

Bus

Most long-distance coaches leave London from **Victoria coach station** (Map p128; ☎ 7730 3466; 164 Buckingham Palace Rd SW1; ☉ Victoria, then about a 10min walk), a lovely 1930s-style building. The arrivals terminal is in a separate building across Elizabeth St from the main coach station.

Car

See p970 for reservation numbers of the main car-hire firms, all of which have airport and various city locations.

Train

London has 10 main-line terminals, all linked by the tube and each serving a different geographical area of the UK.

Charing Cross (Map pp130-1) Southeast England.

Euston (Map pp118-19) Northern and northwest England, Scotland.

King's Cross (Map pp118-19) North London, Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire, northern and northeast England, Scotland.

Liverpool Street (Map p125) East and northeast London, Stansted airport, East Anglia.

London Bridge (Map p125) Southeast England.

Marylebone (Map pp120-1) Northwest London, the Chilterns.

Paddington (Map pp120-1) South Wales, western and southwest England, southern Midlands, Heathrow airport.

St Pancras (Map pp118-19) East Midlands, southern Yorkshire.

Victoria (Map p128) Southern and southeast England, Gatwick airport, Channel ferry ports.

Waterloo (Map pp122-3) Southwest London, southern and southwest England, St Pancras and Waterloo.

Most stations now have left-luggage facilities (around £4) and lockers, toilets (a 20p coin) with showers (around £3), newsstands and bookshops, and a range of eating and drinking outlets. Victoria and Liverpool St stations have shopping centres attached.

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airports HEATHROW

The airport is accessible by bus, the Underground (between 5am and 11pm), main-line train and taxi. The fastest way to and from central London is on the **Heathrow Express** (☎ 0845 600 1515; www.heathrowexpress.co.uk), an ultramodern train to and from Paddington station (one way £14.50, return £27, 15 minutes, every 15 minutes 5.10am to 11.30pm). You can purchase tickets on board (£2 extra), online or from self-service machines (cash and credit cards accepted) at both terminals.

The cheapest way between Heathrow and central London is on London Underground's Piccadilly line (£4, one hour, departing every five to 10 minutes 5.30am to 11.45pm), accessed from all terminals. Note that there are often vast queues at the Underground's ticket office. Get some £1 coins when you exchange money, and buy a ticket at the automatic machine instead.

A black cab to the centre of London will cost you around £50, a minicab around £30.

GATWICK

The **Gatwick Express train** (☎ 0845 748 4950; www.gatwickexpress.co.uk) runs nonstop between Victoria train station and the South Terminal (adult one way/return £14/25, 30 minutes, departing every 15 minutes 5.50am to 1.35am, with an earlier train at 5.20am). The normal train service is slower but cheaper. A black cab to/from central London costs around £80 to £85.

STANSTED

The **Stansted Express** (☎ 0845 748 4950; www.stanstedexpress.com) connects with Liverpool St station (one way/return £15/25, 45 minutes, departing every 15 minutes 6am to 12.30pm, otherwise every 30 minutes). The **Airbus A6** (☎ 0870 580 8080; www.nationalexpress.com) links with Victoria coach station (one way/return £10/16, departing every 20 minutes 5.30am to midnight). A black cab to/from central London costs about £100 to £105.

LONDON CITY

The Docklands Light Railway (DLR) runs between City Airport and the following London stations: Bank (22 minutes), Canning Town (eight minutes), Canary Wharf (14 minutes). Tickets cost £3 one way. A black taxi costs around £25 to/from central London.

LUTON

First Capital Connect (☎ 0845 748 4950; www.firstcapitalconnect.co.uk) runs trains from King's Cross and other central London stations to Luton Airport Parkway station (adult/child one way £11.20/5.60, 35 minutes, departing every five to 15 minutes 7am to 10pm), from where a shuttle bus will get you to the airport within eight minutes. **easyBus** (www.easybus.co.uk) minibuses run between Luton airport and central London (Gloucester Place, near Baker St) at tasty one-way prices that start from £2 (online advance bookings) or £8 (on-board fare). A black taxi costs around £95 to/from central London.

Car

Driving in London is not for the faint-hearted. Traffic is very heavy, parking is a nightmare and wheel-clampers keep busy. If you drive into central London from 7am to 6.30pm on a weekday, you'll need to pay an £8 per day congestion charge (visit www.cclondon.com to register) or face a hefty fine.

MADE IN CLERKENWELL

Support local craftspeople with a trip to **Made in Clerkenwell** (Map pp118-19; www.cga.org.uk; admission £2.50), run by the Clerkenwell Green Association charity (CGA).

Formed in 1970 to support traditional trades (including the famous clock-makers), which were in danger of being lost, the CGA opens its historic Pennybank Chambers and Cornwell House to the public every summer and winter (see website for dates) so visitors can meet the craftspeople and see them at work. Wandering through the maze of tiny studios meeting milliners, jewellery-makers, silversmiths, ceramicists, bag-makers, artists, antiques restorers and musical instrument-makers is a fascinating window into another world. And if you fancy a souvenir, you can often pick up unique hand-crafted pieces at a good price.

Public Transport

Transport for London (TfL; www.tfl.gov.uk) aims to integrate the entire London transport network. Its website has a handy journey planner and information on all transport in the capital.

Servicing a city this large is clearly a logistical nightmare for planners, who get plenty of criticism from locals. But amazingly, the system works pretty well, especially since Mayor Ken Livingstone has made it his cause célèbre. Trains, tube lines, day and night buses, cabs and even shuttle boats work in tandem to fill the gaps and make it possible to navigate the behemoth (unless you're trying to get out of Soho on a weekend night, of course).

A Travelcard (see right) can be used on all forms of public transport as can the pre-pay **Oystercard** (www.oystercard.com), which offers cheaper fares and is recommended for an extended stay.

BOAT

Myriad boats ply the Thames, with more services being announced all the time. Travelling by boat avoids traffic jams while affording great views. Travelcard holders get one-third off all fares.

City Cruises (☎ 7740 0400; www.citycruises.com) operates year-round from Westminster Pier (for more details see p153).

Westminster Passenger Services Association (☎ 7930 2062; www.wpsa.co.uk) is the only company that operates a scheduled service upriver from Westminster. It takes in Kew Gardens and Hampton Park (for prices see Kew Gardens, p151).

London Waterbus Company (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7482 2660) runs trips between Camden Lock and Little Venice, or try **Jason's Canal Trips** (Map pp120-1; ☎ 7286 3428; www.jasons.co.uk) at Little Venice. London has some 40 miles of inner-city canals, mostly built in the 19th century and in the process of renewal.

BUS

Travelling round London by double-decker bus is an enjoyable (and often efficient) way to explore the city and get a feel for its districts and size. It can seem more difficult than the tube though so pick up a bus map from an Underground station. A recommended 'scenic' route is number 24, which runs from Victoria to Hampstead Heath through the West End.

Buses run regularly between 7am and midnight. Single-journey bus tickets (valid for

two hours) cost £1.50, day passes are £3.50. If you're planning to bus it a lot it's worth buying a book of six tickets for £6. Children ride for free. In central London, at stops with yellow signs you have to buy your ticket from the automatic machine *before* boarding.

Less-frequent night buses (prefixed with the letter 'N') wheel into action when the tube stops. They stop on request, so clearly signal the driver with an outstretched arm. Trafalgar Sq, Tottenham Court Rd and Oxford Circus are the main terminals for them.

Stationlink buses (☎ 7941 4600) have a driver-operated ramp for wheelchair access and follow a similar route to the Underground Circle Line, joining up all the main-line stations. From Paddington there are services clockwise (501) from 8.15am to 7.15pm, and anticlockwise (502) from 8.40am to 6.40pm.

DLR & TRAIN

The independent, driverless **Docklands Light Railway** (DLR; ☎ 7363 9700; www.dlr.co.uk) links the City at Bank and Tower Gateway with Canary Wharf, Greenwich and Stratford, providing good views of development at this end of town. The fares operate in the same way as those on the tube.

Several rail companies also operate suburban rail services in and around London. These are especially important south of the river where there are few tube lines. Once again, fares operate in the same way as those on the tube.

LONDON UNDERGROUND

The 12 'tube' lines extend as far as Buckinghamshire, Essex and Heathrow. There are Underground travel information centres at all Heathrow terminals, a half-dozen major tube stations and at larger main-line train stations. Services run from 5.30am to roughly midnight (from 7am on Sunday).

The Underground is divided into six concentric zones. The basic fare for Zone 1 is adult/child £3/1.50; to cross all six zones (eg to/from Heathrow) costs £4/2. Tickets can be bought from machines or counters at the entrance to each station.

If you're travelling through a few zones or several times in one day, consider a Travelcard. One-day Travelcards can be used on all transport: tubes, main-line trains, the DLR and buses (including night buses). Most visitors find a one-day Travelcard for Zones 1 and 2 (£4.90) is sufficient. Before 9.30am Monday to

Friday, you need a Peak Travelcard (£6.20/3.10 for Zones 1 and 2). Three-day Travelcards cost £15.40/7.70. Children under 11 years can travel for free with an adult anytime after 9.30am.

Note that taking the tube for the minuscule journey between Covent Garden and Leicester Sq (£3 for 250m) is more expensive than taking a stretch limo.

Taxi

Wonderfully reliable black cabs are available for hire when the yellow light above the windscreen is lit. Fares are metered, with flag fall at £2.20 and each successive kilometre costing 90p. To order a black cab by phone, try **Dial-a-Cab** (☎ 7253 5000); you must pay by credit card and will be charged a premium.

Licensed minicabs are a cheaper alternative to cabs. To find a local minicab firm visit www.tfl.gov.uk/pco/findaride or if you're out and about and you need a minicab right now, text HOME to 60835 to get the telephone numbers for your two nearest minicab firms.

THE KNOWLEDGE

Taking a black cab is a quintessential London experience. It's more expensive than a minicab, but significantly more comfortable and reliable. To get an all-London licence, cabbies must do 'The Knowledge', which tests them on up to 25,000 streets within a 6-mile radius of Charing Cross and all the points of interest from hotels to churches. If you see people on mopeds with clipboards, they are probably revising. It's a feat that can sometimes take years to achieve, and ensures, according to the Public Carriage Office, that only the most committed join the noble trade. It also ensures you get the most direct route to your destination.

Be aware that there have been many reports of assault by unlicensed minicab drivers. Female travellers should not jump into an unlicensed minicab alone.

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