Welcome to London! One of the greatest cities on earth has so much to explore. So where do you start?

This 3 day London itinerary is perfect for first-time visitors or those who want to revisit the classic sights and venues that make the city so unique.

We assume you like to have a variety of activities in your trip schedule, so our suggestions for your 3 days in London include the major sites, museums, art, eating and shopping. In other words, all the key ingredients for a great time exploring London.

Our 3 days London itinerary is deliberately grouped into 3 main areas to explore to minimise time travelling between different attractions and there are options to spend a little more time at the places that interest you the most. Have fun!

Day 1 of your 3 day London itinerary

London Eye

Start your day and get your bearings with a ride on the London Eye for panoramic views of London’s skyline. A full rotation takes 30 minutes and on a clear day, you can see the city spread out below you for miles and miles. This attraction opens at 10 am each day.

I like watching all the iconic London buses weave in and out of the busy streets past Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament.

My advice is to pre-book skip the line tickets for the London Eye – especially in summer – as the queues are very long and who wants to spend their trip to London waiting in line?

Nearest Underground Station: Waterloo [Jubilee, Northern – Charing Cross Branch, Bakerloo lines]

Thames River cruise or ferry

You can take a cruise boat with commentary or the regular London transport river bus down from the London Eye past major landmarks in the city including Somerset House, St Paul’s Cathedral, the Tate Modern art gallery, and Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre.

The journey by river bus takes only 20 minutes and boats leave regularly every 20 minutes.

Seeing London from the river gives a unique perspective on the city. Imagine how Kings and Queens felt as they travelled from palace to palace, surveying the city around them.

A one-way ticket from the London Eye will take you to the Tower of London where you continue your London adventure.

Tower of London
The Crown Jewels of Queen Elizabeth II and other members of the Royal Family are kept in the **Tower of London**. This royal fortress also holds many secrets and stories and is a must-visit stop on your first trip to London.

Apart from viewing the royal jewels you can meet the famous Beef Eater guards and take a stroll around the castle walls looking out for the ravens along the way. See where Anne Boleyn met her fate and wonder what happened to the two small princes who were held in the Tower by their ambitious uncle King Richard III.

Nearest Underground Station: Tower Hill [District and Circle lines]

**Tower Bridge**
Grab a snack and eat your lunch on the benches outside the Tower of London looking up at Tower Bridge and across to the Shard and south bank of the Thames.

Many people think the famous bridge is called London Bridge but that is actually a non-descript structure you find heading back west along the Thames.

If you are lucky or do some forward planning you may see the iconic bridge lift to let through oversized river traffic.

*Take a break: It can be difficult to find good value, healthy food in London. Check out my guide on the best chain restaurants and eateries in London for ideas on where to eat when you are out and about in the city.*

**Borough Market**

Foodies may want to walk 20 minutes to Borough Market for lunch. Here you can browse the food stalls for almost anything you feel like – from paella to pork buns. This area is also home to some of my favourite London coffee shops – Monmouth coffee and London Grind.

On a sunny day take your lunch and sit in the grounds of Southwark Cathedral for a picnic. If the weather isn’t on your side there is an indoor seating area.

The full market runs Wednesday to Saturday with a limited market (fewer traders) on Monday and Tuesday. The market is closed on Sundays.

Nearest Underground Station: London Bridge [Northern – Bank branch and Jubilee lines]
A walk through the City of London

From the Tower of London, take a 20-minute walk past the Monument to the Great Fire of London to St Paul's Cathedral.

If you have time you can pop into Leadenhall Market a beautiful Victorian covered market that is now home to shops and restaurants. The market was used as the setting for Diagon Alley in the Harry Potter films.

You might also like to drop by the Sky Garden at 20 Fenchurch Street, 10 minutes from the Tower of London. Located in the “Walkie Talkie building” the terrace provides stunning views of London and entry is free. You must book tickets in advance on their on the Sky Garden website.

From Borough Market follow the river past the replica of Sir Francis Drake’s ship the Golden Hinde and Shakespeare's Globe Theatre to Millenium Bridge. There you will cross back over the Thames and enjoy some striking views down the river and towards St Paul’s. This walk will take around 20 minutes without stops.

St Paul’s Cathedral

Rebuilt after the catastrophic Great Fire by Sir Christopher Wren, St Paul’s Cathedral is one of the most instantly recognised landmarks on the London skyline. Inside, the Cathedral is beautiful and ornate and designed to maximise the impact of natural light.

For more spectacular views of London climb more than 500 steps to reach the Golden Gallery. The crypt of the Cathedral holds the tombs of British military heroes Admiral Lord Nelson and the Duke of Wellington.

The Cathedral opens Monday-Saturday, 08:30-16:30 (last admission 16:00). Introductory talks and guided tours are included in your admission fee. Once again I recommend getting your tickets in advance: Book fast track
tickets for St Paul's Cathedral.

Nearest Underground Station: St Paul’s [Central line]

Dinner in Soho

I recommend a visit to Soho for dinner. There are hundreds of restaurants to choose from and you can stop and watch the street performances in Leicester Square before or after your meal.

Expensive

**HIX Soho** – Funky, arty vibe with a seasonal British menu – 66-70 Brewer Street W1F 9UP

**Berner’s Tavern** – Grand dining room with a modern British menu – 10 Berners Street W1T 3NP

Mid Range

**The Ivy Soho Brasserie** – modern British – 26-28 nBroadwick Street W1F 8JB

**Dean Street Townhouse** – posh fish and chips – 71 Dean Street, W1D 3SG

Cheap eats

**Princi** – pizza, pasta and risotto straight from Milan – 135 Wardour St, Soho, W1F 0UT

**Wahaca Soho** – fresh and tasty Mexican – 80 Wardour St, Soho, London W1F

*It’s always a good idea to make reservations in London – you can do this on the go with the [Open Table app](#)*

Day 2 of your 3 day London trip

On the previous day, you explored the London of Kings and Queens past. Today there is a little more of the same but you will catch a glimpse of the lives of how the current royal lives and enjoy the pomp and ceremony of some unique British traditions.

**Palaces of Westminster and Westminster Abbey**
Start your day outside the Palaces of Westminster (also known as the Houses of Parliament) and pay your respects to Big Ben. Actually, Big Ben is the name of the clock inside the famous tower which is in fact called Elizabeth Tower.

You can take a 90-minute tour of the Houses of Parliament followed by afternoon tea if the government is not sitting. This is one of my favourite London experiences. There’s nothing quite like being inside one of the world’s most famous buildings, hearing its stories from a knowledgeable guide.

Walk through Parliament Square past the statue of Winston Churchill to Westminster Abbey. The impressive Gothic church is the final resting place of significant people in British history and the location of royal weddings and coronations. For this reason, the Abbey is a fascinating place to visit.

Do check the Westminster Abbey website for information on opening times and ticket prices. As the Abbey is a working church it may not be open to visitors on the day you are there.

Nearest Underground Station: Westminster [Jubilee, District and Circle lines]

Changing of the Guard – 2 options
Now experience the grandeur of the **Changing of the Guard** ceremonies. Soldiers wearing the famous red tunics and bearskin hats continue a centuries’ old tradition of guarding the Sovereign and Royal Palaces. These days the marching is accompanied by a full military band and the atmosphere is festive.

**Option 1** – walk to Buckingham Palace from Westminster Abbey which will take around 15 minutes. The ceremony starts at 11am at Buckingham Palace, however, preparations including the brass band ensemble and guard inspection take place at Wellington Barracks close by at around 10am. Visit this amazing practical guide to the Changing of Guard for more information on the best vantage points and timings of the parade. Currently, the ceremony is held on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday. This page has an up to date list of confirmed times and dates for the ceremony.

During the Summer months Buckingham Palace, the Queen’s London residence, is open to visitors. Check the Palace website for opening times and ticket prices.

**Option 2** – view a more intimate ceremony featuring the Queen’s cavalry at Horse Guard’s Parade. To get there walk 10 minutes down Whitehall past 10 Downing Street, home of the Prime Minister of Great Britain. The ceremony takes place outside the Household Cavalry Museum. Here the Queen’s Life Guard change, at 11am Monday – Saturday and at 10am on a Sunday.

**Kensington Palace and Hyde Park**

Make your way to Hyde Park and Kensington Palace for lunch or a snack. From Buckingham Palace you can walk in around 40 minutes through Hyde Park or walk through Green Park to Constitution Hill and take the number 9 bus to Palace Gate.

From Horse Guards Parade take the number 9 bus from Trafalgar Square to Kensington Palace.

**Lunch at the Orangery, Kensington Palace**
The Orangery at Kensington Palace is one of my favourite venues for breakfast, lunch or afternoon tea in London. I like that the menu is posh without being stuffy and it is also great value. The grand venue, royal touches and attentive service mean you feel like you have had a special treat. For a snack or more casual sandwich, there is a nice cafe with outdoor seating at Kensington Palace.

An option for the afternoon is to visit Kensington Palace where you can visit the State Apartments and special exhibitions, many of which feature Princess Diana who once lived at the palace. The grounds and gardens are lovely to wander around and if you are travelling with children the nearby Diana Memorial Playground is one of the best in London.

Nearest Underground Station: Kensington High Street [District and Circle lines]

Visit the V&A, Science or Natural History Museum
After lunch, you might like to wander around Hyde Park or visit one of London’s famous and free (except for special exhibitions) museums.

From Kensington Palace, it is a 20-minute walk through Hyde Park past the Albert Hall and Albert Memorial to Exhibition Road where you will find the V&A, Natural History and Science Museums.

My favourite is the **V&A** – the world’s leading museum for art and design. You could spend days exploring their collections of paintings, sculpture, textiles and fashion. Check their upcoming special exhibitions too as these are some of the most brilliantly curated shows I have ever seen.

The **Natural History Museum** is famous for its dinosaur exhibit and the **Science Museum** has brilliant interactive displays and play areas for children. There’s also a wonderful space exhibit on the ground floor.

Nearest Underground Station: South Kensington [District and Circle lines]

**Dinner: A fine dining treat or a pub meal**

Dinner on your second night could take two paths. My first suggestion is to advance book one of London’s many fine dining establishments, many of which are Michelin starred. Your second option is to visit a traditional pub.

**Recommended fine dining restaurants – you must book well in advance**

**Dinner by Heston** – enjoy the cuisine of one of Britain’s most celebrated chef’s Heston Blumenthal at the Mandarin Oriental

**The Ledbury** – this 2 Michelin starred restaurant is in the world’s top 20 and is run by Australian chef Brett Graham

**Spring** – an elegant Italian inspired restaurant with a strong emphasis on fish and seafood at beautiful Somerset House

**Wildcard**

We love taking visitors to **Portrait** the restaurant on the top floor of the National Portrait Gallery. With sweeping views of London over Trafalgar Square and towards Big Ben and a well executed European menu, it is a great night out. Bookings recommended
Traditional pub dinner recommendations

The Lamb, Bloomsbury – 300-year-old pub near the British Museum with traditional fare taken up a notch

The George Inn – this 17th Century staging house near Borough Market is owned by the National Trust. Try the beef and ale pie or sausages and mash

The Grenadier – visit this historic Belgrave Square pub and dine on Beef Wellington

Day 3 of your 3 day London itinerary

British Museum

Start your day at the British Museum, London’s most visited attraction. The museum is free to enter and includes treasures from all over the world. There is a lot to see so pick some highlights of the museum and get there when it opens at 10am to avoid the crowds.

Nearest Underground Stations: Holborn, Tottenham Court Road [Northern – Charing Cross branch and Central lines]

Covent Garden
Make your way to Covent Garden, London’s famous covered market that now houses shops and restaurants. There are many restaurants and cafes here to pick up a snack or lunch – there are outlets of Le Pain Quotidien, Ladurée and Shake Shack though I suggest you eat lightly and save your appetite for afternoon tea.

Enjoy the atmosphere at Covent Garden. We like watching the street performances by the many talented buskers that draw huge crowds.

Nearest Underground Station: Covent Garden [Piccadilly line]

The London Transport Museum is found at the market and is a family favourite. There is a treasure trove of buses and trains to explore inside. So much of London’s transport is iconic that even if you don’t visit the museum, the shop is a great place to pick up high-quality well-designed souvenirs.

**Oxford Street shopping**

This activity seems to be on many visitor’s lists of things to do in London. So much so that I wrote a [guide to shopping on London’s Oxford Street](#). This is the place to find all the big high street brands like Zara, Marks and Spencer and H&M but I prefer the uniquely British atmosphere of Liberty of London in Argyll Street where you could pick up a special scarf or other unique London souvenir.

Continue your walk down Carnaby Street, famous in the 1960s and 70s as the hangout for stars such as David Bowie and the Beatles. Then turn right until you reach Regent Street and continue on to Piccadilly Circus.

Alternatively, you could continue your walk down Oxford Street to iconic London department store – Selfridges.

**Afternoon tea and art fix**

Afternoon tea is a ritual you must not miss in London. Typically taken between 2 and 4pm it consists of
sandwiches, cakes, scones, sometimes champagne and, of course, tea. I have never needed to eat dinner afterwards!

**Option 1 – From Piccadilly Circus** make your way down Piccadilly where you can duck into the elegant shopping arcades. Your destination is **Fortnum and Mason** where you can take afternoon tea in the **Diamond Jubilee Tea Salon** opened in 2012 by Her Majesty the Queen.

**Fortnum and Mason** have been suppliers to the Royal household for over 300 years and is another place I like to shop for gifts and souvenirs of a particularly British flavour. Here you will find the best British tea, marmalade and chocolates among other fine food items.

For the ultimate in British afternoon teas, you can try ‘**tea at The Ritz**’ a little further down Piccadilly. Bookings for this experience are essential.

After your tea, cross the road to the **Royal Academy of Arts** where you will always find a well curated and thought-provoking exhibition. Or walk 10 minutes back down Piccadilly where you can visit the **National Gallery** or **National Portrait Gallery**. Both these galleries have magnificent collections and are free for the main exhibitions. They are open until 6pm every day and until 9pm on Fridays.

Read more about these galleries in my guide to **London’s best galleries**

**Related**  **London loves: Houses of Parliament afternoon tea and tour**

**Option 2 – from Selfridges** it is a short walk past Manchester Square to one of my favourite museums and galleries **The Wallace Collection**. This free to enter museum houses works by Dutch masters and gorgeous French antique furniture among other treasures.

You can take a very delicious and reasonably priced afternoon tea in the beautiful **Wallace Restaurant** found in the central atrium courtyard of the museum.

**Related**  **11 London galleries for art lovers**
Catch a show in the West End

Make your last night in London one to remember by booking tickets to see a show at one of the city’s famous West End theatres. With London Theatre Direct you can browse the latest theatre, musicals, dance and concert tickets available for your visit in the one spot.

Where to stay in London

As you can see, there is so much to do in London – and we have barely scratched the surface! I recommend staying as centrally as your budget allows to minimise transport costs and maximise the time you have to enjoy the city.

3 London hotel recommendations

High end – The Rosewood London in Holborn is close to the British Museum, theatres of Covent Garden and shopping on Oxford Street. This hotel is in a historic building that captures the essence of London’s grandeur. I have enjoyed many meals at the Holborn Dining Room within the hotel and recommend visitors dine there.

Book the Rosewood London on Booking.com and read reviews on TripAdvisor.

Mid-range – Location is everything – at the Piccadilly London West End you are in the heart of the city in hotel that adds those extra touches travellers really appreciate

Book The Piccadilly London West End on Booking.com and read their reviews on TripAdvisor.
Budget – With a great location close to Borough Market and London Bridge station, the London City Hotel also offers apartments suitable for families.

Book the London City Hotel on Booking.com and read the reviews on TripAdvisor.

Finding rental apartments in London

We stay in many rental apartments on our travels and I have come up with a system for choosing the best accommodation rentals. In London, the process is much simpler. The Plum Guide uses experts to identify the best homes for short term rental, cutting out all the leg work. Their listings are close to transport, great value and include all the little touches you expect from a great host.

Go to our travel and trip planning resources page for all our recommendations for booking hotels, tours and flights for your travels.

Tips for making the most of your London itinerary

Eating

If you are staying in a hotel take advantage of the hearty English breakfasts with eggs, bacon, sausages and toast. That way you can keep yourself going until dinner with a few small snacks in between.

London has some of the world’s finest restaurants so book well in advance to secure a reservation for a meal to remember. You can use the OpenTable app to do this.

Also check out my guide to London’s chain restaurants and cafes and best coffee shops.

Transport

Buy an Oyster card which you can use on all forms of transport – underground and overground trains, light rail, buses and river boat services.

You will find information about fares, service outages and travel times on the Transport for London website.

Note: children under the age of 11 travel free when accompanied by an adult. See fare information.

Uber is popular in London but there’s nothing quite like riding in a black cab through the city’s streets. You can easily hail black cabs on the street or feel free to use my code GTCTIES when using the black cab app Gett for £10 free credit when you book your first ride.

I love black cabs because they are pram and wheelchair friendly and can hold 5 passengers with seat belts. Both our double prams fit into cabs without having to collapse them and that is such a relief as most parents would agree.

Related London: Top 5 apps to download for your trip

What to pack for London

Famous for its weather for all the wrong reasons, London is a place that demands layers when you pack. Even in summer, I would recommend bringing a jumper/sweater and a lightweight raincoat. In winter you will need boots, a warm coat, hat and gloves.

If you are visiting during a London winter you will need boots, a warm coat, hat and gloves.
And always, in any season, an umbrella!

Our favourite London activities

Here’s a quick list of other activities to consider for your trip to London

✪ Take a street art tour of London’s east end
✪ Join a unique Camden and Primrose Hill walking tour
✪ 11 London galleries for art lovers
✪ Take a boat ride down Regent’s canal to Camden Lock
✪ Enjoy a stroll around London’s famous parks and gardens

Add a day trip from London

London is fantastic but there are so many places in the UK to explore beyond the capital. Here are some ideas for taking a day trip from London

Greenwich – technically in greater London, this area warrants a full day of exploration on its own. Greenwich is easily reached by river bus, light rail or train services from London Bridge

Hampton Court Palace – visit Henry VIII’s palace and explore the world of the Tudors at this most English of castles complete with ornate gardens (see above)

Brighton – a favourite English seaside resort just over an hour from the capital

Cambridge – just an hour from London by train, the famous university city is incredibly pretty and packed full of history

I hope you found this post useful for planning your trip to London. If you did, I’d love if you could share it using the buttons below – thanks!

If you want to visit all the classic sights in just a few days I think this is one of the best itineraries that you could follow to fit it all in but as always, happy to hear suggestions on how it could be improved.

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