

London



Everyone comes to London with a preconception of the metropolis shaped by a multitude of books, movies, TV shows and songs. Whatever yours is, prepare to have it shattered by this endlessly fascinating, amorphous city.

Don't believe anyone who claims to know London – you could spend a lifetime exploring it and find that the slippery thing's gone and changed on you. One thing is constant: that great serpent of a river enfolding the city in its sinuous loops, linking London both to the green heart of England and the world. The Empire may be long gone but the engines of global capital continue to be stoked by the side of the Thames. This only adds to London's vibrant, finger-on-the-pulse persona. It's also what makes it the third-most expensive city in the world.

Those who call London grey are only telling part of the story. It's also surprisingly green and even a little wild. Deer still wander some of its parks, foxes roam the streets at night and the tenacity of the foliage leaves you in little doubt that a few years without human intervention would transform the whole place into Sleeping Beauty's castle.

But London's in no danger of slumbering anytime soon. From Roman times the world has come to London, put down roots and whinged about the weather. There is no place on earth that is more multicultural; any given street yields a rich harvest of languages. Those narrow streets are also steeped in history, art, architecture and popular culture. With endless reserves of cool, London is one of the world's great cities, if not the greatest.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Watching the world pass by on a sunny day in **Regent's Park** (p130) or any of London's other green oases
- Admiring the booty of an empire at the **British Museum** (p120)
- Losing your head in history at the **Tower of London** (p122)
- Meeting the dead famous in **Westminster Abbey** (p115)
- Discovering the next cool thing in skinny jeans in the city's **live-music venues** (p163)
- Seeing the locals through beer goggles in the capital's numerous **pubs** (p159)
- Getting closer to God at the top of the dome of **St Paul's Cathedral** (p122)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 020

■ POPULATION: 7.51 MILLION

■ AREA: 609 SQ MILES

HISTORY

London first came into being as a Celtic village near a ford across the River Thames, but it wasn't until after the Roman invasion, in the year 43, that the city really began to take off. The Romans enclosed their Londinium in walls that are still echoed in the shape of the City of London (the big 'C' City) today.

By the end of the 3rd century AD, Londinium was almost as multicultural as it is now, with 30,000 people of various ethnic groups and temples dedicated to a large number of cults. 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. 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 its 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 has passed through various houses since (the House of Windsors has warmed its cushion since 1910), with royal power concentrated in London from the 12th century. From then to the late 15th century, London politics were 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 in the 16th century under the House of Tudor.

The Great Plague struck in 1665 and by the time the winter cold arrested the epidemic 100,000 Londoners had perished. 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 Sir 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 artistic creativity with the likes of Dr Johnson, Handel, Gainsborough and Reynolds enriching the city's culture while its architects fashioned an elegant new metropolis. At the same time the gap between the rich and poor grew ever wider, and lawlessness was rife.

In 1837, 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, replacing 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 swathes of the centre and East End were flattened and 32,000 people were killed. Ugly housing and low-cost developments were hastily erected in post-war London, and immigrants from around the world flocked to the city and changed its character forever.

The last 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 Sixties'.

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

In 2000 the modern metropolis got its first Mayor of London (as opposed to the Lord Mayor of the City of London), an elected role covering the City and all 32 urban boroughs. The position was taken in 2008 by Boris Johnson, a Conservative known for his unruly shock of blond hair, appearances on TV game shows and controversial editorials in *Spectator* magazine. One thing the bicycle-riding mayor will have to contend with is the city's traffic snarls. A congestion charge on cars entering the central city had initial success when introduced by his predecessor, but rush-hour congestion has now increased to precharge levels.

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 Olympics and celebrated with a frenzy of flag waving. The following day, the party abruptly ended as suicide bombers struck on three tube trains and a bus, killing 52 people. Only two weeks later a second terrorist attack was foiled. But Londoners are not easily beaten and they immediately returned to the tube, out of defiance and pragmatism.

Work is continuing in earnest in the East End to transform a 500-acre site into the Olympic Park, complete with new legacy venues and an athletes' village that will be turned into housing post-Olympics. It's expected that the project will rejuvenate this economically depressed area – and with a price tag of £9 billion, you'd certainly hope so. The improved transport connections will certainly help. An expanded East London line will link the East End to Highbury & Islington in the north and Clapham and Crystal Palace in the south.

It won't be ready for the Olympics, but the Crossrail project will add a new east-west route to the colourful spaghetti of the tube map.

ORIENTATION

The M25 ring road encompasses the 609 sq miles that is broadly regarded as Greater London. The city's main geographical feature is the murky Thames, which snakes around but roughly divides the city into north and south.

The old City of London (note the big 'C') is the capital's financial district, covering roughly a square mile bordered by the river and the many gates of the ancient (long-gone) city walls: Newgate, Moorgate etc. The areas to the east of the City are collectively known as the East End. The West End, on the City's other flank, is effectively the centre of London nowadays. It actually falls within the City of Westminster, which is one of London's 32 boroughs and has long been the centre of government and royalty. Surrounding these central areas are dozens of former villages (Camden, Islington, Clapham etc), each with their own High Street, which were long ago swallowed by London's sprawl.

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.

Maps

No Londoner would be without a pocket-sized *London A-Z*, which lists nearly 30,000 streets and still doesn't cover London in its entirety. Lonely Planet also publishes a *London City Map*.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Daunt Books (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7224 2295; 83 Marylebone High St W1; ☉ Baker St) An exquisitely beautiful store, with guidebooks, travel literature, fiction and reference books all sorted by country.

Forbidden Planet (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7420 3666; 179 Shaftesbury Ave WC2; ☉ Tottenham Court Rd) On a different planet to our lonely one, populated by comic-book heroes, sci-fi figurines, horror and fantasy literature.

Foyle's (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7437 5660; 113-119 Charing Cross Rd WC2; ☉ Tottenham Court Rd) Venerable independent store with an excellent collection of poetry and women's literature.

Grant & Cutler (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7734 2012; 55-57 Great Marlborough St W1; ☉ Oxford Circus) Foreign-language titles.

Judd Books (Map pp98-9; ☎ 7387 5333; 82 Marchmont St WC1; ☉ Russell Sq) Delightfully musty second-hand and bargain bookshop.

Stanfords (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7836 1321; 12-14 Long Acre WC2; ☉ Covent Garden) The granddaddy of travel bookstores.

Travel Bookshop (Map pp100-1; ☎ 7229 5260; 13 Blenheim Cres W11; ☉ Ladbroke Grove) Hugh Grant's haunt in *Notting Hill* and a wealth of guidebooks and travel literature.

Waterstone's Bloomsbury (Map pp98-9; ☎ 7636 1577; 82 Gower St WC1; ☉ Goudge St); Piccadilly (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7851 2400; 203-206 Piccadilly W1; ☉ Piccadilly Circus) Both beautiful branches of the chain. Check out the 5th View bar in the Piccadilly store.

Emergency

Police/Fire/Ambulance (☎ 999)

Rape & Sexual Abuse Support Centre (☎ 8683 3300)

Samaritans (☎ 0845 790 9090)

Internet Access

You'll find free wireless access at many bars, cafes and hotels, and large tracts of London, notably Canary Wharf and the City, are covered by pay-as-you-go wireless services that you can sign up to *in situ* (about £10/5 per

day/hour). You'll usually pay less at an internet cafe (about £1 to £2 per hour). Although it's unlikely you'll be caught, piggybacking off someone's unsecured connection is illegal and people have been prosecuted for it. Reliable internet cafes include:

BTR (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7209 0984; 39 Whitfield St W1; ☉ Goudge St)

easyInternetcafe (www.easy.com) Kensington (Map pp100-1; 160 Kensington High St W8; ☉ High St Kensington); Oxford St (Map pp104-5; 358 Oxford St W1; ☉ Bond St); Trafalgar Sq (Map pp108-9; 456 The Strand WC2; ☉ Charing Cross) Attached to Subway outlets.

Internet Lounge (Map pp102-3; ☎ 7370 1734; 24 Earl's Court Gardens SW5; ☉ Earl's Court)

Internet Resources

The Lonely Planet website (lonelyplanet.com) has lots of London information. You can also try the following:

BBC London (www.bbc.co.uk/london)

Evening Standard (www.thisislondon.co.uk)

Londonist (www.londonist.com)

Time Out (www.timeout.com/london)

Urban Path (www.urbanpath.com)

View London (www.viewlondon.co.uk)

Walk It (www.walkit.com) Enter your destination and get a walking map, time estimate and information on calories burnt and carbon-dioxide saved.

Media

It's hard to avoid London's free press, with vendors pushing freebies in your face outside every central tube stop on weekdays. The best is the reasonably weighty morning *Metro*, while come midafternoon the trashier *London Lite* and *London Paper* are available.

All the national dailies have plenty of London coverage, but the city's only real paper is the tabloid *Evening Standard*, which comes out in early and late editions. Published every Tuesday, *Time Out* (£2.95) is the local listing guide *par excellence*.

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:

Royal Free Hospital (Map pp96-7; ☎ 7794 0500; Pond St NW3; ☉ Belsize Park)

St Thomas' Hospital (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7188 7188; Lambeth Palace Rd SE1; 🚶 Waterloo)

University College Hospital (Map pp98-9; ☎ 0845 155 5000; 235 Euston Rd WC1; 🚶 Euston Sq)

Money

Banks and ATMs (called cash machines or cash points) are two a penny in central London. You can change cash easily at banks, *bureaux de change*, travel agents and post offices, where rates are usually fair. If you use *bureaux de change*, check commission rates and exchange rates; some can be extortionate.

There are decent bureaux in all London's airports, some charging a £3 flat fee. The following are also reliable (both have many branches):

American Express (Amex; Map pp108-9; ☎ 7484 9610; 30-31 Haymarket SW1; 🕒 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun; 🚶 Piccadilly Circus)

Thomas Cook (Map pp108-9; ☎ 0845 308 9570; 30 St James's St SW1; 🕒 9am-5.30pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, 10am-5.30pm Wed; 🚶 Green Park)

Post

Most High Streets have a post office, where you'll get to join in the national pastime: queuing. The **Trafalgar Square post office** (Map pp108-9; 24 William IV St WC2; 🕒 8.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5.30pm Sat; 🚶 Charing Cross) has the main *poste restante* service for London. London post offices usually open from around 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday. Some also open 9am to noon on Saturdays.

Telephone

The only businesses to rival food outlets for sheer number of shopfronts on London's High Streets are mobile-phone stores. It's a good idea to pick up a local SIM card if you're staying for any length of time; not only will you avoid international roaming charges on your home mobile account, some also offer cheap international call-rates (for example, 6p per minute to Australia). Then there's the added advantage of being able to dish out a local number to hotties you meet at bars! **Carphone Warehouse** (☎ 0870 087 0870; www.carphone-warehouse.com) has branches all over the city and a bewildering array of prepaid plans available. SIMs are often free.

Many internet cafes have booths where you can dial internationally for less than the standard British Telecom (BT) rate. Another handy alternative is to buy a calling card from

a corner store which allows you to connect via a local number to an internet-based international service, with charges as low as 2p per minute.

Toilets

If you're caught short around London, public toilets can be hard to find. Only a handful of tube stations have them but the bigger National Rail stations usually do (although they're often coin operated). If you can face five floors on an escalator, department stores are a good bet. In a busy pub, no-one's going to notice you sneaking in to use the loo, but if you're spotted it would be polite to order a drink afterwards.

Tourist Information

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

Britain & London Visitor Centre (Map pp108-9; www.visitbritain.com; 1 Regent St SW1; 🕒 9.30am-6.30pm Mon, 9am-6.30pm Tue-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun; 🚶 Piccadilly Circus) Books accommodation, theatre and transport tickets, and offers a *bureau de change*, international telephones and terminals for accessing tourist information on the web. It's open longer hours in summer.

City of London Information Centre (Map p112; ☎ 7332 1456; www.cityoflondon.gov.uk; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat; St Paul's Churchyard EC4; 🚶 St Paul's)

Tourist information, fast-track tickets to attractions and guided walks (£6, daily in summer). Open Sundays during summer.

Travel Agencies

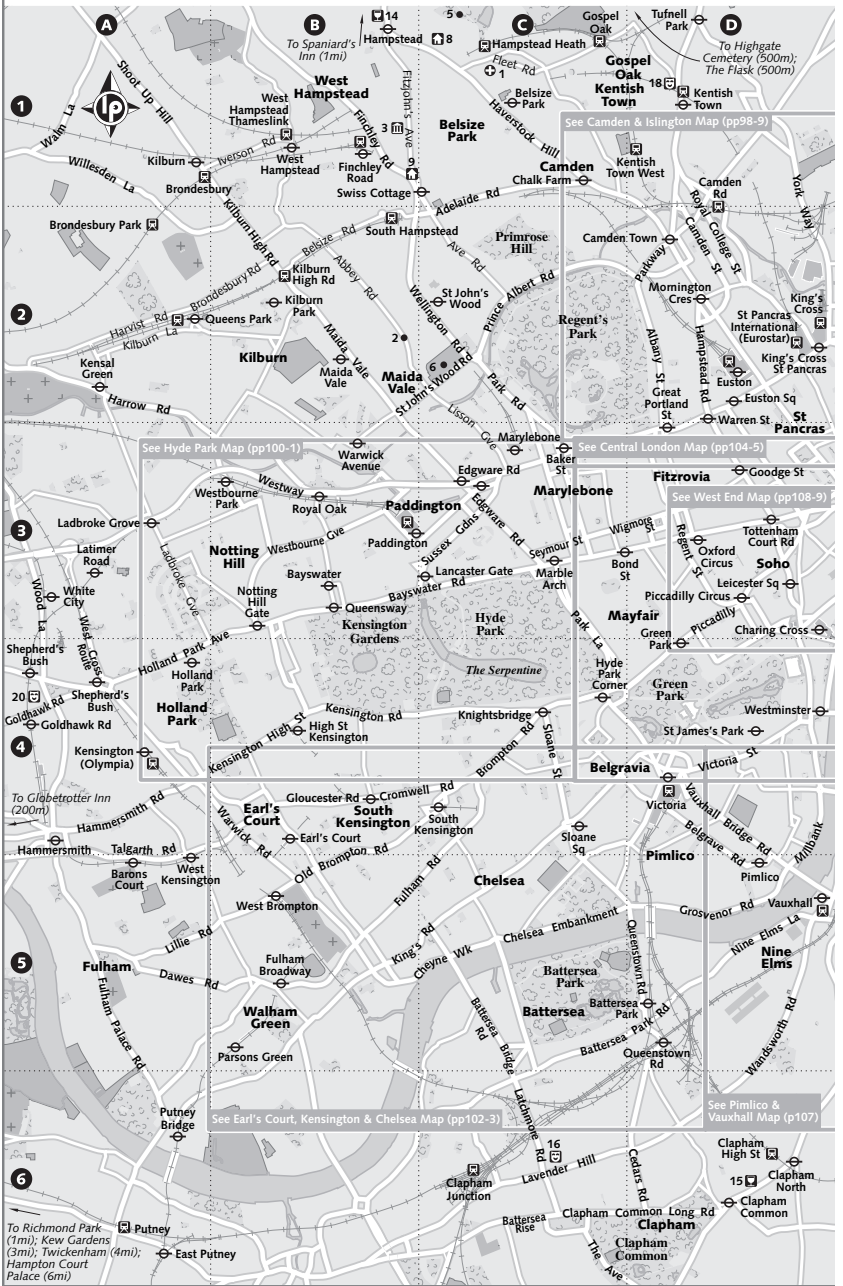
STA Travel (☎ 0871-230 0040; www.statravel.co.uk)

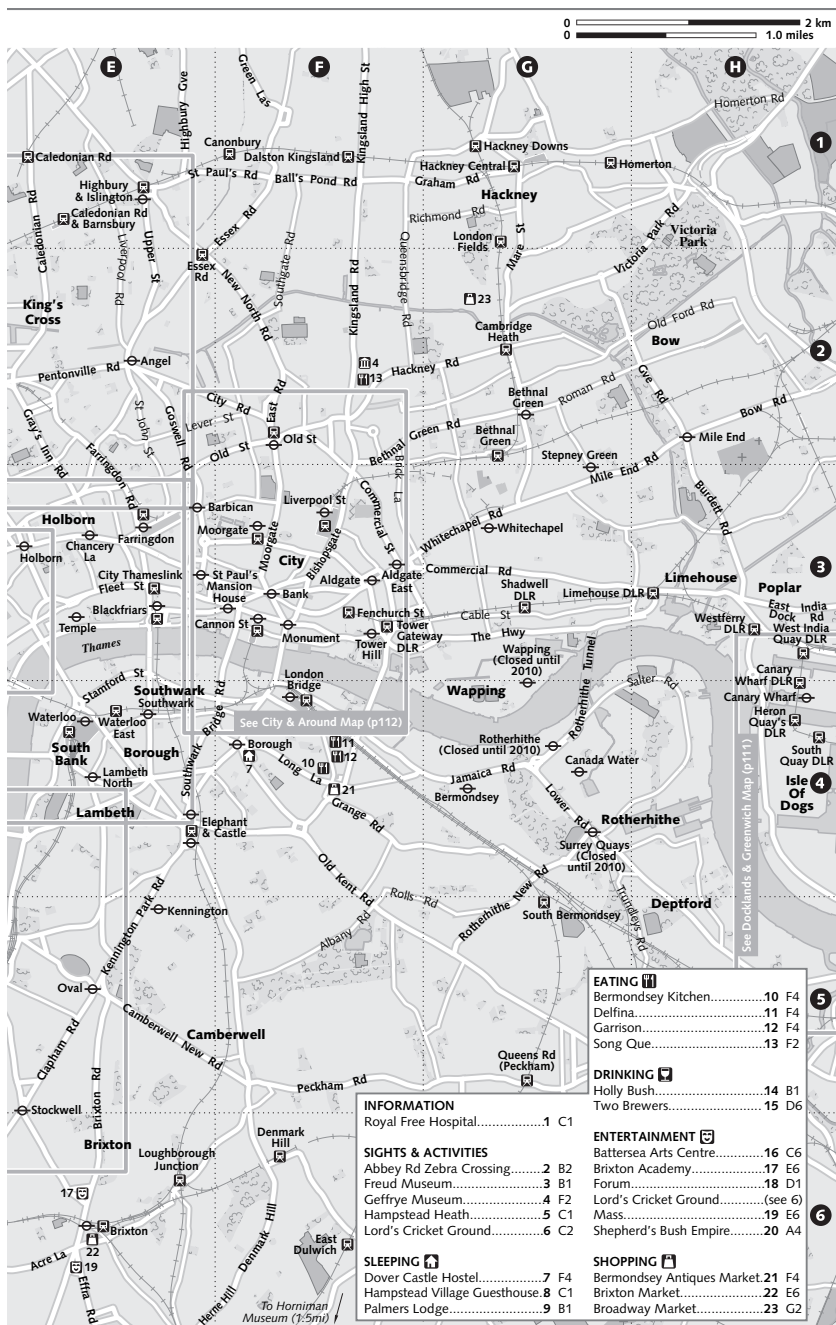
Earl's Court (Map pp102-3; ☎ 7341 3693; 2 Hogarth Rd SW5; 🚶 Earl's Court); Soho (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7432 7474; 85 Shaftesbury Ave W1; 🚶 Leicester Sq); Tottenham Court Rd (Map pp104-5; ☎ 0871-468 0623; 11 Goodge St W1; 🚶 Goodge St); Victoria (Map pp102-3; ☎ 0871-468 0649; 52 Grosvenor Gardens SW1; 🚶 Victoria) Long-standing and reliable with several branches in London.

Trailfinders (www.trailfinders.com) One Stop Travel Shop (Map pp100-1; worldwide travel ☎ 7938 3939, visa & passport service 0845 050 5905, immunisation centre 7938 3999; 194 Kensington High St W8; 🚶 High St Kensington); Canary Wharf (Map p111; 30A The South Colonnade; 🚶 Canary Wharf); City (Map p112; 1 Threadneedle St EC2; 🚶 Bank); European Travel (Map pp100-1; 215 Kensington High St W8; 🚶 High St Kensington) Also has branches in Waterstones, Piccadilly (opposite), Harrods (p166) and Selfridges (p166).

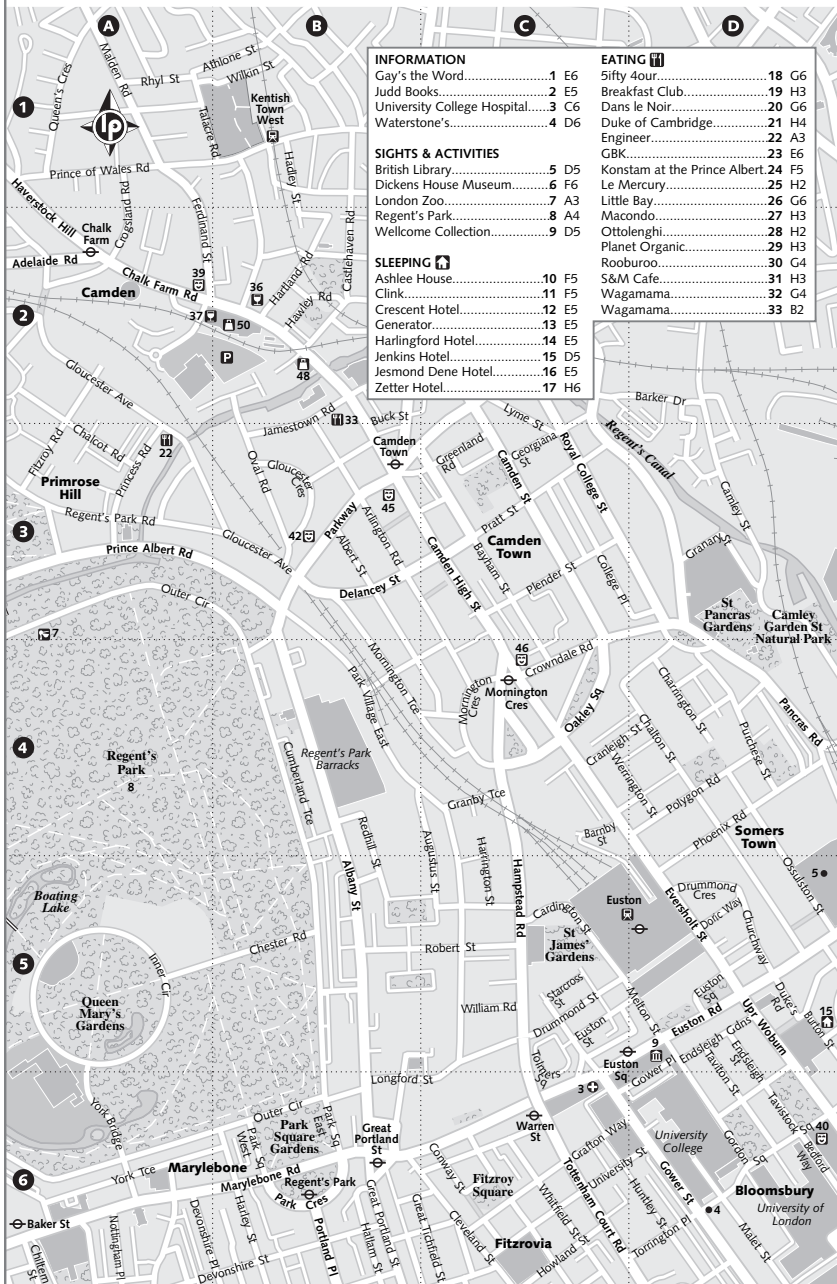
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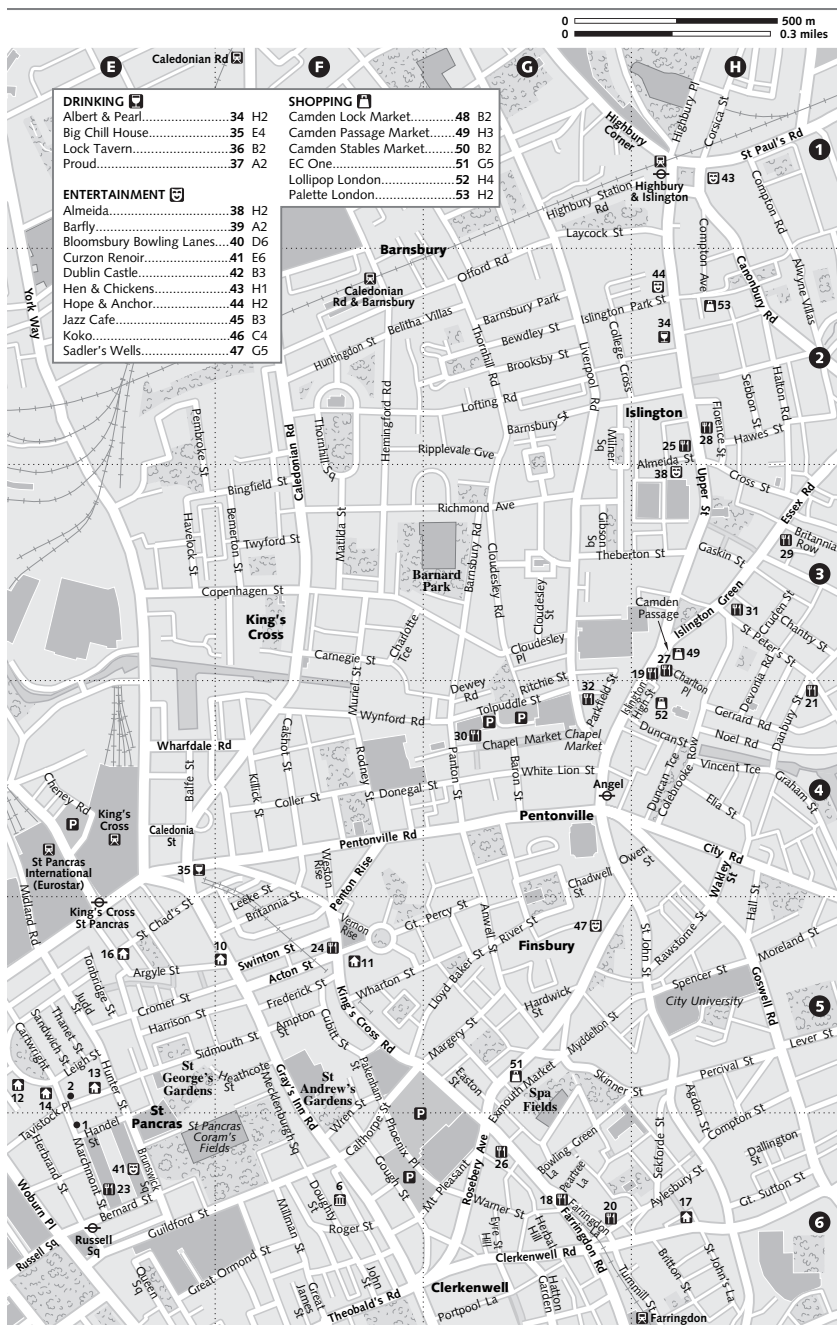
GREATER LONDON





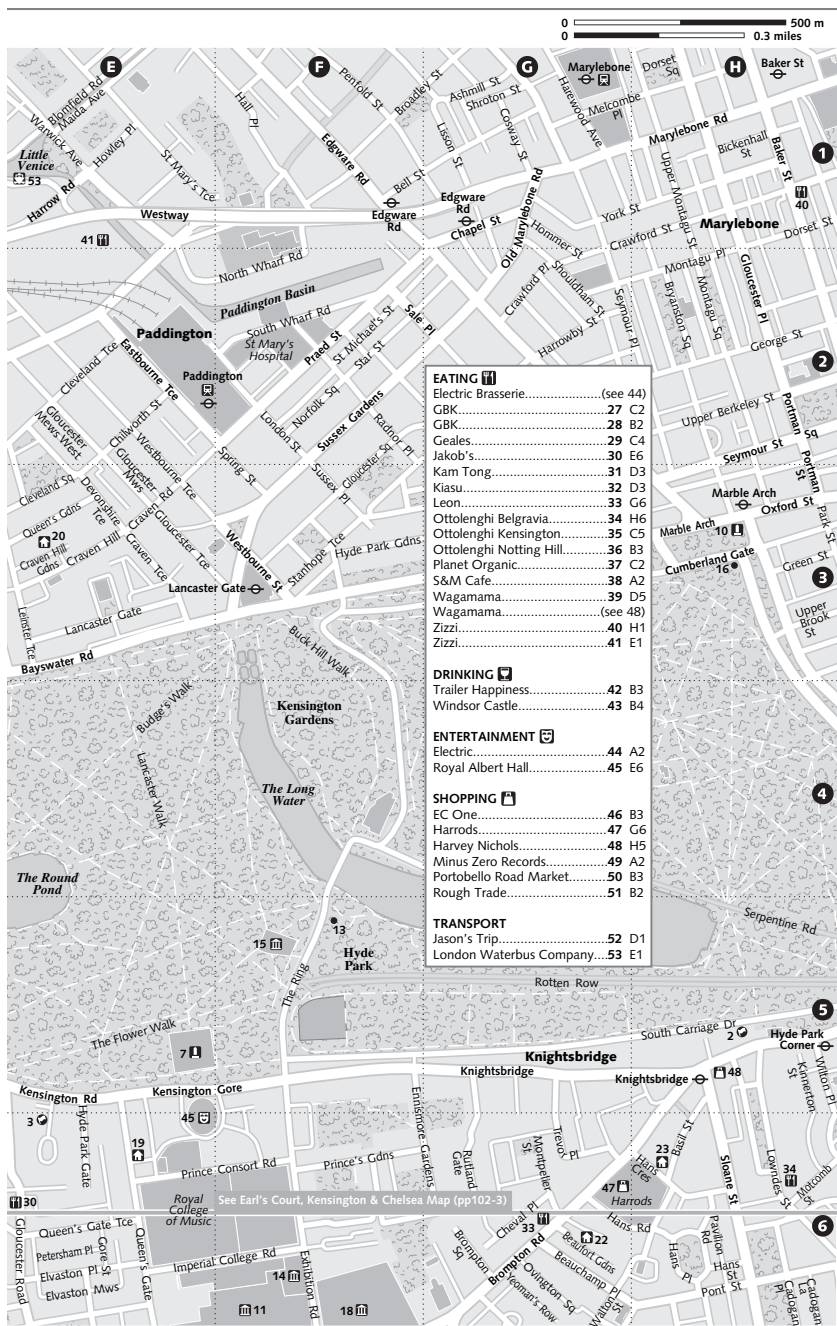
CAMDEN & ISLINGTON



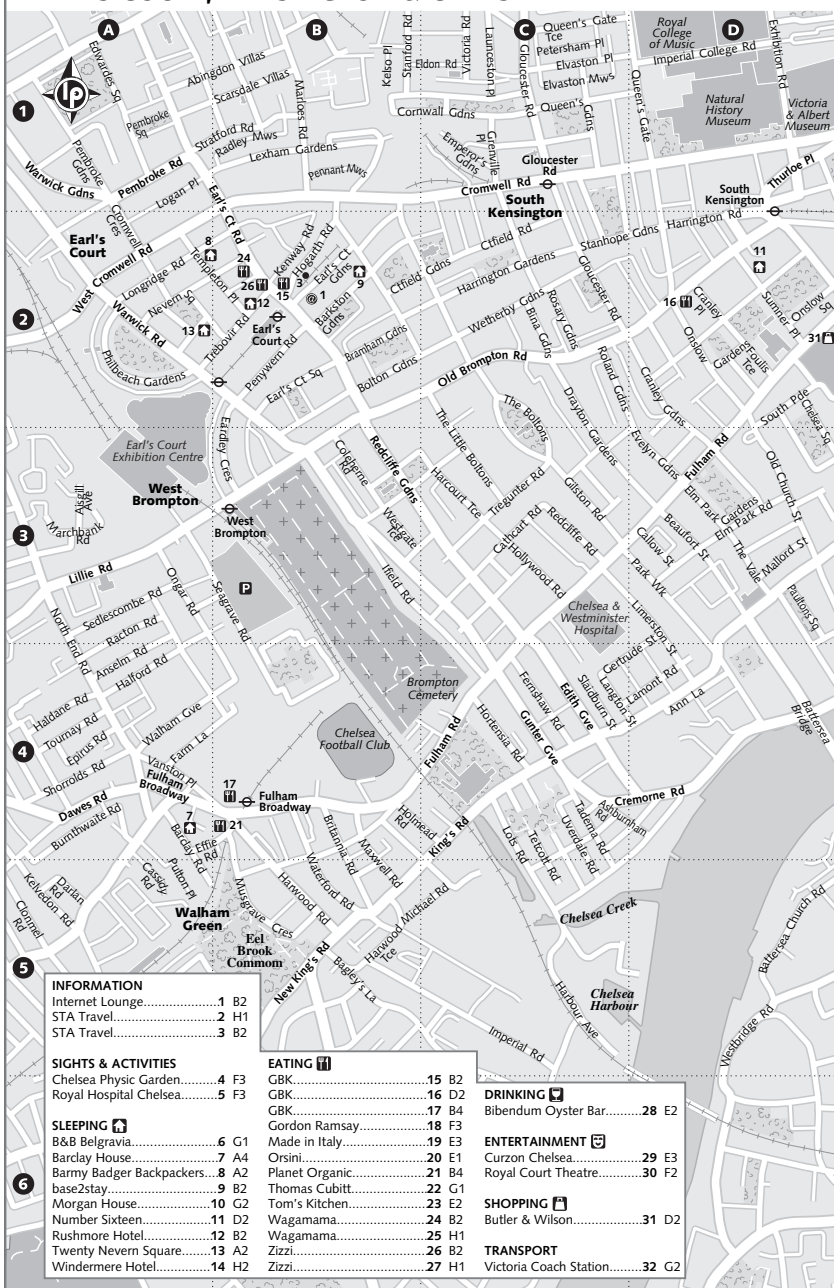


HYDE PARK





EARL'S COURT, KENSINGTON & CHELSEA





CENTRAL LONDON





CENTRAL LONDON (pp104-5)**INFORMATION**

Australian High Commission.....	1	F3
BTR.....	2	C1
Canadian High Commission.....	3	A3
Chinese Embassy.....	4	B1
Daunt Books.....	5	A1
easyInternetcafe.....	6	A2
German Embassy.....	7	A6
Irish Embassy.....	8	A6
Japanese Embassy.....	9	B4
St Thomas's Hospital.....	10	F6
STA Travel.....	11	C1
Traifinders.....	(see 97)	
US Embassy.....	12	A3

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Australian War Memorial.....	13	A5
Banqueting House.....	14	E5
Big Ben.....	15	E5
British Museum.....	16	D1
Buckingham Palace.....	17	B5
Canada Gate.....	18	C5
Canada Memorial.....	19	B5
Churchill Museum & Cabinet War Rooms.....	20	D5
Dalí Universe.....	21	F5
Dr Johnson's House.....	22	G2
Fleet St.....	23	G2
Florence Nightingale Museum.....	24	F5
Gray's Inn.....	25	G1
Handel House Museum.....	26	B3
Hayward Gallery.....	27	F4
Houses of Parliament.....	28	E6
Imperial War Museum.....	29	G6
Inner Temple.....	30	G3
Institute of Contemporary Arts.....	31	D4
Lincoln's Inn.....	32	F2
London Aquarium.....	33	F5
London Bicycle Tour Company.....	34	G4

London Duck Tours Departure Point.....	(see 33)	
London Eye.....	35	F5
Madame Tussauds.....	36	A1
Middle Temple.....	37	G3
New Zealand War Memorial.....	38	A5
Queen's Gallery.....	39	B6
Royal Mews.....	40	B6
Spencer House.....	41	C4
St James's Palace.....	42	C5
St Margaret's Church.....	43	E6
Temple Church.....	44	G3
Wallace Collection.....	45	A2
Westminster Abbey.....	46	E6

SLEEPING

Arosfa Hotel.....	47	D1
Arran House Hotel.....	(see 47)	
Hotel Cavendish.....	48	D1
London Central YHA.....	49	B1
Mad Hatter Hotel.....	50	H4
Maison.....	51	H1
Ridgemoor Private Hotel.....	52	D1
Rookery.....	53	H1
Rubens at the Palace.....	54	B6
St Paul's YHA.....	55	H3

EATING

Bleeding Heart Restaurant & Bistro.....	56	G1
Boxwood Cafe.....	57	A5
GBK.....	58	H3
Konditor & Cook.....	59	G1
La Fromagerie.....	60	A1
Leon.....	61	H2
Mesón Don Felipe.....	62	G5
Nobu.....	63	A5
Olivomare.....	64	B6
Ooze.....	(see 70)	

Oxo Tower Brasserie.....	65	G4
Ping Pong.....	66	A1
Ping Pong.....	67	C1
Ping Pong.....	(see 88)	
Planet Organic.....	68	C1
Providores & Tapa Room.....	69	A2
Salt Yard.....	70	C1
Smiths of Smithfield.....	71	H1
St John.....	72	H1
Tamarind.....	73	B4
Wagamama.....	74	H2
Wagamama.....	75	F4
Zizzi.....	76	A2

DRINKING

Galvin @ Windows.....	77	A4
Jerusalem Tavern.....	78	H1
Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese.....	79	G2

ENTERTAINMENT

BFI IMAX.....	80	F4
BFI Southbank.....	81	F4
Curzon Mayfair.....	82	B4
Fabric.....	83	H1
Ministry of Sound.....	84	H6
National Theatre.....	85	F4
Old Vic.....	86	G5
Purcell Room.....	(see 87)	
Queen Elizabeth Hall.....	87	F4
Royal Festival Hall.....	88	F4
Southbank Centre.....	89	F4
Young Vic.....	90	G5

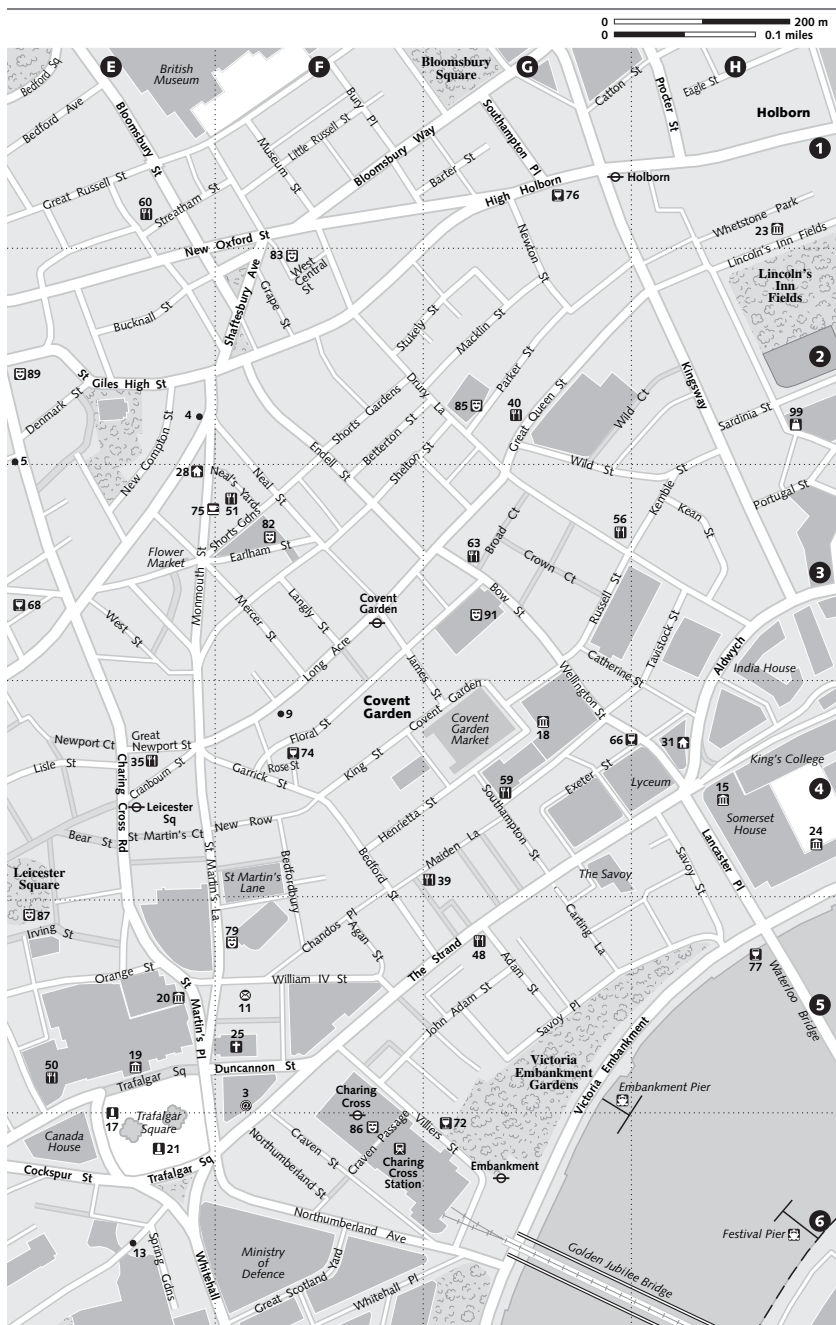
SHOPPING

Butler & Wilson.....	91	B3
Gray's Antique Market.....	92	B3
International Magic.....	93	G1
KJ's Laundry.....	94	A2
London Silver Vaults.....	95	G2
Paul Smith Sale Shop.....	96	B3
Selfridges.....	97	A3



WEST END





WEST END (pp108-9)

INFORMATION

American Express (Main Office)...	1	D5
Britain & London Visitor Centre...	2	D6
easyInternetcafe...	3	F5
Forbidden Planet...	4	E2
Foyle's...	5	E2
Grant & Cutler...	6	B3
New Zealand Embassy...	7	D6
STA Travel...	8	D4
Stanford's...	9	F4
Thomas Cook (Main Office)...	10	B6
Trafalgar Square Post Office...	11	F5
Trailfinders... (see 12)		
Waterstone's...	12	C5

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Admiralty Arch...	13	E6
Burlington Arcade...	14	B5
Courtauld Gallery...	15	H4
Eros Statue...	16	C5
Fourth Plinth...	17	E6
London Transport Museum...	18	G4
National Gallery...	19	E5
National Portrait Gallery...	20	E5
Nelson's Column...	21	E6
Royal Academy of Arts...	22	B5
Sir John Soane's Museum...	23	H1
Somerset House...	24	H4
St Martin-in-the-Fields...	25	F5

SLEEPING

Brown's Hotel...	26	A5
Charlotte Street Hotel...	27	C1
Covent Garden Hotel...	28	E3
Haymarket Hotel...	29	D5
Hazlitt's...	30	D3
One Aldwych...	31	H4
Oxford St YHA...	32	B3
Sanderson...	33	B1
Soho Hotel...	34	C3

EATING

Abeno Too...	35	E4
Breakfast Club...	36	C3
Fernandez & Wells...	37	C3
GBK...	38	D3
GBK...	39	G4
Great Queen Street...	40	G2
Hakkasan...	41	D1
Hibiscus...	42	A3
Hummus Bros...	43	C3
Kettners...	44	D3
Konditor & Cook...	(see 81)	
La Perla...	45	C1
Leon...	46	B3
Leon...	47	A2
Leon...	48	G5
Mother Mash...	49	B3
National Gallery Dining Rooms...	50	E5
Neal's Yard Salad Bar...	51	F3
Nordic Bakery...	52	C4
Ping Pong...	53	B3
Red Veg...	54	C2
Sacred...	55	B3
Sarastro...	56	G3
Sketch...	57	A3
Spiga...	58	C3
Wagamama...	59	G4
Wagamama...	60	E1
Wild Honey...	61	A4
Yauatcha...	62	C3
Zizzi...	63	G3

DRINKING

Absolut Ice Bar...	64	B4
Artesian...	65	A1
Be At One...	66	H4
Candy Bar...	67	D2
Coach & Horses...	68	E3
Flat White...	69	C3

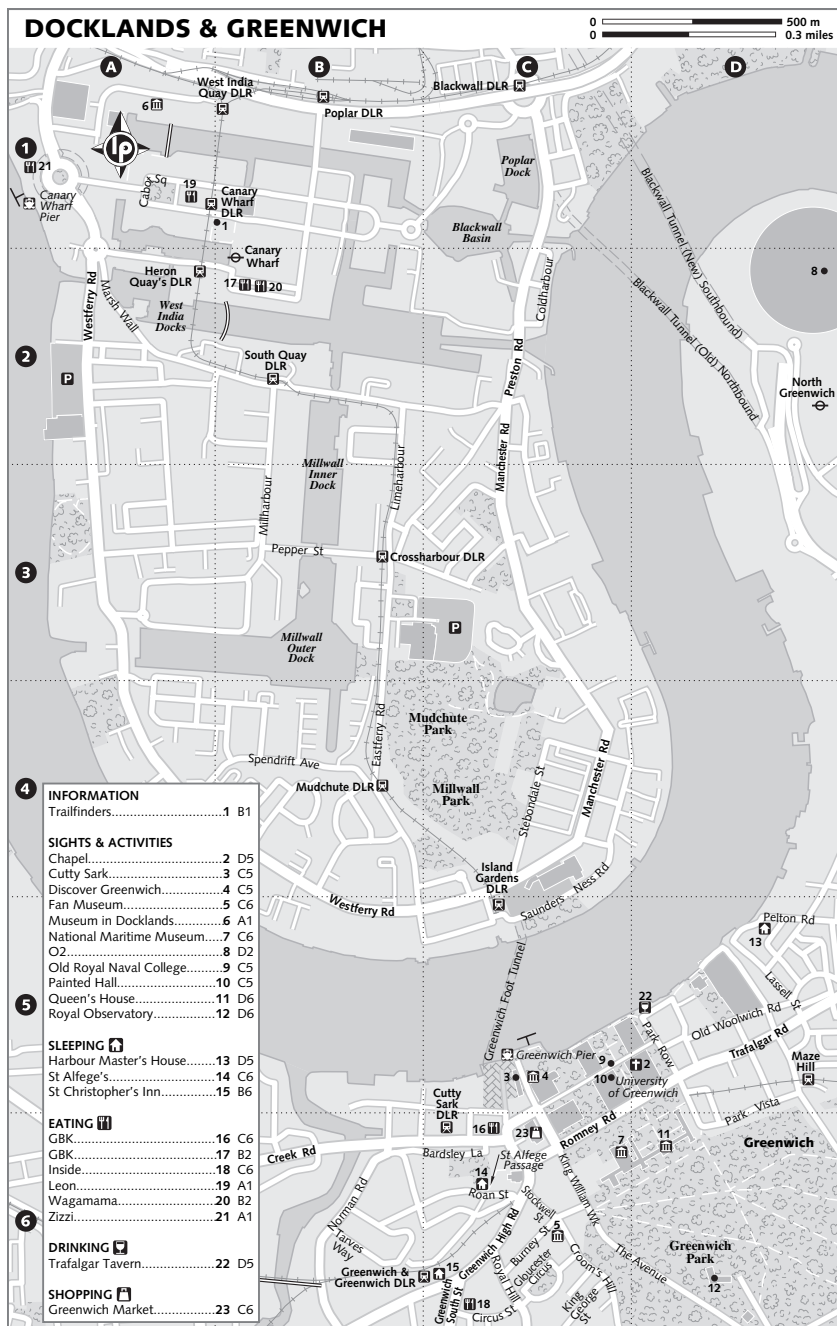
Friendly Society...	70	D4
G-A-Y Bar...	71	D3
Gordon's Wine Bar...	72	G6
Heights...	73	A1
Lamb & Flag...	74	F4
Monmouth Coffee Company...	75	E3
Princess Louise...	76	G1
Queen Mary...	77	H5

ENTERTAINMENT

100 Club...	78	C2
Coliseum...	79	F5
Comedy Store...	80	D5
Curzon Soho...	81	D3
Donmar Warehouse...	82	F3
End...	83	F2
Ghetto...	84	D2
Guanabara...	85	G2
Heaven...	86	F6
Leicester Square Half-Price Ticket Booth...	87	E5
Lucky Voice...	88	B3
Popstarz...	89	E2
Ronnie Scott's...	90	D3
Royal Opera House...	91	G3
Soho Theatre...	92	D3

SHOPPING

Albam...	93	B4
BM Soho...	94	C3
Fortnum & Mason...	95	B6
Hamleys...	96	B4
HMV...	97	B2
Liberty...	98	B3
Old Curiosity Shop...	99	H2
Ray's Jazz... (see 5)		
Rigby & Peller...	100	A4
Sister Ray...	101	C3
Topshop Oxford Circus...	102	A2





CITY & AROUND (p112)

INFORMATION

City of London Information Centre.....	1	A4
Traillfinders.....	2	B4

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Bank of England Museum.....	3	B4
Barbican.....	4	A3
Britain at War Experience.....	5	C6
City Hall.....	6	D6
Dennis Severs' House.....	7	D2
Design Museum.....	8	D6
Guildhall.....	9	B4
HMS Belfast.....	10	C6
London Dungeon.....	11	B6
Monument.....	12	B5
Museum of London.....	13	A3
Old Operating Theatre Museum & Herb Garret.....	14	B6
Shakespeare's Globe.....	15	A5
Southwark Cathedral.....	16	B6
St Katharine Docks.....	17	D5
St Paul's Cathedral.....	18	A4
St Stephen's Walbrook.....	19	B4
Tate Modern.....	20	A5
Tower Bridge Exhibition.....	21	D5
Tower of London.....	22	D5
White Cube.....	23	C1

SLEEPING

Hoxton.....	24	C1
Orient.....	25	B6

Southwark Rose Hotel.....	26	A6
St Christopher's Inn.....	27	B6
St Christopher's Village.....	28	B6
Threadneedles.....	29	B4

EATING

Brick Lane Beigel Bake.....	30	D2
Cafe Bangla.....	31	D2
Fifteen.....	32	B1
GBK.....	33	C5
Hoxton Apprentice.....	34	C1
Konditor & Cook.....	35	B6
Konditor & Cook.....	36	C4
Leon.....	37	B5
Leon.....	38	D3
Les Trois Garçons.....	39	D2
Macondo.....	40	C1
Magdalen.....	41	C6
S&M Cafe.....	42	D3
Story Deli.....	43	D2
Wagamama.....	44	B5
Wagamama.....	45	A4
Zizzi.....	46	D5
Zizzi.....	47	D6

DRINKING

Anchor.....	48	A5
Bar Music Hall.....	49	C1
Bricklayer's Arms.....	50	C1
Commercial Tavern.....	51	D2
Favela Chic.....	52	C1

George & Dragon.....	53	D1
George Inn.....	54	B6
Grapeshots.....	55	D3
Loungelover.....	56	D2
Mother.....	57	C1
Red Lion.....	58	C1
Ten Bells.....	59	D3
Vertigo 42.....	60	C4
Zigfrid Von Underbelly.....	61	C1

ENTERTAINMENT

Barbican Centre.....	(see 4)	
Cargo.....	62	C1
Comedy Cafe.....	63	C1
Menier Chocolate Factory.....	64	A6
Plastic People.....	65	C1
SeOne.....	66	C6

SHOPPING

Borough Market.....	67	B6
Brick Lane Market.....	68	D2
Columbia Road Flower Market.....	69	D1
Duke of Uke.....	70	D3
FairyGothMother.....	71	D3
Petticoat Lane Market.....	72	D3
Rough Trade.....	73	D2
Spitalfields Market.....	74	D3
Start.....	75	C1
Sunday (Up)Market.....	76	D2

(Continued from page 95)

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Considering its size and disparities in wealth, London is generally safe. That said, keep your wits about you and don't flash your cash unnecessarily. A contagion of youth-on-youth knife crime is cause for concern, so walk away if you sense trouble brewing and take care at night. When travelling by tube, choose a carriage with other people in it and avoid deserted suburban stations. Following reports of robberies and sexual attacks, shun unlicensed minicabs.

Nearly every Londoner has a story about a wallet/phone/bag being nicked from under their noses – or arses, in the case of bags on floors in bars. Watch out for pickpockets on crowded tubes, night buses and streets. That friendly drunk who bumped into you may now be wandering off with your wallet.

Scams

When using ATMs, guard your PIN details carefully. Don't use one that looks like it's been tampered with as there have been incidents of card cloning.

It should come as no surprise that 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

With so much to see and do, it can be hard to know where to start. Weather will be a determining factor: the museums and galleries are great for a rainy day, but when the sun shines make like a Londoner and head to the parks – you never know whether this fine day will be your last. Otherwise, attack the sights by area using the ordering of this section as your guide.

Trafalgar Square

Trafalgar Sq is the public heart of London, hosting 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. At the heart of it, Nelson surveys his fleet from the 43.5m-high **Nelson's Column** (Map pp108–9), erected in 1843 to commemorate Nelson's 1805 victory over Napoleon off Cape Trafalgar in Spain. At the edges of the square are four plinths, three of which have permanent statues, while

LONDON IN...

Two Days

Only two days? Start in **Trafalgar Square** (above) and see at least the outside of all the big-ticket sights – **London Eye** (p127), **Houses of Parliament** (p116), **Westminster Abbey** (opposite), **St James's Park and Palace** (p118), **Buckingham Palace** (p117), **Green Park** (p118), **Hyde Park** (p129), **Kensington Gardens & Palace** (p129) – and then motor around the **Tate Modern** (p125) until you get booted out. In the evening, explore **Soho** (p119). On day two race around the **British Museum** (p120) then head to the City. Start with our **walking tour** (p133) and finish in the **Tower of London** (p122). Head to the East End for an evening of **ethnic food** (p155) and **hip bars** (p160).

Four Days

Take the two-day itinerary but stretch it to a comfortable pace. Stop at the **National Gallery** (opposite) while you're in Trafalgar Sq, explore inside Westminster Abbey and **St Paul's Cathedral** (p122) and allow half a day for each of the Tate Modern, British Museum and Tower of London. On your extra evenings, check out **Camden** and **Islington** (p161) or splurge on a slap-up dinner in **Chelsea** (p156).

One Week

As above, but add in a day each for **Greenwich** (p131), **Kew Gardens** (p133) and **Hampton Court Palace** (p133).

LONDON FOR FREE

London may be an expensive city to eat, drink and sleep in, but when it comes to sights, most of the very best one are free. Apart from all the breathtaking parks and wonderful buildings, you won't pay a penny to visit any of the following: National Gallery, National Portrait Gallery, Tate Britain, Tate Modern, British Museum, Museum of London, Bank of England Museum, Imperial War Museum, Victoria & Albert Museum, Natural History Museum, Science Museum, Geffrye Museum, British Library, Guildhall, Wellcome Collection and the Wallace Collection.

the **fourth plinth** (Map pp108–9) is given over to temporary modern installations.

The square is flanked by splendid buildings: **Canada House** to the west, the National Gallery and National Portrait Gallery to the north, **South Africa House** and the church of **St Martin-in-the-Fields** (Map pp108–9) to the east. Further south stands **Admiralty Arch** (Map pp108–9), built in honour of Queen Victoria in 1910, beyond which The Mall (rhymes with 'shall', not 'shawl') is the ceremonial route leading to Buckingham Palace.

NATIONAL GALLERY

Gazing grandly over Trafalgar Sq through its Corinthian columns, the **National Gallery** (Map pp108–9; ☎ 7747 2885; www.nationalgallery.org.uk; Trafalgar Sq WC2; admission free; ☎ 10am–6pm Sat–Thu, to 9pm Fri; ☉ Charing Cross) is the nation's most important repository of art. Four million visitors descend annually to admire its 2300-plus Western European paintings, spanning the years 1250 to 1900.

Highlights include Turner's *The Fighting Temeraire* (voted Britain's greatest painting), Botticelli's *Venus and Mars* and Van Gogh's *Sunflowers*. *Da Vinci Code* fans will make a beeline for Leonardo's *The Virgin of the Rocks*, the sister of the one hanging in the Louvre. The medieval religious paintings in the Sainsbury Wing are fascinating, but for a short, sharp blast of brilliance you can't beat the truckloads of Monets, Manets, Cézannes, Degas and Renoirs in rooms 43 to 46.

It's all a bit overwhelming for one visit, but as admission's free it's possible to dip into it again and again. Free one-hour guided

tours leave at 11.30am and 2.30pm daily. If you prefer, you can devise and print off your own tour from the flashy computer screens of Art Start, the gallery's interactive multimedia system. Visit on Friday evenings for live music and free talks.

NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

The fascinating **National Portrait Gallery** (Map pp108–9; ☎ 7312 2463; www.npg.org.uk; St Martin's Pl WC2; admission free; ☎ 10am–6pm Sat–Wed, to 9pm Thu & Fri; ☉ Charing Cross) is like stepping into a picture book of English history or, if you're trashy, an *OK* magazine spread on history's celebrities ('what's *she* wearing?').

Founded in 1856, the permanent collection (around 10,000 works) starts with the Tudors on the 2nd floor and descends to contemporary figures. Amongst the modern mob, look out for a full-length painting of Dame Judi Dench, a 3D depiction of JK Rowling and a photographic study of David Bowie, seated in a seedy toilet with a dead-looking Natasha Vojnovic across his lap.

An audio guide (£2) will lead you through the gallery's most famous pictures. Look out for the temporary exhibitions, especially the prestigious National Portrait Award (June to September). There's also an interesting view over the rooftops to Trafalgar Sq and Nelson's backside from the top-floor restaurant.

Westminster & Pimlico

Purposefully positioned outside the old City (London's fiercely independent burghers preferred to keep the monarch and Parliament at arm's length), Westminster has been the centre of the nation's political power for a millennium. The area's many landmarks combine to form an awesome display of power, gravitas and historical import. Neighbouring Pimlico can't compete but it does boast some decent B&Bs and the wonderful Tate Britain gallery.

WESTMINSTER ABBEY

If you're one of those boring sods who boast about spending months in Europe without ever setting foot in a church, get over yourself and make this the exception. Not merely a beautiful place of worship, **Westminster Abbey** (Map pp104–5; ☎ 7222 5152; www.westminster-abbey.org; 20 Dean's Yard SW1; adult/child £12/9, tours/audio guides £5/4; ☎ 9.15am–4.30pm Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, to 6pm Wed, to 2.30pm Sat; ☉ Westminster) serves the country's

history cold on slabs of stone. For centuries the country's greatest have been interred here, including most of the monarchs from Henry III (died 1272) to George II (1760).

Unlike St Paul's, Westminster Abbey has never been a cathedral (the seat of a bishop). It's what is called a 'royal peculiar' and is administered directly by the Crown. Every monarch since William the Conqueror has been crowned here, with the exception of a couple of unlucky Eds who were murdered (Edward V) or abdicated (Edward VIII) before the magic moment. Look out for the strangely ordinary-looking **Coronation Chair**.

The building itself is an arresting sight. Though a mixture of architectural styles, it is considered the finest example of Early English Gothic in existence. The original church was built in the 11th century by King (later Saint) Edward the Confessor, who is buried in the chapel behind the main altar. Henry III began work on the new building in 1245 but didn't complete it; the French Gothic nave was finished in 1388. Henry VII's magnificent Late Perpendicular-style **Lady Chapel** was consecrated in 1519 after 16 years of construction.

Apart from the royal graves, keep an eye out for the many famous commoners interred here, especially in **Poet's Corner** where you'll find the resting places of Chaucer, Dickens, Hardy, Tennyson, Dr Johnson and Kipling as well as memorials to the other greats (Shakespeare, Jane Austen, Emily Bronte etc). Elsewhere you'll find the graves of Handel and Sir Isaac Newton.

The octagonal **Chapter House** (☎ 10.30am-4pm) dates from the 1250s and was where the monks would meet for daily prayer before Henry VIII's suppression of the monasteries. Used as a treasury and 'Royal Wardrobe', the cryptlike **Pyx Chamber** (☎ 10.30am-4pm) dates from about 1070. The neighbouring **Abbey Museum** (☎ 10.30am-4pm) has as its centrepiece death masks of generations of royalty.

Parts of the Abbey complex are free to visitors. This includes the **Cloister** (☎ 8am-6pm), which featured prominently in the *Da Vinci Code*, and the 900-year-old **College Garden** (☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Thu Apr-Sep, to 4pm Oct-Mar). Free concerts are held here from 12.30pm to 2pm on Wednesdays from mid-July through August. Adjacent to the abbey is **St Margaret's Church** (Map pp104-5; ☎ 9.30am-3.30pm Mon-Fri, to 1.30pm Sat, 2-5pm Sun), 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.

Of course, admission to the Abbey is free if you wish to attend a service. On weekdays, Matins is at 7.30am, Holy Communion at 8am and 12.30pm, and Choral Evensong at 5pm. There are services throughout the day on Sundays. You can sit and soak in the atmosphere, even if you're not religious.

HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT

Coming face to face with one of the world's most recognisable landmarks is always a surreal moment, but in the case of the **Houses of Parliament** (Map pp104-5; ☎ 0870 906 3773; www.parliament.uk; Parliament Sq SW1; ☎ Westminster) it's a revelation. The BBC's standard title shot just doesn't do justice to the ornate stonework and golden filigree of Charles Barry and Augustus Pugin's neo-Gothic masterpiece (1840).

Officially called the Palace of Westminster, the oldest part is **Westminster Hall** (1097), which is one of only a few parts that survived a catastrophic fire in 1834. Its roof, 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.

The palace's most famous feature is its clock tower, aka **Big Ben** (Map pp104-5). Ben is actually the 13-ton bell, named after Benjamin Hall, who was commissioner of works when the tower was completed in 1858.

At the business end, Parliament is split into two houses. The green-hued **House of Commons** is the lower house where the 646 elected Members of Parliament sit. Traditionally the home of hereditary bluebloods, the scarlet-decorated **House of Lords** now has peers appointed through various means. Both houses debate and vote on legislation, which must then be approved by the Queen. At the annual State Opening of Parliament (usually in November), the Queen takes her throne in the House of Lords, having processed in the gold-trimmed Irish State Coach from Buckingham Palace. It's well worth lining the route for a gawk at the crown jewels sparkling in the sun.

When Parliament is in session, visitors are admitted to the **House of Commons Visitors' Gallery** (admission free; ☎ 2.30-10.30pm Mon & Tue, 11.30am-7.30pm Wed, 10.30am-6.30pm Thu, 9.30am-3pm

some Fridays). Expect to queue for at least an hour and possibly longer during Question Time (at the beginning of each day). The **House of Lords Visitors' Gallery** (admission free; ☎ 2.30-10pm Mon & Tue, 3-10pm Wed, 11am-7.30pm Thu, from 10am some Fridays) is also open.

Parliamentary recesses (ie holidays) last for three months over the summer, and a couple of weeks over Easter and Christmas. When parliament is in recess there are guided **tours** (75min tours adult/child £12/5; telephone for times) of both chambers and other historic areas. UK residents can approach their MPs to arrange a free tour and to climb the clock tower.

WESTMINSTER CATHEDRAL

Begun in 1895, the neo-Byzantine **Westminster Cathedral** (Map p107; ☎ 7798 9055; www.westminstercathedral.org.uk; Victoria St SW1; admission free; ☎ 7am-7pm; ☉ Victoria) is the headquarters of Britain's once suppressed Roman Catholic Church. It's still a work in progress, the vast interior part dazzling marble and mosaic and part bare brick; new sections are completed as funds allow. Look out for Eric Gill's highly regarded stone **Stations of the Cross** (1918).

The **Chapel of St George and the English Martyrs** displays the body of St John Southwark, a priest who was hanged, drawn and quartered in 1654 for refusing to reject the supremacy of the Pope.

The distinctive 83m red brick and white-stone **tower** (adult/child £5/2.50) offers splendid views of London and, unlike St Paul's dome, you can take the lift. Call ahead to book a Cathedral tour (£5).

TATE BRITAIN

Unlike the National Gallery, Britannia rules the walls of **Tate Britain** (Map p107; ☎ 7887 8008; www.tate.org.uk; Millbank SW1; admission free; ☎ 10am-5.50pm; ☉ Pimlico). Reaching from 1500 to the present, it's crammed with local heavyweights like Blake, Hogarth, Gainsborough, Whistler, Spencer and, especially, Turner, whose work dominates the **Clore Gallery**. His 'interrupted visions' – unfinished canvasses of moody skies – wouldn't look out of place in the contemporary section, alongside the work of David Hockney, Francis Bacon, Tracey Emin and Damien Hirst. The always-controversial annual Turner Prize is exhibited in the gallery from October to January.

There are free hour-long guided tours, taking in different sections of the gallery, held

daily at midday and 3pm, as well as additional tours at 11am and 2pm on weekdays. The popular **Rex Whistler Restaurant** (☎ 7887 8825; mains £16), featuring an impressive mural from the artist, is open for breakfast, lunch and snacks.

BANQUETING HOUSE

The beautiful, classical design of the **Banqueting House** (Map pp104-5; ☎ 3166 6154; www.hrp.org.uk/BanquetingHouse; cnr Horse Guards Ave & Whitehall SW1; adult/child £4.50/2.25; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat; ☉ Westminster) was conceived by Inigo Jones for James I in 1622. It's the only surviving part of Whitehall Palace after the Tudor bit burnt down in 1698. The key attraction is the ceiling, 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. An audio guide is included in the price.

CHURCHILL MUSEUM & CABINET WAR ROOMS

The **Cabinet War Rooms** (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7930 6961; www.iwm.org.uk; Clive Steps, King Charles St SW1; adult/child £12/free; ☎ 9.30am-6pm, last entry 5pm; ☉ Westminster) were Prime Minister Winston 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 **Churchill Museum** offers an intriguing exposé of the public and private faces of the man.

St James's & Mayfair

Put on your best rah-rah voice to wander this aristocratic enclave of palaces, famous hotels, exclusive gentlemen's clubs, historic shops and elegant buildings; indeed, there are some 150 historically noteworthy buildings within St James's 36 hectares alone.

BUCKINGHAM PALACE

With so many imposing buildings in the capital, the Queen's well-proportioned but relatively plain city pad is an anticlimax for some. Built in 1803 for the Duke of Buckingham, **Buckingham Palace** (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7766 7302; www.royalcollection.org.uk; The Mall SW1; adult/child £16/8.75; ☎ 9.45am-6pm late Jul-late Sep; ☉ St James's Park) replaced St James's Palace as the monarch's London home in 1837. When

she's not off giving her one-handed wave in far-flung parts of the Commonwealth, Queen Elizabeth II divides her time between here, Windsor and Balmoral. If you've got the urge to drop in for a cup of tea, a handy way of telling whether she's home is to check whether the yellow, red and blue royal standard is flying.

Nineteen lavishly furnished staterooms are open to visitors when HRH (Her Royal Highness) takes her holidays. 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-hers pink chairs initialled 'ER' and 'P'.

Changing of the Guard

If you're a fan of bright uniforms, bearskin hats, straight lines, marching and shouting, join the throngs outside the palace at 11.30am (daily from May to July and on alternate days for the rest of the year, weather permitting), when the regiment of guards outside the palace changes over in one of the world's most famous displays of pageantry. It does have a certain freak-show value, but gets dull very quickly. If you're here in November, the procession leaving the palace for the State Opening of Parliament is much more impressive (p116).

Queen's Gallery

Originally designed by John Nash as a conservatory, it was smashed up by the Luftwaffe in 1940 before being converted to a **gallery** (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7766 7301; Buckingham Palace Rd SW1; adult/child £8.50/4.25; ♿ 10am-5.30pm; ⚡ Victoria) in 1962, housing works from the extensive Royal Collection.

Royal Mews

Indulge your Cinderella fantasies while inspecting the exquisite state coaches and immaculately groomed royal horses housed in the **Royal Mews** (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7766 7302; Buckingham Palace Rd SW1; adult/child £7.50/4.80; ♿ 10am-5pm Aug & Sep, 11am-4pm mid-Mar-Jul & Oct; ⚡ Victoria). Highlights include the stunning gold coach (1762), which has been used for every coronation since George IV, and the 1910 royal weddings' Glass Coach. We're pretty sure these aren't about to change back into pumpkins anytime soon.

ST JAMES'S PARK & ST JAMES'S PALACE

With its manicured flower beds and ornamental lake, **St James's Park** is a wonderful place to stroll and take in the views of Westminster, Buckingham Palace and St James's Palace.

The striking Tudor gatehouse of **St James's Palace** (Map pp104-5; Cleveland Row SW1; ⚡ Green Park), 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 before they shifted next door to **Clarence House** (1828), following the death of its previous occupant, the Queen Mother, in 2002. It's a great place to pose for a photograph beside one of the resolutely unsmiling royal guards.

GREEN PARK

Green Park's 47-acre expanse of meadows and mature trees links St James's Park to Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens, creating a green corridor from Westminster all the way to Kensington. It was once a duelling ground and served as a vegetable garden during WWII. Although it doesn't have lakes, fountains or formal gardens, it's blanketed with daffodils in spring and seminaked bodies whenever the sun shines.

The only concession to formality is the **Canada Memorial** (Map pp104-5) near **Canada Gate** (Map pp104-5), which links the park to Buckingham Palace. At its western end is **Hyde Park Corner**, where you'll find the **Australian and New Zealand War Memorials** (Map pp104-5).

INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ARTS

A one-stop contemporary-art bonanza, the exciting program at the **ICA** (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7930 3647; www.ica.org.uk; The Mall SW1; admission Mon-Fri £2, Sat & Sun £3; ♿ noon-11pm Mon, to 1am Tue-Sat, to 10.30pm Sun; ⚡ Charing Cross), as it's commonly known, 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 beer.

SPENCER HOUSE

The ancestral home of Princess Diana's family, **Spencer House** (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7499 8620; www.spencerhouse.co.uk; 27 St James's Pl SW1; adult/child £9/7; ♿ 10.30am-5.45pm Sun Feb-Jul & Sep-Dec; ⚡ Green Park) was built in the Palladian style between 1756 and 1766. It was converted into offices after the Spencers moved out in 1927, but 60 years

later an £18 million restoration returned it to its former glory. Visits are by guided tour (last tour 4.45pm). Check the website for the few summer dates when the gardens (£3.50) are opened.

HANDEL HOUSE MUSEUM

George Frideric Handel's pad from 1723 to his death in 1759 is now a moderately interesting museum (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7399 1953; www.handelhouse.org; 25 Brook St W1K; adult/child £5/2; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue, Wed, Fri & Sat, to 8pm Thu, noon-6pm Sun; ☎ Bond St) dedicated to his life. He wrote some of his greatest works here, including the *Messiah*, and music still fills the house during live recitals (see the website for details).

From songs of praise to *Purple Haze*, Jimi Hendrix lived next door at number 23 many years (and genres) later.

West End

Synonymous with big-budget musicals and frenzied flocks of shoppers, the West End is a strident mix of culture and consumerism. More a concept than a fixed geographical area, it nonetheless takes in Piccadilly Circus and Trafalgar Sq to the south, Regent St to the west, Oxford St to the north and Covent Garden and the Strand to the east.

Elegant **Regent St** and frantic **Oxford St** are the city's main shopping strips. They're beautifully lit at Christmas to coax the masses away from the home fires and into the frying pan sections of the many department stores (see p166).

At the heart of the West End lies **Soho**, a grid of narrow streets and squares hiding gay bars, strip clubs, cafes and advertising agencies. **Carnaby St** was the epicentre of the Swinging London of the 1960s, but is now largely given over to chain fashion stores, although some interesting independent boutiques still lurk in the surrounding streets.

Lisle and Gerrard Sts form the heart of **Chinatown**, which is full of reasonably priced Asian restaurants and unfairly hip youngsters. Its neighbour, pedestrianised **Leicester Sq** (*les-ter*) heaves with tourists – and buskers, inevitably. Dominated by large cinemas, it sometimes hosts star-studded premieres.

PICCADILLY

Named after the elaborate collars (picadils) that were the sartorial staple of a 17th-century tailor who lived nearby, Piccadilly became

LONDON CALLING

Download these to your MP3 player before tackling the tube.

- David Bowie – *London Boys*
- The Clash – *Guns of Brixton; London Calling; London's Burning*
- Elvis Costello – *Chelsea*
- Hard-Fi – *Tied Up Too Tight*
- The Jam – *Down In The Tube Station At Midnight*
- The Kinks – *Waterloo Sunset*
- Morrissey – *Piccadilly Palare*
- Pet Shop Boys – *London; West End Girls*
- The Smiths – *London*

the fashionable haunt of the well-heeled (and collared), and still boasts establishment icons such as the Ritz hotel and Fortnum & Mason department store (p166). It meets Regent St, Shaftesbury Ave and Haymarket at neon-lit, turbo-charged **Piccadilly Circus**, home to the popular but unremarkable **Eros statue** (Map pp108-9; ☎ Piccadilly Circus). Ironically the love god looks over an area that's long been linked to prostitution, both male and female, although it's less conspicuous these days.

Royal Academy of Arts

Set back from Piccadilly, the grandiose **Royal Academy of Arts** (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7300 8000; www.royalacademy.org.uk; Burlington House, Piccadilly W1; admission varies; ☎ 10am-6pm Sat-Thu, to 10pm Fri; ☎ Green Park) hosts high-profile exhibitions and a small display from its permanent collection. The crafty Academy has made it a condition of joining its exclusive club of 80 artists that new members donate one of their artworks. Past luminaries have included Constable, Gainsborough and Turner, while Sir Norman Foster, David Hockney and Tracey Emin are among the current crop.

Burlington Arcade

The well-to-do **Burlington Arcade** (Map pp108-9; 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 offences such as running, chewing gum or whatever else might lower the arcade's tone.

COVENT GARDEN

A hallowed name for opera fans due to the presence of the esteemed Royal Opera House (p164), Covent Garden is one of London's biggest tourist traps, where chain restaurants, souvenir shops, balconied bars and street entertainers vie for the punters' pound.

In the 7th century the Saxons built Lundenwic here, a satellite town to the City of London. It reverted back into fields until the 1630s, when the Duke of Bedford commissioned Inigo Jones to build London's first planned square. Covent Garden's famous fruit, vegetable and flower market, immortalised in the film *My Fair Lady*, eventually took over the whole piazza, before being shifted in 1974.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, the area immediately north of Covent Garden was the site of one of London's most notorious slums, the 'rookery' of St Giles. Much of it was knocked down in the 1840s to create New Oxford St, but the narrow lanes and yards around Monmouth St still carry an echo of the cramped conditions of the past.

London Transport Museum

Newly refurbished and reopened, this **museum** (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7379 6344; www.ltmuseum.co.uk; Covent Garden Piazza WC2; adult/child £10/free; ♿ 10am-6pm Sat-Thu, 11am-9pm Fri; 🚶 Covent Garden) houses vintage vehicles ranging from sedan chairs to train carriages, along with fascinating posters and photos. You can get your tube map boxer shorts at the museum shop.

THE STRAND

Described by Benjamin Disraeli in the 19th century as Europe's finest street, this 'beach' of the Thames – 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. Look for the two Chinese merchants above the door at number 216; Twinings have been selling tea here continuously since 1787, making it London's oldest store.

Somerset House

The first **Somerset House** (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7845 4600; www.somerset-house.org.uk; Strand WC2; ♿ 7.30am-11pm; 🚶 Temple) was built for the Duke of Somerset, brother of Jane Seymour, in 1551. For two centuries it played host to royals (Elizabeth I once lived here), foreign diplomats, wild masked balls, peace treaties, the Parliamentary army

during the Civil War and Oliver Cromwell's wake. Having fallen into disrepair, it was pulled down in 1775 and rebuilt in 1801 to designs by William Chambers. Among other weighty organisations, it went on to house the Royal Academy of the Arts, the Society of Antiquaries, the Navy Board and, that most popular of institutions, the Inland Revenue.

The tax collectors are still here, but that doesn't dissuade Londoners from attending open-air events in the grand central courtyard, such as live performances in summer and ice-skating in winter. The riverside terrace is a popular spot to get caffeinated with views of the Thames.

Near the Strand entrance, the **Courtauld Gallery** (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7848 2733; adult/child £5/free, admission free 10am-2pm Mon; ♿ to 6pm) displays a wealth of 14th- to 20th-century works, including a room of Rubens and works by Van Gogh, Renoir and Cézanne. Downstairs, the **Embankment Galleries** are devoted to temporary exhibitions; prices and hours vary.

Bloomsbury & Fitzrovia

With the University of London and British Museum within its genteel environs, it's little wonder that Bloomsbury has attracted a lot of very clever, bookish people over the years. Between the world wars, these pleasant streets were colonised by a group of artists and intellectuals known collectively as the **Bloomsbury Group**, which included novelists Virginia Woolf and EM Forster and the economist John Maynard Keynes. **Russell Square**, its very heart, was laid out in 1800 and is one of London's largest and loveliest.

Neighbouring Fitzrovia is only marginally less exalted, although media types outnumber intellectuals in the ever-expanding strip of restaurants and bars around Charlotte and Goodge Sts.

BRITISH MUSEUM

The country's largest museum and one of the oldest and finest in the world, this famous **museum** (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7323 8000; www.thebritishmuseum.org; Great Russell St WC1; admission free; ♿ 10am-5.30pm Sat-Wed, to 8.30pm Thu & Fri; 🚶 Tottenham Court Rd or Russell Sq) boasts 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

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 taken 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've been 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 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.

glass-and-steel roof, making it one of the most impressive architectural spaces in the capital. In the centre is the **Reading Room**, with its stunning blue-and-gold domed ceiling, where Karl Marx wrote the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. 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.

Among the 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 (see boxed text, above); the stunning **Oxus Treasure** of 7th- to 4th-century BC Persian gold; and the Anglo-Saxon **Sutton Hoo** burial relics.

You'll need multiple visits to savour even the highlights here; happily there are 14 half-hour free 'eye opener' tours between 11am and 3.45pm daily, focussing on different parts of the collection. Other tours include the 90-minute highlights tour at 10.30am, 1pm and 3pm daily (adult/child £8/5), and there is a range of audio guides (£3.50). Given the museum's mind-boggling size and scope, an initial tour is highly recommended.

Holborn & Clerkenwell

In these now fashionable streets, it's hard to find an echo of the notorious 'rookeries' of the 19th century, where families were squeezed into damp, fetid basements, living in possibly the worst conditions in the city's history. This is the London documented so

vividly by Dickens. It was also the traditional place for a last drink on the way to the gallows at Tyburn Hill – fitting, as many of the condemned hailed from here, as did many of those who were transported to Australia.

SIR JOHN SOANE'S MUSEUM

Not all of this area's inhabitants were poor, as is aptly demonstrated by the remarkable home of celebrated architect and collector extraordinaire Sir John Soane (1753–1837). Now a fascinating **museum** (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7405 2107; www.soane.org; 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields WC2; admission free, tours 11am Sat £5; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 6-9pm 1st Tue of month; 📍 Holborn), the house has been left largely as it was when Sir John was taken out in a box. Among his eclectic acquisitions are an Egyptian sarcophagus, dozens of Greek and Roman antiquities and the original *Rake's Progress*, William Hogarth's set of caricatures telling the story of a late 18th-century London cad. Soane was clearly a very clever chap – check out the ingenious folding walls in the picture gallery.

DICKENS HOUSE MUSEUM

Mr Dickens' sole surviving **London residence** (Map pp98-9; ☎ 7405 2127; www.dickensmuseum.com; 48 Doughty St WC1; adult/under 16yr/concession £5/3/4; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun; 📍 Russell Sq) is where his work really flourished – *The Pickwick Papers*, *Nicholas Nickleby* and *Oliver Twist* were all written here. The handsome four-storey house opened as a museum in 1925, and visitors can stroll through rooms choc-a-bloc with fascinating memorabilia.

The City

For most of its history, the City of London was London. Its boundaries have changed

little since the Romans first founded their gated community here two millennia ago. You can always tell when you're within it, as the Corporation of London's coat of arms appears on the street signs.

It's only in the last 250 years that the City has gone from being the very essence of London and it's main population centre to just its central business district. But what a business district it is – you could easily argue that the 'square mile' is the very heart of world capitalism.

Currently fewer than 10,000 people actually live here, although some 300,000 descend on it each weekday where they generate almost three-quarters of Britain's entire GDP before squeezing back onto the tube. On Sundays it becomes a virtual ghost town; it's a good time to poke around, even if you won't be able to smell the fear of the planet's leading bankers coping with the financial crisis.

Apart from the big-ticket sights, visitors tend to avoid the City, which is a shame as it's got enough interesting churches, intriguing architecture, hidden gardens and atmospheric lanes to spend weeks exploring.

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 p112; ☎ 7236 4128; www.stpauls.co.uk; adult/child £10/3.50; ☎ 8.30am-4pm Mon-Sat; Ⓞ St Paul's) was designed by Wren after the Great Fire and built between 1675 and 1710. Four other cathedrals preceded it on this site, the first dating from 604.

The dome is renowned for somehow dodging the bombs during the Blitz, and became an icon of the resilience shown in the capital during WWII. 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. It can be reached by a staircase on the western side of the southern transept (9.30am to 3.30pm only). It is 530 lung-busting steps to the **Golden Gallery** at the very top, and an unforgettable view of London.

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 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 £4. Guided tours (adult/child £3/1) leave the tour desk at 11am, 11.30am, 1.30pm and 2pm (90 minutes). Evensong takes place at 5pm most weekdays and at 3.15pm on Sunday.

TOWER OF LONDON

If you pay only one admission fee while you're in London, make it the **Tower of London** (Map p112; ☎ 0844-482 7777; www.hrp.org.uk; Tower Hill EC3; adult/child £17/9.50; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Sun & Mon, 9am-5.30pm Tue-Sat Mar-Oct, 10am-4.30pm Sun & Mon, 9am-4.30pm Tue-Sat Nov-Feb; Ⓞ Tower Hill). One of the city's three World Heritage Sites (joining Westminster Abbey and Maritime Greenwich), it's a window onto a gruesome and fascinating history.

In the 1070s, William the Conqueror started work on the White Tower to replace the castle he'd previously had built here. By 1285, two walls with towers and a moat were built around it and the 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, including Anne Boleyn and her cousin Catherine Howard (Henry's second and fifth wives) were beheaded.

To the north is the **Waterloo Barracks**, which now contains the spectacular **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.

To help get your bearings, take the hugely entertaining free guided tour with any of the Tudor-garbed Beefeaters. Hour-long tours leave every 30 minutes from the Middle Tower; the last tour's an hour before closing.

TOWER BRIDGE

London was still a thriving port in 1894 when elegant Tower Bridge was built. Designed to be raised to allow ships to pass, electricity has now taken over from the original steam engines. A lift leads up from the modern visitors' facility in the northern tower to the **Tower Bridge Exhibition** (Map p112; ☎ 7403 3761; www.towerbridge.org.uk; adult/child £6/3; 🕒 10am-6.30pm Apr-Sep, 9.30am-6pm Oct-Mar; 📍 Tower Hill), where the story of its building is recounted with videos and animatronics. If you're coming from the Tower, you'll pass by Dead Man's Hole, where corpses that had made their way into the Thames (through suicide, murder or accident) were regularly retrieved.

MUSEUM OF LONDON

Visiting the fascinating **Museum of London** (Map p112; ☎ 0870 444 3851; www.museumoflondon.org.uk; 150 London Wall EC2; admission free; 🕒 10am-5.50pm Mon-Sat, noon-5.50pm Sun; 📍 Barbican) early in your stay helps to make sense of the layers of history that make up this place. The Roman section, in particular, illustrates how the modern is grafted on to the ancient; several of the city's main thoroughfares were once Roman roads, for instance.

At the time of writing, the section encompassing 1666 (the Great Fire) to the present day was being redesigned. It should reopen in late 2009, featuring the Lord Mayor's ceremonial coach as its centrepiece.

GUILDHALL

Plum in the middle of the 'square mile', the **Guildhall** (Map p112; ☎ 7606 3030; www.cityoflondon.gov.uk; Gresham St EC2; admission free; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sun May-Sep, reduced hrs 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 city's mayor is sworn in and where important fellows like the Tsar of Russia and the Prince Regent celebrated beating Napoleon. It's an impressive space decorated with the shields and banners of London's 12 principal livery companies, carved galleries (the west of which is protected by disturbing statues of giants Gog and Magog) and a beautiful oak-panelled roof. There's also a lovely bronze statue of Churchill sitting in a comfy chair.

Beneath it is London's largest **medieval crypt** (☎ 7606 3030, ext 1463; visit by free guided tour only, bookings essential) with 19 stained-glass windows showing the livery companies' coats of arms.

The **Clockmakers' Museum** (admission free; 🕒 9.30am-4.45pm Mon-Fri) charts 500 years of time-keeping with more than 700 ticking exhibits, and the **Guildhall Art Gallery** (☎ 7332 3708; adult/child £2.50/1; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-4pm Sun) displays around 250 artworks. Included in admission is entry to the remains of an ancient **Roman amphitheatre**, which lay forgotten beneath this site until 1988.

ST STEPHEN'S WALBROOK

In the 3rd century, a Roman temple stood here, and in the 7th century a Saxon church. Rebuilt after the Great Fire, the current **St Stephen's** (Map p112; ☎ 7626 9000; www.ststephenwalbrook.net; 29 Walbrook EC2; 📍 Bank) is one of Wren's greatest masterpieces, with elegant Corinthian columns supporting a beautifully proportioned dome. Henry Moore sculpted the round central altar from travertine marble in 1972.

INNS OF COURT

All London barristers work from within one of the four atmospheric Inns of Court, positioned between the walls of the old City and Westminster. It would take a lifetime working here to grasp all the intricacies of their arcane protocols – they're similar to the Freemasons, and both are 13th-century creations. It's best just to soak up the dreamy ambience of the alleys and open spaces and thank your lucky stars you're not one of the bewigged barristers scurrying about. A roll call of former members would include the likes of Oliver Cromwell, Charles Dickens, Mahatma Gandhi and Margaret Thatcher.

Lincoln's Inn (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7405 1393; www.lincolnsinn.org.uk; Lincoln's Inn Fields WC2; 🕒 grounds 9am-

6pm Mon-Fri, chapel 12.30-2.30pm Mon-Fri; ☉ Holborn) is largely intact and has several original 15th-century buildings. It's the oldest and most attractive of the bunch, boasting a 17th-century chapel and pretty landscaped gardens.

Gray's Inn (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7458 7800; www.grays.inn.org.uk; Gray's Inn Rd WC1; ☹ grounds 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, chapel to 6pm Mon-Fri; ☉ Chancery Lane) was largely rebuilt after the Luftwaffe levelled it.

Middle Temple (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7427 4800; www.middletemple.org.uk; Middle Temple Lane EC4; ☹ 10-11.30am & 3-4pm Mon-Fri; ☉ Temple) and **Inner Temple** (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7797 8247; 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 intriguing **Temple Church** (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7353 8559; www.templechurch.com; ☹ varies, check website or call ahead), another landmark to score a major mention in *The Da Vinci Code*.

BARBICAN

Like Marmite, you either love or hate the concrete **Barbican** (Map p112; ☎ 7638 4141; www.barbican.org.uk; Silk St EC2; ☉ Barbican). It's true that parts of it are extraordinarily ugly, particularly the forbidding high-rise tower blocks (romantically named Shakespeare, Cromwell and Lauderdale). But at the time of its construction, this vast complex of offices and residences with an arts centre at its heart was revolutionary.

It was designed by Chamberlain, Powell and Bon, disciples of Le Corbusier, to fill a WWII bomb-pummelled space with democratic modern housing. Sadly this 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, and more people are finding beauty in its curved roofs, brightly planted window boxes and large central 'lake'.

At its heart is the Barbican Centre (p164). It also houses the **Barbican Art Gallery** (☎ 7638 4141; Level 3; adult/child £8/6; ☹ 11am-8pm Thu-Mon, 11am-6pm Tue & Wed), home to temporary exhibitions of contemporary art, and the smaller **Curve Gallery** (☎ 7638 4141; Level 0; admission free; ☹ 11am-8pm).

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 cash to support a war with France. It was moved here in 1734 and largely renovated by Sir John Soane. Its **museum** (Map p112; ☎ 7601 5545; www.bankofengland.co.uk; Bartholomew Lane EC2; admission free; ☹ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri; ☉ Bank) traces the history of the bank and banking system, and is surprisingly interesting.

THE MONUMENT

Designed by Wren to commemorate the Great Fire, the **Monument** (Map p112; ☎ 7626 2717; www.themonument.info; Monument St; ☉ 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. It was closed for repairs at the time of writing but scheduled to reopen in early 2009; check the website for prices and opening hours.

DR JOHNSON'S HOUSE

The Georgian **house** (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7353 3745; www.drjohnsonshouse.org; 17 Gough Sq EC4; adult/child £4.50/1.50; ☹ 11am-5.30pm Mon-Sat May-Sep, to 5pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr; ☉ Chancery Lane) where Samuel Johnson and his assistants compiled the first English dictionary (between 1748 and 1759) is full of prints and portraits of friends and intimates, including the good doctor's Jamaican servant to whom he bequeathed this grand residence.

FLEET ST

As 20th-century London's 'Street of Shame', **Fleet St** (Map pp104-5; ☉ Temple) 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.

ST KATHARINE DOCKS

A centre of trade and commerce for 1000 years, **St Katharine Docks** (Map p112) is now a buzzing waterside area of pleasure boats and eateries. It was badly damaged during the war but survivors include the popular **Dickins Inn**, with its original 18th-century timber framework, and **Ivory House** (built 1854) which used to store ivory, perfume and other precious goods.

East End

Traditionally the most economically depressed part of the metropolis, a fair bit of

cash is being splashed around at present in the lead-up to the 2012 Olympic Games. Dockland's Canary Wharf and Isle of Dogs are now an island of tower blocks, rivalling those of the City itself.

HOXTON, SHOREDITCH & SPITALFIELDS

Fans of the long-running TV soap *Eastenders* may find it hard to recognise its setting in traditionally working class but increasingly trendy enclaves like these. The fact is you're more likely to hear a proper Cockney accent in Essex these days than you are in much of the East End. Over the centuries waves of immigrants have left their mark here and it's a great place to come for diverse ethnic cuisine and vibrant but largely attitude-free nightlife.

Geffrye Museum

If you like nosing around other people's homes, the **Geffrye Museum** (Map pp96-7; ☎ 7739 9893; www.geffrye-museum.org.uk; 136 Kingsland Rd E2; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, noon-5pm Sun; 🚶 Old St, then 🚶 243) will be a positively orgasmic experience. Devoted to middle-class domestic interiors, these former almshouses (1714) have been converted into a series of living rooms dating from 1630 to the current Ikea generation. On top of the interiors porn, the back garden has been transformed into period garden 'rooms' and a lovely walled herb garden (April to October only).

Dennis Severs' House

This extraordinary **Georgian House** (Map p112; ☎ 7247 4013; www.dennissevershouse.co.uk; 18 Folgate St E1; 🚶 Liverpool St) is set up as if its occupants had just walked out the door. There are half-drunk cups of tea, lit candles and, in a perhaps unnecessary attention to detail, a full chamber pot by the bed. More than a museum, it's an opportunity to meditate on the minutiae of everyday Georgian life through silent exploration.

Bookings are required for the Monday evening candlelit sessions (£12; call for times), but you can just show up on the first and third Sundays of the month (£8; midday to 4pm) or the following Mondays (£5; midday to 2pm).

White Cube

Set in an industrial building with an impressive glazed-roof extension **White Cube** (Map

TATE-A-TATE

To get between London's Tate galleries in style, the **Tate Boat** – which sports a Damien Hirst dot painting – will whisk you from one to the other, 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 £8, single tickets £4.

p112; ☎ 7930 5373; www.whitecube.com; 48 Hoxton Sq N1; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sat; 🚶 Old St) has an interesting program of contemporary-art exhibitions from sculptures to video, installations and painting.

DOCKLANDS

The Port of London was once the world's greatest, the hub of the enormous global trade of the British Empire. Since being pumelled by the Luftwaffe in WWII its fortunes have been topsy-turvy, but the massive development of Canary Wharf into a second business district has replaced its crusty seadogs with hordes of dark-suited office workers. It's now an interesting if slightly sterile environment, best viewed while hurtling around on the DLR (p170).

The **Museum in Docklands** (Map p111; ☎ 0870-444 3856; www.museumindocklands.org.uk; Hertsmere Rd, West India Quay E17; annual admission adult/child £5/free; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat; DLR West India Quay), housed in a heritage-listed warehouse, uses a combination of artefacts and multimedia to chart the history of the Docklands from Roman trading to its renewal in the twilight of the 20th century.

South of the Thames

Londoners once crossed the river to the area controlled by the licentious Bishops of Southwark for all kinds of raunchy diversions frowned upon in the City. It's a much more seemly area now, but the theatre and entertainment tradition remains.

SOUTHWARK

Tate Modern

It's hard to miss this surprisingly elegant former power station on the side of the river, which is fortunate as the tremendous **Tate Modern** (Map p112; ☎ 7887 8888; www.tate.org.uk; Queen's Walk SE1; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm Sun-Thu,

to 10pm Fri & Sat; ♿; ☎ Southwark) really shouldn't be missed. Focussing on modern art in all its wacky and wonderful permutations, it's been extraordinarily successful in bringing challenging work to the masses, becoming one of London's most popular attractions.

Outstanding temporary exhibitions (on the 4th floor; prices vary) continue to spark excitement, as does the periodically changing large-scale installation in the vast Turbine Hall. The permanent collection is organised into four main sections. On floor three you'll find *Material Gestures* (post-war painting and sculpture, including Mark Rothko's affecting *Seagram Murals*) and *Poetry and Dream* (Pablo Picasso, Francis Bacon and surrealism). On the 5th floor, *Idea and Object* showcases minimalism and conceptual art, while in *States of Flux* cubism and futurism rub shoulders with pop art (Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol) and Soviet imagery.

The multimedia guides (£2) are worthwhile for their descriptions of selected works and there are free daily guided tours of the collection's highlights (Level 3 at 11am and midday; Level 5 at 2pm and 3pm). Make sure you cop the view from the top floor's restaurant and bar.

Shakespeare's Globe

Today's Londoners might grab a budget flight to Amsterdam to behave badly. Back in Shakespeare's time they'd cross London Bridge to Southwark. Free from the city's constraints, you could hook up with a prostitute, watch a bear being tortured for your amusement and then head to the theatre, the most famous of which was the **Globe** (Map p112; ☎ 7401 9919; www.shakespeares-globe.org; 21 New Globe Walk SE1; adult/child £9/6.50; ♿ 10am-6pm May-Sep, last entry 5pm; to 5pm Oct-Apr; ☎ London Bridge), where a clever fellow was producing box-office smashes like *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*.

Originally built in 1599, the Globe burnt down in 1613 and was immediately rebuilt. The Puritans, who regarded theatres as dreadful dens of iniquity, eventually closed it in 1642. Its present incarnation was the vision of American actor and director Sam Wanamaker, who sadly died before the opening night in 1997.

Admission includes a guided tour of the open-roofed theatre, faithfully reconstructed from oak beams, handmade bricks, lime plas-

ter and thatch. There's also an extensive exhibition about Shakespeare and his times.

Plays are still performed here, and while Shakespeare and his contemporaries dominate, modern plays are also staged (see the website for upcoming performances). As in Elizabethan times, 'groundlings' can watch proceedings for a modest price (£5; seats are £15 to £35), but there's no protection from the elements and you'll have to stand.

Southwark Cathedral

Although the central tower dates from 1520 and the choir from the 13th century, **Southwark Cathedral** (Map p112; ☎ 7367 6700; Montague Close SE1; suggested donation £4-6.50; ♿ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat & Sun; ☎ London Bridge) is largely Victorian. Inside are monuments galore, including a Shakespeare Memorial; it's worth picking up one of the small guides. Catch Evensong at 5.30pm on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, 4pm on Saturdays and 3pm on Sundays.

Old Operating Theatre Museum & Herb Garret

One of London's most genuinely gruesome attractions, the **Old Operating Theatre Museum** (Map p112; ☎ 7188 2679; www.thegarret.org.uk; 9A St Thomas St SE1; adult/child £5.45/3; ♿ 10.30am-4.45pm; ☎ London Bridge) is Britain's only surviving 19th-century operating theatre, rediscovered in 1956 within the garret of a church. The display of primitive surgical tools is suitably terrifying, while the pickled bits of humans are just unpleasant.

It's a hands-on kind of place, with signs saying 'please touch', although obviously the pointy things are locked away. For a more intense experience, check the website for the regular 20-minute 'special events'.

City Hall

The Norman Foster-designed, wonky-egg-shaped **City Hall** (Map p112; ☎ 7983 4000; www.london.gov.uk; Queen's Walk SE1; admission free; ♿ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri) is an architectural feast of glass and home to the mayor's office, the London Assembly and the Greater London Assembly (GLA). Visitors can see the mayor's meeting chamber and attend debates. On some weekends the top-floor reception hall, known as **London's Living Room**, is opened for the public to enjoy its panoramic views. It's accessed via a glass winding ramp similar to the one in Berlin's Reichstag (see website for dates).

Design Museum

The whiter-than-white **Design Museum** (Map p112; ☎ 7403 6933; www.designmuseum.org; 28 Shad Thames SE1; adult £8.50; ☎ 10am-5.45pm; 🚶 Tower Hill) is a must for anyone interested in beautiful, practical things. The permanent collection has displays of modern British design and there are also regular temporary exhibitions including the annual *Designs of the Year* competition.

HMS Belfast

Launched in 1938, **HMS Belfast** (Map p112; ☎ 7407 6328; www.iwm.org.uk/hmsbelfast; Morgan's Lane, Tooley St SE1; adult/child £10.30/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

Older kids tend to love the **London Dungeon** (Map p112; ☎ 0871-423 2240; www.thedungeons.com; 28-34 Tooley St SE1; adult/child £19.95/14.95; ☎ 10.30am-5pm, longer hrs some weeks, check website; 🚶 London Bridge), as the terrifying queues during school holidays and weekends testify. It's all spooky music, ghostly boat rides, macabre hangman's drop-rides, fake blood and actors dressed up as torturers and gory criminals (including Jack the Ripper and Sweeney Todd). 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 p112; ☎ 7403 3171; www.britainatwar.co.uk; 64-66 Tooley St SE1; adult/child £11/4.95; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, to 4.30pm Oct-Mar). It's crammed with fascinating WWII memorabilia.

SOUTH BANK

London Eye

It may seem a bit Mordor-ish to have a giant eye overlooking the city, but the **London Eye** (Map pp104-5; ☎ 0870 5000 600; www.londoneye.com; adult/child £15.50/7.75; ☎ 10am-8pm Jan-May & Oct-Dec, to 9pm Jun & Sep, to 9.30pm Jul & Aug; 🚶 Waterloo) doesn't actually resemble an eye at all, and, in a city where there's a CCTV camera on every other corner, it's probably only fitting. Originally designed as a temporary struc-

ture to celebrate the year 2000, the Eye is now a permanent addition to the cityscape, joining Big Ben as one of London's most distinctive landmarks.

This 135m-tall, slow-moving Ferris wheel (although we're not supposed to call it that for all kinds of technical reasons) is the largest of its kind in the world. Passengers ride in an enclosed egg-shaped pod; the wheel takes 30 minutes to rotate completely and offers a 25-mile view on a clear day. It's so popular that it's advisable to book your ticket online to speed up your wait (you also get a 10% discount), or you can pay an additional £10 to jump the queue.

Joint tickets for the London Eye and Madame Tussauds can be purchased (adult/child £35/25), as well as a 40-minute, sight-seeing **River Cruise** (adult/child £12/6) with a multilingual commentary.

London Aquarium

One of the largest in Europe, the **London Aquarium** (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7967 8000; www.londonaquarium.co.uk; County Hall SE1; adult/child £14/9.75; ☎ 10am-6pm, last entry 5pm; 🚶 Waterloo) has three levels of fish organised by geographical origin, but you'll be peering over children's excited heads during holidays. Check the website for shark-feeding times.

Dali Universe

The brochure invites you to 'enter the mind of a genius' – a daunting prospect, as it's a place where clocks melt and telephones morph into lobsters. **Dali Universe** (Map pp104-5; ☎ 0870 744 7485; www.daliuniverse.com; County Hall SE1; adult/child £12/8; ☎ 9.30am-7pm Sat-Thu, to 8pm Fri; 🚶 Waterloo) is a large collection that focuses on the surrealist master's rare etchings, movies, furniture and sculptures rather than his famous canvasses. Included in the price, **Picasso: Art of a Genius** also concentrates on rare work, such as tapestry and ceramic design. You can download a two-for-one entry voucher from the website; last entry is an hour prior to closing.

Hayward Gallery

Part of the Southbank Centre (p164), the **Hayward** (Map pp104-5; ☎ 0871-663 2587; www.southbankcentre.co.uk/visual-arts; Belvedere Rd SE1; admission prices vary; ☎ 10am-6pm Sat-Thu, to 10pm Fri; 🚶 Waterloo) hosts a changing roster of modern art (video, installations, photography, collage, painting etc).

LAMBETH**Imperial War Museum**

You don't have to be a lad to appreciate the **Imperial War Museum** (Map pp104-5; ☎ 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 thought-provoking **Florence Nightingale Museum** (Map pp104-5; ☎ 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; ☺ Waterloo) recounts the story of 'the lady with the lamp' who led a team of nurses during the Crimean War. She established a training school for nurses here at St Thomas' hospital in 1859.

Chelsea, Kensington & Knightsbridge

Known as the royal borough, residents of Kensington and Chelsea are certainly paid royally, earning the highest incomes in the UK (shops and restaurants will presume you do too). Knightsbridge is where you'll find some of London's best-known department stores, including Harrods (p166) and Harvey Nicks (p166), while Kensington High St has a lively mix of chains and boutiques. Thanks to the surplus generated by the 1851 Great Exhibition, which allowed the purchase of a great chunk of land, South Kensington boasts some of London's most beautiful and interesting museums all on one road.

VICTORIA & ALBERT MUSEUM

A vast, rambling and wonderful museum of decorative art and design, the **Victoria & Albert** (V&A; Map pp100-1; ☎ 7942 2000; www.vam.ac.uk; Cromwell Rd SW7; admission free; ☹ 10am-5.45pm Sat-Thu, to 10pm Fri; ☺ South Kensington) is part of Prince Albert's legacy to Londoners in the wake of the Great Exhibition.

It's a bit like the nation's attic, comprising four million objects collected 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, Japanese swords, cartoons by Raphael, spellbinding Asian and Islamic art, Rodin sculptures, actual-size reproductions of famous European architecture and sculpture (including Michelangelo's *David*), Elizabethan gowns, ancient jewellery, an all-wooden Frank Lloyd Wright study and a pair of Doc Martens. Yes, you'll need to plan.

The British Galleries (1500 to 1900) take up the entire western wing, while the eastern wing will hold the revamped Mediterranean and Renaissance Galleries (due to be completed in late 2009).

To top it all off, it's a fabulous building, with an attractive garden cafe as well as the original, lavishly decorated V&A cafe.

NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

Let's start with the building itself: stripes of pale blue and honey-coloured stone are broken by Venetian arches decorated with all manner of carved critters. Quite simply, it's one of London's finest.

A sure-fire hit with kids of all ages, the **Natural History Museum** (Map pp100-1; ☎ 7942 5725; www.nhm.ac.uk; Cromwell Rd SW7; admission free; ☹ 10am-5.50pm; ☺ South Kensington) is crammed full of interesting stuff, starting with the giant dinosaur skeleton that greets you in the main hall. In the main dinosaur section, the fleshless fossils are brought to robotic life with a very realistic 4m-high animatronic Tyrannosaurus Rex and his smaller, but no less sinister-looking, cousins.

The Earth Galleries are equally impressive. An escalator slithers up and into a hollowed-out globe where two main exhibits – *The Power Within* and *The Restless Surface* – explain how wind, water, ice, gravity and life itself impact on the earth. For parents not sure on how to broach the facts of life, a quick whiz around the Human Biology section should do the trick – rather graphically.

The **Darwin Centre** (☎ 7942 5011) houses some 22 million zoological exhibits, which can be visited by prearranging a free tour.

SCIENCE MUSEUM

With seven floors of interactive and educational exhibits, the **Science Museum** (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0870 870 4868; www.sciencemuseum.org.uk; Exhibition Rd SW7; admission free; ☹ 10am-6pm; ☺ South Kensington) covers everything from the Industrial Revolution to the exploration of space. There is something for all ages, from vintage cars,

trains and aeroplanes to labour-saving devices for the home, a wind tunnel and flight simulator. Kids love the interactive sections. There's also a 450-seat **IMAX cinema**.

KENSINGTON PALACE

Dating from 1605, **Kensington Palace** (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0870 751 5170; www.hrp.org.uk; Kensington Gardens W8; adult/child £13/6.15; 🕒 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.

KENSINGTON GARDENS

Blending in with Hyde Park, these **royal gardens** (Map pp100-1; admission free; 🕒 dawn-dusk; 🚶 Queensway) are part of Kensington Palace and hence popularly associated with Princess Diana. Diana devotees can visit the **Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Playground** (Map pp100-1) in its northwest corner, a much more restrained royal remembrance than the over-the-top **Albert Memorial** (Map pp100-1), a lavish marble, mosaic and gold affair opposite the Royal Albert Hall, built to honour Queen Victoria's purportedly humble husband, Albert (1819-61).

The gardens also house the **Serpentine Gallery** (Map pp100-1; ☎ 7402 6075; www.serpentinegallery.org; admission free; 🕒 10am-6pm), one of London's edgiest contemporary art spaces. The **Sunken Garden** (Map pp100-1), near the palace, is at its prettiest in summer, while tea in the **Orangery** (Map pp100-1) is a treat any time of the year.

HYDE PARK

At 145 hectares, **Hyde Park** (Map pp100-1; 🕒 5.30am-midnight; 🚶 Marble Arch, Hyde Park Corner or Queensway) 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 energetic or, near Marble Arch, **Speaker's Corner** (Map

pp100-1) for oratorical acrobats. These days, it's largely possible nutters and religious fanatics who maintain the tradition begun in 1872 as a response to rioting.

A soothing structure, the **Princess Diana Memorial Fountain** (Map pp100-1) is a meandering stream that splits at the top, flows gently downhill and reassembles in a pool at the bottom. It was unveiled here in mid-2004 with inevitable debate over matters of taste and gravitas.

ROYAL HOSPITAL CHELSEA

Designed by Wren, the **Royal Hospital Chelsea** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 7881 5246; Royal Hospital Rd SW3; admission free; 🕒 10am-noon & 2-4pm Mon-Sun; 🚶 Sloane Sq) was built in 1692 to provide shelter for ex-servicemen. Today it houses hundreds of war veterans known as Chelsea Pensioners, charming old chaps who are generally regarded as national treasures. As you wander around the grounds or inspect the elegant chapel and interesting museum, you'll see them pottering about in their winter blue coats or summer reds. The Chelsea Flower Show takes place in the hospital grounds in May.

CHELSEA PHYSIC GARDEN

One for the garden obsessives (the less hardcore should head to the many free parks or Kew), this historic **botanical garden** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 7352 5646; www.chelseaphysicgarden.co.uk; 66 Royal Hospital Rd SW3; adult/child £7/4; 🕒 noon-5pm Wed-Fri, to 6pm Sat & Sun; 🚶 Sloane Sq) is one of the oldest in Europe, established in 1673 for apprentice apothecaries to study medicinal plants. An audio guide is included in the price and tours leave at 3pm on Sundays.

MARBLE ARCH

London's grandest bedsit – with a one-room flat inside – **Marble Arch** (Map pp100-1; 🚶 Marble Arch) was designed by John Nash in 1828 as the entrance to Buckingham Palace. It was moved here in 1851.

The infamous Tyburn Tree, a three-legged gallows, once stood nearby. It is estimated that up to 50,000 people were executed here between 1196 and 1783.

Marylebone

With one of London's nicest high streets and Regent's Park on its doorstep, increasingly hip Marylebone is an interesting area to wander.

REGENT'S PARK

A former royal hunting ground, **Regent's Park** (Map pp98-9; ☉ 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 one of London's most lovely open spaces – at once serene and lively, cosmopolitan and local – with football pitches, tennis courts and a boating lake. **Queen Mary's Gardens**, towards the south of the park, are particularly pretty, with spectacular roses in summer. **Open Air Theatre** (☎ 7935 5756; www.openairtheatre.org) hosts performances of Shakespeare here on summer evenings, along with comedy and concerts.

LONDON ZOO

A huge amount of money has been spent to bring **London Zoo** (Map pp98-9; ☎ 7722 3333; www.londonzoo.co.uk; Regent's Park NW1; adult/child £15.40/11.90; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Mar-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Feb; ☉ Camden Town), established in 1828, into the modern world. It now has a swanky new £5.3 million gorilla enclosure and is involved in gorilla conservation in Gabon. Feeding times, reptile handling and the petting zoo are guaranteed winners with the kids.

WALLACE COLLECTION

Housed in a beautiful, opulent Italianate mansion, the **Wallace Collection** (Map pp104-5; ☎ 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. Oliver Peyton's Wallace Restaurant occupies a lovely glassed-in courtyard at its centre.

MADAME TUSSAUDS

With so much fabulous free stuff to do in London, it's a wonder that people still join lengthy queues to visit pricey **Madame Tussauds** (Map pp104-5; ☎ 0870 400 3000; www.madame-tussauds.co.uk; Marylebone Rd NW1; adult/child £25/21; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat & Sun; ☉ Baker St), but in a celebrity-obsessed, camera-happy world, the opportunity to pose beside Posh and Becks is not short on appeal.

The life-sized wax figures are remarkably lifelike and are as close to the real thing as most of us will get. It's interesting to see which

are the most popular; nobody wants to be photographed with Richard Branson, but Prince Charles and Camilla do a brisk trade.

Honing her craft making effigies of victims of the French revolution, Tussaud brought her wares to England in 1802. Her Chamber of Horrors still survives (complete with the actual blade that took Marie Antoinette's head) but it's now joined by Chamber Live, where actors lunge at terrified punters in the dark. The Spirit of London ride is wonderfully cheesy but the conversion of the old planetarium into the Stardome show is just lame.

Tickets are cheaper when ordered online and for entries after 5pm. Combined tickets with London Eye and London Dungeon are also available (adult/child £50/35).

North London

Once well outside the city limits, the former hamlets of North London have long been gobbled up by the metropolis, and yet still maintain a semblance of a village atmosphere and distinct local identity. Not as resolutely wealthy as the west or as gritty as the east, the Norf is a strange mix of genteel terrace houses and council estates, containing some of London's hippest neighbourhoods.

EUSTON & KING'S CROSS

Most people are content to experience Kings Cross subterraneously, as it's a major interchange on the tube network, but the conversion of spectacular **St Pancras station** (Map pp98-9) into the new Eurostar terminal and a ritzy apartment complex seems to be reviving its fortunes. The streets are still grey and car-choked, but some decent accommodation options and interesting bars have sprung up.

British Library

You need to be a 'reader' (ie member) to use the vast collection of the **library** (Map pp98-9; ☎ 7412 7332; www.bl.uk; 96 Euston Rd NW1; admission free; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon & Wed-Fri, to 8pm Tue, to 5pm Sat, 11am-5pm Sun; ☉ King's Cross St Pancras), but the Treasures gallery is open to everyone. Here you'll find Shakespeare's first folio, Leonardo da Vinci's notebooks, the lyrics to 'A Hard Day's Night' scribbled on the back of Julian Lennon's birthday card, St Thomas Moore's last letter to Henry VIII, Jane Austen's correspondence, religious texts from around the world and, most importantly, the 8th-century Lindisfarne Gospel and 1215 Magna Carta.

Wellcome Collection

Say what you like about pharmaceutical companies, but when one of their charitable trusts spends £30 million opening a new, free gallery, it's very welcome indeed. The **Wellcome Collection** (Map pp98-9; ☎ 7611 2222; www.wellcomecollection.org; 183 Euston Rd NW1; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue, Wed, Fri & Sat, to 10pm Thu, 11am-6pm Sun; ⚡ Euston Sq) focuses on the interface of art, science and medicine. There are interactive displays where you can scan your face and watch it stretched into the statistical average; wacky modern sculptures inspired by various medical conditions; and downright creepy things like an actual cross-section of a body.

CAMDEN

Technicolour hairstyles, facial furniture, intricate tattoos and ambitious platform shoes are the look of Bohemian Camden, a lively neighbourhood of pubs, live-music venues, interesting boutiques and, most famously, Camden Market (see p167). There are often a few cartoon punks hanging around earning a few bucks for being photographed by tourists, as well as none-too-discreet dope dealers.

ST JOHN'S WOOD

Posh St John's Wood is famous for two things: cricket and Abbey Road Studios. Local traffic is by now pretty used to groups of tourists lining up on the **zebra crossing** (Map pp96-7) outside 3 Abbey Rd to recreate the cover of The Beatles' 1969 album *Abbey Road*.

Lord's Cricket Ground

The next best thing to watching a test at **Lord's** (Map pp96-7; ☎ 7616 8595; www.lords.org; St John's Wood Rd NW8; tours adult/child £12/6; ☎ tours 10am, noon & 2pm when there's no play; ⚡ St John's Wood) is the absorbingly anecdotal 100-minute tour of the ground and facilities. It takes in the famous (members only) Long Room and the **MCC Museum** featuring evocative memorabilia including the tiny Ashes trophy. For more information on attending test matches, see p165.

HAMPSTEAD & HIGHGATE

These quaint and well-heeled villages, perched on hills above London, are home to an inordinate number of celebrities.

Hampstead Heath

With its 320 hectares of rolling meadows and wild woodlands, **Hampstead Heath** (Map pp96-7; ☎ Gospel Oak or Hampstead Heath) 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 and on summer days it's popular with picnickers. Also bewilderingly popular are the murky brown waters of the separate single-sex or mixed bathing ponds (basically duck ponds with people splashing about in them), although most folk are content just to sun themselves around London's 'beach'.

Kenwood House (☎ 8348 1286; www.english-heritage.org.uk; Hampstead Ln NW3; admission free; ☎ 11.30am-4pm; ⚡ Archway or Golders Green, then 🚎 210) is a magnificent neoclassical mansion on the northern side of the heath, and houses a small collection of paintings by European masters.

Highgate Cemetery

The **cemetery** (☎ 8340 1834; www.highgate-cemetery.org; Swain's Lane N6; ⚡ Archway) weaves a creepy kind of magic, with its Victorian symbols – shrouded urns, obelisks, upturned torches (life extinguished) and broken columns (life cut short) – eerily overgrown graves and the twisting paths on the western side, where admission is by tour only (adult/child £5/1; 2pm weekdays, on the hour 11am to 4pm weekends). On the less atmospheric **eastern side** (admission £3; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct, to 4pm Nov-Mar) you can pay your respects to Karl Marx and George Eliot.

From Archway station, walk up Highgate Hill until you reach Waterlow Park on the left. Go through the park; the cemetery gates are opposite the exit.

Freud Museum

After fleeing Nazi-occupied Vienna in 1938, Sigmund Freud lived the last year of his life here. The fascinating **Freud Museum** (Map pp96-7; ☎ 7435 2002; www.freud.org.uk; 20 Maresfield Gardens NW3; adult £5; ☎ noon-5pm Wed-Sun) maintains his study and library much as he left it, with his couch, books and collection of small Egyptian figures and other antiquities. Excerpts of dream analysis are scattered around the house and there's a video presentation upstairs.

Greenwich

Simultaneously the first and last place on earth, Greenwich (*gren-itch*) straddles the

hemispheres as well as the ages. More than any of the villages swamped by London, Greenwich has managed to retain its own sense of identity based on splendid architecture and strong connections with the sea and science. All the great architects of the Enlightenment made their mark here, leaving an extraordinary cluster of buildings that have earned 'Maritime Greenwich' its place on Unesco's World Heritage list.

Greenwich is easily reached on the DLR or via train from London Bridge. **Thames River Services** (☎ 7930 4097; www.westminsterpier.co.uk) has boats departing half-hourly from Westminster Pier (single/return £7.50/9.80, one hour), or alternatively take the cheaper Thames Clippers ferry (p171).

OLD ROYAL NAVAL COLLEGE

Also designed by Wren, the **Old Royal Naval College** (Map p111; ☎ 8269 4747; www.oldroyalnavalcollege.org; 2 Cutty Sark Gardens SE10; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat; DLR Cutty Sark) is a magnificent example of monumental classical architecture. Parts are now used by the University of Greenwich and Trinity College of Music, but you can visit the **chapel** and the extraordinary **Painted Hall**, which took artist Sir James Thornhill 19 years of hard graft to complete.

The complex was built on the site of the 15th-century Palace of Placentia, the birthplace of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I. This Tudor connection will be explored in **Discover Greenwich**, a new centre due to open in late 2009. The **tourist office** (☎ 0870 608 2000; www.greenwich.gov.uk) will be housed here, but until then look for it in temporary buildings nearby.

NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM

Directly behind the old college, the **National Maritime Museum** (Map p111; ☎ 8858 4422; www.nmm.ac.uk; Romney Rd SE10; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm, last entry 4.30pm; DLR Cutty Sark) completes Greenwich's trump hand of historic buildings. The **museum** itself houses a massive collection of paraphernalia recounting Britain's seafaring history. Exhibits range from interactive displays to humdingers like Nelson's uniform complete with a hole from the bullet that killed him.

At the centre of the site, the elegant Palladian **Queen's House** has been restored to something like Inigo Jones' intention when he designed it in 1616 for the wife of Charles I. It's a stunning setting for a gallery focusing on illustrious seafarers and historic Greenwich.

Behind Queen's House, idyllic **Greenwich Park** climbs up the hill, affording great views of London. It's capped by the **Royal Observatory**, which Charles II had built 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. Here 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 for ships on the Thames to set their clocks by.

The observatory's newly revamped galleries are split into those devoted to astronomy and those devoted to time. There's also a 120-seat **planetarium** (adult/child £6/4) screening a roster of digital presentations; check the website for details.

CUTTY SARK

A famous Greenwich landmark, this **dipper** (Map p111; ☎ 8858 3445; www.cuttysark.org.uk; King William Walk) was the fastest ship in the world when it was launched in 1869. Despite a fire in 2007, only a fraction of the ship was destroyed as much of its fabric had already been removed for conservation. By early 2010 it should have reopened and be better displayed than ever – you'll even be able to walk under her. Watch the website for details.

FAN MUSEUM

Housed in an 18th-century Georgian house, the engaging **Fan Museum** (Map p111; ☎ 8305 1441; www.fan-museum.org; 12 Croom's Hill SE10; admission £4; ☎ 11am-5pm Tue-Sat, noon-5pm Sun; DLR Cutty Sark) is one of a kind. Only a fraction of its collection of hand-held fans from around the world, dating back to the 17th century, are on display at any one time.

THE O2

The world's largest dome (365m in diameter) opened on 1 January 2000 at a cost of £789m as the Millennium Dome, but closed on 31 December, only hours before the third millennium began. Renamed **The O2** (Map p111; ☎ 8463 2000; www.theo2.co.uk; Peninsula Sq SE10; Ⓣ North Greenwich), it's now a 20,000-seater sports and entertainment arena surrounded by shops

and restaurants. It has hosted some massive concerts, including the one-off Led Zeppelin reunion and a 21-night purple reign by Prince. There are shuttle-boat services from central London on concert nights.

Outside Central London

KEW GARDENS

In 1759 botanists began rummaging around the world for specimens they could plant in the 3-hectare plot known as the **Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew** (Map pp96-7; ☎ 8332 5655; www.kew.org.uk; Kew Rd; adult/child £13/free; 🕒 9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, to 7.30pm 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. It's now recognised as a Unesco World Heritage Site.

You can easily spend a whole day wandering around, but if you're pressed for time, the **Kew Explorer** (adult/child £4/1) is a hop-on hop-off road train that leaves from Victoria Gate and takes in the gardens' main sights.

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 £5/2.50; 🕒 10am-5pm Easter-30 Sep), formerly King George III's country retreat; the celebrated **Great Pagoda** designed by William Chambers in 1762, due to reopen in 2009 following restoration; and the **Temperate House**, which is the world's largest ornamental glasshouse and home to its biggest indoor plant, the 18m Chilean Wine Palmand.

The gardens are easily reached by tube, but you might prefer to take a cruise on a riverboat from the **Westminster Passenger Services Association** (☎ 7930 2062; www.wpsa.co.uk), which runs several daily boats from April to October, departing from Westminster Pier (return adult/child £16.50/8.25, 90 minutes).

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** (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0844-482 7777; www.hrp.org.uk/HamptonCourtPalace; adult/child £13.50/6.65; 🕒 10am-6pm Apr-Oct, to 4.30pm Nov-Mar; 🚶 Hampton Court) is England's largest and grandest Tudor structure. It was already one of the most sophis-

ticated palaces in Europe when, in the 17th century, 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 **Wolsey Rooms**. You could easily spend a day exploring the palace and its 60 acres of riverside gardens, especially if you get lost in the 300-year-old **maze**.

Hampton Court is 13 miles southwest of central London and is easily reached by train from Waterloo. Alternatively, the riverboats that head from Westminster to Kew (left) continue here (return adult/child £19.50/9.75, 3½ hours).

RICHMOND PARK

London's wildest **park** (Map pp96-7) spans more than 1000 hectares and is home to all sorts of wildlife, most notably herds of red and fallow deer. It's a terrific place 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.

HORNIMAN MUSEUM

Set in an Art Nouveau building amid gorgeous gardens, **Horniman Museum** (Map pp96-7; ☎ 8699 1872; www.horniman.ac.uk; 100 London Rd SE23; admission free; 🕒 10.30am-5.30pm; 🚶 Forest Hill) has three main themes: anthropology (Britain's third-most important collection of ethnographical objects), natural history (250,000 specimens) and a fab assortment of musical instruments.

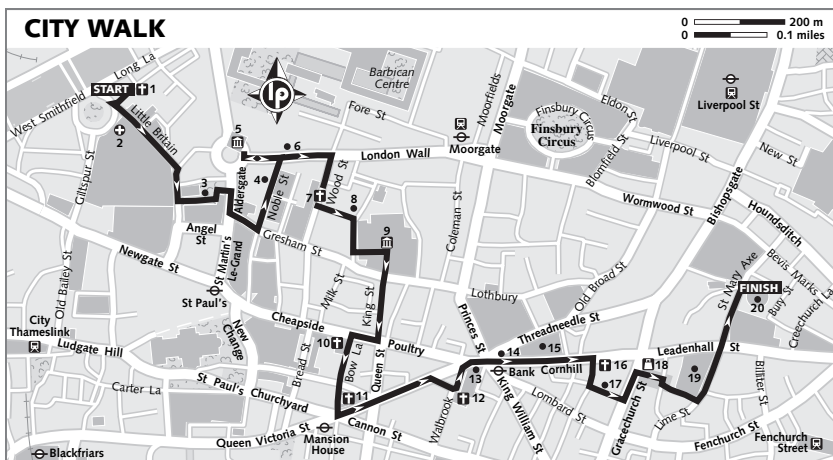
Trains to Forest Hill leave from London Bridge. The museum is a well-signposted five-minute walk from the station, uphill along London Rd.

CITY WALKING TOUR

The City of London has as much history and interesting architecture in its square mile as the rest of London put together. This tour focuses on the City's hidden delights (secluded parks, charming churches) in a journey from the ancient to the ultramodern.

It's fitting to start at **St Bartholomew-the-Great (1)**, as this fascinating 12th-century church was once a site of pilgrimage for travellers to

CITY WALK



WALK FACTS

Start: St Bartholomew-the-Great

Finish: 30 St Mary Axe

Distance: 2 miles

Duration: two hours

London. In more recent times, it's been used for scenes in *Four Weddings & A Funeral* and *Shakespeare In Love*.

Head out through the Tudor gatehouse, where in the distance you'll see the Victorian arches of Smithfield's meat market, which has occupied this site just north of the old city walls for 800 years. Executions were held here, most famously the burning of Protestants under Mary I and the grisly killing of Scottish hero William Wallace (Braveheart) in 1305; a plaque on the front of **St Batholemew's Hospital (2)** commemorates him. Also note the shrapnel damage to the wall, the legacy of an attack in 1916 by a German Zeppelin.

Head back towards the gate and turn right into Little Britain. Follow it as it curves to the right and look out for the large oak marking the entrance to **Postman's Park (3)**. This lovely space includes a touching legacy of Victorian socialism: a tiled wall celebrating everyday heroes.

Turn right at the end of the park, then left and left again into Noble St. You're now inside the City's **walls (4)**, remnants of which you'll pass on your left. Take the stairs up to the footbridge and cross towards the **Museum of**

London (5, p123). Its Roman section will give you a feel for the layout of the City.

Turn left when leaving the museum and follow the Highwalk. On your left you'll see **ruins (6)** of the barbicans (defensive towers) that once guarded the northwestern corner of the walls, with the Barbican centre (p124) behind them.

Take the escalator (by Pizza Express) down to Wood St and head towards the remaining tower of **St Alban's (7)**, a Wren-designed church destroyed in WWII. Turn left and you'll find a sweet garden on the site of **St Mary Aldermansbury (8)**, capped by a bust of Shakespeare. The 12th-century church was ruined in the war then shipped to Missouri where it was re-erected.

Turn right onto Aldermansbury and head to the **Guildhall (9, p123)**. Take King St down to Cheapside, cross the road and head right to elegant **St Mary-le-Bow (10)**. The church was rebuilt by Wren after the Great Fire, and then rebuilt again after WWII. The term 'Cockney' traditionally refers to someone born within the sound of this church's bell.

Backtrack to Bow Lane and follow this narrow path to beautiful **St Mary Aldermary (11)**, rebuilt in the Perpendicular Gothic style in 1682 following the fire. Turn left onto Queen Victoria St and then right into Bucklersbury, where you'll see **St Stephen's Walbrook (12, p123)** directly in front of you.

Leaving the church, you'll pass **Mansion House (13)**, built in 1752 as the official residence of the Lord Mayor. As you approach

the busy Bank intersection, lined with neo-classical temples to commerce, you might think you've stumbled into the ancient Roman forum (the actual forum was a couple of blocks east). Head for the **equestrian statue of the Iron Duke (14)**, behind which a metal pyramid details the many significant buildings here. Directly behind you is the **Royal Exchange (15)**; walk through it and exit through the door on the right, then turn left onto Cornhill.

If you're not churched out, cross the road to **St Michael's (16)**, a 1672 Wren design which still has its box pews. Hidden in the warren of tiny passages behind the church is its **churchyard (17)**. Head through to Gracechurch St, turn left and cross the road to wonderful **Leadenhall Market (18)**. This is roughly where the ancient forum once stood.

As you wander out the far end, the famous **Lloyd's building (19)** displays its innards for all to see.

Once you turn left onto Lime St, you'll see ahead of you Norman Foster's 180m **30 St Mary Axe building (20)**. Its dramatic curved shape has given birth to many nicknames (the Crystal Phallus, the Towering Innuendo), but it's the Gherkin by which it's fondly referred. Built nearly 900 years after St Bartholomew-the-Great, it's testimony to the City's ability to constantly reinvent itself for the times.

LONDON FOR CHILDREN

London has plenty of sights that parents and kids can enjoy together, and many of them are free, including the Natural History Museum (p128), Science Museum (p128) and all of the city's parks, many of which have excellent playgrounds. Pricier but popular attractions include London Dungeon (p127), London Zoo (p130), Madame Tussauds (p130), Tower of London (p122), London Aquarium (p127) and the London Eye (p127).

On top of that, there are a number of city farms (see www.london-footprints.co.uk/visitfarms.htm) and the big galleries have activities for children. However, don't expect a warm welcome in swanky restaurants or pubs.

All top-range hotels offer in-house babysitting services. Prices vary enormously from hotel to hotel, so ask the concierge about hourly rates. Alternatively try www.sitters.co.uk: membership costs £12.75 for three months, then sitters cost around £8 per hour plus a £4 booking fee.

TOURS

One of the best ways to get yourself orientated when you first arrive in London is with a 24-hour hop-on/hop-off pass for the double-decker bus tours operated by the **Original London Sightseeing Tour** (☎ 8877 1722; www.theoriginallondon.com; adult/child £22/12) or the **Big Bus Company** (☎ 7233 9533; www.bigbustours.com; adult/child £24/10). The buses loop around interconnecting routes throughout the day, providing a commentary as they go, and the price includes a river cruise and three walking tours. You'll save a couple of pounds by booking online.

There are loads of walking-tour operators, including **Citisights** (☎ 8806 3742; www.chr.org.uk/cswalks.htm), focussing on the academic and the literary; **London Walks** (☎ 7624 3978; www.walks.com), including Harry Potter tours, ghost walks and the ever-popular Jack The Ripper tours; and **Mystery Tours** (☎ 07957 388280; mysterywalks@hotmail.com).

Other unusual options include:

Black Taxi Tours of London (☎ 7935 9363; www.blacktaxitours.co.uk; 8am-6pm £95, 6pm-midnight £100, plus £5 on weekends) Takes up to five people on a two-hour spin past the major sights with a chatty cabbie as your guide.

City Cruises (☎ 7740 0400; www.citycruises.com; single/return trips from £6.40/7.80, day pass £10.50; ☎ 10am-6pm, later Jun-Aug) Operates a ferry service between Westminster, Waterloo, Tower and Greenwich piers.

London Bicycle Tour Company (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7928 6838; www.londonbicycle.com; 1A Gabriel's Wharf, 56 Upper Ground SE1; tour incl bike £14.95-17.95; ☎ Waterloo) Offers themed 2½- to 3½-hour tours of the 'East', 'Central' or 'Royal West'.

London Duck Tours (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7928 3132; www.londonducktours.co.uk; County Hall; adult/child £21.50/15.50; ☎ Waterloo) Cruise the streets in the same sort of amphibious landing craft used on D-Day before making a dramatic plunge into the Thames.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Although it's not renowned as a festival city, London has a few events that might sway your plans:

Chinese New Year Late January or early February sees Chinatown (p119) snap, crackle and pop with fireworks, a colourful street parade and eating aplenty.

University Boat Race (www.theboatrace.org) A posh-boy grudge match held annually since 1829 between the rowing crews of Oxford and Cambridge Universities (late March).

Chelsea Flower Show (www.rhs.org.uk/chelsea; Royal Hospital Chelsea; admission £18-41) Held in May, the world's most renowned horticultural show attracts green fingers from near and far.

GAY & LESBIAN LONDON

London's had a thriving scene since at least the 18th century, when the West End's 'Mollie houses' were the forerunners of today's gay bars. The West End, particularly Soho, remains the visible centre of gay and lesbian London, with numerous venues clustered around Old Compton St and its surrounds. However, Soho doesn't hold a monopoly on gay life. One of the nice things about the city is that there are local gay bars in many neighbourhoods.

Despite, or perhaps because of, its grimness and grime, Vauxhall's taken off as a hub for the hirsute, hefty and generally harder-edged sections of the community. The railway arches are now filled with dance clubs, leather bars and a sauna.

Also in southwest London, Clapham's got some of the friendliest gay bars in the city, while Earl's Court (West London), Islington (North London) and Limehouse (East End) have their own miscenes.

Generally, London's a safe place for lesbians and gays. It's rare to encounter any problem with sharing rooms or holding hands in the inner city, although it would pay to keep your wits about you at night and be conscious of your surroundings.

The easiest way to find out what's going on is to pick up the free press (*Pink Paper*, *Boyz*, *QX*) from a venue, but be warned: the mags can be somewhat...confronting. The gay section of *Time Out* is useful, as are www.gaydarnation.com (for men) and www.gingerbeer.co.uk (for women).

Here are some places to get you started:

Candy Bar (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7494 4041; 4 Carlisle St W1; ☉ Tottenham Court Rd) Long-running lesbian hang-out.

Friendly Society (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7434 3805; 79 Wardour St W1; ☉ Piccadilly Circus) Soho's quirkiest gay bar, this Bohemian basement is bedecked in kid's-room wallpaper and Barbie dolls.

G-A-Y Bar (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7494 2756; 30 Old Compton St W1; ☉ Leicester Sq) At the time of research the famous club night of the same name was planning to move. Find out where to from this, its little boozy sister.

Gay's the Word (Map pp98-9; ☎ 7278 7654; 66 Marchmont St WC1; ☉ Russell Sq) Books and mags of all descriptions.

George & Dragon (Map p112; ☎ 7012 1100; 2 Hackney Rd E2; ☉ Old St) Appealing corner pub where the crowd is often as eclectically furnished as the venue.

Ghetto (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7287 3726; 5-6 Falconberg Ct W1; admission £3-7; ☉ Tottenham Court Rd) Home to a roster of crazy nights such as *The Cock*, with inexpensive drinks and alternative music.

Heaven (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7930 2020; The Arches, Villiers St WC2; ☉ Charing Cross) One of the world's best-known gay clubs, Saturday night's the big one (£15) but Monday's Popcorn is lots of frothy fun (free before midnight, £5 after).

Popstarz (Map pp108-9; www.popstarz.org/popzmini; Sin, Andrew Borde St WC1; admission free-£7; 📺 10pm-4am Fri; ☉ Tottenham Court Rd) London's legendary indie club night. The online flyer gets you in cheaper.

Royal Vauxhall Tavern (RVT; Map p107; ☎ 7820 1222; 372 Kennington Ln SE11; admission free-£7; ☉ Vauxhall) A much-loved pub with crazy cabaret and drag acts.

Two Brewers (Map pp96-7; ☎ 7498 4971; 114 Clapham High St SW4; admission free-£5; ☉ Clapham Common) Friendly gay bar with regular acts and a nightclub out the back.

Camden Crawl (www.thecamdencrawl.com); 1/2-day pass £30/50) Your chance to spot the next big thing in the music scene or witness a secret gig by an established act, with 28 of Camden's intimate venues given over to live music for two full days in April.

London Marathon (www.london-marathon.co.uk) Up to half a million spectators watch the whippet-thin champions and often bizarrely clad amateurs take to the streets in late April.

Trooping the Colour Celebrating the Queen's official birthday (in June), this ceremonial procession of troops, marching along the Mall for their monarch's inspection, is a pageantry overload.

Royal Academy Summer Exhibition (www.royalacademy.org.uk; Royal Academy of Arts; adult/child £8/3) Running from mid-June to mid-August, this is an annual showcase of works submitted by artists from all over Britain, mercifully distilled to 1200 or so pieces.

Meltdown Festival (www.southbankcentre.co.uk/festivals-series/meltdown) Held late June, where the Southbank Centre hands over the curatorial reins to a legend of contemporary music (such as David Bowie, Morrissey or Patti Smith) to pull together a full program of concerts, talks and films.

Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Championships (www.wimbledon.org; tickets by public ballot) 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) The big event on the gay and lesbian calendar, a technicolour street parade heads through the West End in late June or early July, culminating in a concert in Trafalgar Sq.

Notting Hill Carnival (www.nottinghillcarnival.biz) Held over two days in August, this is Europe's largest and London's most vibrant outdoor carnival, where London's Caribbean community shows the city how to party. Unmissable and truly crazy.

SLEEPING

Take a deep breath and sit down before reading this section because no matter what your budget, London is a horribly pricey city to sleep in – one of the most expensive in the world, in fact. Anything below £80 per night for a double is pretty much 'budget', and at the top end, how does a £3500 penthouse sound? For this book we've defined the price categories for London differently than for the other chapters. Double rooms ranging between £80 and £150 per night are considered midrange; cheaper or more expensive options fall into the budget or the top-end categories respectively.

Ignore the scary money stuff for a minute. London has a wonderful selection of interesting hotels, whether they be brimming with history or zany modern decor. Most of the ritzier places offer substantial discounts on the weekends, for advance bookings and at quiet times (if there is such a thing in London).

Public transport is exceptionally good, so you don't need to be sleeping at Buckingham Palace to be at the heart of things. However, if you're planning some late nights and don't fancy enduring the night buses (a consummate London experience, but one you'll want only once) it'll make sense not to wander too far from the action (see p161).

London's a noisy city, so expect a bit of the din to seep into your room. If you're a light sleeper, earplugs are a sensible precaution, as is requesting a room back from the street and higher up.

It's now becoming the norm for budget and midrange places to offer free wireless internet. The expensive places will offer it too, but often charge. Hostels tend to serve up free breakfast (of the toast and cereal variety). If your hotel charges for breakfast, check the prices; anything over £8 just isn't worth it when there are so many eateries to explore.

Budget accommodation is scattered about, with some good options in West London, Southwark, Victoria and King's Cross. For something a little nicer, check out Victoria, Bloomsbury, Fitzrovia, Bayswater and Earl's Court. If you've the cash to splash, consider Mayfair, the West End, Clerkenwell and Kensington.

Westminster & Pimlico

Handy to the big sights but lacking a strong sense of neighbourhood, the streets get prettier the further you stray from Victoria station. Despite being the queen's own hood, there are some surprisingly affordable options.

BUDGET

Astor Victoria Hostel (Map p107; ☎ 7834 3077; www.astorhostels.com; 71 Belgrave Rd SW1; dm £16-19, d & tw £60; ☑ wi-fi; ☉ Pimlico) This cheap and cheerful hostel has plenty of mixed or women-only dorms but only a scattering of private rooms, so book early. There are two comfortable lounges with PCs, a fully equipped kitchen and weekly dinners for bonding over grub.

Morgan House (Map pp102-3; ☎ 7730 2384; www.morganhouse.co.uk; 120 Ebury St SW1; s/d/tw/tr without bathroom £52/72/72/92, with bathroom £86/92/92/112; ☉ Victoria) More homely than swanky, this pleasant Georgian house offers romantic iron beds (some a little saggy), chandeliers, period fireplaces, sparkling bathrooms and a full English breakfast.

MIDRANGE

Luna & Simone Hotel (Map p107; ☎ 7834 5897; www.lunasimonehotel.com; 47-49 Belgrave Rd SW1; s £45-65, d/tw/tr/q £95/95/115/140; ☑ wi-fi; ☉ Pimlico) The 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 aren't huge but they're clean and calming; the ones at the back are quieter. A full English breakfast is included.

Windermere Hotel (Map pp102-3; ☎ 7834 5163; www.windermere-hotel.co.uk; 142-144 Warwick Way SW1; s £95-134, d £119-144, tw £126-144, f £159; ☑ wi-fi; ☉ Victoria) Chintzy but homely, this early-Victorian town house has 22 rooms, all traditionally British in decor. Lively floral curtains correspond with matching bedspreads, tartan headboards complement armchairs, and tables are draped in lace. Most have lacklustre but perfectly adequate en suites.

BOOKING SERVICES

It's possible to make same-day accommodation bookings for free at most tourist offices, and

Visit London (☎ 08456 443010; 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 (☎ 7592 3055; www.bhronline.com) Free online booking.

Lastminute (www.lastminute.com) Has kiosks at the Britain & London Visitor Centre (p95) and Victoria station.

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

LondonTown (☎ 7437 4370; www.londontown.com) Hotel, hostel and B&B bookings.

Uptown Reservations (☎ 7937 2001; www.uptownres.co.uk) Books upmarket B&Bs, mainly around Chelsea and the West End.

YHA (☎ 01629-592700; www.yha.org.uk) Operates its own central reservations service, provided you give at least two weeks' notice.

B&B Belgravia (Map pp102-3; ☎ 7259 8570; www.bb-belgravia.com; 64-66 Ebury St SW1; s/d/tw/tr/q £99/115/125/145/155; 📶 wi-fi; 🚪 Victoria) This small hotel's unassuming facade belies a chic, contemporary interior that comprises stylish bathrooms and floor-to-ceiling dark-wood cupboards. The only noticeable design blip is the EasyJet-style orange staff uniform. Outside, the pretty courtyard garden is a suntrap.

Rubens at the Palace (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7834 6600; www.rubenshotel.com; 39 Buckingham Palace Rd SW1; s £129, d £139-279, ste £329-579; 📶 wi-fi; 🚪 Victoria) Opposite Buckingham Palace, it's perhaps not surprising to find that Rubens is a firm favourite with Americans looking for that quintessential British experience. With décor and service as traditional as high tea, it doesn't disappoint. The rooms are octogenarian chic, full of heavy patterned fabrics, dark wood, thick drapes and crowns above the beds.

St James's & Mayfair

Home to some of London's most famous 'establishment' hotels (such as the Ritz and Claridges), you'll need to be seriously cashed up to consider staying here.

Brown's Hotel (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7493 6020; www.brownsotel.com; 30 Albemarle St W1; d £325-615, ste £840-3000; 📶 wi-fi; 🚪 Green Park) Stay here and you're in good company – Rudyard Kipling penned many of his works here, Kate Moss has frequented the spa and both Queen Victoria and Winston Churchill dropped in for tea. There's a lovely old-world feel to Browns, but without the snootiness of some others in the neighbourhood. The rooms have every modern comfort.

West End

This is the heart of the action, so naturally accommodation comes at a price, and a hefty one at that. A couple of hostels cater for would-be Soho hipsters of more modest means.

BUDGET

Oxford St YHA (Map pp108-9; ☎ 0845 371 9133; www.yha.org.uk; 14 Noel St W1; dm/tw £25/64; 📶 wi-fi; 🚪 Oxford Circus) In most respects, this is a bog-standard YHA hostel with tidy rooms and all the usual facilities (kitchen, TV room, laundry). What it's got going for it are a terrific (albeit noisy) location and decent views over London's rooftops from some of the rooms.

TOP END

Hazlitt's (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7434 1771; www.hazlittshotel.com; 6 Frith St W1; d/ste from £205/300; 📶 wi-fi; 🚪 Tottenham Court Rd) Staying in this charming Georgian house (1718) is a trip back into a time when four-poster beds and claw-footed baths were the norm for gentlefolk. Each of the individually decorated 23 rooms is packed with antiques and named after a personage connected with the house.

Haymarket Hotel (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7470 4000; www.haymarkethotel.com; 1 Suffolk Pl SW1; d £250-325, ste £395-3000; 📶 wi-fi; 🚪 Piccadilly Circus) The building was designed by John Nash (Buckingham Palace's main man) but the rest is Kit Kemp all the way (see boxed text, opposite). We love the gold loungers around the sunset-lit indoor swimming pool.

Soho Hotel (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7559 3000; www.soho-hotel.com; 4 Richmond Mews W1; d £280-350, ste £385-2750; 📶 wi-fi; 🚪 Oxford Circus) Hello Kitty! This Kit Kemp-designed hotel (see boxed text, opposite) has a giant cat sculpture in a reception

that looks like a psychedelic candy store; try to refrain from licking the walls.

Also recommended:

Covent Garden Hotel (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7806 1000; www.coventgardenhotel.co.uk; 10 Monmouth St WC2; d £235-330, ste £385-1150; 📶 wi-fi; ☎ Covent Garden) First-time guests get a complimentary massage in this well-positioned Firdale hotel.

One Aldwych (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7300 1000; www.onealdwych.com; 1 Aldwych WC2; d £380-460, ste £625-1160; 📶 wi-fi; ☎ Covent Garden) Granite bathrooms, long swimming pool with underwater music, majestic bar and restaurant, modern art, and a lift that changes colour to literally lift your mood.

Bloomsbury & Fitzrovia

Only one step removed from the West End and crammed with Georgian town-house conversions, these neighbourhoods are much more affordable. You'll find a stretch of lower-priced hotels along Gower St and on the pretty Cartwright Gardens crescent.

BUDGET

London Central YHA (Map pp104-5; ☎ 0845 371 9154; www.yha.org.uk; 104-108 Bolsover St W1; dm £19-32; 📶 wi-fi; ☎ Great Portland St) The newest and best of London's YHA hostels, everything's got that just-out-of-the-wrapper look and most of the four- to six-bed rooms have en suites. Communal space is lacking but there's a flash cafe-bar attached to reception.

Generator (Map pp98-9; ☎ 7388 7666; www.generatorhotels.com/London; Compton Pl, 37 Tavistock Pl WC1; dm £20-25, s/tw/tr/q £70/70/75/100; 📶 wi-fi; ☎ Russell Sq) Lashings of primary colours and shiny metal are the hallmarks of this futuristic but fun hostel. This former police barracks has 850 beds; a bar that stays open until 2am and hosts quizzes, pool competitions, karaoke and DJs; safe-deposit boxes; and a large eating area but no kitchen. Come to party.

Ridgmount Private Hotel (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7636 1141; www.ridgmounthotel.co.uk; 65-67 Gower St WC1; s/d/tr/q without bathroom £42/58/78/92, with bathroom £54/75/93/104; 📶 wi-fi; ☎ Goodge St) There's a comfortable, welcoming feel at this old-fashioned, slightly chintzy place that's been in the same family for 40 years.

Arran House Hotel (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7636 2186; www.arranhotel-london.com; 77-79 Gower St WC1; s/d/tr/q without bathroom £50/77/95/101, with bathroom £60/100/118/122; 📶 wi-fi; ☎ Goodge St) Period features such as cornicing 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. Squashed en suites or shared bathrooms are the trade-off for these reasonable rates.

MIDRANGE

Jenkins Hotel (Map pp98-9; ☎ 7387 2067; www.jenkinshotel.demon.co.uk; 45 Cartwright Gardens WC1; s £52, s/d/tr with bathroom from £72/89/105; ☎ Russell Sq) This modest hotel has featured in the TV series of Agatha Christie's *Poirot*. Rooms are small but the hotel has charm.

Crescent Hotel (Map pp98-9; ☎ 7387 1515; www.crescenthotellofondon.com; 49-50 Cartwright Gardens WC1; s £49-81, d/tw/tr/q £97/97/110/120; 📶 wi-fi; ☎ Russell Sq) One of the cheaper options on the crescent overlooking Cartwright Gardens, there's a homely feel to this humble hotel, despite the odd saggy bed.

Arosfa Hotel (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7636 2115; www.arosfalondon.com; 83 Gower St WC1E; s £60-65, d/tr/q £90/102/110; 📶 wi-fi; ☎ Goodge St) While the decor of the immaculately presented rooms is unremarkable, Arosfa's guest lounge has been blinged up with chandeliers, clear plastic chairs and a free internet terminal. Recent refurbishments have added en suites to all 15 bedrooms, but they're tiny (putting the 'closet' back into water closet).

Hotel Cavendish (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7636 9079; www.hotelcavendish.com; 75 Gower St WC1E; s £85, d £105-130, tr/q £120/140; 📶 wi-fi; ☎ Goodge St) Following a

THE KIT KEMP CLUB

Kit Kemp's interiors purr loudly rather than whisper. She's waved her magically deranged wand over all the hotels of London's boutique Firdale chain – including Covent Garden (left), Haymarket (opposite), Soho (opposite), Charlotte St (p140), Knightsbridge (p149) and Number Sixteen (p149) – creating bold, playful spaces full of zany fabrics, crazy sculpture and sheer luxury. Yet somehow she manages to create an old-fashioned feel from a thoroughly modern sensibility. While nonconformity is the norm, key values are shared throughout the chain: the staff is welcoming, guest lounges are inviting spaces with honesty bars, each bedroom features a dressmaker's dummy (some in miniature) and each bathroom is crafted from beautiful grey-flecked granite.

complete refurbishment a few years back, bedrooms have a contemporary look, with flat-screen TVs, and all are equipped with compact en suite shower rooms (some have pretty tiles and bumper mirrors). The two gardens at the back are a good place to catch some rays.

Harlingford Hotel (Map pp98-9; ☎ 7387 1551; www.harlingfordhotel.com; 61-63 Cartwright Gardens WC1; s/d/tw/tr/q £85/110/110/125/135; 📶 wi-fi; 🚗 Russel Sq) This family-run hotel sports refreshing, upbeat decor such as bright-green mosaic-tiled bathrooms (with trendy sinks), fuchsia bedspreads and colourful paintings. Lots of stairs and no lift – consider requesting a 1st-floor room.

TOP END

Charlotte Street Hotel (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7806 2000; www.charlottestreethotel.com; 15 Charlotte St W1; d £210-295, ste £350-950; 📶 wi-fi; 🚗 Goodge St) Another of the Firdale clan (see boxed text, p139), this one's a favourite with media types, with a small gym and a screening room.

Sanderson (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7300 1400; www.sandersonlondon.com; 50 Berners St W1; d £305-875, ste £611-925, apt £2500-3500; 📶 📶 wi-fi; 🚗 Goodge St) Liberate meets Philippe Starck in an 18th-century French bordello – and that's just the reception. A 3D space scene in the lift shuttles you into darkened corridors leading to blindingly white rooms complete with sleigh beds, oil paintings hung on the ceiling, en suites behind glass walls and pink silk curtains. Très chic.

Holborn & Clerkenwell

The availability of accommodation hasn't kept pace with Clerkenwell's revival, but it's still a great area to stay in. The best pickings aren't exactly cheap.

Rookery (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7336 0931; www.rookeryhotel.com; Peter's Lane, Cowcross St EC1; s £175, d £210-495; 📶 wi-fi; 🚗 Farringdon) Taking its name from London's notorious slums (Fagin's house in *Oliver Twist* was set a few streets west), this antique-strewn luxury hotel recreates an early 19th-century ambience with none of the attendant grime or crime. For a bird's-eye view of St Paul's, book the Rook's Nest but be warned: Fagin never had a lift.

Zetter Hotel (Map pp98-9; ☎ 7324 4444; www.zetter.com; 86-88 Clerkenwell Rd EC1M; d £188-400; 📶 wi-fi; 🚗 Farringdon) A slick, beautiful 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.

Malmaison (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7012 3700; www.malmaison.com; 18-21 Charterhouse Sq EC1; s from £205, d £225-250, ste £295-475; 📶 wi-fi; 🚗 Farringdon) Given Malmaison's grand frontage onto a hidden square, the *Alice in Wonderland* lobby of chessboard carpet, black seats that look like pawns and oversized chairs are a quirky surprise. Once in the rooms, the look is more classical with contemporary fittings in neutral shades.

The City

Bristling with bankers during the week, you can often pick up a considerable bargain in the City on weekends.

St Paul's YHA (Map pp104-5; ☎ 0845 371 9012; www.yha.org.uk; 36 Carter Lane EC4; dm £27; 📶 wi-fi; 🚗 St Paul's) The former St Paul's Cathedral Choir Boys School is located just notes away from the cathedral itself. After the lovely facade, the interiors are a bit of a let-down, but the dorms are small and have their own TVs and lockers. There's a licensed cafeteria but no kitchen.

Threadneedles (Map p112; ☎ 7657 8080; www.theetollection.com; 5 Threadneedle St EC2; d £370-499, ste £582-617; 📶 📶 wi-fi; 🚗 Bank) The incredible stained-glass dome in the lobby points to its former status as a 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.

Hoxton, Shoreditch & Spitalfields

It's always had a rough-edged reputation, but London's East End is being gentrified faster than you can say 'awright' guv'. Staying here, you'll be handy to some of London's best bars.

our pick Hoxton (Map p112; ☎ 7550 1000; www.hoxtonhotels.com; 81 Great Eastern St; d & tw £59-189; 📶 📶 wi-fi; 🚗 Old St) A novel approach to pricing means that while all the rooms are identical, the first ones on any given day are offered at £59: an absolute steal for a hotel of this calibre. Rooms are a decent size, scrupulously clean, have comfy beds with quality linen and a well designed desk space where you can access the internet through the TV.

South of the Thames

Just south of the river is good if you want to immerse yourself in workaday London and still be central.

(Continued on page 149)

*(Continued from page 140)***BUDGET**

Dover Castle Hostel (Map pp96-7; ☎ 7403 7773; www.dovercastlehostel.com; 6a Great Dover St; dm £10-16; 📶 wi-fi; 🚶 Borough) If living in a pub is your fantasy, this is your chance. It's a modest affair (what do you expect for a tenner?), but the dorms are tidy, freshly painted and get loads of natural light. If you fancy a sound sleep, bring earplugs or drink yourself into oblivion downstairs.

St Christopher's Village (Map p112; ☎ 7407 1856; www.st-christophers.co.uk; 163 Borough High St SE1; dm £16-24, d & tw £52; 📶; 🚶 London Bridge) With three locations on the same street sharing a main reception, there's quite a range of experiences on offer. The main hub is the Village, a huge, up-for-it party hostel, with a club that opens until 4am on the weekends and a spa pool on the roof terrace. It's either heaven or hell, depending on what side of 30 you're on. The others are much smaller, quieter and, frankly, more pleasant. St Christopher's Inn (121 Borough High St) is situated above a very nice pub, while the Orient (59 Borough High St), above a cafe, has a separate women's floor. For these last two, you still need to book and check in at the Village.

MIDRANGE

Mad Hatter Hotel (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7401 9222; www.fullershotels.com/frames/1044; 3-7 Stamford St SE1; r £145-165; 🚶 Southwark) There's nothing particularly mad (or even unusual) about it, but this is a good basic hotel with decent-sized rooms and unassuming decor hiding behind a lovely Victorian frontage. Prices fall below £100 on weekends.

Southwark Rose Hotel (Map p112; ☎ 7015 1480; www.southwarkrosehotel.co.uk; 47 Southwark Bridge Rd SE1; d weekdays/weekends £180/105, ste £245; 📶 📶 wi-fi; 🚶 Borough) Though it's somewhat pricey during the week, this business hotel drops its rates considerably to attract the weekenders visitors.

Chelsea, Kensington & Knightsbridge

Classy Chelsea and Kensington offer easy access to the museums and fashion retailers. It's all a bit sweetie-darling, along with the prices.

BUDGET

Holland House YHA (Map pp100-1; ☎ 0845 371 9122; www.yha.org.uk; Holland Walk W8; dm £15-25; 📶 wi-fi;

TOP FIVE SWANKY STAYS

- **Browns** (p138)
- **One Aldwych** (p139)
- **Hempel** (p150)
- **Sanderson** (p140)
- Any of the **Firmdale hotels** (see boxed text, p139)

🚶 High St Kensington) Built out of the bombed-out remains of a 1607 mansion in the heart of Holland Park, there's an unfortunate school-camp vibe to the large dorm rooms. However, it's well looked after and the cheapest option for miles around, and the setting is unforgettable.

MIDRANGE

Vicarage Private Hotel (Map pp100-1; ☎ 7229 4030; www.londonvicaragehotel.com; 10 Vicarage Gate W8; s/d/tr/q without bathroom £52/88/109/116, with bathroom £88/114/145/160; 📶 wi-fi; 🚶 High St Kensington) If you were staying here 15 years ago, Princess Di would have been your neighbour – you can see Kensington Palace from the doorstep. This grand Victorian town house looks onto a cul-de-sac, so you shouldn't have a problem with noise in the simply furnished rooms. The cheaper ones (without bathrooms) are on floors three and four, so you may get a view as well as a workout.

TOP END

Number Sixteen (Map pp102-3; ☎ 7589 5232; www.number sixteenhotel.co.uk; 16 Sumner Pl SW7; s £120-165, d £200-270; 📶 wi-fi; 🚶 South Kensington) The least pricey of the Firmdale hotels (see boxed text, p139), with a lovely garden tucked away.

Knightsbridge Hotel (Map pp100-1; ☎ 7584 6300; www.knightsbridgehotel.com; 10 Beaufort Gdn SW3; s £170-185, d £210-295, ste £345-595; 📶 wi-fi; 🚶 Knightsbridge) Another Firmdale (see boxed text, p139), this one's on a quiet, tree-lined cul-de-sac very close to Harrods. It's the most restrained of the chain.

Gore (Map pp100-1; ☎ 7584 6601; www.gorehotel.com; 190 Queen's Gate SW7; r £187-390; 📶 wi-fi; 🚶 Gloucester Rd) A short stroll from the Royal Albert Hall, the Gore serves up British grandiosity (antiques, carved four-posters, a secret bathroom in the Tudor room) with a large slice of camp. How else could you describe the Judy Garland

room (complete with ruby slippers) and the Nellie room (Dame Nellie Melba, dahling), named after famous former occupants?

Levin (Map pp100-1; ☎ 7589 6286; www.thelevinhotel.co.uk; 28 Basil St SW3; d £235-445; ☎ Knightsbridge) As close as you can get to sleeping in Harrods, the Levin knows its market. Despite the baby-blue colour scheme, there's a subtle femininity to the decor, although it's far too elegant to be flouncey.

Notting Hill, Bayswater & Paddington

Don't be fooled by Julia Roberts and Hugh Grant's shenanigans, Notting Hill and the areas immediately north of Hyde Park are as shabby as they are chic. There are some nice gated squares surrounded by Georgian town houses, but the area is better exemplified by the Notting Hill Carnival (p137), where the West Indian community who made the area their home from the 1950s party up big time.

Scruffy Paddington has lots of cheap hotels, with a major strip of unremarkable ones along Sussex Gardens, worth checking if you're short on options.

MIDRANGE

Vancouver Studios (Map pp100-1; ☎ 7243 1270; www.vancouverstudios.co.uk; 30 Prince's Sq W2; apt £85-170; ☎ wi-fi; ☎ Bayswater) Technically apartments, it's only the addition of kitchenettes and a self-service laundry that differentiate these smart but reasonably priced studios (sleeping from one to three people) from a regular Victorian town-house hotel. In spring, the garden is filled with colour and fragrance.

New Linden Hotel (Map pp100-1; ☎ 7221 4321; www.newlinden.co.uk; 58-60 Leinster Sq W2; s £95, d £129-179, tr/f/ste £210/150/189; ☎ wi-fi; ☎ Bayswater) Cramming in a fair amount of style for the price, this terrace-house hotel has interesting modern art in the rooms and carved wooden fixtures from India combined with elegant wallpaper in the guest lounge. The quiet location, helpful staff and monsoon shower heads in the deluxe rooms make this an excellent proposition.

TOP END

Hempel (Map pp100-1; ☎ 7298 9000; www.the-hempel.co.uk; 31-35 Craven Hill Gardens; d £239-315, ste £319-1345; ☎ wi-fi; ☎ Bayswater) As soon as you enter the expansive all-white lobby with sunken seating areas, supermodern fireplaces and dramatic ceiling-grazing flower arrangement, you know you're in for something special. Created by

Anouska Hempel, every detail is a feat of superb design, from the Zen garden to the minimalist but luxurious rooms.

North London

EUSTON & KING'S CROSS

While hardly a salubrious location, King's Cross is handy to absolutely everything and has some excellent budget options.

Ashlee House (Map pp98-9; ☎ 7833 9400; www.ashleehouse.co.uk; 261-265 Grays Inn Rd; dm £21-24, s/tw/tr £57/76/76; ☎; ☎ Kings Cross) This hostel is a cheery surprise in a gritty but central location. There's a large tube map and London scenes on the walls, green dice tables in the small lounge, bright paintwork in the compact rooms and stripy duvets on the blue bunk beds.

Clink (Map pp98-9; ☎ 7183 9400; www.clinkhostel.com; 78 Kings Cross Rd; dm £21-28, tw with/without bathroom £70/60, d/tr £70/78; ☎ wi-fi; ☎ Kings Cross) If anyone can think of a more right-on London place to stay than the courthouse where The Clash went on trial, please let us know. You can watch TV from the witness box or sleep in the cells, but the majority of the rooms are custom-built and quite comfortable.

Jesmond Dene Hotel (Map pp98-9; ☎ 7837 4654; www.jesmonddenehostel.co.uk; 27 Argyle St; s/d/tw/tr/q from £50/60/60/85/120; ☎ wi-fi; ☎ Kings Cross) A surprisingly pleasant option for a place so close to busy Kings Cross station, this modest hotel has clean but small rooms, some of which share bathrooms. A full English breakfast is included in the price.

HAMPSTEAD & HIGHGATE

A little further out but still in transport Zone 2, the following are excellent options within walking distance of Hampstead Heath.

Palmer's Lodge (Map pp96-7; ☎ 7483 8470; www.palmerlodge.co.uk; 40 College Cres NW3; dm £15-22, tw £46-50, d £52; ☎ wi-fi (P); ☎ Swiss Cottage) Reminiscent of a period murder mystery (in a good way), this former children's hospital has bags of character. Listed by English Heritage, 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 grand stairway and a roomy lounge. Privacy curtains make the 28-bed men's dorm bearable (imagine you're in the hold of a pirate ship), but they don't shut out the amorous noises in the couples dorm.

Hampstead Village Guesthouse (Map pp96-7; ☎ 7435 8679; www.hampsteadguesthouse.com; 2 Kemplay

Rd NW3; s £55-75, d £80-95, apt £100-175; ☑ wi-fi; ⚡ Hampstead) Eclectic, cluttered and thoroughly charming, this grand Victorian house has an easy-going hostess, comfy beds and a delightful back garden. There's also a studio flat, which can accommodate up to five people.

Greenwich

If you'd rather keep the bustle of central London at arm's length and nightclubbing is your idea of hell, Greenwich offers a village ambience and some great old pubs to explore.

BUDGET

St Christopher's Inn (Map p111; ☎ 8858 3591; www.st-christophers.co.uk; 189 Greenwich High Rd SE10; dm £18-22, tw £44-50; ☑ wi-fi; 🚶 /DLR Greenwich) The nicest of the St Christopher's chain, this lovely old Georgian block is right by the station, with bright six- to eight-bed dorms and bunk-style twins. The downstairs pub is a nicer place to hang out in than the claustrophobic basement lounge.

MIDRANGE

St Alfege's (Map p111; ☎ 8853 4337; www.st-alfeges.co.uk; 16 St Alfege Passage SE10; s/d £60/90; ☑ wi-fi; DLR Cutty Sark) Both the house and the host have personality plus, so much so that they were featured on TV's *Hotel Inspector* series. The two double rooms are elegant and comfortable, but the single would suit the vertically challenged and going to the toilet in the wardrobe might take some getting used to.

Harbour Master's House (Map p111; ☎ 8293 9597; http://website.lineone.net/~harbourmaster; 20 Ballast Quay SE10; d £85; 🚶 Maze Hill) The 1855 building is Grade 2-listed and perfectly positioned by the Thames, but don't expect views from this self-contained flat in the vaulted cellar. However, the windows let in natural light and it's great value for its size, with a large lounge and separate kitchen/dining area.

West London

Earl's Court is lively, cosmopolitan and so popular with travelling Antipodeans it's been nicknamed Kangaroo Valley. There are no real sights, but it does have inexpensive digs and an infectious holiday atmosphere.

BUDGET

Barmy Badger Backpackers (Map pp102-3; ☎ 7370 5213; www.barmybadger.com; 17 Longridge Rd SW5; dm £16-

18, d & tw £38; ☑ wi-fi; ⚡ Earl's Court) A humble but friendly hostel in a big old house, most of the rooms (including the dorms) have their own toilet. There's a big kitchen and a small garden out the back.

ourpick Globetrotter Inn (Map pp96-7; ☎ 8746 3112; www.globetrotterinn.com; Ashlar Ct, Ravenscourt Gardens W6; dm £20-24, d & tw £60; ☑; ⚡ Stamford Brook) At the far reaches of Zone 2 (so still relatively central), this former nurses' home inhabits an attractive art-deco building in a leafy part of West London. It's certainly not boutique (there are 390 beds), but high ceilings and an attractive central lawn with a fountain give a sense of space, and personal reading lights and curtains in the dorms allow extra privacy.

MIDRANGE

Barclay House (Map pp102-3; ☎ 7384 3390; www.barclayhouselondon.com; 21 Barclay Rd SW6; s/d £68/88, apt £135-200; ☑ wi-fi; ⚡ Fulham Broadway) A proper homestay B&B, the two comfy bedrooms in this charming Victorian town house share a bathroom and an exceptionally welcoming hostess. You'll be well set up to conquer London with helpful tips, maps, umbrellas and a full stomach. There's also a self-contained, two-bedroom apartment downstairs.

Rushmore Hotel (Map pp102-3; ☎ 7370 3839; www.rushmore-hotel.co.uk; 11 Trebovir Rd SW5; s £69-79, d & tw £89-99, tr/q £115/139; ☑ wi-fi; ⚡ Earl's Court) The soft pastel colours, draped fabrics and simple designs of this modest hotel create a cheery, welcoming atmosphere, heightened by the friendly family that runs the joint. There's no lift, so a complimentary workout is provided for those on the upper floors. The double rooms can be tight but the twins have a bit more space.

Twenty Nevern Square (Map pp102-3; ☎ 7565 9555; www.twentyneversquare.co.uk; 20 Nevern Sq SW5; s £79-140, d £85-189; ☑ wi-fi; ⚡ Earl's Court) An Ottoman theme runs through this contemporary town house hotel, where a mix of wooden furniture, luxurious fabrics and natural light helps maximise space even though the cheaper bedrooms are not particularly large.

base2stay (Map pp102-3; ☎ 0845 262 8000; www.base2stay.com; 25 Courtfield Gardens SW5; s £93, d £107-127, tw £127; ☑ wi-fi; ⚡ Earl's Court) With smart decor, power showers, flat-screen TVs with internet access and artfully concealed kitchenettes, this boutique establishment feels like a four-star hotel without the hefty price tag.

Airports

Yotel (☎ 7100 1100; www.yotel.com; r per 4/5/6/7-24 hr £38/45/53/59; ☑ wi-fi) Gatwick (South Terminal); Heathrow (Terminal 4) The best news for early-morning flyers since coffee-vending machines, Yotel's smart 'cabins' offer pint-sized luxury: comfy beds, soft lights, internet-connected TVs, monsoon showers and fluffy towels. Swinging cats isn't recommended, but when is it ever?

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 and service can be hit and miss regardless of price tag. In this section, we steer you towards restaurants and cafes distinguished by their location, value for money, unique features, original settings and, of course, good food. Vegetarians needn't worry; London has a host of dedicated meat-free joints, while most others offer at least a token dish.

Westminster & Picnic

There's very little action around these parts at night and those restaurants that are worth the detour will set you back a few quid.

ourpick Olivomare (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7730 9022; 10 Lower Belgrave St SW1; mains £14-19; ☑ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat; ☉ Victoria) The Sardinian seaside comes to Belgravia in a dazzling white dining room with flavoursome seafood dishes and authentic wines. The grilled sea bass with olives and tomato is a treat and the service impeccable.

Thomas Cubitt (Map pp102-3; ☎ 7730 6060; 44 Elizabeth St SW1; mains £16-21; ☉ Victoria) The bar below gets rammed to the impressively high rafters with the swanky Belgravia set, but don't let that put you off this excellent, elegant dining room. The culinary focus is thoroughly British and deftly executed. The downstairs menu is cheaper (£9 to £14).

St James's & Mayfair

Like on the Monopoly board, if you land on Mayfair you may have to sell a house (to afford to eat here).

Sketch (Map pp108-9; ☎ 0870 777 4488; 9 Conduit St W1; Parlour mains £4-14, Gallery mains £11-27, Lecture Room 2-course lunch/8-course dinner £30/90; ☉ Oxford Circus) A design enthusiast's wet dream, with shimmering white rooms, video projections, designer Louis XIV chairs and toilet cubicles

TOP FIVE BLOW THE INHERITANCE

- **Gordon Ramsay** (p157)
- Lecture Room at **Sketch** (left)
- **Hibiscus** (below)
- **Hakkasan** (p154)
- **Nobu** (below)

shaped like eggs. And that's just the Gallery, which becomes a buzzy restaurant and bar at night. The ground-floor Parlour has decadent cakes and decor, but is surprisingly affordable; perfect for breakfast, or afternoon tea served on fine bone china. The swanky Lecture Room upstairs is the realm of three-Michelin-starred chef Pierre Gagnaire, whose book *Reinventing French Cuisine* gives a hint of what to expect.

Nobu (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7447 4747; Metropolitan Hotel, 19 Old Park Ln W1; dishes £10-26; ☉ Hyde Park Corner) One of London's most famous eateries, Nobu's dining room is surprisingly unremarkable but it does have nice views over Hyde Park. It's nonetheless out of this world when it comes to exquisitely prepared and presented Japanese dishes. Ordering the sublime lunchtime bento box (£28) is a sensible way of limiting the financial pain, especially compared to the £50 to £90 chef's choices.

Wild Honey (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7758 9160; 12 St George St W1; mains £16-22; ☉ Oxford Circus) If you fancy a swanky evening at a top Mayfair restaurant without breaking the bank, Wild Honey offers an excellent value pretheatre menu (£19 for three courses). Of course, the danger is that once you're ensconced in this elegant dining room, you won't be able to resist the delights of the full Modern European menu.

Tamarind (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7629 3561; 20 Queen St W1; mains £16-28; ☉ Green Park) London's only Michelin-starred Indian restaurant serves up mouth-watering spicy classics. The set lunches are a good deal (two-/three-courses £17/19).

Hibiscus (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7629 2999; 29 Maddox St W1; 3-course lunch/dinner £25/60; ☉ Oxford Circus) Claude and Claire Bosi have generated an avalanche of praise from London critics since moving their Michelin-starred restaurant from Shropshire to Mayfair. Expect adventurous French and English cuisine in an elegant dining room.

West End

Soho and Covent Garden are the gastronomic heart of London, with stacks of restaurants and cuisines to choose from at budgets to suit both booze hounds and theatre-goers. If you're craving a decent coffee, this is the place to come.

BUDGET

Nordic Bakery (Map pp108-9; ☎ 3230 1077; 14a Golden Sq W1; snacks £3-5; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 11am-7pm Sat, 11am-6pm Sun; ☎ Piccadilly Circus) As simple and stylish as you'd expect from the Scandinavians, this small café has bare wooden walls and uncomplicated Danish snacks such as sticky cinnamon buns and salmon served on dark rye bread.

Neal's Yard Salad Bar (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7836 3233; Neal's Yard WC2; mains £3-12; ☎ Covent Garden) Occupying both sides of the courtyard, this bright-orange salad bar has waiters in black bow ties serving fresh, leafy meals and moist Brazilian cakes.

Yauatcha (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7494 8888; 15 Broadwick St W1; dishes £3-18; ☎ Piccadilly Circus) Dim sum restaurants don't come much cooler than this, and the menu is fantastic and Michelin-starred. Upstairs, the chilled-out teahouse serves pretty cakes.

Fernandez & Wells (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7287 2814; 73 Beak St W1; mains £4-5; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-7pm Sat & Sun; ☎ Piccadilly Circus) With its sister deli around the corner, there's no shortage of delicious charcuterie and cheese to fill the fresh baguettes on the counter of this teensy café. The coffee's superb.

Sacred (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7734 1415; 13 Ganton St W1; mains £4-5; ☎ 7.30am-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-8pm Sat, 10am-7pm Sun; ☎ Oxford Circus) The spiritual paraphernalia and blatant Kiwiana don't seem to deter the smart Carnaby St set from lounging around this eclectic café. It must be something to do with the excellent coffee, appealing counter food and deliciously filling cooked breakfasts (try the scrambled eggs with salmon and goat's cheese).

Hummus Bros (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7734 1311; 88 Wardour St W1; meals £4-7; ☎ Piccadilly Circus) Don't come here if you're chickpea challenged, because this informal place is hummus heaven. It comes in small or regular bowls with a choice of meat or veggie toppings and a side of pitta bread.

Mother Mash (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7494 9644; 26 Ganton St W1; mains £7; ☎ Oxford Circus) If you've survived

a London winter, you'll know the importance of good comfort food. This Mother certainly does, offering choices of four types of mashed potato, eight varieties of sausage (including a vegetarian version), six choices of pie and five types of gravy (including the traditional, parsley-based East End 'liquor').

Also recommended:

Breakfast Club (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7434 2571; 33 D'Arbury St W1; ☎ ; ☎ Oxford Circus) See p158.

Konditor & Cook (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7292 1684; Curzon, 99 Shaftesbury Ave W1; ☎ Leicester Sq) See p156.

Red Veg (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7437 3109; 95 Dean St W1; ☎ Tottenham Court Rd) Everyone's favourite communist vegetarian burger bar.

MIDRANGE

Abeno Too (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7379 1160; 17-18 Great Newport St WC2; mains £8-15; ☎ Leicester Sq) Specialists in *okonomi-yaki* (Japanese-style pancakes), which are cooked in front of you on a hotplate. Sit at the bar or by the window and feast. Japanese noodle dishes are also available.

Sarastro (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7836 0101; 126 Drury Ln WC2; mains £8-16; ☎ Covent Garden) This Turkish-influenced restaurant is gaudy, kitsch and loads of fun. The opera theme – with balcony tables, gold everywhere (even the ceiling), crushed velvet and myriad lamps – is totally over the top. Good for pre- and post-theatre meals.

Spiga (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7734 3444; 84-86 Wardour St W1; mains £9-18; ☎ Piccadilly Circus) With Italian movie posters on the walls, warm, colourful decor and a tasty menu of pastas, pizzas, fish and meat dishes, this popular restaurant is a winner.

Kettners (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7734 6112; 29 Romilly St W1; mains £9-20; ☎ Leicester Sq) Founded in 1867 (no, that's not a typo), Kettners has served the likes of Oscar Wilde and Edward VIII. Nowadays it dishes up pizza and burgers, which you can wash down with champagne while soaking in the gently fading grandeur and tinkling piano.

TOP END

National Gallery Dining Rooms (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7747 2525; Sainsbury Wing, National Gallery, Trafalgar Sq WC2; 2 courses £25; ☎ lunch daily, dinner Fri; ☎ Charing Cross) It's fitting that Oliver Peyton's acclaimed restaurant should celebrate British food (such as smoked haddock, traditional Suffolk cob chicken and 'Farmer Shep's aged sirloin'), being in the National Gallery and overlooking Trafalgar Sq. For a much cheaper option with

the same views, ambience, quality produce and excellent service, try a salad, pie or tart at the adjoining bakery (mains £4.50 to £9.50).

Bloomsbury & Fitzrovia

Tucked away behind busy Tottenham Court Rd, Fitzrovia's Charlotte and Goodge Sts form one of central London's most vibrant eating precincts.

Salt Yard (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7637 0657; 54 Goodge St W1; tapas £5-8; ☎ Goodge St) Named after the place where cold meats are cured, this softly lit joint serves delicious Spanish and Italian tapas. Try the roasted chicken leg with gnocchi, wild garlic and sorrel, or flex your palate with courgette flowers stuffed with cheese and drizzled with honey.

Ooze (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7436 9444; 62 Goodge St W1; mains £7-15; ☎ Goodge St) The humble risotto gets its moment on the catwalk in this breezy Italian restaurant. There are a handful of grills on the menu, but it's the 16 varieties of oozy, but still slightly crunchy, risotto that take centre stage.

La Perla (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7436 1744; 11 Charlotte St W1; mains £9-17; ☎ closed Sun lunch; ☎ Goodge St) The service is lovely, but it's the street tacos that have us infatuated: mini tacos loaded up with tomato, coriander, onion, chilli and your choice of pork, prawns or chicken.

Hakkasan (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7907 1888; 8 Hanway Pl W1; mains £10-60; ☎ 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 incredibly sophisticated Chinese food.

Holborn & Clerkenwell

Similarly hidden away, Clerkenwell's gems are well worth digging for. Pedestrianised Exmouth Market is a good place to start.

BUDGET

Little Bay (Map pp98-9; ☎ 7278 1234; 171 Farringdon Rd EC1; mains before/after 7pm £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 hearty food is very good value.

It's also worth checking out **Konditor & Cook** (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7404 6300; Gray's Inn Rd, WC1; ☎ Chancery Ln) – see p156.

MIDRANGE

Bleeding Heart Restaurant & Bistro (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7242 8238; Bleeding Heart Yard EC1; bistro £8-16, restaurant £13-25; ☎ 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.

Sifty 4our (Map pp98-9; ☎ 7336 0603; 54 Farringdon Rd; mains £9-13.50; ☎ Farringdon) Britain and Malaysia go back a long way and this smart-looking restaurant celebrates that fact with tasty fusion dishes like lamb shanks with redang sauce.

Great Queen Street (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7242 0622; 32 Great Queen St WC2; mains £10-14; ☎ lunch Tue-Sat, dinner Mon-Sat; ☎ Holborn) There's no tiara on this Great Queen, her claret-coloured walls and mismatched wooden chairs suggesting cosiness and informality. But the food's still the best of British, including brawn, lamb that melts in the mouth and Arbroath smokie (a whole smoked fish with creamy sauce).

Smiths of Smithfield (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7251 7950; 67-77 Charterhouse St EC1; mains 1st fl £11-17, top fl £17-29; ☎ Farringdon) This converted meat-packing warehouse endeavours to be all things to all people and succeeds. Hit the ground-floor bar for a beer, follow the silver-clad ducts and wooden beams upstairs to a relaxed dining space, or continue up for two more floors of feasting, each slightly smarter and pricier than the last.

St John (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7251 0848; 26 St John St EC1; mains £14-23; ☎ Farringdon) Bright whitewashed brick walls, high ceilings and simple wooden furniture keep diners free to concentrate on its world-famous nose-to-tail offerings. Expect offal, ox tongue and tripe.

TOP END

Dans le Noir (Map pp98-9; ☎ 7253 1100; 30-31 Clerkenwell Green EC1; 2/3 courses £29/37; ☎ Farringdon) If you've ever felt in the dark about food, eating in the pitch black might suit you. A visually impaired 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...

The City

You'll be sorely dismayed if you've got an empty belly on a Sunday morning in the City. Even during the busy weekdays, your best

CHAIN-CHAIN-CHAIN, CHAIN OF FOODS

It's an unnerving, but not uncommon, experience to discover the idiosyncratic cafe or pub you were so proud of finding on your first day in London popping up on every other high street. But amongst the endless Caffe Neros, Pizza Expresses and All-Bar-Ones are some gems, or, at least, great fallback options.

Some of the best include:

GBK (Map pp104-5, pp100-1, pp98-9, pp102-3, p111, p112, pp108-9; www.gbkinfo.com) Producing creative burger constructions in 19 Gourmet Burger Kitchens.

Leon (Map pp104-5, p111, p112, pp108-9; www.leonrestaurants.co.uk) Focussing on fresh, seasonal food (salads, wraps and the like).

Ping Pong (Map pp104-5, pp108-9; www.pingpongdimsum.com) Stylish Chinese dumpling joints.

Wagamama (Map pp104-5, pp100-1, pp98-9, pp102-3, p111, p112, pp108-9; www.wagamama.com) Japanese noodles taking over the world from their London base.

Zizzi (Map pp104-5, pp100-1, pp102-3, p111, p112, pp108-9; www.zizzi.co.uk) Wood-fired pizza.

bets are the chains (above) or the **Konditor & Cook** (Map p112; ☎ 0845 262 3030; 30 St Mary Axe EC3; ☪ Liverpool St) bakery in the Gherkin.

Hoxton, Shoreditch & Spitalfields

From the hit-and-miss Bangladeshi restaurants of Brick Lane to the Vietnamese strip on Kingsland Rd, and the Jewish, Spanish, French, Italian and Greek eateries in between, the East End's cuisine is as multicultural as its residents.

BUDGET

Brick Lane Beigel Bake (Map p112; ☎ 7729 0616; 159 Brick Lane E2; most bagels less than £2; ☎ 24hr; ☪ Liverpool St) A relic of London's Jewish East End, it's more a takeaway than a cafe and sells dirt-cheap bagels. They're a top snack on a bellyful of booze.

Cafe Bangla (Map p112; ☎ 7247 7885; 128 Brick Ln E1; mains £4-13; ☪ Liverpool St) Dining in the famous curry houses of Brick Lane is inevitably more about the experience than the food. Amongst the hordes of practically interchangeable restaurants, this one stands out for its murals of scantily-clad women riding dragons, alongside a tribute to Princess Di.

Song Que (Map pp96-7; ☎ 7613 3222; 134 Kingsland Rd E2; mains £5-7; ☪ Old St) If you arrive after 7.30pm, expect to queue as this humble eatery has already had its cover blown as one of the best Vietnamese in London. There's never much time to admire the institutional-green walls, fake lobsters and bizarre horse portrait, as you'll be shunted out shortly after your last bite.

Macondo (Map p112; ☎ 7729 1119; 8-9 Hoxton Sq N1; mains £5-8; ☎ 9.30am-11pm Sun-Thu, to midnight Fri &

Sat; ☪ Old St) A welcome respite from the full English breakfast, Macondo brings some Latin loving to eggs on toast, transforming it into eggs on tortilla with spicy *tomatillo* or bitter *anchilo* pepper sauce. Beverages range from excellent coffee to cocktails, best enjoyed on a sunny day on the outdoor tables facing the square.

We also recommend **S&M Cafe** (Map p112; ☎ 7247 2252; 48 Brushfield St E1; ☪ Liverpool St) – flick to p158.

MIDRANGE

Story Deli (Map p112; ☎ 7247 3137; 3 Dray Walk; pizzas £9-10; ☪ Liverpool St) This organic cafe 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. The pizzas are thin and crispy, and you can rest assured that anything fishy has been sustainably caught.

Hoxton Apprentice (Map p112; ☎ 7749 2828; 16 Hoxton Sq N1; mains £9-17; ☪ Old St) Similar in concept to Fifteen (below), both professionals and apprentices work the kitchen in this restaurant, housed appropriately enough in a former Victorian primary school. The music selection's awful (hotel lobby piano when we visited), but the prices are reasonable and it's under the auspices of the Training For Life charity.

ourpick Fifteen (Map p112; ☎ 0871-330 1515; www.fifteen.net; 15 Westland Pl N1; breakfast £2-8.50, trattoria £9-18, restaurant £22-24; ☪ Old St) It can only be a matter of time before Jamie Oliver becomes Sir Jamie. His culinary philanthropy started at Fifteen, set up to give unemployed young

people a shot at a career. The Italian food is beyond excellent and, surprisingly, even those on limited budgets can afford a visit. In the trattoria, a croissant and coffee will only set you back £3.50, while a £9 pasta makes for a delicious lunch.

TOP END

Les Trois Garçons (Map p112; ☎ 7613 1924; 1 Club Row E1; mains £18-32; ☎ Liverpool St) The name may prepare you for the French menu, but nothing on earth could prepare you for the camp decor. A virtual menagerie of stuffed or bronze animals fills every surface, while chandeliers dangle between a set of suspended handbags. The food is good, if overpriced, and the small army of bow-tie-wearing waiters unobtrusively deliver complementary bread and tasty gifts from the kitchen.

South of the Thames

You'll find plenty of touristy eateries on the riverside between Westminster and Tower Bridges, making the most of the constant foot traffic and iconic London views. For a feed with a local feel, head to Borough Market, Bermondsey St or The Cut in Waterloo.

BUDGET

Konditor & Cook (Map p112; ☎ 7407 5100; 10 Stoney St SE1; snacks £2-5; ☎ London Bridge) The original location of arguably the best bakery in London, it serves excellent muffins, sweets, bread and coffee. There's only one table but everything is yours to take away.

Estrala Bar (Map p107; ☎ 7793 1051; 111-115 South Lambeth Rd SW8; tapas £2-8, mains £8-12; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner; ☎ Oval) In a Portuguese pocket of South London, Estrala's waistcoated waiters deliver the national dish, *bacalhau* (salt cod), in several different guises, along with excellent tapas.

Mesón Don Felipe (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7928 3237; 53 The Cut SE1; tapas £3-6; ☎ Waterloo) The Don is tops for tapas and an authentic Spanish atmosphere, helped by bright orange walls and theatrical but friendly staff. Serves are a decent size for the price, which explains why this place is always rammed with satisfied customers.

MIDRANGE

Bermondsey Kitchen (Map pp96-7; ☎ 7407 5719; 194 Bermondsey St SE1; mains £10-15; ☎ London Bridge) Smart but informal, this place sits somewhere between a restaurant and a gastropub,

serving cocktails and tapas all day. It does an outrageously tasty bouillabaisse, lunch specials under £10 and excellent brunch on the weekends.

Garrison (Map pp96-7; ☎ 7089 9355; 99-101 Bermondsey St SE1; mains £12-15; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner; ☎ London Bridge) It may be a gastropub but the ambience is more French country kitchen than London boozier, with soft colours and baskets of fresh vegetables proudly displayed. Vegetarians will find they're almost as well served by interesting, beautifully presented options as carnivores.

Delфина (Map pp96-7; ☎ 7357 0244; 50 Bermondsey St SE1; mains £13-16; ☎ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner 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 with more works.

Magdalen (Map p112; ☎ 7403 1342; 152 Tooley St SE1; mains £15-20; ☎ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat; ☎ London Bridge) Roasting up the best of the critters that walk, hop, flap and splash around these fair isles, Magdalen isn't the place to bring a vegetarian or a weight-conscious waif on a date. Carnivorous couplings, however, will appreciate the elegant room and traditional treats presented in interesting ways. Love that pork crackling!

TOP END

Oxo Tower Brasserie (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7803 3888; Barge House St SE1; 2 courses £20; ☎ Waterloo) The spectacular views are the big drawcard, so skip the restaurant and head for the slightly less extravagantly priced brasserie, or if you're not hungry, the bar. Italian with a twist is the focus of the very proficient kitchen.

Chelsea, Kensington & Knightsbridge

These highbrow neighbourhoods harbour some of London's very best (and priciest) restaurants. Perhaps the Chelsea toffs are secretly titillated by the foul-mouthed telechefs in their midst.

BUDGET

Jakob's (Map pp100-1; ☎ 7581 9292; 20 Gloucester Rd SW7; mains £4-10; ☎ Gloucester Rd) A charismatic cafe/delicatessen serving a mixture of Armen-

ian, Persian and Mediterranean dishes including salads, falafel and quiches.

Orsini (Map pp102-3; ☎ 7581 5553; 8a Thurloe Pl SW3; snacks £2-6, mains £7-12; ☉ South Kensington) Marinated in authentic Italian charm, this tiny family-run eatery serves excellent espresso and deliciously fresh baguettes stuffed with Parma ham and mozzarella.

Made in Italy (Map pp102-3; ☎ 7352 1880; 249 King's Rd SW3; pizzas £5-13, mains £15-19; ☉ Sloane Sq) Pizza is served by the tasty quarter-metre at this traditional trattoria. Sit on the Chelsea roof terrace and dream of Napoli.

Ottolenghi Belgravia (Map pp100-1; ☎ 7823 2707; 13 Motcomb St SW1; ☉ Knightsbridge); Kensington (Map pp100-1; ☎ 7937 0003; 1 Holland St W8; ☉ High St Kensington) is another decent option. See p158.

MIDRANGE

Tom's Kitchen (Map pp102-3; ☎ 7349 0202; 27 Cale St SW3; breakfast £2-11; lunch 2 courses £14; mains £17-22; ☎ breakfast Mon-Fri, lunch & dinner daily; ☉ South Kensington) Tom Aikens is the notorious kitchen firebrand who's been gradually taking over Chelsea; around the corner you'll find his Michelin-starred, mortgage-your-mother eponymous restaurant as well as his blinged-up fish diner. This excellent, informal British/French restaurant sits between somewhere between the two: dinners can be pricey but a delicious breakfast or lunch needn't break the bank.

TOP END

Boxwood Cafe (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7235 1010; Berkeley Hotel, Wilton Pl SW1; mains £16-31; ☉ Knightsbridge) A New York-style cafe 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'.

Gordon Ramsay (Map pp102-3; ☎ 7352 4441; www.gordonramsay.com; 68 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 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 the telly, you won't argue.

Notting Hill, Bayswater & Paddington

Notting Hill teems with good places to eat, from cheap takeaways to atmospheric pubs

and restaurants worthy of the fine-dining tag. Queensway has the best strip of Asian restaurants this side of Soho.

BUDGET

Kam Tong (Map pp100-1; ☎ 7229 6065; 59-63 Queensway W2; yum cha £2-3, mains £7-14; ☉ Bayswater) When most of the clientele are actually Chinese, you know you're on to a good thing, which can't be said for the trendy dumpling chains that have sprung up around London recently. Kam Tong serves genuine Cantonese dishes and wonderful yum cha, but we can't help wondering where the pushy trolley dollies are (you order from a menu instead).

Kiasu (Map pp100-1; ☎ 7727 8810; 48 Queensway W2; mains £6-8; ☉ Bayswater) Local Malaysians and Singaporeans rated rate this place highly, as do those who know a tasty cheap thing when they see it. Kiasu serves 'Food from the Straits of Malacca'. You'll also find Thai and Vietnamese food on the menu, but it's hard to go past the delicious and filling *laksa*.

Also recommended:

Ottolenghi (Map pp100-1; ☎ 7727 1121; 63 Ledbury Rd W11; ☉ Notting Hill Gate) See p158.

S&M Cafe (Map pp100-1; ☎ 8968 8898; 268 Portobello Rd W10; ☉ Ladbroke Grove) See p158.

MIDRANGE

Geales (Map pp100-1; ☎ 7727 7528; 2 Farmer St W8; mains £8-17; ☎ closed lunch Mon; ☉ Notting Hill Gate) It may have opened in 1939 as a humble chippie, but now it's so much more. Fresh fish from sustainable fisheries in Devon and Cornwall star in a variety of guises – either battered and British or with an Italian sensibility. Tables spill out onto the pleasant side street.

Electric Brasserie (Map pp100-1; ☎ 7908 9696; 191 Portobello Rd W11; breakfast £2-8, mains £9-28; ☉ Ladbroke Grove) The leather-and-cream look is suitably

TOP FIVE AFFORDABLE GRUB AT SWISH SPOTS

- Breakfast or a trattoria pasta at **Fifteen** (p155)
- The Parlour at **Sketch** (p152)
- Tapa Room at **Providores** (p158)
- The Bakery at **National Gallery Dining Rooms** (p153)
- Pretheatre menu at **Wild Honey** (p152)

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, more moody dinner.

Marylebone

You won't go too far wrong planting yourself on a table anywhere along Marylebone's charming High Street.

Providores and Tapa Room (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7935 6175; 109 Marylebone High St W1; mains £18-25; ☎ Baker St) New Zealand's greatest culinary export since kiwifruit, chef Peter Gordon works his fusion magic here, matching his creations with exclusively NZ wine. Downstairs, in a cute play on words, the Tapa Room (as in the Polynesian bark-cloth) serves sophisticated tapas, along with excellent brunch on the weekends.

North London

Allow at least an evening to explore Islington's Upper St, along with the lanes leading off it. Camden's great for cheap eats, while neighbouring Chalk Farm and Primrose Hill are salted with gastropubs and upmarket restaurants.

BUDGET

Breakfast Club (Map pp98-9; ☎ 7226 5454; 31 Camden Passage N1; mains £5-9; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-10pm Sat & Sun; ☎ Angel) Eighties survivors will immediately clock this place and, with dishes like *Hungry Like The Wolf* (the big breakfast) and *When Haloumi Met Salad*, they'll feel right at home.

Roobüroo (Map pp98-9; ☎ 7278 8100; 21 Chapel Market N1; mains £5-10; ☎ Angel) 'Waltzing Matilda' isn't in this particular Roo's repertoire, but a hell of a lot of piquant chillies, fresh spices and interesting north and south Indian dishes are. The name means face to face (although you might want to down a breath mint first if you've just finished a meal here).

Ottolenghi (Map pp98-9; ☎ 7226 5454; 287 Upper St N1; mains £5-10; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Sat, 9am-7pm Sun; ☎ Angel) Mountains of meringues tempt you through the door, where a sumptuous array of sweet and savoury bakery treats greets you. The big communal table is great for conversation surfing (aka eavesdropping). Dinners are as light and tasty as the oh-so-white interior design.

S&M Cafe (Map pp98-9; ☎ 7359 5361; 4/6 Essex Rd N1; mains £6-10; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner; ☎ Angel)

The S&M refers to sausages and mash in this cool diner (which featured in the movie *Quadrophenia*) that won't give your wallet a spanking. There's a range of sausages, mash and gravies.

Le Mercury (Map pp98-9; ☎ 7354 4088; 140A Upper St N1; mains £6-10; ☎ Highbury & Islington) A cosy Gaelic haunt ideal for a romantic dalliance, given that it appears much more expensive than it is. Sunday lunch by the open fire upstairs is a treat, although you'll have to book.

Another place you could try is **Macondo** (Map pp98-9; ☎ 7226 7275; 20 Camden Passage N1; ☎ Angel). See p155.

MIDRANGE

Konstam at the Prince Albert (Map pp98-9; ☎ 7833 5040; 2 Acton St WC1; mains £11-17; ☎ closed Sundays; ☎ Kings Cross) As London a restaurant as you can get, chef Oliver Rowe sources all but a few of his ingredients from within the tube map. Sit below the bizarrely elegant draped metal beads and watch your often adventurous London-centric dish take shape in the open kitchen.

Duke of Cambridge (Map pp98-9; ☎ 7359 3066; 30 St Peter's St N1; mains £12-17; ☎ Angel) Pioneers in bringing sustainability to the table, this tucked-away gastropub serves only organic food, wine and beer, fish from sustainable sources and locally sourced fruit, vegetables and meat.

our pick Engineer (Map pp98-9; ☎ 7722 0950; 65 Gloucester Ave NW1; mains £13-17; ☎ Chalk Farm) One of London's original gastropubs, Engineer has been serving up consistently good international cuisine to hip north Londoners for a fair while now. The courtyard garden is a real treat on balmy summer nights.

Greenwich

Inside (Map p111; ☎ 8265 5060; 19 Greenwich South St SE10; mains £13-17; ☎ /DLR Greenwich) Cap off your genteel Greenwich visit with white linen and smart food (British with a dash of Turkish) in this elegant dining room. The lunch special (two courses for £12) is a steal.

Self-Catering

There are supermarkets absolutely everywhere in central London. Look out for the big names: Waitrose, Tesco, Sainsbury's, Marks & Spencer, Morrisons and Asda.

Planet Organic Bayswater (Map pp100-1; ☎ 7727 2227; 42 Westbourne Grove W2; ☎ Bayswater); Fitzrovia (Map

pp104-5; ☎ 7436 1929; 22 Torrington Pl WC1; ☉ Goodge St); Fulham (Map pp102-3; ☎ 7731 7222; 25 Effie Rd; ☉ Fulham Broadway); Islington (Map pp98-9; 64 Essex Rd, N1; ☉ Angel) As the name suggests, everything in this cafe/supermarket is organic. Fresh veges are sourced (where possible) directly from British farms.

La Fromagerie Cafe (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7935 0341; 2-6 Moxon St W1; mains £8-13; ☉ Baker St) This providore-cafe has bowls of delectable salads, antipasto, peppers and beans 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.

DRINKING

As long as there's been a city, Londoners have loved to drink – and, as history shows, often immoderately. The pub is the focus of social life and there's always one near at hand. When the sun shines, drinkers spill out into the streets, parks and squares as well. It was only in 2008 that drinking was banned on the tube!

Soho is undoubtedly the heart of bar culture, with enough variety to cater to all tastes. Camden's great for grungy boozers and rock kids, although it's facing stiff competition on the Bohemian-cool front from the venues around Hoxton and Shoreditch.

Now that Princes William and Harry have hit their stride, the Sloane Ranger scene has been reborn in exclusive venues in South Ken(sington), although the 'Turbo Sloanes' now count megarich commoners among their numbers.

Us mere mortals will find plenty of pub-crawl potential in places like Clerkenwell, Islington, Southwark, Notting Hill, Earl's Court...hell, it's just not that difficult. The reviews below are simply to make sure you don't miss out on some of the most historic, unusual, best-positioned or excellent examples of the genre.

St James's & Mayfair

Absolut Ice Bar (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7478 8910; 31-33 Heddon St W1; admission Thu-Sat £15, Sun-Wed £12; ☉ noon-midnight; ☉ Piccadilly Circus) At -6°C, this bar made entirely of ice is literally the coolest in London. Entry is limited to 40 minutes and your ticket includes a vodka cocktail served in an ice glass. 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, sure, but a good one, and there are plenty of places nearby that charge the same for a cocktail alone.

Galvin at Windows (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7208 4021; The Hilton, 22 Park Ln W1; ☉ Hyde Park Corner) Drinks are well priced, but the view's astounding from this 28th-floor eyrie.

West End

CAFES

Flat White (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7734 0370; 17 Berwick St W1; ☉ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat & Sun; ☉ Piccadilly Circus) Trailblazers of the unexpected but thoroughly welcome Kiwi invasion of Soho cafes, Flat White is both named after and delivers the holy grail of Antipodean coffee. The beach scenes on the walls are a comfort on a cold day.

Monmouth Coffee Company (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7379 3516; 27 Monmouth St WC2; snacks £1-2; ☉ Covent Garden) While the array of treats displayed on the counter is alluring, it's the coffee that's the star, nay god, here. Chat to a caffeinated stranger on one of the tight tables at the back, or grab a takeaway and slink off to a nearby lane for your fix.

BARS & PUBS

Be At One (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7240 9889; 23 Wellington St WC2; happy hours 5-8pm Mon & Tue, to 7pm Wed-Sat, 6pm-close Sun; ☉ Covent Garden) Forgive the silly name and make the most of the generous happy hours (two cocktails for £6.50).

Coach & Horses (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7437 5920; 29 Greek St W1; ☉ Leicester Sq) This Soho institution has been patronised by Sigmund Freud, Francis Bacon, Dylan Thomas, Peter Cooke and Peter O'Toole. The Wednesday night East End sing-along is tops.

Gordon's Wine Bar (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7930 1408; 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. In summer, the crowd spills out into Embankment Gardens.

Lamb & Flag (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7497 9504; 33 Rose St WC2; ☉ Covent Garden) Everyone's Covent Garden 'find', this popular historic pub is often jammed. It was built in 1623, formerly called the 'Bucket of Blood'.

Queen Mary (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7240 9404; Waterloo Pier WC2; ☉ Embankment) Board this steamer for a

welcoming public atmosphere accompanied by great views of the London Eye and the South Bank.

Holborn & Clerkenwell

Jerusalem Tavern (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7490 4281; 55 Britton St; ☉ Farringdon) Pick a wood-panelled cubbyhole to park yourself in 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, grapefruit or, if you're not feeling fruity, creamy ale or bitter.

Princess Louise (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7405 8816; 208 High Holborn WC1; ☉ Holborn) This late-19th-century Victorian boozier is arguably London's most beautiful pub. Spectacularly decorated with fine tiles, etched mirrors, plasterwork and a gorgeous central horseshoe bar, it gets packed with the after-work crowd.

The City

Vertigo 42 (Map p112; Tower 42, Old Broad St, EC2; ☉ Liverpool St) Book a two-hour slot in this 42nd-floor bar with vertiginous views across London.

Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese (Map pp104-5; Wine Office Ct, 145 Fleet St EC4; ☉ Holborn) Rebuilt six years after the Great Fire, it was popular with Dr Johnson, Thackeray, Dickens and the visiting Mark Twain. Touristy but always atmospheric and enjoyable for a pub meal.

Hoxton, Shoreditch & Spitalfields

Bar Music Hall (Map p112; ☎ 7729 7216; 134 Curtain Rd EC2; ☉ Old St) Keeping the East End music-hall tradition alive but with a modern twist, this roomy space with a central bar amuses the friendly punters with DJs and live bands. Music runs the gamut from punk to jazz to rock and disco.

Commercial Tavern (Map p112; ☎ 7247 1888; 142 Commercial St E1; ☉ Liverpool St) The zany decor's a thing of wonder in this reformed East End boozier. Check out the walls coated in buttons and jigsaw puzzle pieces. The little boy's room has been wallpapered like, well, a little boy's room: Popeye, astronauts and cyclists all make an appearance.

Grapeshots (Map p112; ☎ 7247 8215; 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, there's a decent wine list and the old-world ambience continues.

Loungelover (Map p112; ☎ 7012 1234; 1 Whitby St E1; ☎ 6pm-midnight Sun-Thu, to 1am Fri & Sat; ☉ Liverpool St)

Book a table, sip a cocktail and admire the Louis XIV chairs, the huge hippo head, the cage-turned-living room, the jewel-encrusted stag's head and the loopy chandeliers. Utterly fabulous.

Ten Bells (Map p112; ☎ 7366 1721; cnr Commercial & Fournier Sts E1; ☉ Liverpool St) The most famous Jack the Ripper pub, Ten Bells was patronised by his last victim before her grisly end, and possibly by the slayer himself. Admire the wonderful 18th-century tiles and ponder the past over a pint.

The following are all good stops on a Hoxton hop:

Bricklayer's Arms (Map p112; ☎ 7613 0469; 63 Charlotte Rd EC2; ☉ Old St) Back-street pub with an interesting crowd.

Favela Chic (Map p112; ☎ 7613 4228; 91-93 Great Eastern St EC2; entry £5-10 after 9pm; ☎ 5pm-1am Tue-Thu, to 2am Fri, 6pm-2am Sat; ☉ Old St) Ticks the following boxes: hip young things; crazy theme nights; lumberyard meets jungle decor; fun and funky music.

Mother (Map p112; ☎ 7613 0469; 333 Old St EC1; entry £5 Fri & Sat; ☉ Old St) Red-and-gold flocked wallpaper, chequerboard floors and live alternative music and DJs on weekends. Downstairs, 333 is a part nightclub/part live venue.

Red Lion (Map p112; ☎ 7729 7920; 41 Hoxton St N1; ☉ Old St) Old corner pub with eclectic furniture and cheap drinks.

Zigfried Von Underbelly (Map p112; ☎ 7613 1988; 11 Hoxton Sq N1; ☉ Old St) Furnished like an oversized lounge room (check out the disturbing family portrait over the fireplace), it's simultaneously the coolest and the most fun of the Hoxton Sq venues.

South of the Thames

Anchor (Map p112; ☎ 7407 1577; 34 Park St SE1; ☉ London Bridge) A 17th-century boozier just east of the Globe Theatre, it has a terrace offering superb views over the Thames. Dr Johnson was once a regular.

George Inn (Map p112; ☎ 7407 2056; Talbot Yard, 77 Borough High St SE1; ☉ London Bridge or Borough) Tucked away in a cobbled courtyard is London's last surviving galleried coaching inn, dating from 1677 and now belonging to the National Trust. Dickens and Shakespeare used to prop up the bar here (not together, obviously). There are outdoor tables for sunny days.

Chelsea, Kensington & Knightsbridge

Bibendum Oyster Bar (Map pp102-3; ☎ 7581 5817; 81 Fulham Rd SW3; ☉ South Kensington) If rubber-clad

men happen to be your thing, slurp up a bivalve and knock back a champers in the foyer of the wonderful Art Nouveau Michelin House (1911). The Michelin Man is everywhere: in mosaics, stained glass, crockery and echoed in the architecture itself.

Notting Hill, Bayswater & Paddington

Trailer Happiness (Map pp100-1; ☎ 7727 2700; 177 Portobello Rd W11; ☉ Ladbroke Grove) Think shagpile carpets, 1960s California kitsch and trashy trailer-park glamour. Try the Tiki cocktails and share a flaming volcano bowl of Zombie with a friend to ensure your evening goes off with a bang.

Windsor Castle (Map pp100-1; ☎ 7243 9551; 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 of any pub in London. Thomas Paine (*The Rights of Man* writer) is rumoured to be buried in the cellar.

Marylebone

Artesian (Map pp108-9; Langham Hotel, 1C Portland Pl W1; ☉ Oxford Circus) For a dose of colonial glamour with a touch of the orient, the sumptuous bar at the Langham hits the mark. Rum is the speciality here – award-winning cocktails (£15) are concocted from the 60 varieties on offer.

Heights (Map pp108-9; 7580 0111; St George's Hotel, 14 Langham Pl W1; ☉ Oxford Circus) Take the lift up to this understated bar with huge windows to showcase the panorama. It's an unusual view, managing to miss most of the big sights, but impressive nonetheless.

North London

EUSTON & KING'S CROSS

Big Chill House (Map pp98-9; 257-259 Pentonville Rd N1; entry £5 after 10pm Fri & Sat; ☉ King's Cross) Come the weekend, the only remotely chilled-out space in this busy bar, split over two levels, is its first-rate and generously proportioned rooftop terrace.

CAMDEN & ISLINGTON

Albert & Pearl (Map pp98-9; ☎ 7354 9993; 181 Upper St; ☉ Highbury & Islington) The chap behind Fabric (p163) also has a finger in this chic, cocktail-filled pie (pie with cocktails – now there's an idea). DJs play until the small hours on Friday and Saturday nights (admission £3 after midnight).

Lock Tavern (Map pp98-9; 35 Chalk Farm Rd NW1; ☉ Camden Town) The archetypal Camden pub, the Lock has both a rooftop terrace and a beer garden and attracts an interesting crowd with its mix of ready conviviality, pleasant surroundings and regular live music.

Proud (Map pp98-9; Stables Market NW1; admission £10 after 7.30pm Mon-Sat; ☉ Camden Town) No, despite the name it's not a gay bar. Proud occupies a former horse hospital within Stables Market, with booths in the stalls, ice-cool rock photography on the walls and deckchairs printed with images of Marilyn Manson and Pete Doherty. Spin around the gallery during the day or enjoy bands at night.

HAMPSTEAD & HIGHGATE

Holly Bush (Map pp96-7; ☎ 7435 2892; 22 Holly Mount NW3; ☉ Hampstead) Dating from the early 19th century, this beautiful pub has a secluded hill-top location, open fires in winter and a knack for making you stay a bit longer than you had intended. It's above Heath St, reached via the Holly Bush Steps.

Flask (Map pp96-7; ☎ 8340 7260; 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 (p131).

Spaniard's Inn (Map pp96-7; ☎ 8731 6571; Spaniard's Rd NW3; ☉ Hampstead, then bus 21) A marvellous tavern that dates from 1585, complete with dubious claims that Dick Turpin, the dandy highwayman, was born here and used it as a hideout. More savoury sorts like Dickens, Shelley, Keats and Byron also availed themselves of its charms. There's a big, blissful garden and good food.

Greenwich

Trafalgar Tavern (Map p111; ☎ 8858 2909; Park Row SE10; DLR Cutty Sark) An 1837 Regency-style pub that stands above the site of the Placentia Palace where Henry VIII was born. Dickens, Gladstone and Disraeli have all darkened its doors, although they wouldn't have had the wonderful views of the O2 and Canary Wharf highrises to admire.

ENTERTAINMENT

From West End luvvies to End End geezers, Londoners have always loved a spectacle. With bear baiting and public executions no

longer an option, they've learnt to make do with having the world's best theatres, night-clubs and live music scene to divert them. Yet the gladiatorial contests that the Romans brought to these shores still survive on the football fields, especially when Chelsea goes head-to-head with Arsenal.

For a comprehensive list of what to do on any given night, check out *Time Out*. The listings in the free tube papers are also handy.

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 Theatre** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 7565 5000; www.royalcourttheatre.com; Sloane Sq SW1; ☎ Sloane Sq), the patron of new British writing; the **National Theatre** (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7452 3000; www.nationaltheatre.org.uk; South Bank SE1; ☎ Waterloo), which has cheaper tickets for both classics and new plays from some of the world's best companies; and the **Royal Shakespeare Company** (RSC; ☎ 0870 609 1110; www.rsc.org.uk), with productions of the Bard's classics and other quality stuff. Kevin Spacey continues his run as artistic director (and occasional performer)

at the **Old Vic** (Map pp104-5; ☎ 0870-060 6628; www.oldvictheatre.com; The Cut SE1; ☎ Waterloo).

On performance days, you can buy half-price tickets for West End productions (cash only) from the official **Leicester Square Half-Price Ticket Booth** (Map pp108-9; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Sat, noon-3pm Sun; Leicester Sq; ☎ 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 pp98-9; ☎ 7359 4404; www.almeida.co.uk; Almeida St N1; ☎ Highbury & Islington), **Battersea Arts Centre** (Map pp96-7; ☎ 7223 2223; www.bac.org.uk; Lavender Hill SW11; ☎ Clapham Junction) and the **Young Vic** (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7922 2920; www.youngvic.org; 66 The Cut 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).

Other interesting companies, such as the not-for-profit **Donmar Warehouse** (Map pp108-9; ☎ 0870-060 6624; www.donmarwarehouse.com; 41 Earlham St WC2; ☎ Covent Garden) and the **Menier Chocolate Factory** (Map p112; ☎ 7907 7060; www.menierchocolatefactory.com; 55 Southwark St SE1; ☎ London Bridge), have started Off West End and ended up with West End reputations.

As far as the blockbuster musicals go, you can be fairly confident that *Les Miserables* and *Phantom of the Opera* will still be chugging

NOVEL NIGHTS OUT

It seems that some of the cool kids are bored with simply 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 haunts.

Bloomsbury Bowling Lanes (Map pp98-9; ☎ 7183 1979; nr Bedford Way & Tavistock Sq WC1; ☎ noon-2am Mon-Thu, to 3am Fri & Sat, 1-10pm Sun; ☎ Russell Sq) With eight 10-pin bowling lanes, a 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 are also private karaoke rooms, a cinema screening independent movies, DJs and up-and-coming live bands.

Lucky Voice (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7439 3660; 52 Poland St W1F; 4-person booth per hr £20-40; ☎ 5.30pm-1am Mon-Thu, 3pm-1am Fri & Sat, 3-10.30pm Sun; ☎ Oxford Circus) Moulded on the private karaoke bars of Tokyo, superstylish Lucky Voice is a low-lit maze of dark walls with hidden doors revealing snug leather-clad soundproofed booths for your secret singalong. Select one of 50,000 songs from a touch screen, pick up a microphone and you're away. In the Super Lucky rooms, there are wigs and blow-up guitars to enhance your performance. Drinks and bento boxes are ordered by the touch of a button; expect to spend a fortune in Dutch courage.

Roller Disco (Map p107; ☎ 0844-736 5375; www.rollerdisco.info; Renaissance Rooms, off Wandsworth Rd SW8; admission incl skate hire £10-13; ☎ 8pm-midnight Thu, to 2am Fri & Sat; ☎ Vauxhall) Remember those adolescent roller discos you used to go to? Well, this is your chance to dust off your skating skills and roll to a changing soundtrack of disco, funk, house, garage and R&B. Dressing up like a twat is encouraged.

along, as well as the new revival of *Oliver!* For a comprehensive look at what's being staged where, visit www.officiallondontheatre.co.uk, www.theatremonkey.com or <http://london.broadway.com>.

Nightclubs

London's had a lot of practice perfecting the art of clubbing – Samuel Pepys used the term in 1660! – and the volume and variety of venues in today's city is staggering. Clubland's no longer confined to the West End, with mega-clubs scattered throughout the city wherever there's a venue big enough, cheap enough or quirky enough to hold them. Some run their own regular weekly schedule, while others host promoters on an ad hoc basis. The big nights are Friday and Saturday, although you'll find some of the most cutting-edge sessions mid-week. Admission prices vary widely; it's often cheaper to arrive early or prebook tickets.

Cargo (Map p112; ☎ 7739 3440; www.cargo-london.com; 83 Rivington St EC2; admission free-£16; Ⓧ 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.

our pick The End (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7419 9199; www.endclub.com; 18 West Central St WC1; admission £6-16; Ⓧ from around 10.30pm Mon-Sat, 5.30am-midday Sun; Ⓧ Tottenham Court Rd) The End offers an eclectic range of cutting-edge nights starting with Durrr on Mondays, devoted to underground music, live acts and kids in skinny jeans. If you've got a Wednesday drum and bass itch, Swerve's where you can scratch it, while the aptly named Jaded kicks off at 5.30am Sundays.

Fabric (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7336 8898; www.fabric.london.com; 77A Charterhouse St EC1; admission £13-16; Ⓧ 10pm-6am Fri, 11pm-8am Sat; Ⓧ Farringdon) In 2008 Fabric was once again voted the world's best club by *DJ* magazine. Fabric's not a meat market but its three dance floors are based in a converted meat cold-store opposite the actual Smithfield meat market. Friday's FabricLive offers an 'urban music sound-clash' (drum and bass, breakbeats, hip-hop and live acts), while Saturdays see house, techno and electro.

Guanabara (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7242 8600; www.guanabara.co.uk; cnr Parker St & Drury Lane WC2; admission £5-10; Ⓧ Covent Garden) Brazil comes to London with live music seven nights a week. On Wednesdays enjoy an authentic *Roda de*

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 Blythly 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.

Agent Lynch (www.agentlynch.com)

Immodesty Blaize (www.immodestyblaize.com)

Jitterbugs (www.jitterbugs.co.uk)

Lady Luck (www.ladyluckclub.co.uk)

Madame Jo Jo's (www.madamejojoss.com)

Velvet London (www.myspace.com/velvetlondon)

Viva Cake (www.myspace.com/vivacakebitches)

Volupté (www.volupte-lounge.com)

Samba, tuck into Brazilian snacks, sip on a *Caipirinha* and shake your booty. Admission is free before 9pm.

Mass (Map pp96-7; ☎ 7738 7875; www.mass-club.com; St Matthew's Church, Brixton Hill SW2; admission £5-10; Ⓧ 10pm-6am Fri & Sat; Ⓧ Brixton) The congregation's swollen at this Brixton church under its new high priests, with regular services of live music and club nights.

Ministry of Sound (Map pp104-5; ☎ 0870 060 0010; <http://club.ministryofsound.com>; 103 Gaunt St SE1; admission £12-20; Ⓧ 10pm-6am Fri, 11pm-7am Sat; Ⓧ Elephant & Castle) Where the global brand started, it's London's most famous club and still packs in a diverse crew with big local and international names.

Plastic People (Map p112; 147-149 Curtain Rd EC2; admission £5-13; Ⓧ Old St) Taking the directive 'underground club' literally, Plastic People provides a low-ceilinged subterranean den of dubstep, techno, electro and no-frills fun times.

SeOne (Map p112; ☎ 0870 246 2050; www.seone-london.com; 41-43 Saint Thomas St SE1; Ⓧ London Bridge) Under the railway arches of London Bridge, this mammoth venue can (and frequently does) cram in 3000 up-for-it ravers.

Live Music

ROCK & JAZZ

While London may have stopped swinging in the 1960s, every subsequent generation has given birth to a new set of bands in the city's

thriving live venues: punk in the 1970s, New Romantics in the 1980s, Brit Pop in the 1990s and the current crop of skinny-jeaned rockers and electro acts thrilling the scenesters today. You'll find interesting young bands gigging around venues all over the city. Big-name gigs sell out quickly, so check www.seetickets.com before you travel.

100 Club (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7636 0933; www.the100club.co.uk; 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.

Barfly (Map pp98-9; ☎ 0844-847 2424; www.barflyclub.com; 49 Chalk Farm Rd NW1; ☎ Chalk Farm) Pleasantly grungy, and the place to see the best new bands. The same crew run a couple of other joints around town.

Brixton Academy (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0844-477 2000; www.brixton-academy.co.uk; 211 Stockwell Rd SW9; ☎ Brixton) This Grade 2-listed art-deco venue is always winning awards for 'best live venue' (something to do with the artfully sloped floor, perhaps) and hosts big-name acts in a relatively intimate setting (5000 capacity).

Dublin Castle (Map pp98-9; ☎ 7485 1773; www.thedublincastle.com; 94 Parkway NW1; ☎ Camden Town) There's live punk or alternative music most nights in this pub's back room.

Forum (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0844-847 2405; www.kentishtownforum.com; 9-17 Highgate Rd NW5; ☎ Kentish Town) A grand old theatre and one of London's best large venues.

Hope And Anchor (Map pp98-9; ☎ 7700 0550; 207 Upper St; admission free-£6; ☎ Angel) Live music's still the focus of the pub that hosted the first London gigs of Joy Division and U2 (only nine people showed up).

Jazz Cafe (Map pp98-9; ☎ 7485 6834; 5 Parkway NW1; ☎ Camden Town) Jazz is just one part of the picture at this intimate club that stages a full roster of rock, pop, hip-hop and dance, including famous names.

Koko (Map pp98-9; ☎ 0870 432 5527; www.koko.uk.com; 1A Camden High St NW1; ☎ Mornington Cres) Occupying the grand Camden Palace theatre, Koko hosts live bands most nights and the regular Club NME (£5) on Friday.

Ronnie Scott's (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7439 0747; www.ronniescotts.co.uk; 47 Frith St W1; ☎ Leicester Sq) London's legendary jazz club has been pulling in the hep cats since 1959.

Shepherd's Bush Empire (Map pp96-7; ☎ 8354 3300; www.shepherds-bush-empire.co.uk; Shepherd's Bush

Green W12; ☎ Shepherd's Bush) A slightly dishevelled, midsize theatre that hosts some terrific bands.

See also Bar Music Hall (p160), Mother and 333 (p160), and Proud (p161).

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. Keep an eye out for the free (or nearly so) lunchtime concerts held in many of the city's churches.

Barbican Centre (Map p112; ☎ 0845 120 7500; www.barbican.org.uk; Silk St EC2; ☎ Barbican) This hulking complex has a full program of film, music, theatre, art and dance including loads of concerts from the London Symphony Orchestra, which is based here.

Southbank Centre (Map pp104-5; ☎ 0871-663 2509; www.southbankcentre.co.uk; South Bank; ☎ Waterloo) Home to the London's Philharmonic Orchestra, Sinfonietta and the Philharmonia Orchestra, amongst others, this centre has three premier venues: the **Royal Festival Hall** (Map pp104-5), the smaller **Queen Elizabeth Hall** (Map pp104-5) and **Purcell Room** (Map pp104-5), which hosts classical, opera, jazz and choral music. The precinct is a riverside people-watching mecca of shops and restaurants. Look out for free recitals in the foyer.

Royal Albert Hall (Map pp100-1; ☎ 7589 8212; www.royalalberthall.com; Kensington Gore SW7; ☎ South Kensington) A splendid circular Victorian arena that hosts classical concerts and the occasional contemporary act, but is best known as the venue for the Proms.

Opera & Dance

Coliseum (Map pp108-9; ☎ 0871-911 0200; www.eno.org; St Martin's Lane WC2; tickets £10-85; ☎ Leicester Sq) Home of the progressive English National Opera; all performances are in English.

Royal Opera House (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7304 4000; www.royaloperahouse.org; Bow St WC2; tickets £5-190; ☎ Covent Garden) The gleaming Royal Opera House has been attracting a younger audience since its £213-million millennium redevelopment, which also seems to have breathed new life into its programming. The Royal Ballet, Britain's premier classical ballet company, is also based here.

Sadler's Wells (Map pp98-9; ☎ 0844-412 4300; www.sadlers-wells.com; Rosebery Ave EC1; tickets £10-49; ☎ An-

gel) A glittering modern venue that was in fact first established in the 17th century, Sadler's Wells has been given much credit for bringing modern dance to the mainstream.

Comedy

When London's comics aren't being terribly clever on TV, you might find them doing stand-up somewhere in your neighbourhood. There are numerous venues to choose from, and many pubs getting in on the act.

99 Club (☎ 7739 5706; www.the99club.co.uk; admission £10-25) Not quite the famous 100 Club, this virtual venue takes over various bars around town from Tuesday to Sunday night, with four rival clones on Saturdays.

Comedy Cafe (Map p112; ☎ 7739 5706; www.comedycafe.co.uk; 66-68 Rivington St EC2; admission free-£15; ☉ Old St) Have dinner and watch some comedy; take to the stage on Wednesday if you're brave/foolhardy/drunk.

Comedy Store (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7839 6642; www.thecomedystore.co.uk; 1A Oxendon St SW1; admission £13-18; ☉ Piccadilly Circus) One of London's first comedy clubs, featuring the capital's most famous improvisers, the Comedy Store Players, on Wednesdays and Sundays.

Hen & Chickens (Map pp98-9; ☎ 7704 2001; www.henandchickens.com; 109 St Paul's Rd N1; admission £10-18; ☉ Highbury & Islington) Catch a chuckle in the theatre above this Islington boozier.

Soho Theatre (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7478 0100; www.sohotheatre.com; 21 Dean St W1; ☉ Tottenham Court Rd) Where grownup comedians graduate to once they start pulling the crowds.

Cinemas

Glitzy premieres usually take place in one of the mega multiplexes in Leicester Sq.

For less mainstream movies try **Curzon Cinemas** (☎ 0870 756 4621; www.curzoncinemas.com; tickets £8-12) Chelsea (Map pp102-3; 206 Kings Rd SW3; ☉ Sloane Sq); Mayfair (Map pp104-5; 38 Curzon St W1; ☉ Green Park); Renoir (Map pp98-9; Brunswick Sq WC1; ☉ Russell Sq); Soho (Map pp108-9; 99 Shaftesbury Ave W1; ☉ Leicester Sq). They're some of a clutch of independent cinemas spread throughout the capital.

BFI Southbank (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7928 3232; Belvedere Rd SE1; tickets £9; ☉ Waterloo) A film-lover's fantasy, it screens some 2000 flicks a year, ranging from classics to foreign art house. There's also the Mediatheque viewing stations, where you can explore the British Film Institute's extensive archive of movies and watch whatever you like for free.

BFI IMAX (Map pp104-5; ☎ 0870-787 2525; www.bfi.org.uk/imax; Waterloo Rd SE1; tickets £13; ☉ Waterloo) Watch 3D movies and cinema releases on the UK's biggest screen: 20m high (nearly five double-decker buses) and 26m wide.

Electric (Map pp100-1; ☎ 7908 9696; www.electriccinema.co.uk; 191 Portobello Rd W11; tickets £13-15; ☉ Ladbroke Grove) Grab a glass of wine from the bar, head to your leather sofa (£30) and snuggle down to watch a flick. All cinemas should be like this. Tickets are cheapest on Mondays.

Sport

As the capital of a football-mad nation, you can expect London to be brimming over with sporting spectacles during the cooler months. The Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Championships (p136) is one of the biggest events on the city's summer calendar.

FOOTBALL

Tickets for Premier League football matches are ridiculously hard to come by for casual fans these days, but if you want to try your luck, the contacts for London's Premiership clubs are listed here:

Arsenal (☎ 7704 4040; www.arsenal.com)

Chelsea (☎ 0870 300 2322; www.chelseafc.com)

Fulham (☎ 0870 442 1234; www.fulhamfc.com)

Tottenham Hotspur (☎ 0870 420 5000; www.tottenhamhotspur.com)

West Ham United (☎ 0870 112 2700; www.whufc.com)

RUGBY

Twickenham (☎ 0870 405 2000; www.rfu.com; Rugby Rd, Twickenham; tickets £10-45, more for internationals; 📍 Twickenham) is the home of English rugby union, but as with football, tickets for tests are difficult to get unless you have contacts. The ground also boasts the **World Rugby Museum** (☎ 0870 405 2001; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun), which can be combined with a tour of the stadium (adult/child £10/7; bookings recommended).

CRICKET

Cricket is as popular as ever in the land of its origin. Test matches take place at two venerable grounds: **Lord's Cricket Ground** (Map pp96-7; ☎ 7616 8500; www.lords.org; St John's Wood Rd NW8; ☉ St John's Wood) and the **Brit Oval** (Map pp96-7; ☎ 0871-246 1100; www.surreyccricket.com; Kennington SE11; ☉ Oval). Tickets are from £24 to £80, but if you're a fan it's worth it. If not, it's an expensive and protracted form of torture.

SHOPPING

Napoleon famously described Britain as a nation of shopkeepers, which doesn't sound at all bad to us! 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 Twinings tea, Paul Smith shirts, Royal Doulton china and Marmite. For bookshops, see p94.

Antiques & Crafts

Curios, baubles and period pieces abound along Camden Passage in Islington, Bermondsey Antiques Market and the Saturday market at Portobello (see opposite).

Greys Antiques Market (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7629 7034; 58 Davies St W1; ☉ Bond St) Top-hatted doormen welcome you to this wonderful building full of specialist stallholders. Make sure you head to the basement where the Tyburn River still runs through a channel in the floor.

London Silver Vaults (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7242 3844; 53-63 Chancery Lane WC2; ☉ Chancery Lane) Has 72 subterranean shops forming the world's largest collection of silver under one roof.

Department Stores

London's famous department stores are a tourist attraction in themselves, even if you don't intend to make a personal contribution to the orgy of consumption.

Harrods (Map pp100-1; ☎ 7730 1234; 87 Brompton Rd SW1; ☉ Knightsbridge) An overpriced theme park for fans of Britannia, Harrods is always crowded with slow tourists.

Harvey Nichols (Map pp100-1; ☎ 7235 5000; 109-125 Knightsbridge SW1; ☉ Knightsbridge) This is London's temple of high fashion, jewellery and perfume.

Fortnum & Mason (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7734 8040; 181 Piccadilly W1; ☉ Piccadilly Circus) The byword for quality and service from a bygone era, steeped in 300 years of tradition. It is particularly noted for its old-world, ground-floor food hall, where Britain's elite come for their cornflakes and bananas.

Liberty (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7734 1234; 214-220 Regent St W1; ☉ Oxford Circus) An irresistible blend of contemporary styles and indulgent pampering in a mock-Tudor fantasyland of carved dark wood. Access from Great Marlborough St.

Selfridges (Map pp104-5; ☎ 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.

Fashion

If there's a label worth having, you'll find it in central London. Oxford St is the place for High St fashion, while Regent St cranks it up a notch. Carnaby St is no longer the hip hub that it was in the 1960s, but the lanes around it still have some interesting boutiques. These days, stylists are more likely to seek out attention-grabbing new looks on Portobello Rd. For something different, head to Camden, Exmouth Market or Islington's Upper and Cross Sts.

Kensington High St has a nice mix of chains and boutiques, Bond St has designers galore, while Knightsbridge draws the hordes with quintessentially English department stores. Savile Row is famous for bespoke tailoring, and Jermyn St is the place for Sir to buy his smart clobber (particularly shirts).

Look out for dress agencies that sell second-hand designer clothes, bags and shoes – there are particularly rich pickings in the wealthier parts of town.

Albam (Map pp108-9; ☎ 3157 7000; 23 Beak St W1; ☉ Oxford Circus) UK-produced classic duds for stylish dudes.

Butler & Wilson Chelsea (Map pp102-3; ☎ 7352 3045; 189 Fulham Rd SW3; ☉ South Kensington); Mayfair (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7243 8811; 20 South Moulton St W1; ☉ Bond St) Camp costume jewellery, antique baubles and vintage clothing.

EC One Clerkenwell (Map pp98-9; ☎ 7713 6185; 41 Exmouth Market EC1; ☉ Farringdon); Notting Hill (Map pp100-1; ☎ 7243 8811; 184 Westbourne Grove W11; ☉ Notting Hill Gate) Husband-and-wife team Jos and Alison Skeates sell beautiful contemporary collections by British and international jewellery designers.

KJ's Laundry (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7486 7855; 74 Marylebone Ln W1; ☉ Bond St) Break out of the High St uniform in this women's boutique, which sources ranges from up-and-coming designers.

Lollipop London (Map pp98-9; ☎ 7226 4005; 114 Islington High St N1; ☉ Angel) A girlie boutique stocking shoes and accessories from independent designers.

Palette London (Map pp98-9; ☎ 7288 7428; 21 Canonbury Ln N1; ☉ Highbury & Islington) Fancy an

ROLL OUT THE BARROW

London has more than 350 markets selling everything from antiques and curios to flowers and fish. Some, such as Camden and Portobello Rd, are full of tourists, while others exist just for the locals and sell everything from lunch to underwear. Here's a sample:

Bermondsey Antiques Market (Map pp96-7; Bermondsey Sq SE1; ☎ 4am-1pm Fri; ☉ Borough) The place to come for opera glasses, bowling balls, hatpins, costume jewellery, porcelain or other curios.

Borough Market (Map p112; cnr Borough High & Stoney Sts SE1; ☎ 11am-5pm Thu, 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 wonderfully atmospheric; you'll find everything from organic falafel to boars' heads.

Brick Lane Market (Map p112; Brick Lane E1; ☎ early-2pm Sun; ☉ Liverpool St) An East End pearler, a sprawling bazaar featuring everything from fruit and veggies to paintings and bric-a-brac.

Brixton Market (Map pp96-7; Electric Ave & Granville Arcade; ☎ 10am-dusk Mon-Sat, to 1pm Wed; ☉ Brixton) Immortalised in the Eddie Grant song, Electric Ave is a cosmopolitan treat that mixes everything from reggae music to exotic foods and spices.

Broadway Market (Map pp96-7; Broadway Mkt E8; ☎ 9am-5pm Sat; ☉ Bethnal Green) Graze from the organic food stalls, choose a cooked meal and then sample one of the 200 beers on offer at the neighbouring Dove Freehouse.

Camden Market (☎ 10am-5.30pm; ☉ Camden Town) London's most famous market is actually a series of markets spread along Camden High St and Chalk Farm Rd. It's been quieter since the major fire in 2008, but the Lock (Map pp98-9) and Stables (Map pp98-9) markets are still the place for punk fashion, cheap food, hippy shit and a whole lotta craziness.

Camden Passage Market (Map pp98-9; Camden Passage N1; ☎ 10am-2pm Wed, to 5pm Sat; ☉ Angel) Get your fill of antiques and trinkets galore. Not in Camden (despite the name).

Columbia Road Flower Market (Map p112; Columbia Rd; ☎ 8am-2pm Sun; ☉ Old St) The best place for East End barrow boy banter ('We got flowers cheap enough for ya mother-in-law's grave'). Unmissable.

Greenwich Market (Map p111; College Approach SE10; ☎ 11am-7pm Wed, 10am-5pm Thu & Fri, 10am-5.30pm Sat & Sun; DLR Cutty Sark) Rummage through antiques, vintage clothing and collectibles on weekdays, arts and crafts on weekends, or just chow down in the food section.

Petticoat Lane Market (Map p112; Wentworth St & Middlesex St E1; ☎ 9am-2pm Sun-Fri; ☉ Aldgate) A cherished East End institution overflowing with cheap consumer durables and jumble sale ware.

Portobello Road Market (Map pp100-1; Portobello Rd W10; ☎ 8am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, closes 1pm Thu; ☉ Ladbroke Grove) One of London's most famous (and crowded) street markets. New and vintage clothes are its main attraction, with antiques at its south end and food at the north.

Spitalfields Market (Map p112; 105a Commercial St E1; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sun; ☉ Liverpool St) Housed in a Victorian warehouse but the market's been here since 1638. Thursdays are devoted to antiques and Fridays to fashion and art, but Sunday's the big day.

Sunday (Up)market (Map p112; The Old Truman Brewery, Brick Lane E1; ☎ 10am-5pm Sun; ☉ Liverpool St) Handmade handbags, jewellery, new and vintage clothes and shoes, plus food if you need refuelling.

original 1970s Halston dress or 1980s Chanel? Vintage meets modern and fashion meets collectables in this interesting store.

Paul Smith Sale Shop (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7493 1287; 23 Avery Row W1; ☉ Bond St) Classic Paul Smith shirts and other delights by London's most commercially successful designer, at a discounted price.

Rigby & Peller (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7491 2200; 22A Conduit St W1S 2XT; ☉ Oxford Circus) Get into

some right royal knickers with a trip to the Queen's corsetière.

Star (Map p112; ☎ 7729 3334; 42-44 Rivington St EC2; ☉ Old St) Spilling over three stores on the same lane (womenswear, menswear and men's formal), your quest for designer jeans starts here.

Topshop Oxford Circus (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7636 7700; 216 Oxford St W1; ☉ Oxford Circus) Billed as the 'world's largest fashion store', the Topshop

TOP FIVE ECCENTRIC STORES

- **Duke of Uke** (Map p112; ☎ 7247 7924; 22 Hanbury St E1; 🚶 Liverpool St) Devoted entirely to ukuleles and banjos.
- **FairyGothMother** (Map p112; ☎ 7247 7924; 15 Lamb St E1; 🚶 Liverpool St) Purveyors of custom-made corsets and vampy evening wear, not all in black.
- **Hamleys** (Map pp108-9; ☎ 0844-855 2424; 188-196 Regent St W1; 🚶 Oxford Circus) A seemingly endless wonderland of toys.
- **International Magic** (Map pp104-5; ☎ 7405 7324; 89 Clerkenwell Rd EC1; 🚶 Chancery Ln) If you've ever fancied pulling a rabbit out of hat, here's where you'll find the hat.
- **Old Curiosity Shop** (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7405 9891; 13-14 Portsmouth St WC2; 🚶 Holborn) Having been constructed from recycled ship timber in 1567, this is London's oldest shop building. It now sells out-there handmade, high-fashion shoes.

branch on Oxford Circus is a constant frenzy of shoppers searching for the latest look at reasonable prices. It's been given a shot of cool by being home to a range by London's favourite local supermodel rock chick, Kate Moss. Topman is next door.

Music

Nick Hornsby's book *High Fidelity* may have done for London music-store workers what *Sweeney Todd* did for barbers, but those obsessive types still lurk in wonderful independent stores all over London. If you'd like to purchase schmaltz without attitude, try the giant Oxford St **HMV** (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7631 3423; 150 Oxford St W1; 🕒 9am-9pm; 🚶 Oxford Circus), which has many central branches.

For personality, visit the following:

BM Soho (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7437 0478; 25 D'Arblay St W1; 🚶 Oxford Circus) Your best bet for dance – if they haven't got what you're after, they'll know who has.

Minus Zero Records (Map pp100-1; ☎ 7229 5424; 2 Blenheim Cres W11; 🚶 Ladbroke Grove) The place for collectables, like Bowie seven-inch singles.

Ray's Jazz (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7437 5660; Foyle's, 113-119 Charing Cross Rd WC2; 🚶 Tottenham Court Rd) Where aficionados find those elusive back catalogues from their favourite jazz and blues artists.

Rough Trade East (Map p112; ☎ 7392 7788; Dray Walk, 91 Brick Ln E1; 🚶 Liverpool St); West (Map pp100-1; ☎ 7229 8541; 130 Talbot Rd W11; 🚶 Ladbroke Grove) At the forefront of the punk explosion of the 1970s, it's the best place to come for basically anything of an indie or alternative bent.

Sister Ray (Map pp108-9; ☎ 7734 3297; 34-35 Berwick St W1; 🚶 Oxford Circus) If you need to be told that this store is named after a 17-minute distorted

Velvet Underground classic about a trannie smack dealer, then this shop's not for you.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

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

Air

For information on flying to/from London see p803.

Bus

Most long-distance coaches leave London from **Victoria Coach Station** (Map pp102-3; ☎ 7824 0000; 164 Buckingham Palace Rd SW1; 🚶 Victoria), a lovely art-deco building. The arrivals terminal is in a separate building across Elizabeth St from the main coach station.

Car

See p807 for reservation numbers of the main car-hire firms, all of which have airport and various city locations.

Train

With the reopening of beautiful St Pancras station, London is now only 2¼ hours by train from Paris on the Eurostar (see p805). Its vast vaulted concourse holds all the services you might find in an airport terminal, along with a giant statue of embracing lovers that Londoners love to hate.

London's main-line terminals are all linked by the tube and each serve different destinations. Most stations now have left-luggage facilities (around £4) and lockers, toilets (a 20p coin) with showers (around £3), news-

stands and bookshops, and a range of eating and drinking outlets. St Pancras, Victoria and Liverpool St stations have shopping centres attached.

If you can't find your destination below, see the journey planner at www.nationalrail.co.uk.

Charing Cross (Map pp108-9) Canterbury.

Euston (Map pp98-9) Manchester, Liverpool, Carlisle, Glasgow.

King's Cross (Map pp98-9) Cambridge, Hull, York, Newcastle, Scotland.

Liverpool Street (Map p112) Stansted airport, Cambridge.

London Bridge (Map p112) Gatwick airport, Brighton.

Marylebone (Map pp100-1) Birmingham.

Paddington (Map pp100-1) Heathrow airport, Oxford, Bath, Bristol, Exeter, Plymouth, Cardiff.

St Pancras (Map pp98-9) Gatwick and Luton airports, Brighton, Nottingham, Sheffield, Leicester, Leeds, Paris.

Victoria (Map pp102-3) Gatwick airport, Brighton, Canterbury.

Waterloo (Map pp104-5) Windsor, Winchester, Exeter, Plymouth.

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airports

HEATHROW

The transport connections to Heathrow are excellent, and the journey to and from the city is painless. The cheapest option is the Underground (p170). The Piccadilly line is accessible from every terminal (£4, one hour to central London, departing from Heathrow every five minutes from around 5am to 11.30pm). If it's your first time in London, it's a good chance to practice using the tube as it's at the beginning of the line and therefore not too crowded when you get on. Although for first timers buying a ticket can still be confusing, with little signage and the sometimes impenetrable accents. If there are vast queues at the airport ticket office, use the automatic machines instead; some accept credit cards as well as cash. Keep your bags near you and expect a scramble to get off if you're hitting the city at rush hour (7am to 9am and 5pm to 7pm weekdays).

The fastest (and easiest) way to central London is the **Heathrow Express** (☎ 0845 600 1515; www.heathrowexpress.co.uk), an ultramodern train to Paddington station (one-way/return £14.50/28, 15 minutes, every 15 minutes 5.10am to 11.25pm). You can purchase tickets on board (£2 extra), from self-service

machines (cash and credit cards accepted) at both stations or online.

There are taxi ranks for black cabs outside every terminal. A black cab to the centre of London will cost you between £40 and £70, a minicab around £35.

GATWICK

There are **National Rail** (www.nationalrail.co.uk) services from Gatwick's South Terminal to Victoria (£9.50, 37 minutes), running every 15 minutes during the day and hourly through the night. Other trains head to St Pancras (£8.90, 63 minutes), stopping at London Bridge, City Thameslink, Blackfriars and Farringdon. If you're racing to make a flight, the **Gatwick Express** (☎ 0845 850 1530; www.gatwickexpress.co.uk) departs Victoria every 15 minutes from 5.50am to 12.35am (one-way/return £18/31, 30 minutes, first/last train 4.35am/1.35am).

Prices start very low, depending on when you book, for the **EasyBus** (www.easybus.co.uk) minibus service between Gatwick and Victoria (return from £11, allow 1½ hours, every 30 minutes from 3am to 1am). You'll be charged extra if you have more than one carry-on and one check-in bag.

Gatwick's taxi partner, **Checker Cars** (www.checkercars), has a counter in each terminal. Fares are quoted and paid for in advance (about £83 for the 65-minute ride to Central London). A black cab costs similar, a minicab around £55.

STANSTED

The **Stansted Express** (☎ 0845 600 7245; www.stanstedexpress.com) connects with Liverpool St station (one way/return £17/26, 46 minutes, departing every 15 minutes 5.10am to 10.55pm, first/last train 4.40am/11.25pm).

EasyBus (above) also has services between Stansted, Baker St and Victoria (return from £13, allow 1¾ hours, every 30 minutes from 3am to 1.05am). The **Airbus A6** (☎ 0870 580 8080; www.nationalexpress.com) links with Victoria coach station (one way/return £10/16, allow 1¾ hours, departing at least every 30 minutes).

A black cab to/from central London costs about £100, a minicab around £55.

LONDON CITY

The Docklands Light Railway connects London City Airport to the tube network, taking 22 minutes to reach Bank station (£4). A black taxi costs around £25 to/from central London.

LONDON'S OYSTER DIET

To get the most out of London, you need to be able to jump on and off public transport like a local, not scramble to buy a ticket at hefty rates each time. The best and cheapest way to do this is with an Oyster card, a reusable smartcard on which you can load either a season ticket (weekly/monthly £24.20/93) or prepaid credit. The card itself is free with a season ticket, otherwise it's £3.

London is divided into six concentric transport zones, although almost all of the places covered in this book are in Zones 1–2. The season tickets quoted above will give you unlimited transport on tubes, buses and most National Rail services within these zones. All you need to do is touch your card to the sensors on the station turnstiles or at the front of the bus.

If you opt for pay as you go, the fare will be deducted from the credit on your card at a much lower rate than if you were buying a one-off paper ticket. An oyster bus trip costs 90p as opposed to £2, while a Zone 1 tube journey is £1.50 as opposed to £4. Even better, in any single day your fares will be capped at the equivalent of the Oyster day-pass rate for the zones you've travelled in (Zones 1-2 peak/off-peak £6.30/4.80).

Assuming you'll avoid the tube during peak hours (before 9.30am), this ready reckoner gives the cheapest options for your length of stay:

- 1–4 days: non-Oyster off-peak daily (£5.30 per day)
- 5–25 days: Oyster weeklies topped up with prepay for any remaining days
- 26–31 days: monthly

LUTON

There are regular **National Rail** (www.nationalrail.co.uk) services from St Pancras (£14, 28 to 48 minutes) to Luton Airport Parkway station, where a shuttle bus (£1) will get you to the airport within 10 minutes. EasyBus (p169) minibuses head from Victoria and Baker St to Luton (return from £12, allow 1¼ hours, departing every 30 minutes). A black taxi costs around £95 to/from central London, minicabs around £55.

Public Transport

Although locals love to complain about it, London's public transport is excellent, with tubes, trains, buses and boats conspiring to get you anywhere you need to go. **Transport for London** (TfL; www.tfl.gov.uk) is the glue that binds the network together. Its website has a handy journey planner and information on all services, including cabs. As a creature of leisure, you'll be able to avoid those bits that Londoners hate (especially the sardine squash of rush-hour tubes), so get yourself an Oyster (above) and make the most of it.

LONDON UNDERGROUND, DLR & OVERGROUND

'The tube', as it's universally known, extends its subterranean tentacles throughout London and into the surrounding counties, with services running every few minutes from 5.30am to roughly 12.30am (from 7am on Sunday).

It's incredibly easy to use. Tickets (or Oyster card top-ups) can be purchased from counters or machines at the entrance to each station using either cash or credit card. They're then inserted into the slot on the turnstiles (or you touch your Oyster card on the yellow reader) and the barrier opens. Once you're through you can jump on and off different lines as often as you need to get to your destination. See the boxed text above for information about fares, zones and Oyster cards.

Also included within the network are the driverless Docklands Light Railway (DLR), and the train lines shown on tube maps as 'Overground'. The DLR links the City to Docklands, Greenwich and London City Airport. It's very Jetsons-like, especially when it hurtles between the skyscrapers of Canary Wharf; try to get the front row seat.

The tube map itself is an acclaimed graphic design work, using coloured lines to show how the 14 different routes intersect. However, it's not remotely to scale. The distances between stations become greater the further from central London you travel, while Leicester Sq and Covent Garden stations are only 250m apart.

BUS


Travelling round London by double-decker bus is an enjoyable way to get a feel for the city, but it's usually more difficult and slower than the tube. A recommended scenic route

is number 24, which runs from Victoria to Hampstead Heath through the West End. Heritage 'Routemaster' buses with conductors operate on route 9 (from Aldwych to Royal Albert Hall) and 15 (between Trafalgar Sq and Tower Hill); these are the only buses without wheelchair access.

Buses run regularly during the day, while less-frequent night buses (prefixed with the letter 'N') wheel into action when the tube stops. Single-journey bus tickets (valid for two hours) cost £2 (90p on Oyster, capped at £3 per day); cash day passes are £3.50 and books of six tickets are £6. Children ride for free. At stops with yellow signs, you have to buy your ticket from the automatic machine *before* boarding. Buses stop on request, so clearly signal the driver with an outstretched arm.

TAXI

London's famous black cabs are available for hire when the yellow light above the windscreen is lit. 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. Fares are metered, with flag fall at £2.20 and the additional rate dependent on time of day, distance travelled and taxi speed. A 1-mile trip will cost between £4.40 and £8. 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 operate via agencies (most busy areas have a walk-in office with drivers waiting). They're a cheaper alternative to black cabs and quote trip fares in advance. The cars are recognisable by the  symbol displayed in the window. To find a local minicab firm, visit www.tfl.gov.uk.

There have been many reports of sexual assault and theft by unlicensed minicab drivers. Only use drivers from proper agencies; licensed minicabs aren't allowed to tout for business, so avoid the characters who hang around outside nightclubs or bars.

TRAIN

Particularly south of the river, where tube lines are in short supply, the various rail companies

are an important part of the public transport picture. More stations are being fitted with Oyster readers, but you should check before travelling as to whether you need to purchase a separate ticket.

BOAT

The myriad boats that ply the Thames are a great way to travel, avoiding traffic jams while affording great views. Passengers with daily, weekly or monthly travelcards (Oyster or otherwise) get one third off all fares.

Thames Clippers (☎ 0871-781 5049; www.thamesclippers.com) runs regular commuter services between Embankment, Waterloo, Bankside, London Bridge, Tower, Canary Wharf, Greenwich and Woolwich piers (adult £2.50 to £6.50, children £1.25 to £3.25) from 7am to 12.30pm (from 9am weekends). Another service runs from Putney to Blackfriars during the morning and evening rush hours.

Leisure services include the Tate-to-Tate boat (see boxed text, p125), Westminster-to-Greenwich services (p131) and a loop route taking in Westminster, Embankment, Festival, Bankside, London Bridge and St Katherine's piers (day pass £7.80/3.70, May to September). For boats to Kew Gardens and Hampton Court Palace, see p133.

London Waterbus Company (Map pp100-1; ☎ 7482 2660; www.londonwaterbus.com, single/return £6.50/9) and **Jason's Trip** (Map pp100-1; ☎ 7286 3428; www.jasons.co.uk; opposite 60 Blomfield Rd W9; single/return £7.50/8.50) both run canal boat journeys between Camden Lock and Little Venice; see websites for times. London has some 40 miles of inner-city canals, mostly built in the 19th century.

Car

Don't even think about it. Driving in London is a nightmare: traffic is heavy, parking is either impossible or expensive and wheel-clampers keep busy. If you drive into central London from 7am to 6pm on a weekday, you'll need to pay an £8 per day congestion charge (visit www.tfl.gov.uk to register) or face a hefty fine. If you're hiring a car to continue your trip, take the tube to Heathrow and pick it up from there.

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