

BLUELIST¹ (blu,list) v.
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THE ARTS

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There are no two ways about it: London's cultural life is fantastic. Its theatre is the most diverse and rich in the world, from Shakespeare's classics performed in the traditional manner, to innovative productions that involve Indian street dancers and acrobatics. There's a wealth of new writing and acting talent and, after many decades, politically provocative plays are making headlines again. Theatre in London is taken so seriously that many deem performing in the West End to be the only way to earn respect among their peers, so much so that even Hollywood stars abandon their glitzy lives for a season treading London's boards.

But it's not all drama and seriousness. In fact, one of the most popular forms of entertainment in the capital is the musical. The 1980s revival put *Dirty Dancing* into musical form, making it one of the most successful shows around, and sending hundreds of ladies into excitement-overdrive every night (ah, the power of Patrick Swayze); Monty Python's surreal sketches and silly songs were transferred into *Spamalot*; and even *The Lord of the Rings* hasn't escaped the clutches of the musical. And that's without mentioning the many classics that still have actors exercising their vocal cords. Dance is another loved form, with performances ranging from classical ballet to modern dance, many of which are held in wonderful venues such as the Royal Opera House, Laban and Sadler's Wells.

The Royal Opera House (p316) stages classical opera and ballet in the grandiose new building in the heart of Covent Garden, while the English National Opera (p316) delves into adventurous experiments that don't always pay off. Lovers of classical music won't know where to start, from high-profile BBC Proms to fantastic lunchtime concerts at the Wigmore Hall (opposite).

London's a fantastic place for catching up on independent film and cinema seasons that celebrate the independents and the classics, though if you like a blockbuster, fret not, as there are many (overpriced) cinemas offering Hollywood flicks. Huge multiplexes give you endless screens and mega-sound systems, and smaller, independent cinemas offer the delight of a sofa for two, with a glass of wine at your side. The refurbished and expanded British Film Institute (BFI; p314) is a temple to the love of film.

CLASSICAL MUSIC

London's four world-class symphony orchestras, two opera companies, various smaller ensembles, brilliant venues, reasonable prices and high standards of performance make it the world's most desirable place for classical music followers. You can see traditional crowd-pleasers, new music or 'difficult' composers any night of the year.

BARBICAN Map p110

☎ 7638 8891; www.barbican.org.uk; Silk St EC2; admission £6.50-30, student & over 60yr on day of performance £6.50-9; † Moorgate or Barbican The Barbican is home to the wonderful London Symphony Orchestra, but scores of leading international musicians also perform here every year. The lesser-known BBC Symphony Orchestra, City of London Symphonia and English Chamber Orchestra are also regulars.

KENWOOD HOUSE Map p166

☎ 0870 154 4040; www.ticketmaster.co.uk; Hampstead Lane NW3; admission £16.50-24.50; † Archway or Golders Green then G 210

Attending an outdoor concert in the grounds of Hampstead's Kenwood House for Proms on the Heath has been a highlight of any good summer in London. People picnicked on the grass or sat in deck chairs, with strawberries and chilled wine, and listened to classical music and opera (staying for the fireworks) on selected weekend evenings in July and August. The concert season was cancelled in summer 2007, but the English Heritage committee is trying to reinstate the lovely tradition for summer 2008.

ROYAL ALBERT HALL Map pp138-9

☎ 7589 8212; www.royalalberthall.com; Kensington Gore SW7; admission £5-150, Proms admission £4-75; † South Kensington This splendid Victorian concert hall hosts many classical-music, rock and other performances, but it is most famous as the venue for the (BBC) Proms – one of the world's biggest classical-music festivals. Booking is possible, but from mid-July to mid-September Proms punters also queue for £4 standing (or 'promenading') tickets that go on sale one hour before curtain up.

Otherwise, the box office and prepaid ticket collection counter are both through door 12 on the south side of the hall.

ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL Map p126

☎ 7960 4242; www.southbankcentre.co.uk; Belvedere Rd SE1; admission £6-60; † Waterloo The Royal Festival Hall (RFH) is London's premier concert venue. It reopened in mid-2007 after two years of renovations, revealing an improvement in space, layout, vision and sound. Allies and Morrison architects worked on the £91 million renovations by using the existing 1950s materials – concrete, leather and wood – to excellent effect. You can see music and dance performances at the RFH and more eclectic gigs at the smaller Queen Elizabeth Hall and Purcell Room.

WIGMORE HALL Map p100

☎ 7935 2141; www.wigmore-hall.org.uk; 36 Wigmore St W1; admission £6-35; † Bond St This is one of the best concert venues in town, not only because of its fantastic acoustics, beautiful Art Nouveau hall and great variety of concerts and recitals, but also because of the sheer standard of the performances. Built in 1901 as the recital hall for Bechstein Pianos, it has remained one of the top places in the world for chamber music. The Sunday-morning coffee concerts (£10) and the lunchtime concerts at 1pm on Monday (adult/senior £8/6) are both excellent value.

DANCE

London is home to five major dance companies and a host of small, experimental ones. The Royal Ballet, the best classical-ballet company in the land, is based at the Covent Garden Royal Opera House (p316); the Coliseum (Map pp72-3; ☎ 0870 145 0200; www.eno.org; St Martin's Lane WC2; † Charing Cross) is another venue for ballet at Christmas and in summer.

The annual contemporary dance event in London is Dance Umbrella (see p194). For more information about dance in the capital, visit the London Dance Network's website at www.londondance.com.

BARBICAN Map p110

☎ 7638 8891; www.barbican.org.uk; Silk St EC2; admission £6.50-30, student & over 60yr on day of performance £6.50-9; † Moorgate or Barbican

The Barbican Centre stages dance performances within its eclectic programme. Its multidisciplinary BITE (Barbican International Theatre Events) festival, which runs year-round, has fun dance shows.

LABAN Map p180

☎ 8691 8600; www.laban.org; Creekside SE8; admission £1-15; † Deptford Bridge, DLR Greenwich This is an independent dance training school, which also presents student performances, graduation shows and regular pieces by its resident troupe, Transitions, as well as other assorted dance, music and physical performances. Its stunning £22 million home was designed by Tate Modern's architects, Herzog & de Meuron.

PEACOCK THEATRE Map pp72-3

☎ 7863 8222; www.sadlers-wells.com; Portugal St WC2; admission £10-37; † Holborn The Peacock Theatre is a small venue in the West End, part of the Sadler's Wells complex (see p314), hosting dance and music performances.

PLACE Map pp92-3

☎ 7387 0031; www.theplace.org.uk; 17 Duke's Rd WC1; admission £5-15; † Euston One of the most exciting modern dance venues, the Place was the birthplace of modern British dance. It concentrates on challenging, contemporary and experimental choreography. Behind the late-Victorian façade you'll find a 300-seat theatre, an arty, creative café atmosphere and six training studios. The Place sponsors an annual dance award, 'Place Prize', which strives to seek out and award new and outstanding dance talent.

ROYAL BALLET Map pp72-3

☎ 7304 4000; www.royalballet.co.uk; Royal Opera House, Bow St WC2; admission £4-80; † Covent Garden Although the Royal Ballet's programme has been fluffed up by modern influences, classical ballet is still its bread and butter. This is where to head if you want to see traditional performances such as *Giselle* or *Romeo & Juliet*, performed by stars such as Sylvie Guillem, Irek Mukhamedov and Tamara Rojo. Standing tickets cost £4 to £5. There are same-day tickets, one per customer, from 10am for £8 to £40, and half-price stand-by tickets.

SADLER'S WELLS Map p150

‰ 7863 8000; www.sadlers-wells.com; Rosebery Ave EC1; admission £10-40; † Angel
The theatre site dates from 1683 and is one of the most eclectic and modern dance venues in town. It stages Rambert's excellent productions, Pina Bausch is a regular on the programme, there are experimental dance shows, hip-hop conventions and an annual flamenco festival. Sylvie Guillem and Akram Khan were made associate artists to the theatre in 2006 and staged the acclaimed *Sacred Monsters*. The Lilian Baylis Theatre here stages smaller productions.

SOUTHBANK CENTRE Map p126

‰ 7960 4242; www.southbankcentre.co.uk; Belvedere Rd SE1; admission £6-60; † Waterloo
The *Royal Festival Hall* (p313), Queen Elizabeth Hall and Purcell Room are regular venues for the Dance Umbrella citywide festival, as well as hosting independent dance productions year-round.

FILM

Londoners love their cinemas and they adore their film. That's why the city has so many fabulous independent cinemas, where you can put your feet up (often literally), sip your drink and feel at home (but better). Aside from general releases, there are monthly seasons and premieres, plus directors and actors talking about their films. If you're in town in October or November, attend at least one screening at the *Times London Film Festival* (www.lff.org.uk), Europe's largest of its kind, with plenty of previews, debates, talks and film-star spotting.

Latest Hollywood blockbusters play at the various Warner Villages, Odeons or UGCs; be prepared to pay up to an astonishing £17 for a first-run film. Many major premieres are held in Leicester Sq, which, although a bit of an eyesore, is where most screenings for the Times London Film Festival are held, as well as major movie premieres (eg the latest Bond or Spiderman flick).

If your tastes are a little more eclectic, try one of the cinemas following. Most art-house or mainstream cinemas offer price discounts on Monday and for most weekday-afternoon screenings.

BARBICAN Map p110

‰ info 7382 7000, bookings 7638 8891; www.barbican.org.uk; Silk St EC2; † Moorgate or Barbican

The several screens at the Barbican pull the crowds with great programming, regular film seasons, and talks by directors and stars. It's a dream to watch a film here, with brilliant sloping seating that ensures full-screen view wherever you sit and legroom that 1st-class transatlantic flights would be proud of.

BFI SOUTH BANK Map p126

‰ 7928 3232; www.bfi.org.uk; South Bank SE1; † Waterloo or Embankment
Spring 2007 gave London's cinema lovers a wonderful pressie: the British Film Institute (BFI). The spruced-up and extended former National Film Theatre (NFT) means that now not only do we have both new releases and golden oldies dusted off for retrospectives, directors' exclusive talks and an unrivalled screening programme, we now have the Mediatheque (a room with 14 state-of-the-art viewing booths where visitors can browse for free the hundreds of hours of film and TV from the BFI archive), a gallery space with shows relating to film, a well-stocked film and bookshop, a restaurant and a gorgeous café with free wi-fi access and a stand-up piano.

CINÉ LUMIÈRE Map pp138-9

‰ 7073 1350; 17 Queensberry Pl SW7; † South Kensington
Ciné Lumière is attached to South Kensington's excellent French Institute, and its large screen-room was launched by Catherine Deneuve in 1998. It screens great international seasons and French films subtitled in English.

CLAPHAM PICTURE HOUSE Map p200

‰ info 7498 2242, bookings 7498 3232; www.picturehouse-cinemas.co.uk; 76 Venn St SW4; † Clapham Common
The Picture House is much loved by its locals for its four comfy theatres and café-bar. The programme has everything, from first-run blockbusters to art-house cinema. The Picture House is now a chain with branches in Greenwich and Stratford and has taken over Brixton's *Ritz* (p316) and Notting Hill's *Gate* (opposite) cinemas.

CURZON MAYFAIR Map p100

‰ info 7495 0501, bookings 7495 0500; www.curzoncinemas.com; 38 Curzon St W1; † Hyde Park Corner or Green Park
This is the original Curzon cinema, which although a bit shabbier than its Soho sister

(see below), is a real avant-garde outpost that screens new independent and foreign films, shorts and Sunday screenings.

CURZON SOHO Map p68

‰ info 7439 4805, bookings 7734 2255; www.curzoncinemas.com; 93-107 Shaftesbury Ave W1; † Leicester Sq or Piccadilly Circus
Curzon Soho is London's best cinema. It has fantastic programming with the best of British, European, world and American indie films; regular Q&As with directors; shorts and minifestivals; a Konditor & Cook café upstairs with tea and cakes to die for, and an ultracomfortable bar that often doubles-up as a place for a drink for many Londoners. A haven in the midst of the chaotic West End.

ELECTRIC CINEMA Map p175

‰ 7908 9696, 7229 8688; www.electricensema.co.uk; 191 Portobello Rd W1; † Ladbroke Grove or Notting Hill Gate
If you've got a date who's hard to impress, head here for certain success. This is the UK's oldest cinema, updated with luxurious leather armchairs, footstools, tables for food and drink in the auditorium, and an upmarket brasserie. Seeing a flick at this Edwardian building is, of course, slightly pricier than elsewhere; on full-price nights the seats are £12.50, or £30 for a two-seater sofa. One of the most lavish venues in town.

EVERYMAN HAMPSTEAD Map p166

‰ 0870 066 4777; www.everymancinema.com; 5 Holly Bush Vale NW3; † Hampstead
Ever dream of having your own private cinema? For the next best thing, go to the Everyman. The two auditoriums have comfy armchairs and sofas where you can sprawl out and watch a film with your cup of tea or glass of wine. The programme has a wide range of films, from current blockbusters to *Singing in the Rain* or *The Godfather*.

GATE Map p175

‰ 7727 4043; 87 Notting Hill Gate W1; † Notting Hill Gate
The Gate's single screen has one of London's most charming Art Deco cinema interiors – although the bar area is a little squished. It's the programming it prides itself on, however, introducing new art-house and independent films.

INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ARTS Map pp96-7

‰ 7930 3647; www.ica.org.uk; Nash House, the Mall SW1; † Charing Cross or Piccadilly Circus
The Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) is a treasure for all lovers of indie cinema – its programme always has material no-one else is showing, such as the latest American independents, odd seasons, all-night screenings and rare documentaries. The two screens are quite small, but comfortable enough.

NOTTING HILL CORONET Map p175

‰ 7727 6705; 103 Notting Hill Gate W8; † Notting Hill Gate
This *fin-de-siècle* stunner is one of London's most atmospheric places to watch a film. Indeed, a lovesick Hugh Grant munches popcorn here while watching Julia Roberts on the big screen in *Notting Hill*. The wonderful Edwardian interior, including a gorgeous balcony and even boxes, recalls the glory days of cinema, when filling a 400-seat house for every showing was easy.

PRINCE CHARLES Map p68

‰ bookings 0870 811 2559; www.princecharlescinema.com; Leicester Pl WC2; † Leicester Sq
You'd be right to think that ticket prices at Leicester Sq cinemas are daylight robbery, so wait until the first-runs have finished and moved to central London's cheapest cinema (tickets generally cost from £1 to £4, with the best deals on Monday Madness night). There are also minifestivals and Q&As with film directors. Famously, the cinema also transformed *The Sound of Music* into a phenomenal – and very camp – sing-a-long hit.

RENOIR Map pp92-3

‰ 7837 8402; Brunswick Centre, Brunswick Sq WC1; † Russell Sq
This art-house cinema, affiliated with Curzon cinemas, has got a new lease of life thanks to the renovated and shiny Brunswick Centre. Not that the Renoir was ever short of loyal devotees, thanks to its share of international film, from French drama to slow-paced Iranian stories and Taiwanese love tales. There's also a range of art-house DVDs on sale in the lower foyer, plus coffee and cake.

RIO CINEMA *Map p168*

☎ 7241 9410; www.riocinema.ndirect.co.uk; 107 Kingsland High St E8; ㊦ Dalston Kingsland The Rio is Dalston's neighbourhood art-house, classic and new-release cinema, and the venue for off-beat festivals, such as the Kurdish Film Festival and the Turkish Film Festival (in autumn and December respectively), the East End Film Festival (April), the Spanish Film Festival and the Gay & Lesbian Film Festival (for which some screenings are held in April and March respectively). Despite its major renovation in the late '90s, you can still see traces of the lovely Art Deco theatre in the auditorium.

RITZY *Map p200*

☎ 7733 2229; www.picturehouses.co.uk; Brixton Oval, Coldharbour Lane SW2; ㊦ Brixton Despite fears that making the Ritzy a multiplex would kill its cool style and community feeling (four new screens were added to this 1911 building in the late '90s, making it London's biggest independent cinema), this is still one of London's favourites, screening a good mix of mainstream and indie films. The Ritzy is an off-West End screen during the Times London Film Festival, and alternative gigs are often held inside the large original auditorium. The funky bar-café upstairs is a gathering spot for arty locals.

RIVERSIDE STUDIOS *Map p205*

☎ 8237 1111; Crisp Rd W6; ㊦ Hammersmith Once a film and TV studio itself, where classics such as *Dr Who* and *Hancock's Half-Hour* were shot, the cinema at the Riverside now shows classic art-house flicks and those you might have missed a few months back.

SCREEN ON THE GREEN *Map p168*

☎ 7226 3520; 83 Upper St N1; ㊦ Angel At a bustling junction of Islington's busy nightlife, this film house has a single auditorium with one large screen, attracting an upmarket crowd with a taste for independent cinema (and good ice cream). Pity about the seats, though – bring a cushion and don't have long legs.

OPERA

It's not just the classics that get staged in London's opera houses. Apart from the traditional Verdi tragedies or Mozart's comedies, you'll also find innovative productions that bring modern-day events to the bellowing music form.

ENGLISH NATIONAL OPERA*Map pp72–3*

☎ 7632 8300; www.eno.org; Coliseum, St Martin's Lane WC1; admission £8-85; ㊦ Leicester Sq or Charing Cross

The ENO's new music director, Edward Gardner, is promising better years ahead, and God knows it needs better years. Generally renowned for making opera modern and relevant, the ENO has been suffering a miserable few years of bad reviews, financial difficulties and media flak (not helped by *Gaddafi: The Opera* in 2006). The company's home is the impressive Coliseum building, built in 1904 and wonderfully restored in 2004. Five hundred £10-and-under tickets are available for all weekday performances. All opera at the ENO is sung in English.

OPERA HOLLAND PARK *Map p177*

☎ 0845 230 9769; www.operahollandpark.com; Holland Park W8; admission £25-40; ㊦ High St Kensington

This is England Jane Austen-style, with picnics on the grass, opera and frightfully posh surroundings. Sit under the 800-seat canopy, which is temporarily erected every summer for a nine-week season in the middle of Holland Park, and enjoy the fabulous setting and good performances. The programme mixes crowd pleasers such as *Tosca* and *Fidelio* with rare works such as *L'Arlesiana* and attracts a wide range of guests.

ROYAL OPERA HOUSE *Map pp72–3*

☎ 7304 4000; www.royaloperahouse.org; Royal Opera House, Bow St WC2; admission £6-150, mid-week matinees £6.50-50; ㊦ Covent Garden

The Royal Opera House has been doing its best to ward off the stuffy, exclusive image it was accused of having some years ago, and is attracting a younger, wealthy audience. Its £210 million redevelopment in 2000 has given the classic a fantastic setting, and coming here for a night is a sumptuous prospect. The renovated Floral Hall is now open to the public during the day, with free lunchtime concerts at 1pm on Monday, exhibitions and daily tours. If you're a student, you can register your details on the ROH website, and join the Traveler discount scheme which offers discounted tickets (£15 Opera, £12 ballet), but only if the performance isn't selling very

SPOKEN WORD

Londoners treat their literati like glitterati. It's not just home-grown UK talent such as Monica Ali, Louis de Bernières, Patrick Neate, Zadie Smith, Tony Parsons, Will Self or even occasionally JK Rowling you might find here, but international writers such as Bill Bryson, Douglas Coupland and Andrey Kurkov on promotional tours.

The best place to see both established and budding authors is the once-monthly **Book Slam** (www.bookslam.com) held at **Neighbourhood** (last Thursday of the month; p302) club, and hosted by Patrick Neate. It's had guests such as Dave Eggers, Jonathan Safran Foer and Nick Hornby, and hosts readings, slam poetry, live music and DJs, and the literary fun can go on until late at night. It's the best literary night in London.

A monthly writers' Express Excess session is held at **Enterprise** (*Map p166*; ☎ 7485 2659; www.expressexcess.co.uk; 2 Haverstock Hill NW3; ㊦ Chalk Farm). From small beginnings in 1996, the Express Excess evening has since managed to attract top names in British writing. John Cooper Clarke, John Hegley, Will Self and Murray Lachlan Young have all appeared in the cosy room at the top of this typically grungy Camden pub.

The **Institute of Contemporary Arts** (p315) has excellent talks every month, with well-known writers from all spectrums, from the hip to the seriously academic. The best events are those in the wonderful, high-ceilinged Nash Room upstairs.

Covent Garden's **Poetry Café** (*Map pp72–3*; ☎ 7420 9888; 22 Betterton St WC2; ㊦ Covent Garden) is a favourite for lovers of (serious) spoken word. It has performances by established poets and a regular poetry and jazz evening every Saturday, writing workshops and open-mic evenings.

Additionally, bookshops, particularly **Waterstone's** (p218) and **Foyle's** (p217), often have readings. Some major authors now appear at the **South Bank Centre** (p314). As they tend to rely on the author's availability, many of these readings are organised on an ad-hoc basis, so if you're interested it's best to keep an eye on the listings in *Time Out* or the *Evening Standard's Metro Life* supplement on Thursday.

well. This, apparently, doesn't happen very often, but it might be worth trying.

THEATRE

Don't even think about leaving London without a night at the theatre. This is the epicentre of theatrical innovation, great new writing, and if that's not enough, London is officially the world's greatest city for drama. See a West End show, spend a night at the National or the Old Vic, or go for a good old-fashioned pub-theatre performance.

Patrick Swayze, Kevin Spacey, Christian Slater and Kathleen Turner have all swapped the easy life of Hollywood for theatrical roles in London's West End, continuing a tradition of earning Equity minimum in return for some artistic credibility started by Nicole Kidman (successful in her bid) and Madonna (not) a few years previously.

For a comprehensive look at what's being staged, pick up the free *Official London Theatre Guide* or visit www.officallondontheatre.co.uk.

BARBICAN *Map p110*

☎ 7638 8891; www.barbican.org.uk; Silk St EC2; admission to theatre £7-50, to Pit £15; ㊦ Moorgate or Barbican

The Barbican turned 25 in 2007, and it's looking – and feeling – as great as ever.

Barbican International Theatre Events (BITE) continues to find exciting overseas drama companies, alongside local fringe-theatre troupes; among its recent outstanding performances were the National Theatre of Iceland's *Peer Gynt*, and Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, staged in Russian by Cheek By Jowl. Stand-by tickets are available on the day of the performance to students, seniors and the unemployed for about £12.

NATIONAL THEATRE *Map p126*

☎ 7452 3000; www.nationaltheatre.org.uk; South Bank SE1; admission Olivier & Lyttleton £10-36, Cottesloe £10-28; ㊦ Waterloo

England's flagship theatre showcases a mix of classic and contemporary plays performed by excellent casts. Its outstanding artistic director, Nicholas Hytner, is not only using exciting stagings and plays to attract new audiences but has also slashed ticket prices. Look forward to Ralph Fiennes in *Oedipus* in 2008 and a new play by David Hare, commissioned by the NT.

In the revolutionary Traveler season, tickets have been sold at £10 for the peak period over the last few years, and this is set to continue. Otherwise, stand-by tickets (usually £17) are sometimes available two hours before the performance. Students or the unemployed must wait until just 45 minutes before the curtain goes up to

TICKETS, PLEASE!

Competition for tickets to the best theatre, dance, opera, gigs and exclusive club events can be stiff, so make the most of online booking forums. If you can, it's best to buy direct from the venue to save yourself commission charges. Events in London sell out astonishingly quickly, and agencies tend to have tickets after the venue has sold out. **Ticketmaster** (% 0870 534 444; www.ticketmaster.co.uk), **Stargreen** (% 7734 8932; www.stargreen.co.uk), **Ticketweb** (% 7771 2000; www.ticketweb.co.uk) and **Keith Prowse Ticketing** (% 0870 906 3838, www.keithprorowse.com) all have 24-hour telephone and online booking.

For theatre productions you may be able to buy a returned ticket on the day of the performance, although for something really popular you might need to start queuing before the returns actually go on sale. On the day of performance only, you can buy discounted tickets, sometimes up to 50% off, for West End productions from the **Tkts Booth** (Map pp72-3; 10am-7pm Mon-Sat, noon-3pm Sun; t Leicester Sq) in the clock tower on the south side of Leicester Sq. It's run by the nonprofit **Society of London Theatre** (SOLT; % 7836 0971) and wholly legitimate, although it levies a £2.50 service charge per ticket and has a limit of four tickets per customer. Payment is by cash or credit/debit card. Note that commercial ticket agencies nearby, particularly those along Cranbourn St, advertise half-price tickets without mentioning the large commission added to the price. Student stand-by tickets are sometimes available on production of identity cards one hour before the performance starts.

For all gigs, be wary of ticket touts outside the venue on the night. If you're happy with the mark-up it's usually fine, but be sure to check with the holder of a genuine ticket before buying, to avoid the possibility of buying a forgery.

purchase stand-by tickets at a concession price of around £9. Registered disabled visitors are eligible for discounts.

ROYAL COURT Map pp138-9

% 7565 5000; www.royalcourttheatre.com; Jerwood Theatre, Sloane Sq SW1; admission Tue-Sun 10p-£25, Mon £10; t Sloane Sq

Equally excellent for staging new plays and old classics, the Royal Court is among London's most progressive theatres. Starting with its inaugural piece in 1956, John Osborne's *Look Back In Anger*, it has continued to discover major writing talent across the UK from Sarah Kane to Conor McPherson; without it, London's theatre scene wouldn't be the same. Recent major sell-outs were a star-studded performance of *The Seagull*, and Tom Stoppard's latest play, *Rock'n'Roll*.

All tickets on Monday are £10; students, under 21s, seniors and the unemployed pay £10; and 10p standing tickets for eight people are sold just before the performance in the Jerwood Theatre. Stand-by tickets are sold an hour before the performance, but at full price.

SHAKESPEARE'S GLOBE Map p126

% 7401 9919; www.shakespeares-globe.org; admission seated £13-29, standing £5; 21 New Globe Walk SE1; t London Bridge

If you love Shakespeare and the theatre, the Globe will knock you off your feet. This is authentic Shakespearean theatre, and

a near-perfect replica of the building the Bard worked in from 1598 to 1611, that follows Elizabethan staging practices. The building is a wooden O without a roof over the central stage area, and although there are covered wooden bench seats in tiers around the stage, many people like to do as the 17th-century 'groundlings' did, and stand in front of the stage, shouting and heckling. Because the building is quite open to the elements, you may have to wrap up. No umbrellas are allowed, but cheap rain coats are on sale.

The theatre season runs from May to September and includes works by Shakespeare and his contemporaries such as Christopher Marlowe. The theatre's new artistic director, Dominic Dromgoole, has decided to introduce new writing and we can't help but think that old William would have liked it that way.

A warning: two pillars holding up the stage canopy (the 'Heavens') obscure much of the view in section D; you'd almost do better to stand. In winter plays are staged in the new indoor **Inigo Jones Theatre**, a replica Jacobean playhouse at the Globe.

OFF WEST END & FRINGE

This is where most of the really creative and innovative theatre happens in the capital, thanks to new writing that can be experimental, amazing or even downright ridiculous, held in smaller theatres. Some of the better venues are listed here.

ALMEIDA THEATRE Map p168

% 7359 4404; www.almeida.co.uk; Almeida St N1; t Angel

A plush venue that can be relied on to provide the city with an essential programme of imaginative theatre, the Almeida, under its creative artistic director, Michael Attenborough, attracts directors such as Richard Eyre and Rufus Norris, and stages plays such as *The Mercy Seat* and the acclaimed *Dying For It*. Check out the Conran restaurant opposite.

ARCOLA THEATRE Map p156

% 7503 1646; www.arcolatheatre.com; 27 Arcola St E8; t Liverpool St then G 30

Arcola's East End location makes it a bit of a trek, but many still flock to this innovative theatre whose director Mehmet Ergen has been staging adventurous and eclectic programmes since 2000. A season focusing on Turkish writers and plays about Turkey was met with acclaim in 2007, so check the programme for more cutting-edge, international productions.

BATTERSEA ARTS CENTRE Map p200

% 7223 2223; www.bac.org.uk; Lavender Hill SW11; t Clapham Common, d Clapham Junction, G 77, 77A or 345

This is a friendly, down-to-earth community theatre where staff chat to you and the actors mingle in the bar with the audience postshow. Playwrights see it as a valuable nurturer and crucible of new plays and talent. Artistic director David Jubb's infamous Scratch programme is an excellent exercise in learning about the writing process: a developing play is shown to increasing audiences until it's finished.

BUSH THEATRE Map p177

% 7610 4224; www.bushtheatre.co.uk; Shepherd's Bush Green W12; t Shepherd's Bush

For what is essentially a pub-theatre, the Bush is exceptionally good and encourages new writing. Its success is due to strong writing from the likes of Tina Brown, Jonathan Harvey, Conor McPherson and Stephen Poliakoff. It also attracts top actors.

DONMAR WAREHOUSE Map pp72-3

% 7369 1732; www.donmar-warehouse.com; 41 Earlham St WC2; t Covent Garden

The small Donmar Warehouse will always be known as the theatre in which Nicole

Kidman administered 'theatrical Viagra' nightly by peeling off her clothes in Sam Mendes' production of *The Blue Room*. Although nothing quite as headline-grabbing as Kidman's extravaganza has been staged since, the director Michael Grandage consistently stages interesting and inventive productions.

HAMPSTEAD THEATRE Map p166

% 7722 9301; www.hampsteadtheatre.com; 98 Avenue Rd NW3; t Swiss Cottage

Not only is this Ewan McGregor's favourite London theatre, the Hampstead is famed for putting on new writing and taking on emerging directors. It staged Harold Pinter's new work way back in the 1960s, which shows it knows a good thing when it sees one. The theatre is in a modern building, with two auditoria. One seats 80, the other 325.

LYRIC HAMMERSMITH Map p177

% 0870 050 0511; www.lyric.co.uk; King St W6; t Hammersmith

The Lyric is a great venue that turns classics on their head, staging Greek tragedies through mixed-media, with film projection, dance and music. A modern glass entrance takes you to the historic, plush auditorium (seating 550), and a smaller (180-seat) studio. The studio is aimed at audiences under 20.

MENIER CHOCOLATE FACTORY

Map p126

% 7909 7060; www.menierchocolatefactory.com; 51-53 Southwark St SE1; t London Bridge

Theatre and chocolate, two of life's major passions, have never been as gloriously paired up as they have here – a theatre inside a gorgeous conversion of a 19th-century chocolate factory. To make matters better, the theatre's superb restaurant makes for great combination deals (£20 per person for a two-course dinner and a ticket).

OLD VIC Map p126

% 0870 060 6628; www.oldvictheatre.com; Waterloo Rd SE1; t Waterloo

Never has there been a London theatre with a more world-famous artistic director – Kevin Spacey looks after this glorious theatre's programme, which although not meeting with the best reviews all the time,

WEST END THEATRES

Every summer the West End theatres stage a new crop of plays and musicals, but some performances really do run and run. Examples of immortal musicals are *Mamma Mia*, *Chicago* and *The Phantom of the Opera*, though new shows such as *Spamalot*, *Dirty Dancing* and *Billy Elliot* are looking to become new classics. Addresses and box-office phone numbers of individual theatres are given below. Consult weekly London bible *Time Out* to see what's on.

- Adelphi** (Map pp72–3; ☎ 7344 0055; The Strand WC2; ￯ Charing Cross)
- Albery** (Map pp72–3; ☎ 7369 1740; 85 St Martin's Lane WC2; ￯ Leicester Sq)
- Aldwych** (Map pp72–3; ☎ 0870 400 0805; 49 Aldwych WC2; ￯ Holborn or Covent Garden)
- Apollo** (Map p68; ☎ 7494 5070; 39 Shaftesbury Ave W1; ￯ Piccadilly Circus)
- Cambridge** (Map pp72–3; ☎ 7494 5080; Earlham St WC2; ￯ Covent Garden)
- Comedy** (Map p68; ☎ 7369 1731; Pantom St SW1; ￯ Piccadilly Circus)
- Criterion** (Map p68; ☎ 7413 1437; Piccadilly Circus W1; ￯ Piccadilly Circus)
- Dominion** (Map p68; ☎ 0870 607 7400; 268–269 Tottenham Court Rd W1; ￯ Tottenham Court Rd)
- Duke of York's Theatre** (Map pp72–3; ☎ 7836 4615; St Martin's Lane WC2; ￯ Leicester Sq)
- Fortune** (Map pp72–3; ☎ 7836 2238; Russell St WC2; ￯ Covent Garden)
- Garrick** (Map pp72–3; ☎ 7494 5085; 2 Charing Cross Rd WC2; ￯ Charing Cross)
- Gielgud** (Map p68; ☎ 7494 5065; 33 Shaftesbury Ave W1; ￯ Piccadilly Circus)
- Her Majesty's Theatre** (Map p68; ☎ 7494 5400; Haymarket SW1; ￯ Piccadilly Circus)
- London Palladium** (Map p68; ☎ 7494 5020; 8 Argyll St W1; ￯ Oxford Circus)
- Lyceum** (Map pp72–3; ☎ 7420 8100; 21 Wellington St WC2; ￯ Covent Garden)
- Lyric** (Map p68; ☎ 7494 5045; Shaftesbury Ave W1; ￯ Piccadilly Circus)
- New Ambassadors** (Map pp72–3; ☎ 7369 1761; West St WC2; ￯ Leicester Sq or Covent Garden)
- New London** (Map pp72–3; ☎ 7405 0072; Drury Lane WC2; ￯ Holborn or Covent Garden)
- Palace** (Map p68; ☎ 7434 0909; Shaftesbury Ave W1; ￯ Leicester Sq)
- Phoenix** (Map p68; ☎ 7369 1733; 110 Charing Cross Rd WC2; ￯ Tottenham Court Rd)
- Piccadilly** (Map p68; ☎ 7478 8800; Denman St W1; ￯ Piccadilly Circus)
- Prince Edward** (Map p68; ☎ 7447 5400; 30 Old Compton St W1; ￯ Leicester Sq)
- Prince of Wales** (Map p68; ☎ 7839 5987; 31 Coventry St W1; ￯ Piccadilly Circus)
- Queen's Theatre** (Map p68; ☎ 7494 5040; Shaftesbury Ave W1; ￯ Piccadilly Circus)
- St Martin's** (Map pp72–3; ☎ 7836 1443; West St WC2; ￯ Leicester Sq)
- Savoy Theatre** (Map pp72–3; ☎ 7836 8888; Savoy Ct, The Strand WC2; ￯ Charing Cross)
- Shaftesbury** (Map pp72–3; ☎ 7379 5399; 210 Shaftesbury Ave WC2; ￯ Tottenham Court Rd or Holborn)
- Strand** (Map pp72–3; ☎ 7836 4144; Aldwych WC2; ￯ Covent Garden)
- Theatre Royal Drury Lane** (Map pp72–3; ☎ 7494 5060; Catherine St WC2; ￯ Covent Garden)
- Theatre Royal Haymarket** (Map p68; ☎ 0870 901 3356; Haymarket SW1; ￯ Piccadilly Circus)
- Whitehall Theatre** (Map pp72–3; ☎ 7321 5400; 14 Whitehall SW1; ￯ Charing Cross)
- Wyndham's** (Map pp72–3; ☎ 7369 1736; Charing Cross Rd WC2; ￯ Leicester Sq)

bowled the public and the critics over with the Howard Davies 2006 production of Eugene O'Neill's *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, with Spacey as Jim Tyrone. The production moved to Broadway and left the Old Vic with a deserving confidence boost.

SOHO THEATRE Map p68

☎ 0870 429 6883; www.sohotheatre.com; 21 Dean St W1; ￯ Tottenham Court Rd
The Soho Theatre Company dedicates itself solely to the noble task of finding new writing talent, having put on hundreds of

new plays since it started operating from its smart Dean St premises in 2000. It has innovative programmes to support and develop new writing, and also showcases comedy and gets kids penning drama. This is the place to see where London drama is heading.

TRICYCLE THEATRE Map p64

☎ 7328 1000; www.tricycle.co.uk; 269 Kilburn High Rd NW6; ￯ Kilburn

If political theatre is your thing, the Tricycle delivers. The Tricycle has made a name for itself in the recent years as the theatre-world's conscience, with plays that draw on world events (conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan,

and the Middle East) in intelligent and provocative ways. There's a nice cinema and bar on site, too.

YOUNG VIC Map p126

☎ 7928 6363; www.youngvic.org; 66 The Cut SE1; ￯ Waterloo

One of the capital's funkiest and most respected theatre troupes – bold, brave and talented – the Young Vic reopened in early 2007 to great acclaim, grabbing audiences with arresting plays such as *Vernon God Little* (as adapted from DBC Pierre's novel) and the fantastic *The Big Brecht Fest* season. There's a gorgeous bar-restaurant with a little summer balcony upstairs.

BLUELIST¹ (blu,list) v.
to recommend a travel experience.

What's your recommendation? www.lonelyplanet.com/bluelist

SPORTS & ACTIVITIES

top picks

- Hampstead Heath Ponds (p325)
- Porchester Baths (p326)
- Serpentine Lido (p326)
- Brockwell Park Lido (p325)
- Sanctuary (p326)
- Wembley Stadium (p326)
- Wimbledon (p328)

London's a great place for sport lovers, be it those who love to play or just sit back and watch a game, and for a place that's traditionally associated with cold and bad weather, you'll be surprised at the number of outdoor-swimming options. Those of you who like to get sweaty and pump some 'aayron' (Arnie-style) will find gleaming state-of-the-art gyms and community sports centres to work out in, while the lazybones among you have tons of pampering spas to choose from.

Needless to say that lovers of football, rugby, horse racing, tennis or cricket have come to the right place to see great matches and tournaments. Just prepare to queue for those tickets.

HEALTH & FITNESS

London loves to sweat on the dance floor and on the treadmill. And if you too love a good workout, there are so many gyms and swimming pools in the city, you'll always be in the vicinity of a chance to burn those calories. Gyms are either local authority-run places at the bottom end of the market or private enterprises at the top, with the latter often coming in large chains. Like most other things in London, keeping fit in the capital can be expensive and riddled with snobbery – the gym you're a member of says a lot about you.

Opening hours vary hugely even within certain leisure centres, where some facilities open or close before others. As a rule, most gyms are open until at least 9pm. However, it's best to call ahead.

GYMS

CENTRAL YMCA Map p68

☎ 7343 1700; www.centralymca.org.uk; 112 Great Russell St WC1; membership per day/week £15/49; **t** Tottenham Court Rd
The gym at London's YMCA is popular and busy. Membership gives you the chance to use the pool. The YMCA compares favourably with many of the more expensive and elitist London gyms, and of course it's very friendly.

FITNESS FIRST

☎ 01202-845000; www.fitnessfirst.co.uk
The largest health club in the UK as well as the whole of Europe, this pan-London organisation has a reputation as a good middle-range gym chain. Handily, you can use any Fitness First club, no matter where you joined up. With branches all over the

city, this chain is the very popular with short-term visitors to London.

GYMBOX

☎ 7395 0270; www.gymbox.co.uk
With two big gyms in the West End (one is inside an old cinema), Gymbox is presently the most popular newish gym chain in town. It's got an array of innovative classes and facilities, including an Olympic-size boxing ring and Latino hip-hop workout/dance classes.

LA FITNESS

☎ 7366 8080; www.lafitness.co.uk
With more than 20 gyms in all areas of London, from Victoria to the City, LA Fitness is another big player on the scene. Its gyms are modern and well equipped, and the membership packages are extremely flexible.

QUEEN MOTHER SPORTS CENTRE

Map pp138–9
☎ 7630 5522; www.courtneys.co.uk; 223 Vauxhall Bridge Rd SW1; membership per month from £22; **t** Victoria
This place is another reliable, central London gym, named after the Queen's late mum. It features three pools and comprehensive sporting facilities.

SEYMOUR LEISURE CENTRE Map p100

☎ 7723 8019; www.courtneys.co.uk; Seymour Pl W1; membership per month from £22, pool visit £3; **t** Marble Arch or Edgware Rd
The Seymour is a bit of a shabby, but long-standing London leisure centre. Its main advantage is the central location and reasonable prices, which means it's always quite busy.

THIRD SPACE Map p68

☎ 7439 6333; www.thirdspace.com; 13 Sherwood St W1; membership per month £118; **t** Piccadilly Circus
London's most chic gym provides everything necessary for busy Soho media execs to relax in or work up a sweat on, at a hefty price.

VIRGIN ACTIVE

☎ 0845 130 4747; www.virginactive.co.uk
Virgin Active is the biggest chain in the UK, and is the best of the top-end gym chains in terms of quality and services. It has masses of facilities (pools, classes etc) and offers for families and children.

SWIMMING

London has something of a love affair with its lovely 'lidos'. They are what most people simply call swimming pools, though the term historically denotes an open-air establishment. There are some lovely 1930s Art Deco lidos and most neighbourhoods have at least one.

BROCKWELL PARK LIDO Map p200

☎ 7274 3088; www.thelido.co.uk; Dulwich Rd SE24; admission £2-5; **t** 6.45am-7pm mid-Jun–Aug, weather dependent rest of year; **t** Brixton, **d** Herne Hill
A beautifully designed 1930s lido, Brockwell is one of London's best, as witnessed by the multitudes that descend in the summer months.

HAMPSTEAD HEATH PONDS Map p166

Hampstead Heath, Gordon House Rd NW5; adult/concession £2/1; **d** Gospel Oak or Hampstead Heath, **g** 214, C2 or 24

SAVING THE LOCAL LONDON LIDO

The London-based listings magazine, *Time Out*, started the worthy Save Our Pools campaign in 2006 which set out to do just what it says – save London's local pools from closing or falling into disrepair due to the lack of funds and general care. The campaign found that seven pools had closed in the last 12 years and 16 faced imminent closure or were decaying fast.

The magazine ran the campaign, and got such a massive response from Londoners that it became one of the (local) political hot potatoes. The magazine found that Londoners were only too happy to challenge their local councils on the state of their pools, and had been struggling to get their voices heard on the subject. It was particularly ironic that the coming of the 2012 Olympics meant that the city's money was being poured into building new facilities while local pools were being neglected.

The campaign was quite a success, and 2006 saw 'a renaissance for lidos' – several were re-opened after laying closed for years, and many had their funding secured, while others prevented their local baths' closure altogether. For more details on the campaign, go to *Time Out's* website (www.timeout.com).

Set in the midst of the gorgeous Heath, the three ponds offer a slightly chilly dip surrounded by wild shrubbery; the men's pond is a bit of a gay cruising area (but it's also a fantastic, beautiful place for a swim), the secluded women's pond less so. The mixed pond can sometimes get rather crowded and isn't so scenically located.

IRONMONGER BATHS Map p150

☎ 7253 4011; www.aquaterra.org; Ironmonger Row EC1; per swim £3.40; **t** Old St
The Ironmonger Baths is a local authority-run gym and pool complex which is popular but not too crowded, and has a great pool and friendly atmosphere. There are wonderful Turkish baths downstairs (£10 per day).

OASIS Map pp72–3

☎ 7831 1804; 32 Endell St WC2; adult/concession £3.50/1.50; **t** Tottenham Court Rd or Covent Garden
A brilliant heated open-air pool has to be the best thing to find right in the heart of London. At such bargain prices, it often gets very crowded. There's an indoor pool for fresher London days.

PARLIAMENT HILL LIDO Map p166

☎ 7485 3873; Hampstead Heath, Gordon House Rd NW5; adult/concession 7-9am £2/1, 10-6pm £4/2; **d** Gospel Oak, **g** 214 or C2
This classic lido on Hampstead Heath is a wonderful place to come for a bracing morning swim during the summer months. It attracts a friendly but dedicated bunch of locals and boasts a children's paddling pool and sunbathing area.

PORCHESTER BATHS Map p175

☎ 7792 2919; Porchester Centre, Queensway W2; admission £4.70; ☎ Bayswater or Royal Oak
The lovely Porchester Baths' pool has had its 1930s Art Deco beauty fully restored and is loved by those wishing to swim in atmospheric surroundings.

SERPENTINE LIDO Map pp138–9

☎ 7298 2100; Hyde Park W2; ☎ Hyde Park Corner or Knightsbridge

Perhaps the ultimate London pool inside the Serpentine lake, this fabulous lido is usually open in July and August. Admission prices and opening times are always subject to change, so it's essential to call ahead.

TOOTING BEC LIDO Map p64

☎ 8871 7198; Tooting Bec Rd SW17; adult/under 5yr/concession £3.65/free/£2.50; ☎ May-Sep; ☎ Tooting Bec

The first-ever public lido in London, Tooting Bec was built in 1906 and remains one of the largest in Europe at 90m by 36m. There are Jacuzzis and saunas.

YOGA & PILATES

TRIYOGA

☎ 7483 3344; www.triyoga.co.uk

One of London's first yoga centres and still its most prestigious, Triyoga has three venues (Primrose Hill, Soho and Covent Garden), first-class teachers and classes of all types of yoga, as well as pilates. Classes cost £11, and courses start at £45.

ACTIVITIES

If you love spending a day being attacked with hot towels, heated pebbles and facials, and pummed with hands covered in aromatic oils, and, at the end of such harsh treatment swimming in heated pools and lying in wonderfully relaxing spaces for hours on end, London's spas will provide you with many joyous hours.

SPAS

ELEMIS DAY SPA Map p100

☎ 8909 5060; www.elemis.com/dayspa.html; 2-3 Lancashire Ct; ☎ Bond St

This incredible Mayfair spa is almost ridiculously elaborate and features themed

suites: Balinese, Moroccan, the purple room and the emerald room. Upmarket and offering a huge range of services, this is one hell of a place to treat yourself. Book ahead.

K SPA Map p177

☎ 0870 027 4343; www.k-west.co.uk; Richmond Way W12; ☎ Shepherd's Bush

The K Spa is an important part of the **K West hotel (p360)**, and has a good range of facilities: a Jacuzzi, eucalyptus steam room, sauna and two gyms. Alternatively, you can choose from a range of exotic treatments, facials and massages. It's one of the best complexes in West London.

SANCTUARY Map pp72–3

☎ 0870 770 3350; www.thesanctuary.co.uk; 12 Floral St WC2; ☎ Covent Garden

A women's-only spa, the Sanctuary lives up to its name. With heated and exercise pools, saunas, Jacuzzis, masses of treatments, quiet rooms for napping, a café and a relaxing and friendly atmosphere, it's a haven to get away to from the chaos of the West End.

SPECTATOR SPORTS

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

FOOTBALL

Wembley Stadium (Map p64; www.wembleystadium.com), in northwest London, has been the premier national stadium since it was built in 1923. It's where England traditionally plays its international matches and where the FA Cup final is contested in mid-May. Its greatest moment came when the victorious England captain, Bobby Moore, held the World Cup trophy aloft in 1966. Controversially, the great stadium and its two landmark towers were demolished in 2001, and even more controversially the new 90,000-capacity, state-of-the-art Norman Foster-designed complex, due to open in 2003, hosted its first game four years late: the FA Cup final in 2007. Even though it was abysmally late and cost twice the original budget (at £798 million, it's the most expensive stadium ever built), Wembley is one of the world's most significant football landmarks.

CLUBS IN THE CAPITAL

Football is at the very heart of English culture, and attending a game is one of the highlights of any visit to London. At the time of writing, Arsenal, Chelsea, Fulham, Tottenham Hotspur and West Ham were all in the Premiership. For more on football in London, see [opposite](#).

Arsenal (Map p64; ☎ 7704 4040; www.arsenal.com; Avenell Rd N5; admission £25-45; ☎ Arsenal)

Charlton Athletic (Map p64; ☎ 8333 4010; www.cafc.co.uk; the Valley, Floyd Rd SE7; admission £15-40; ☎ Charlton)

Chelsea (Map p177; ☎ 0870 300 1212, 7915 2222, tickets 7915 2951; www.chelseafc.com; Stamford Bridge Stadium, Fulham Rd SW6; admission £11-40; ☎ Fulham Broadway)

Crystal Palace (Off Map p64; ☎ 0871 200 0071; www.cpcfc.co.uk; Selhurst Park, Whitehorse Lane SE25; admission £20-26; ☎ Selhurst)

Fulham (Map p205; ☎ 0870 442 1234; www.fulhamfc.com; Craven Cottage, Stevenage Rd SW6; admission £25-40; ☎ Putney Bridge)

Leyton Orient (Map p64; ☎ 8926 1111; www.leytonorient.com; Matchroom Stadium, Brisbane Rd E10; admission £12-16; ☎ Leyton)

Millwall (Map p180; ☎ 7232 1222; www.millwallfc.co.uk; the Den, Zampa Rd SE16; admission £16-25; ☎ South Bermondsey)

Queens Park Rangers (Map p64; ☎ 0870 112 1967; www.qpr.co.uk; Loftus Rd W12; admission £14-20; ☎ White City)

Tottenham Hotspur (Map p64; ☎ 0870 420 5000; www.spurs.co.uk; White Hart Lane N17; admission £12-55; ☎ White Hart Lane)

West Ham United (Map p64; ☎ 0870 112 2700; www.westhamunited.co.uk; Boleyn Ground, Green St E13; admission £22-39; ☎ Upton Park)

Arsenal Emirates Stadium (www.arsenal.com), on the other hand, opened on time in July 2006, and although quite a bit smaller (60,400 capacity), it is still the third largest in London. It's located in Ashburton Grove, Highbury, and was named after the project's biggest sponsor, the airline Emirates. Many were sorry to see the old stadium go, with its old tea ladies and working-class atmosphere, and the stadium's construction was met with objections from the unhappy locals whose houses and businesses were cleared for the stadium. Most have learned to love it, however.

There are a dozen league teams in London, and usually around five or six play in the Premier League, meaning that on any weekend of the season – from August to mid-May – top-quality football is just a tube or train ride away. If you really want to see a match, you might consider dropping a division and going to see one of the first-division teams, for which you can normally just rock up on the day.

CRICKET

If you're hot and bothered from seeing the sights, you could do a lot worse than pack-

ing up a picnic and spending a day enjoying the thwack of leather on willow and savouring the atmosphere of this most English of sports. Although the game was invented here, the England team has struggled on the international stage, with the notable exception of winning the Ashes in 2005, only to lose them again in 2006, becoming the shortest ever champion's reign.

The **English Cricket Board** (☎ 0870 533 8833; www.ecb.co.uk) has full details of match schedules and tickets, which cost between £20 and £50 and can be difficult to get. Test matches are regularly played at the venerable Lord's and Oval grounds. Tickets (between £5 and £10) are a lot easier to come by for county games; county teams compete in four-day, one-day and 20-over matches between April and September.

LORD'S Map p175

☎ tours 7616 8585, switchboard 7616 8500; www.lords.org; St John's Wood Rd NW8; ☎ St John's Wood
The 'home of cricket,' a trip to Lord's is often as much a pilgrimage as anything else. As well as being home to Middlesex County Cricket Club, the ground hosts test

matches, one-day internationals and domestic finals. For more on Lord's see p174.

BRIT OVAL Map p198

☎ 7582 7764; www.surreycricket.com; Kennington Oval SE11; t Oval

County side Surrey plays at the Oval, known for its distinctive gasholders. It's also famous as the place where cricket-lover John Major went immediately after losing the election to Blair in 1997. For more on the Brit Oval, see p202.

RUGBY UNION & RUGBY LEAGUE

Between January and March, England competes against Scotland, Wales, Ireland, France and Italy in the Six Nations Championship, and there are always three games at Twickenham Stadium.

Union fans should head to Southwest London, where mighty teams including the **Harlequins** (☎ 8410 6000; www.quins.co.uk; Stoop Memorial Ground, Langhorn Dr, Twickenham TW2; admission £12-25; d Twickenham) and **Wasps** (☎ 8993 8298; www.wasps.co.uk; Adams Park, High Wycombe W3; admission £7-18; d High Wycombe) play from August to May. **London Irish** (☎ 01932-783034; www.londonirish.com; Bennet Rd, Reading; admission £7-16; d Reading) and **Saracens** (☎ 01923-475222; www.saracens.com; Vicarage Rd, Watford; admission £12-35; d Watford High St) are also in the Premiership. Most matches are played on Saturday and Sunday afternoons.

LONDON BRONCOS Map p64

☎ 8853 8001; www.londonbrontos.co.uk; the Valley, Floyd Rd SE7; d Charlton

The only place in southern England to see rugby league.

TWICKENHAM RUGBY STADIUM

Map p64

☎ 8892 2000; www.rfu.com; Rugby Rd, Twickenham; t Hounslow East, then G 281, d Twickenham
The home of English rugby union. For information about guided tours, see p210.

TENNIS

Tennis and Wimbledon, in Southeast London, are almost synonymous, and SW19 suddenly becomes the centre of the sporting universe for a fortnight in June/July when the world-famous tennis tournament takes place.

WIMBLEDON Off Map p64

☎ 8944 1066, 8946 2244; www.wimbledon.org; Church Rd SW19; t Wimbledon, then G 493
The All England Lawn Tennis Championships have been taking place here in late June/early July since 1877. Most tickets for the Centre and Number One courts are distributed by ballot, applications for which must be made the preceding year. Try your luck by sending a stamped self-addressed envelope to the **All England Lawn Tennis Club** (PO Box 98, Church Rd, Wimbledon SW19 5AE). Limited tickets go on sale on the day of play, though queues are painfully long. The nearer to the finals, the higher the prices. Prices for outside courts are under £10, reduced after 5pm. You might be better off going to the men's warm-up tournament at **Queen's Club** (Map p205; ☎ 7385 3421; www.queensclub.co.uk; Palliser Rd, Hammersmith W14; admission per day £12; t Barons Ct), which takes place a couple of weeks before Wimbledon.

ATHLETICS

England – and London in particular – has a rich history in athletics and continues to produce world champions. There are major international meets each summer at the grand old venue of Crystal Palace in Southeast London, which has been the site of many magical moments in recent years and where every major international athlete has competed.

CRYSTAL PALACE NATIONAL SPORTS CENTRE Off Map p64

☎ 8778 0131; www.crystalpalace.co.uk; Ledrington Rd SE19; d Crystal Palace

Athletics and swimming meetings attracting major international and domestic stars take place here regularly throughout the summer.

HORSE RACING

There are several racecourses within striking distance of London for those wanting to have a flutter. The flat racing runs from April to September, while you can see the gee-gees scaling fences from October to April.

ASCOT

☎ 01344-622211; www.ascot.co.uk; Berkshire; admission from £6; d Ascot
Best known for the fashion circus of Royal Ascot in June.

EPSOM

☎ 01372-470047; www.epsomderby.co.uk; Epsom, Surrey; admission from £5; d Epsom Downs
With much more racing credibility than Ascot, this famous racetrack's star turn is Derby Day in June, but it has meets all year.

KEMPTON PARK

☎ 01932-782292; www.kemptonpark.co.uk; Staines Rd East, Sunbury-on-Thames, Middlesex; admission from £6; d Kempton Park
Of its all-year meetings, summer-evening events are best.

ROYAL WINDSOR RACECOURSE

☎ 01753-865234; www.windsor-racecourse.co.uk; Maidenhead Rd, Windsor, Berkshire; admission from £6; d Windsor
An idyllic spot beside the castle.

SANDOWN PARK

☎ 01372-463072; www.sandown.co.uk; Portsmouth Rd, Esher, Surrey; admission from £12; d Esher
Generally considered the southeast's finest racecourse.

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