

## London

### Overview

London is a huge, cosmopolitan city covering around 600 square miles, with a multi-cultural population of around 7.5 million. The city is the capital of Great Britain, home of the Royal Family and is at the heart of British political, business and financial life. The city boasts a huge array of attractions, historic buildings, galleries and museums and attracts millions of domestic and foreign tourists every year.

Once the centre of a great Empire, London is a city where almost anything can happen and often does but that is why London is so exciting. Although the capital of Great Britain has seen foreign visitors from at least the time of the Romans, it was not until the mid 20th century that its cultural diversity took off in explosive proportions. This is now reflected by the fact that most high streets contain a variety of restaurants catering in the cuisine of so many different nationalities.

Like no other city around the world, London is a place of modern myths and legends borne from romantic illusions created in Hollywood. Common Londoners never have spoken with an accent as portrayed by Dick van Dyke in the 1964 cinema musical *Mary Poppins*. Pea Soupers (an almost whiteout fog/smog) are something that have not occurred for more than half a century.

As with any capital city in the world there are traditions, but some in London are daily such as the changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace or the Ceremony of the Keys at the Tower of London. Some ceremonies and events in the capital date back many centuries such as Beating the Retreat which has its origins in the 1600's and some events such as The Henry Wood Promenade Concerts are more recent having began in 1895. The Proms is also one of the most watched and listened to musical events in the world as it is broadcast on television and radio around the world, in recent years the last night has been joined by events known as Proms in the Park around the UK.

London is famous the world over for both its history and its cultural diversity, which are evident in the range of choices it offers to visitors looking for a good night out: traditional pubs and chip shops sit alongside trendy bars and a wide range of restaurants. For centuries the pub has been a mainstay of British culture, and so it remains to this day. If a traditional English pub is what you're after, look out for Young's, Fullers and Shepherd Neame. All of these have numerous pubs around the capital, and while no two pubs are the same they generally cater for the more discerning, family-oriented drinker. Another chain to look out for is the Yorkshire brewer Samuel Smith, whose old-fashioned pubs are usually the cheapest in town. Districts in London that are rich in good places to drink include historic Hampstead, Highgate and London Bridge which offer plenty of traditional pubs ideal for a relaxing drink after wandering through the many narrow cobbled streets. If live music is what you're after, then a trip to Camden will be in order - gig venues and pubs with live music abound, as do tourists in Goth makeup. For a more upmarket culinary & drinking experience, Notting Hill is littered with bars & restaurants, particularly around Portobello Road, as well as galleries and other venues, such as the Notting Hill Arts Club.

Despite being the biggest and most densely populated city in Europe, London contains a surprising amount of green spaces, ideal destinations for a family day out. Hyde Park, one of the Royal Parks of London, is divided in two by the Serpentine Lake. The most notable feature of Hyde Park is its Speakers' Corner (in the north-east corner near Marble Arch), where public speakers and conspiracy theorists alike can air their views. South of the Serpentine is the Diana, Princess of Wales memorial, an oval stone ring fountain. Richmond Park, near the Thames, is probably one of the nicest parks in Europe.

Most visitors agree that London is truly one of the most exciting cities in the world!

## **Places to Visit**

### **Buckingham Palace**

The London home of the Queen, Buckingham Palace has some 600 rooms and gardens covering more than 4 acres. During the summer the staterooms, such as the Throne Room, are open to the public. The famous Changing of the Guard ceremony takes place daily at 11:30 between April and July, and on every other day for the rest of the year.

### **The Palace of Westminster**

With its clock tower and the world famous bell, Big Ben, The Palace of Westminster is home to the Houses of Parliament. It is possible to watch debates in the House of Commons and the House of Lords by joining one of the queues outside the Palace.

### **Westminster Abbey**

This beautiful building houses an extraordinary collection of tombs, monuments and memorials of great public figures, from politicians, such as Winston Churchill, explorers such as David Livingstone, inventors as Isaac Newton, to poets such as Geoffrey Chaucer.

### **The London Eye**

One of London's newest attractions, offering panoramic views of the city, is the London Eye. It is a huge wheel, standing 135m tall, located on the south bank of the Thames near to Westminster Palace. Its enclosed passenger capsules offer a gentle ride as it takes about half an hour to complete one revolution.

### **The Tate Modern Gallery**

At Bankside is dedicated to 20th century art the Tate Modern Gallery includes work by Matisse, Picasso, Rothko and Warhol. The building itself, opened in 2000, was converted from a power station at a cost of £130-million.

### **Greenwich**

A visit to Greenwich cannot easily be undertaken in one day, as it encompasses possibly 3000 or more years of London's history, however for many visitors the best known attractions are from the Tudor times onward. Although there is so much to see in Greenwich, its two most famous attractions are the Cutty Sark and the Royal Observatory.

### **O2 Arena**

The O2 Arena located on the Greenwich peninsula has since its shaky start as the Millennium Dome has become one of Europe's top sport and entertainment venues. Since it reopened in mid 2007 the O2 has hosted many major sports events as well as American wrestling, additionally numerous top musical artist have performed at the Arena. The O2 is also an excellent location for exhibitions including the Tutankhamun Exhibition in 2007/8. One of the O2's great advantages is that everything is undercover so a rainy day is not a problem and with various restaurants providing every thing from fine dining to hamburgers it's a good choice for a winter day out.

## **Trafalgar Square**

The recently-pedestrianised Trafalgar Square is famous for Nelson's Column and the bronze lions, and it is rightly regarded as one of the world's great public squares, which every visitor to London ought to get a glimpse at. Also nearby is the historic St Martin in-the-Fields church.

## **Regent's Park**

Regent's Park is one of the biggest green spaces in central London. The north-east end of the park contains London Zoo, the world's first scientific zoo, which houses a collection of more than 650 different species of animals. South of the river, Battersea Park features the Festival Gardens, an attraction of the 1951 Festival of Britain.

## **The South Bank**

The South Bank of the Thames hosts many of London's finest attractions, many of which can be taken in on a scenic walk along the river. West of Tower Bridge, one of the capital's most famous landmarks, is the modern glass ovoid City Hall, the headquarters of London's regional assembly.

## **The Tate Britain**

London is renowned for its culture, and many of its institutions can be visited free of charge. The Tate Britain is situated on Millbank, (Tube: Pimlico) was initially concentrated on the works of Victorian painters. Its collection was later expanded to include foreign works, but still remains largely devoted to British art from 1500 to the present day.

## **The British Museum**

The British Museum in Bloomsbury (Tube: Tottenham Court Road) offers such treasures as the Rosetta Stone and Easter Island statues, and has been free to the world since 1753.

## **Events**

### **January - New Years Day – 1st January**

A public holiday in the UK to celebrate the start of a new year, most people make new year's resolution's that they try and keep throughout the entire year.

### **February - Valentine's Day**

14th February is the time of year to tell someone that you love him or her. Both men and women can send cards or give presents. Traditionally, you do not write your name on the card or present. They are often sent by post, delivered by someone else or are hidden: they are not normally given directly to the person. Among the most common presents are chocolates, teddy bears and flowers. Couples sometimes go out for a meal: reserve a table early if you want to go to a restaurant on this day. This is the most expensive time of year to buy red roses.

### **February - Shrove Tuesday (Pancake Day) 16th February**

Historically, on Shrove Tuesday Christians confessed their sins and asked to be forgiven for them (this was known as "shriving"). It is the day before the period known as Lent, when Christians traditionally did not eat fatty foods (for example: meat, fish, eggs and milk) for 40 days until Palm Sunday, which is a week before Easter Sunday. Families had a feast on this day to eat those foods which could not be kept for 40 days: eggs and milk were used by adding flour and frying them to make pancakes. This tradition is still kept by many families. The popular name for Shrove Tuesday is Pancake Day.

### **February - Chinese New Year: Chinatown event**

26th February is a celebration of the Chinese New Year in the Chinatown area of London. The main events are in Gerrard Street, Leicester Square and Trafalgar Square. The entertainment includes lion and dragon dances, martial art demonstrations, Chinese food and music, and firecrackers.

### **March - London St Patrick's Day Festival**

A celebration of Irish culture in London, usually on the Sunday nearest to St Patrick's Day which is 17 March. There is a parade starting at 12 noon which passes down Piccadilly, Regent Street and Trafalgar Square before finishing in Whitehall Place. There is also a festival of music and cultural performances in Trafalgar Square, Leicester Square and Covent Garden.

### **March - Cheltenham Festival**

One of the main horse racing events of the year takes place in Cheltenham. This is jump racing (over fences), with many top British and Irish horses competing. The most important race is the Gold Cup on Friday.

### **March - Head of the River Race**

A boat race on the river Thames in London for "eights", which each have eight people who row and one person who directs the boat. There are several hundred boats competing, setting off at 10-second intervals and the times to finish the course are recorded. It is expected to start at 1:15pm and end at about 2:30pm; the fastest boats can complete the 4.25 mile (7 kilometer) course in about 20 minutes. The race starts at Chiswick Bridge and ends at Putney Bridge. You can watch it from any accessible point along the river, but the best views are probably on the east bank of the Thames (the side which is in Surrey) just north of Chiswick Bridge.

### **April - April Fools Day – 1st April**

Be careful - it is traditional for people to try to trick you. This is meant to be for fun so try not to take it too seriously if someone tries a joke on you or tries to make you believe something strange. Many people believe that someone should only be tricked in the morning; otherwise the person who is doing the tricking is the "fool".

### **April - St Georges Day**

England's national day celebrated in conjunction with Shakespeare's birthday. The legend of George slaying a dragon and rescuing an innocent maiden from death is medieval. St George's Day is celebrated on the 23rd April, presumed to be the day of George's death in 303, this day was officially named this day in 1222. The story of Saint George is so wrapped in myth and legend that it's difficult to extract the historical facts of a real life but we know he was born in Cappadocia and area which is now in Turkey, he later lived in Palestine. His parents were Christian but he protested against Rome's persecution of Christians and became a Roman soldier.

## **April - The Grand National**

A famous horse race which is held in Aintree near Liverpool. You can see it in the afternoon on television on BBC1. Many British people like to make a small bet about the result of this race; it is quite popular amongst the British people.

## **April - Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race**

The world famous boat race between the two oldest universities in the country takes place on the banks of the River Thames each year for what promises to be an epic battle between the two. The Race takes place on the River Thames. The Race starts at Putney Bridge, following the river and ends up at Chiswick Bridge.

## **April - The London Marathon**

The London Marathon has been taking place each year since 1981. Many of the runners are taking part in order to raise money for charity. There are three starting points close to Greenwich, races start between 9am and 10am. The nearest railway stations are Maze Hill or Blackheath; Greenwich train station and the DLR station at Cutty Sark are also close. The race ends on The Mall. The centre of Greenwich (near the boat called the "Cutty Sark") and the area near to the finishing line can become very busy. Recommended places to view the race are either close to the start, or somewhere along Westferry Road on the Isle of Dogs. A free spectator's guide is available from underground stations. You can also watch the marathon on television: it is shown on BBC1 in the morning and early afternoon.

## **May - The Chelsea Flower Show**

Held every year during May, The Chelsea Flower Show is the worlds most popular and renowned flower show. The show lasts for a week and includes large Show Gardens, created by the world's best known designers, as well as a variety of smaller gardens created by individuals and members of small clubs and societies. The floral pavilions contain displays from around the world and there are all sorts of garden related items to be seen, ranging from conservatories and greenhouses to furniture, statues and tools.

## **June - The Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Championships**

A must for any tennis fan. The tournament takes place at the all England lawn tennis and croquet club and starts six weeks before the first Monday in August and lasts for a fortnight, or for as long as necessary to complete all events. Tickets are hard to come by and are allocated by ballot, details of which can be found at the official Wimbledon website. There are also a small number of tickets available on the day by queuing at the All England Club.

## **June - Taste of London Festival**

Hotly anticipated London restaurant event Taste of London brings together a selection of world famous London restaurants in a unique outdoor food and drink festival, showcasing cuisine from some of the country's best chefs. At the Taste of London festival, visitors can sample gourmet cooking in Regents Park over four mouthwatering days in June.

## **July - London Proms**

Proms in the Park is still one of London's most popular events, Uniting the nation in song, the world-famous Last

Night of the Proms is one of the hottest tickets in the musical calendar. And if you're looking for the best way to enjoy it, just head to Hyde Park with food, flags, family and friends, where for £25.00 you'll get five hours of music and entertainment, and a sensational firework finale.

### **July - Henley Regatta**

Each summer, Henley-on-Thames is brought to life with the Henley Royal Regatta. The Regatta, first held in 1839, is a unique rowing event offering 100 world-class races over 5 days and the chance to see our Olympic stars, whilst enjoying a day of lavish hospitality and elegance on the banks of the River Thames. The pleasing surroundings and glorious summer sunshine, provide a welcome haven of relaxation and tranquillity from the stresses of city life. The ambience is one of a large, Edwardian garden party and this prestigious event offers an idyllic opportunity for corporate or social entertainment.

### **August - The Notting Hill Carnival**

Taking place every year during the August bank holiday weekend the Notting hill carnival transforms this part London into an exotic blaze of colour and sound, as street performers use a combination of music, drama, costumes and dance to dazzle the crowds.

### **September - Brick Lane Curry Festival**

The Brick Lane Curry Festival is a gastronomic extravaganza in London's Brick Lane, celebrating the best in curry culture. Visitors have the chance to sample some of the most tantalizing cuisine from Bangladesh, India and Pakistan over two weeks.

### **September - London Design Festival**

Exhibitions and general designer love this event. The festival is huge and extremely varied; there are open studios, installations, talks, workshops, tours and exhibitions by the well established big names. Everything is scattered between a dozen or more venues so you'll need to plan your day.

### **October - London Film Festival**

The London Film festival is a celebration of actors, directors and writers. The Times BFI London Film Festival is the UK's largest public film event, screening over 300 films from 60 countries. The festival, the LFF, is held every year by the British Film Festival and currently sponsored by The Times Newspaper. The Festival presents selected new films from the full spectrum of world cinema, with an extensive schedule of industry and public forums, education events, lectures and celebrity interviews.

### **November - The Lord Mayor's Show**

Held annually on the second Saturday of November, the lord mayor's show has been taking place for nearly 800 years. It is a spectacular procession that carries the Lord Mayor of London to the Royal Courts of Justice to pledge allegiance to the Crown. With thousands of participants and military personnel, hundreds of vehicles, numerous marching bands and the glorious state coach, it is the largest parade of its kind in the world. The end of the day is marked by a spectacular fireworks display on the River Thames.

### **November - Somerset House Ice Rink**

Somerset House ice rink is open to skaters and spectators alike, promising a magical ice skating London experience for all visitors to Somerset House courtyard. Relax before or after your skate and soak in the atmosphere at Somerset House, which promises something special for Londoners of all ages. There's also The Skate Cafe and Bar which is open for the skating season so if you fancy some tasty hot food, or just a warming or refreshing drink, it's all right there.

### **November - Winter Wonderland**

Even if you're feeling Scrooge-like, this often surreal market-meets-fairground in Hyde Park will have you grinning ear-to-ear from the second you pass the talking, mounted moose head on the way in. The city's largest rink is pretty narrow so watch the turns as you work up an appetite. In fact, just standing in the outdoor seating area, it's hard not to salivate; the air is so perfumed with waffles, chocolate crepes, caramelized nuts and the occasional waft of bratwurst. After your skating session have a nose round the other activities on offer - great views of the city from the Ferris wheel, a Bavarian village, the pirate haunted house and plenty of stalls for picking up stocking fillers.

### **November - State Opening of Parliament/the Queen's Speech**

One of the most colorful and glamorous state occasions of the year, the State opening of Parliament marks the beginning of a new parliamentary year and sets out the agenda for the coming period. This is held at House of Parliament, Westminster, London. Procession starts at Buckingham Palace and ends at the Houses of Parliament.

### **November - Remembrance Sunday**

In the United Kingdom, Remembrance Sunday is the second Sunday in November, the Sunday nearest to 11 November (Armistice Day), which is the anniversary of the end of the hostilities of the First World War at 11 a.m. Since 1918 in the United Kingdom, Remembrance Sunday is marked by ceremonies at local war memorials in most cities, towns and villages.

### **December - Trafalgar Square Christmas Tree Lighting**

Marking the official start of the Christmas season, the lighting of the Christmas tree at Trafalgar Square is accompanied by carols by the St Martins in the Fields Choir. The tree itself is given to Londoners by the Norwegian people, as a token of their appreciation for Britain's help during the Second World War.

### **December - Royal Variety Performance**

Since 1912 there has been an annual variety show performance attended by the king or queen, with the money raised going to a fund to help retired entertainers in need (the artists perform for free). The show is shown on television at a later date.

## **Getting Around**

### **Boat**

There are a number of companies offering boat trips on the Thames including sightseeing tours or cruises with dinner/tea. Services between two or more piers or circular cruises operate on a regular basis and are operated under Licence to London River Services (LRS) whose duties include the regulation of fares and levels of service. Travelcard holders are entitled to significant discounts on boat trips operated under licence from the LRS.

## **Bus**

London offers an extensive bus service, with approximately 4 million journeys being made each weekday. Most bus shelters are now fitted with displays showing waiting times for buses and have maps explaining their routes and where to go for a bus to a chosen destination. Night buses are the only method of public transport available for travel at night as Underground stations close at around midnight.

## **Taxi**

London is full of the famous Black Cabs and their drivers are reputed to provide the best taxi service in the world. Before drivers are awarded their taxi badge they must first pass a comprehensive test assessing their knowledge of London, preparation for which can take in the region of four years. Checks concerning the driver's character and criminal records are also conducted helping to ensure that Black Cabs are as safe a method of transport as possible. The taxis themselves typically carry five people and luggage, but some models can take six people. Wheelchair access is standard and child seats are available. The London Black Cabs can be booked by phone on 0207 833 0996 or hailed in the street when the yellow taxi sign is lit. They are also to be found on designated ranks in prominent places such as mainline rail, underground and bus stations.

## **Private Hire Taxis**

Private-hire taxis are now coming under regulation by the Public Carriage Office. Licences are granted for a period of five years providing the applicant meets, and continues to satisfy, certain requirements for the duration of the licence. There are numerous private taxi companies in London whose numbers can be found in any local directory. The main difference between private taxis and Black Cabs is that the former must be booked in advance and cannot ply for hire on the street. As with the Black Cabs, private-hire taxis licensed by the Public Carriage Office have regulated fares.

## **Travel Card**

One of the best ways for getting around London is with a Travelcard. London has been divided into six zones for travel, with central London as zone 1. The Travelcard gives convenience and flexibility, entitling the bearer to unlimited travel on any combination of tube, train, bus and Docklands Light Railway within the selected zone(s). However, there are some restrictions on this, such as with the Heathrow Express. Travelcards also offer the holder a significant discount on the standard fares of most scheduled boat services, on the Thames, operated under licence to London River Services. You can purchase Travelcards from Underground and railway stations and also selected newsagents. There are several types of Travelcard available including daily and weekend Travelcards, Travelcards for longer periods of time and family Travelcards.

## **Underground**

Apart from during the rush hour (07:00-10:00 and 17:00-19:00, Monday to Friday) when it is extremely crowded, the underground is generally a comfortable and convenient way to travel. For disabled persons there is a booklet available from any Travel Information Centre which provides details of lifts and ramps at each station. The trains operate from 0530 until about midnight Monday to Saturday and from 0700 to 2330 on Sundays.



## Preferred Services

### Apartments

#### **EASYROOMLET**

A stylish Victorian guest house less than a 5-minute walk from Walthamstow Central Underground Station, Easyroomlet offers free Wi-Fi and rooms with a flat-screen TV.

All bedrooms have en-suite facilities. All of them have a desk and storage furniture.

Guests have access to a fully equipped kitchen with a cooker, a microwave and utensils. Towels and toiletries are provided, and a hairdryer can also be provided upon request. Free tea and coffee facilities are available.

The heart of London is accessible in 20 minutes by underground. There are parking restriction on the street but permits can be arranged for a small additional charge.

Couples particularly like the location — they rated it 8 out of 10 for a two-person trip.

This property is also rated for the best value in London! Guests are getting more for their money when compared to other properties in this city.

We speak Czech and Slovak too!

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## Guest Houses

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## **Retail Food & Drink**

### **Halusky - Delicious Discoveries**

Halusky UK is the leading supplier of Czech and Slovak food and drink across the UK. With a small store in south west London, Halusky serves customers from the south west tip of England all the way up to the Scottish highlands from its website - [www.halusky.co.uk](http://www.halusky.co.uk).

Halusky UK is run by husband and wife entrepreneurs Anish and Minal Shah. They have been growing their business for nearly 15 years, and have built strong relationships with leading suppliers throughout Slovakia and Czech Republic.

The key to Halusky UK's continued success, where others have faltered, has been a relentless focus on what their customers want, and a committed approach to sourcing the highest quality products.

Their user-friendly website has an extensive range which includes speciality products, healthy foods, fresh groceries, confectionery, and beers and wines.

If you've recently visited Prague, for example, why not order some food and drink as a reminder of your trip?

And if there is something special you miss from Slovakia or Czech Republic, and you can't find it on the website, Anish and Minal can try to get it for you. Just ask!

Search for '[Halusky UK](#)' to start your next shopping trip!!!

Address: The Sonam Halusky Shop  
132 Upper Richmond Road West,  
East Sheen, London  
SW14 8DS  
Tel: 020 8876 8346  
Email: [info@halusky.co.uk](mailto:info@halusky.co.uk)  
Web: [www.halusky.co.uk/czech-slovak-foods/?utm\\_source=smartwings&utm\\_medium=cpc&utm\\_campaign=destinationpr](http://www.halusky.co.uk/czech-slovak-foods/?utm_source=smartwings&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=destinationpr)