

Visitors Guide to London

Before you book your hotel read this useful guide to the main districts of London.

London Area Guide

Battersea

Battersea has been “up-and-coming” for years but still remains just on the cusp of becoming trendy and is in-fact mostly residential. The famous Battersea Power Station resides here but nowadays it is abandoned and destitute. On the plus side there are some great gastro-pubs and lively bars. However, the south of the river location makes it a bit pesky for getting around town.

Bayswater & Paddington

Bayswater & Paddington are Central London districts offering affordable accommodation and great transport links. It's very handy to travel around town using either of these locations as a base. Unfortunately, there's not a great deal to actually do – other than eat at one of the myriad of restaurants spanning the cuisine of the world. For the outdoors-y types you are an easy walk from Hyde Park where you will find Kensington Palace and the Princess Diana Memorial Fountain.

Bloomsbury, Euston & Fitzrovia

Close to the hustle-and-bustle of the West End, Bloomsbury houses the spectacular British Museum (pictured) as well as the British Library and the Charles Dickens Museum. Traditionally this area is known as the literary heart of London. Hotels in this area are generally more expensive than, for example, Bayswater – but you are paying a premium here for the proximity to the centre. Transport links are good. Overall, it's a great base to spend your time in London.

Brixton

Located towards the southern end of the Piccadilly line this area has the largest afro-Caribbean population of London. There are hundreds of bars, cafes, live music venues and clubs to entertain you. Reggae music, dance, ska, indie all catered for along the famous Coldharbour lane; or you could ‘*take a walk on through, Electric Avenue*’. Brixton can be a bit dodgy, contrary to what many other guides claim it's not been completely cleaned up.

Camden

The world famous Camden Market is great for thrift and gift shopping and there are many clubs and bars open until the early hours. The picturesque Grand Union Canal runs through the town and many of the river-boats moor up here – some of which take paying passengers for a meander upstream. Walking distance to London Zoo. After dark this area has recently become a hotspot for violent drug-related crime.

Chelsea & Fulham

Home to many city workers, stockbrokers and bankers, the streets are (almost) paved with gold. Designer shops, boutiques, staggeringly expensive restaurants and designer-clad yuppies are to be found at every turn in this upmarket part of town. Good location, decent transport links and overall a safe, if not overtly expensive, neighbourhood.

The City & Square Mile

The financial hub of the UK and the historical centre of London before the West End claimed that title. The Tower of London and St Pauls Cathedral are located here – which are must visits. A vibrant area for post-work drinks was once a bit of a ghost-town at the weekends but recent years has seen a change. Hotels tend to be cheaper at the weekends due to the fact most of them cater to the business market.

Clerkenwell & Shoreditch

This East London hangout has seen a rapid transformation from a once almost destitute area to what can be fairly said is the coolest part of town. Non-trendies shall not pass! Bohemians, artists and media types congregate here to dance the night away to music that is painfully cool.

Covent Garden & Holborn

Located in the heart of London this central area is a tourist magnet. There are some great shops and, if you do your research, some great restaurants. Beware the tourist traps though! With easy access to Theatreland and the rest of town it is a popular choice for hotels but again you are paying a premium for location.

Docklands & Wapping

A business oriented area housing Canary Wharf – serviced by the Docklands Light Railway (part of the London Underground) there's not a lot happening here. Strictly business only.

Ealing

A bit too far West for most people to consider staying at unless you are visiting the Ealing Studios, where Shaun of The Dead and many other films have been made. Has links with Poland due to the large Polish community.

Greenwich

A beautiful district located on the banks of the River Thames and home to time... yes the Meridian Line starts here and you can visit the Greenwich Observatory to learn about it's history. A lovely area with some great gastro-pubs but perhaps just a bit too far from the centre of London for many to consider. Greenwich is also home to the O₂ which is one of London's newest and best venues for live music and shows.

Hammersmith, Shepherds Bush & Chiswick

Hammersmith and Shepherds Bush are mainly residential areas, with supermarket chains and cheapo pound shops lining the streets. You might consider this area if you are visiting one of the theatres (Apollo or Lyric), but I wouldn't bother, get a cab here instead. Shepherds Bush is also home to London's biggest retail development, The Westfield Centre (due to open October 2008).

Hampstead

A beautiful leafy suburb of London home to rich and famous of past and present. It's a village within a city with some first class restaurants and boutique stores. Not an area renowned for wild partying – you can enjoy a more relaxed stay in London here with the huge green space of Hampstead Heath (popular with dog walkers, bird watchers and George Michael).

Islington

A district shared equally between business and residential occupants. This has led to the development of a vibrant bar-culture along Upper Street. If bars are not your thing, this is not an area for you.

Kensington & Earl's Court

Kensington along with Bayswater is the most popular place for people to stay in London. Home to some great shopping along High Street Kensington and three of the major London museums (Science, Natural history and the V&A) this safe, cosmopolitan area is served well by transport links. Many hotel bargains can be found here. When choosing a hotel look to be within walking distance of Gloucester Rd, High Street Kensington or South Kensington tube stations. Earl's Court, which is home to the Earl's Court Exhibition Centre, is a little further to the West, is not so well served by transport links and is lacking somewhat in character. Hostels and budget hotels abound this district which is extremely popular with backpackers.

Knightsbridge & Belgravia

Harrods, the world famous department store, is located in Knightsbridge and certainly typifies the area. Known for its luxurious apartments and wealthy residents its a great place to stay with easy access to all parts of town.

Lambeth

An untidy area located just to the south of Waterloo station. Known for its sprawling residential estates. Nothing of interest here for the visiting tourist. Avoid.

Leicester Square & Piccadilly

Leicester Square is famed for its night life but really is not the place to go out for those "in the know". Commercial bars and clubs surround the area, many of which are drastically over-priced. Restaurants tend to be rubbish (especially Steak-house types). At Piccadilly you can see the famous neon advertising boards (hardly Time Square though) and a short walk brings you to the department store Fortnum & Mason or the Ritz... both famous for their afternoon tea which costs upwards of £35.00 per person.

Maida Vale & St John's Wood

Residential area with parks and tree-lined streets. Absolutely brilliant for those who want to be very close (10 mins) from Central London without the traffic noise or crowds. Good accommodation options and surprisingly close to the West End. St John's Wood is home to Lord's Cricket ground. The other major attraction is the world famous Abbey Road Studios, where many legendary acts, including The Beatles, have recorded albums. Sir Paul McCartney still has a property nearby.

Marylebone & Regent's Park

Regents Park is one of London's most beautiful. With the carefully cultivated Rose Garden, boating lake, neatly trimmed hedges and baroque fountains you would be forgiven for thinking you were in a Stately home's garden. Nearby Primrose Hill offers a great view of the city and offers a fantastic photo opportunity... perhaps of a passing celebrity. Marylebone High Street is great for shopping and restaurants and is just a short walk to Oxford Street or Baker Street. This area is, in our opinion, is the best for families or couples as it is safe and there's plenty to do. As well as the upmarket shops and restaurants there are many activities to while away your stay in London including Madame Tussauds and the London Planetarium, Sherlock Holmes Museum, Wallace Collection and the RIBA Museum (architecture). It is generally an expensive area in which to stay, but there are several budget hotels along the busy Baker Street.

Mayfair

Ultra-luxury hotels are this area's forte. The Dorchester and Claridges to name just two. The central location is great for access around the city so if you are looking to impress a stay here is recommended... expect to pay hundreds of pounds per night though.

Notting Hill & Ladbroke Grove

A hip and happening neighbourhood famed for Portobello Market. Some areas are a bit run-down but overall it's a fairly decent location for a stay in London. White-fronted Georgian houses line the streets. Every year, during the August Bank Holiday, Europe's largest street Carnival, The Notting Hill Carnival, takes place.

Putney

This is a gentrified district of London situated on the banks of the River Thames. Mainly residential there are some great riverside pubs to while away Summer weekends. There's not too much to do here and it is a fair distance from the centre of town.

Richmond

Home to Kew Gardens and Hampton Court Palace. This area is some distance away from the centre of town and tricky to get to and from. By all means take time to visit but it's not ideal for a London trip.

Soho & West End

Soho has many reputations – as a lively gay-friendly area, as a red-light district but mainly, in our eyes, simply as a great place to go out for an evening. A mixture of trendy bars and tourist traps line the bustling streets. Accommodation is scarce in this district and what there is, is generally overpriced.

South Bank, Southwark & Waterloo

This area stretches the centre of London to just south of the River Thames. It is a lively area, not really residential and is home to many of London's greatest attractions including the London Eye and all the entertainment along South Bank. A safe district with several good accommodation options.

Victoria

Victoria is a main transport hub within London offering both rail and coach stations with connections to all over the UK. The area immediately around the train station like most in London, is not very pretty and mainly caters for a transient crowd of rush hour workers and tourists entering / exiting the city. Accommodation in this area can be described as patchy, with many budget hotels and hostels it is one of the cheaper central areas but the quality can be extremely poor. In saying that it is a 10-minute walk to Buckingham Palace where, for obvious reasons, the surroundings improve drastically.

Westminster & St James's

The political hub of the UK. The awesome Houses of Parliament and Big Ben can be found here. This is civil servant territory and as such apart from the amazing architecture of parliament there's not too much else in the way of shopping, food or reasonably priced accommodation. However, if you do locate a good deal in this area it is safe, central, picturesque and steeped in history.

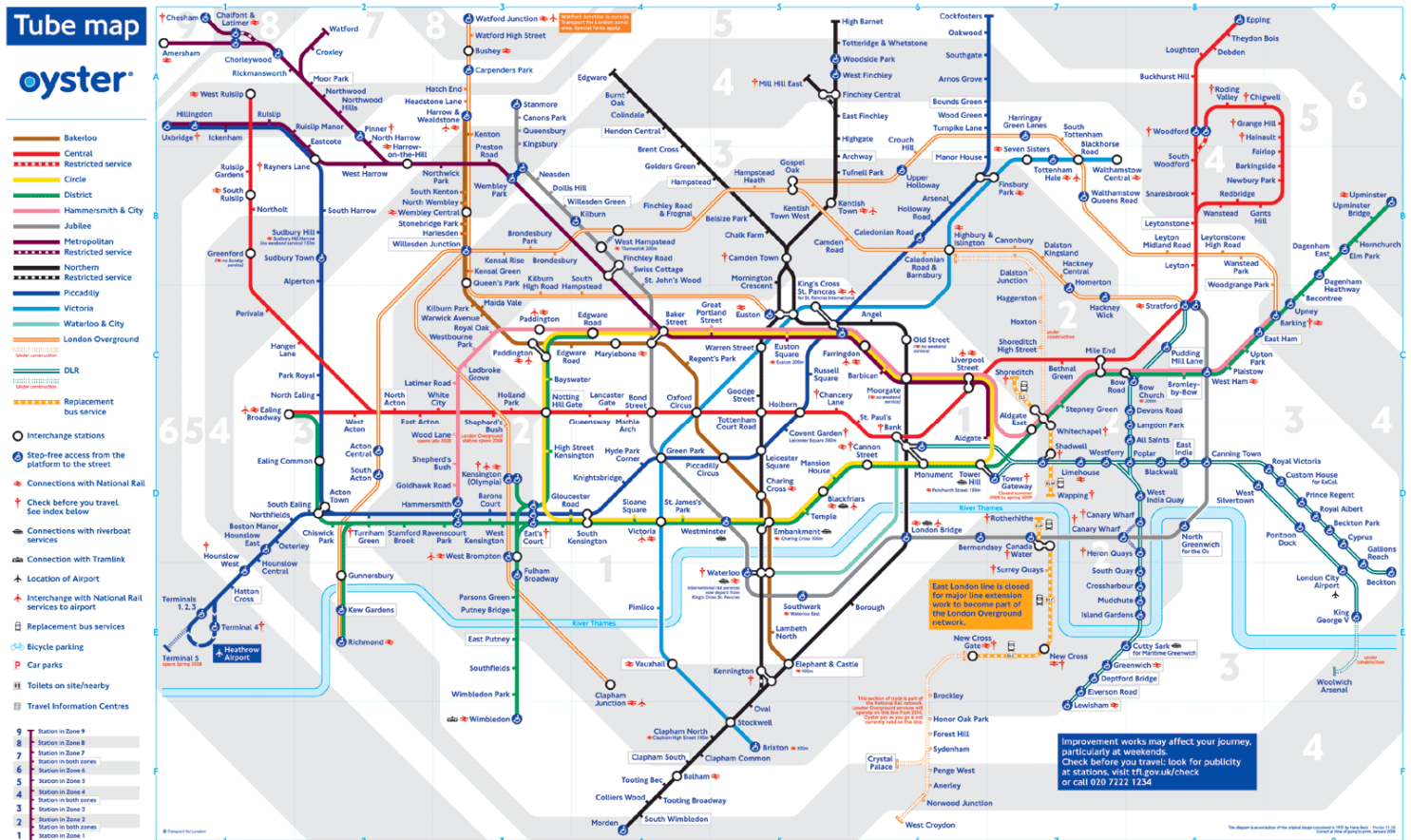
Wimbledon

Wimbledon is another leafy suburb located miles from the centre of town. It's famous for the Wimbledon Tennis Championship. A very safe area which is mainly residential. Tricky to get to and from and so not recommended as a base for getting around town.

Getting about on the London Underground

The London Underground A.K.A “the tube” is the Londoners choice of transport. It is a complicated system that takes a bit of getting used to but, once mastered, it is by far the quickest way to travel medium or large distances around town. Beware that the tube map is not representative of actual distances between stations, by which we mean that although King’s Cross and Russell Square seem to be a fair distance from each other on this map, they are in fact less than a five minute walk apart. The general rule for working out journey time is that there are, on average, 2 minutes between stations (often less for very central journeys).

London Tube Map



Oyster Cards

The Oyster Card is a pre-paid card used for discounted travel on the tube and buses. It is only valid for use in London. There is a special Oyster card available for visitors to London. The cards are sold with an initial £10 or £15 balance on them. Available at adult-rate only the cards cost £2 each (i.e. a card with a £10 balance will cost £12). You can pick up an Oyster at all tube ticket offices, major airports, some overseas travel agencies and the Eurostar.

