

University of Sunderland in London

TLH121 Tourism and Hospitality

17 Top Rated tourism attractions in London

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Lecturer: Travel London

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Introduction

It's little wonder London is one of the world's top tourist destinations, attracting upward of 15 million visitors each year. Britain's capital city is a vibrant arts and entertainment centre (its theatres are always busy), and 50 years after the Beatles, the country's music scene still rocks.

London also offers one of the planet's greatest concentrations of cultural attractions. From royal palaces to the people's parliament, from museums and churches to riding a giant Ferris wheel for breath-taking views, you could spend endless days exploring London's sites without ever running out of unique things to see and do. An added bonus is that many of the most popular places to visit are free.

1 Buckingham Palace and the Changing of the Guard

One of Britain's most iconic buildings, Buckingham Palace is also the scene of London's most popular display of pomp and circumstance, the Changing of the Guard. Drawing crowds at 11:30am in every season, this colourful and free display of precision marching and music also takes place at St. James's Palace where you can follow the band along The Mall as they march between sites.

Buckingham Palace was built in 1837 and has been the London residence of the Royal Family since Queen Victoria's accession. If you're wondering whether the Queen is in, look at the flagpole atop the building: if the royal standard is flying day and night, she's at home. On special state occasions, she and members of the Royal Family may even emerge on the central balcony.

When she's away at her summer palace in Scotland, visitors can purchase tickets for tours of the State Rooms, the Queen's Gallery, and the Royal Mews. One of the best ways to tour the palace, see the Changing of the Guard, and experience a traditional afternoon tea, is on a 4.5-hour Buckingham Palace Tour Including Changing of the Guard Ceremony and Afternoon Tea.

This tour is a very efficient way of seeing the highlights in a short period of time, and having a knowledgeable guide to explain the history makes the whole experience that much more enjoyable and relevant for first time visitors.

2 The Tower of London and Tower Bridge

From prison to palace, treasure vault to private zoo, the magnificent Tower of London has fulfilled many different roles down the centuries. One of Britain's most iconic structures, this spectacular World Heritage Site offers hours of fascination for visitors curious about the country's rich history - after all, so much of it happened here. Inside the massive White Tower, built in 1078 by William the Conqueror, is the 17th-century Line of Kings with its remarkable displays of royal armaments and armour. Other highlights include the famous Crown Jewels exhibition, the Beefeaters, the Royal Mint, and gruesome exhibits about the executions that took place on the grounds. The adjacent Tower Bridge, its two huge towers rising 200 feet above the River Thames, is one of London's best-known landmarks.

For the best use of your time, especially during the busy summer season, purchase the Tower of London Entrance Ticket Including Crown Jewels and Beefeater Tour in advance, to bypass the ticket office lines. This ticket guarantees the lowest price, helps avoid the crowds, and saves time and hassle.

3 The British Museum

Displaying one of the world's finest collections of antiquities, the British Museum contains more than 13 million artefacts from the ancient world. With priceless objects from Assyria, Babylonia, China, Europe, and elsewhere, it's hard to know where to begin. But most tourists head first for the museum's most famous exhibits: the controversial Elgin Marbles from the

Parthenon, the Rosetta Stone, the colossal bust of Ramesses II, the Egyptian mummies, and the spectacular hoard of 4th-century Roman silver known as the Mildenhall Treasure.

4 Big Ben and Parliament

Nothing says "London" more emphatically than the 318-foot tower housing the giant clock and its resounding bell known as Big Ben. It's as iconic a landmark as Tower Bridge. The tolling of Big Ben is known throughout the world as the time signal of BBC radio. Below it, stretching along the Thames, are the Houses of Parliament, seat of Britain's government for many centuries and once the site of the royal Westminster Palace occupied by William the Conqueror. Tours of the parliament buildings offer a unique chance to see real-time debates and lively political discussions. From Parliament Square, Whitehall is lined by so many government buildings that its name has become synonymous with the British government.

5 National Gallery

Ranking among the top art museums in the world, London's National Gallery represents an almost complete survey of European painting from 1260 until 1920. The museum's greatest strengths are in its collections of Dutch Masters and Italian Schools of the 15th and 16th centuries. Among its highlights are a cartoon (preliminary sketch) of the Madonna and Child by Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo's *The Entombment*, Botticelli's *Venus and Mars*, van Gogh's *Sunflowers*, and *The Water-Lily Pond* by Monet.

6 The Victoria and Albert Museum

The Victoria and Albert Museum (aka the V&A) is part of a South Kensington-based group of museums that includes the Natural History Museum and Science Museum. Founded in 1852, the V&A covers close to 13 acres and contains 145 galleries spanning some 5,000 years of art and related artefacts. Exhibits include ceramics and glass, textiles and costumes, silver and jewellery, ironwork, sculpture, prints, and photos.

7 Piccadilly Circus and Trafalgar Square

Two of London's best-known tourist spots, these famous squares lie not far apart and mark the gateways to Soho, London's lively theatre and entertainment district. Trafalgar Square was built to commemorate Lord Horatio Nelson's victory over the French and Spanish at Trafalgar in 1805. Nelson's Column, a 183-foot granite monument, overlooks the square's fountains and bronze reliefs, which were cast from French cannons. Admiralty Arch, St. Martin-in-the-Fields, and the National Gallery surround the square. Piccadilly Circus marks the irregular intersection of several busy streets - Piccadilly, Regent, Haymarket, and Shaftesbury Avenue - and overlooking this somewhat untidy snarl of traffic stands London's best-known sculpture, the winged Eros delicately balanced on one foot, bow poised. "It's like Piccadilly Circus" is a common expression describing a busy and confusing scene.

8 The Two Tates: Tate Britain and Tate Modern

Once collectively known as the Tate Gallery, London's two Tate galleries - Tate Britain and Tate Modern - comprise one of the world's most important art collections. Opened in 1897 as the basis of a national collection of significant British art, the gallery continued to make acquisitions and needed more space to properly display its collections. The end result was the establishment of Tate Britain, in Millbank on the north side of the Thames, as home to its permanent collection of historic British paintings. A superbly transformed power station across the Thames became home to the modern art collections. Art lovers can spend a whole day viewing both sites, conveniently connected by high-speed ferry.

9 Westminster Abbey

Another location with a long association with British royalty, Westminster Abbey stands on a site that's been associated with Christianity since the early 7th century. Officially known as the

Collegiate Church of St. Peter in Westminster, Westminster Abbey was founded by Edward the Confessor in 1065 as his place of interment. From his burial in 1066 until that of George II almost 700 years later, most sovereigns were not only crowned here but they were buried here, too. More recently, it's become famous as the preferred location for Royal Weddings.

10 Churchill's War Rooms

Among the most fascinating and evocative of London's historic sites is the perfectly preserved nerve-centre from which Prime Minister Winston Churchill directed the British military campaigns and the defence of his homeland throughout World War II. Their Spartan simplicity and cramped conditions underline the desperate position of England as the Nazi grip tightened across Europe. You'll see the tiny cubicle where Churchill slept and the improvised radio studio where he broadcast his famous wartime speeches. Simple details, such as Clementine Churchill's knitting wool marking the front lines on a map of Europe, bring the era to life as no museum could possibly do.

11 Hyde Park

Covering 350 acres, Hyde Park is London's largest open space and has been a destination for sightseers since 1635. One of the park's highlights is the Serpentine, an 18th-century man-made lake popular for boating and swimming. Hyde Park is also where you'll find Speakers' Corner, a traditional forum for free speech (and heckling). Another Hyde Park landmark is Apsley House, former home of the first Duke of Wellington and purchased after his famous victory at Waterloo. Now a museum, it houses Wellington's magnificent collections of paintings, including Velázquez's *The Waterseller of Seville*, along with gifts presented by grateful European kings and emperors. England's greatest hero is also commemorated at the Wellington Arch.

12 St. Paul's Cathedral

The largest and most famous of London's many churches - and undoubtedly one of the most spectacular cathedral's in the world - St. Paul's Cathedral sits atop the site of a Roman temple. The previous church structure was destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666, and Sir Christopher Wren designed the rebuild. Today, the twin Baroque towers and magnificent 365-foot dome of St. Paul's are a masterpiece of English architecture. If you're up to it, be sure to walk the stairs with their spectacular views of the dome's interior, including the Whispering Gallery.

13 Covent Garden

The market halls of Covent Garden are only the beginning of the neighbourhood, which encompasses the shops and restaurants of Long Acre and other adjacent streets, those of Neal's Yard and Seven Dials, as well as the Central Square with its street performers. The halls and arcades of Covent Garden Market are lined with specialty shops and kiosks selling everything from fine handcrafts to tacky souvenirs. Housed in the former flower market, you'll find the London Transport Museum, filled with historic buses, trolleys, and trams. This area is also where you'll find the Royal Opera House.

14 The London Eye

Built to mark London's millennium celebrations in 2000, the London Eye is Europe's largest observation wheel. Its individual glass capsules offer the most spectacular views of the city as you embark on a circular tour rising 443 feet above the Thames. The journey lasts 30 minutes, often quicker than the time spent lining up for your turn. If you can, reserve your time in advance. The best option is to skip the line completely with a London Eye: Skip-the-Line Ticket. This advance ticket allows you to take a flight at any time on the day you plan to visit.

Address: Riverside Building, County Hall, Westminster Bridge Rd, London

15 Hampton Court Palace

Another great Thames-side attraction, Hampton Court is one of Europe's most famous palaces. Its Great Hall dates from Henry VIII's time (two of his six wives supposedly haunt the palace), and it's where Elizabeth I learned of the defeat of the Spanish Armada. Other interesting features include the Clock Court with its fascinating astronomical clock dating from 1540, the State Apartments with their Haunted Gallery, the Chapel, the King's Apartments, and the Tudor tennis court. The gardens are also worth visiting - especially in mid-May when in full bloom - and include the Privy Garden, the Pond Garden, the Elizabethan Knot Garden, the Broad Walk, an area known as the Wilderness, and of course, the palace's famous Maze.

16 Greenwich and Docklands

For centuries the hub of Britain's naval power, Greenwich is best known to tourists as the home of Cutty Sark, the last of the 19th-century tea clippers that sailed between Britain and China. The ship is adjacent to the Discover Greenwich Visitor Centre, with its exhibits showcasing more than 500 years of maritime history, and the Palladian mansion known as Queen's House. The impressive collections of the National Maritime Museum, the largest of its kind in the world, illustrate the history of the Royal Navy. One of the most unusual things to do in London is standing with one foot in each hemisphere, astride the Meridian Line in the Meridian Building in the Royal Observatory.

The revitalized Docklands across the river has been transformed into an international place of business and recreation, filled with some of London's smartest new restaurants. The excellent Museum of London Docklands, in the old Georgian warehouses, brings to life the river, port, and its people from Roman times to the present through hands-on displays that are especially interesting for children.

17 Kew Gardens

Kew Gardens - officially called the Royal Botanic Gardens - is situated in southwest London on the south bank of the Thames and is a wonderful place to spend time as you enjoy the numerous plants grown amidst its 300-acres. Laid out in 1759, the gardens became government property in 1841. In 1897 Queen Victoria added Queen's Cottage and the adjoining woodland. A variety of tours are available free with admission, and many musical and cultural events are held here throughout the year.

Where to Stay in London for Sightseeing

London's top tourist attractions are spread out over several different areas of the city. If you want to spend time sightseeing, it's a good idea to base yourself in a central location and use the city's excellent public transport system to travel between the sites. Here are some highly-rated hotels in central London:

- **Luxury Accommodation:**

When it comes to posh hotels, the Grande Dames still grace the list of London's best. Pampering guests for more than a century are The Goring, a stone's throw from Buckingham Palace, while The Langham, in the heart of the West End, has played host to royals and celebrities for more than 150 years. A few steps from Trafalgar Square is the Corinthia Hotel London, with a rooftop terrace and luxurious afternoon teas. The Ritz London, also known for teas, is handy to the posh shops of Mayfair.

- **Mid-Range Accommodation:**

The Fielding Hotel, a popular boutique property, places you right near Covent Garden, one of the city's most touristy areas. Handy for those arriving by train from Heathrow or Gatwick airports, The Grosvenor Hotel is right over Victoria Station. About a 15-minute stroll from

Covent Garden, Bloomsbury was once London's literary hub and is now home to one of the city's top attractions, the British Museum, as well as highly-rated mid-range hotels such as The Montague on the Gardens and The Bloomsbury Hotel London. Both are also a short stroll from Oxford Street shopping.

- **Budget Accommodation:**

If you're watching your wallet, the Premier Inn London Kensington is an affordable option minutes from museums and Earls Court tube station. You can also head north and try The Alhambra Hotel or Jesmond Dene Hotel, both near busy King's Cross tube station, a major transport hub.

Reference list:

17 top-rated tourist attractions in london / planetware (no date). Available at: /tourist-attractions-/london-eng-1-lon.htm (Accessed: 28 August 2019).