



EYEWITNESS TRAVEL

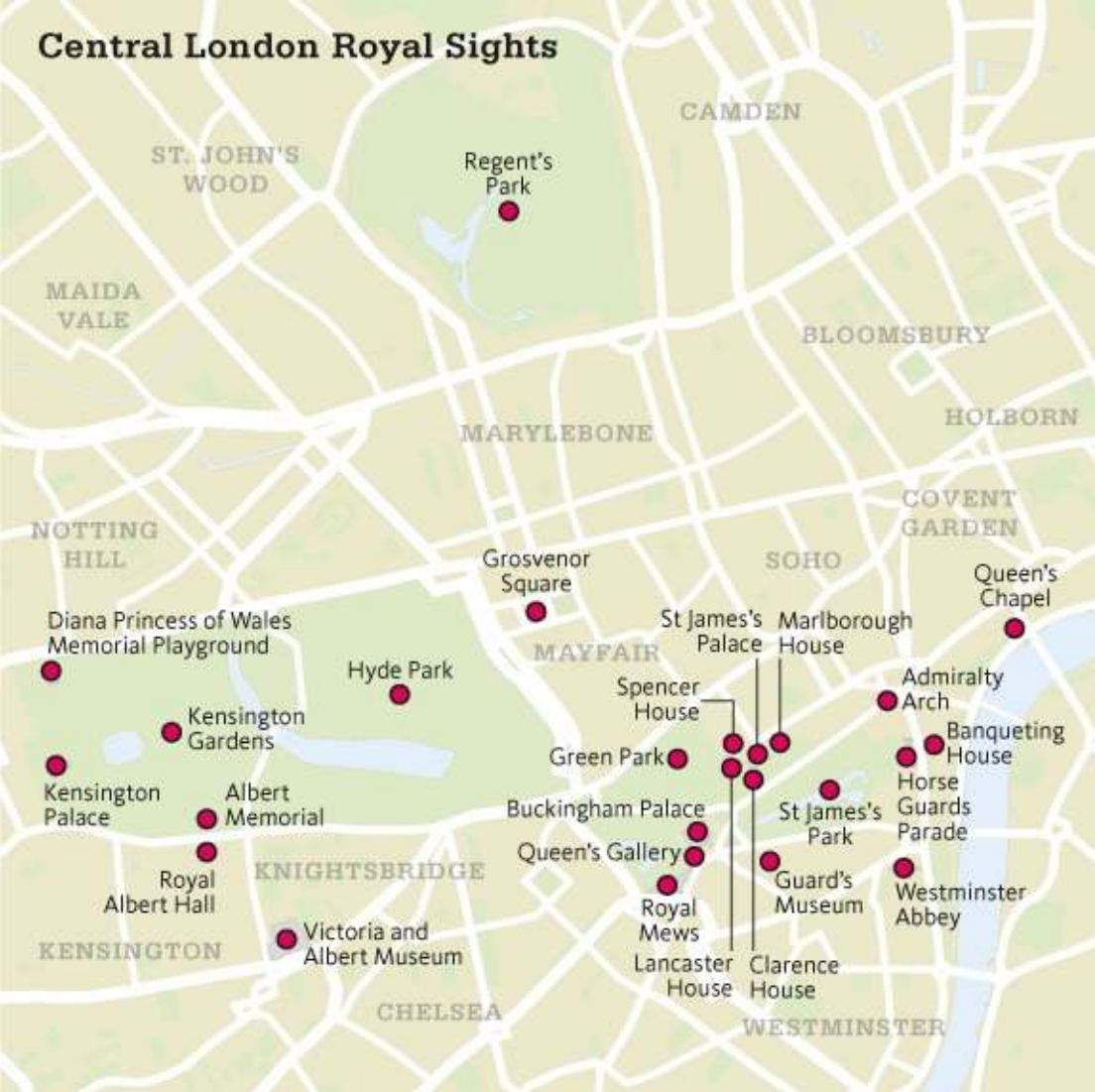
ROYAL LONDON



DK Eyewitness Travel

ROYAL LONDON

Central London Royal Sights



INTRODUCTION

Home to the most famous royal family in the world, London doesn't disappoint when it comes to pomp and circumstance. From the unrivalled pageantry and glamour of Prince William and Kate Middleton's wedding in 2011 to the daily massing of "busbies" at the Changing of the Guard, the spectacle of the Trooping of the Colour and the ceremonial State Opening of Parliament, royal events draw crowds throughout the year. For those seeking more of Britain's heritage, the crown jewels are always on public display, guarded by elaborately dressed Beefeaters at the Tower of London, while dotted around the capital are numerous royal palaces and parks, world-famous churches, fascinating museums and splendid monuments.



The Tower of London, seen from across the River Thames

ROYAL CEREMONIES

Although the Queen's role is now largely symbolic, the Guard at Buckingham Palace still patrols the palace grounds. The impressive ceremony of the **Changing of the Guard** – dazzling uniforms, shouted commands, military music – consists of the Old Guard, which forms up in the palace forecourt, going off duty and handing over to the New Guard. The Guard consists of three officers and 40 men when the Queen is in residence, but only three officers and 31 men when she is away. The ceremony takes place in front of the palace. In another changeover ceremony, the Queen's Life Guards travel daily from Hyde Park Barracks to Horse Guards' Parade.

The **Ceremony of the Keys** at the Tower of London is one of the capital's most timeless ceremonies. After each of the Tower gates has been locked, the last post is sounded by a trumpeter before the keys are secured in the Queen's House.

The Tower of London and Hyde Park are also the scene of **Royal Salutes**, which take place on birthdays and other occasions throughout the year. At such times 41 rounds are fired in Hyde Park at noon, and 62 rounds at the Tower at 1pm. The spectacle in Hyde Park is a stirring one as 71 horses and six 13-pounder cannons swirl into place and the roar of the guns begins.

The combination of pageantry, colour, and music makes the annual **Trooping the Colour** the high point of London's ceremonial year. The Queen takes the Royal Salute, and after her troops have marched past, she leads them to Buckingham Palace where a second march past takes place. The best place to watch this spectacle is from the Horse Guards Parade side of St James's Park. Bands of the Household Cavalry and the Foot Guards stage the ceremony of **Beating the Retreat** at Horse Guards Parade. This takes place three or four evenings a week in the fortnight leading up to Trooping the Colour.

The spectacular **State Opening of Parliament**, when the Queen opens the annual parliamentary session in the House of Lords – usually in November – is not open to the general public, although it is now televised. The huge royal procession, which moves from Buckingham Palace to Westminster, is, however, a magnificent sight, with the Queen traveling in the highly ornate Irish State Coach drawn by four horses.



One of the Queen's Life Guards in full ceremonial dress

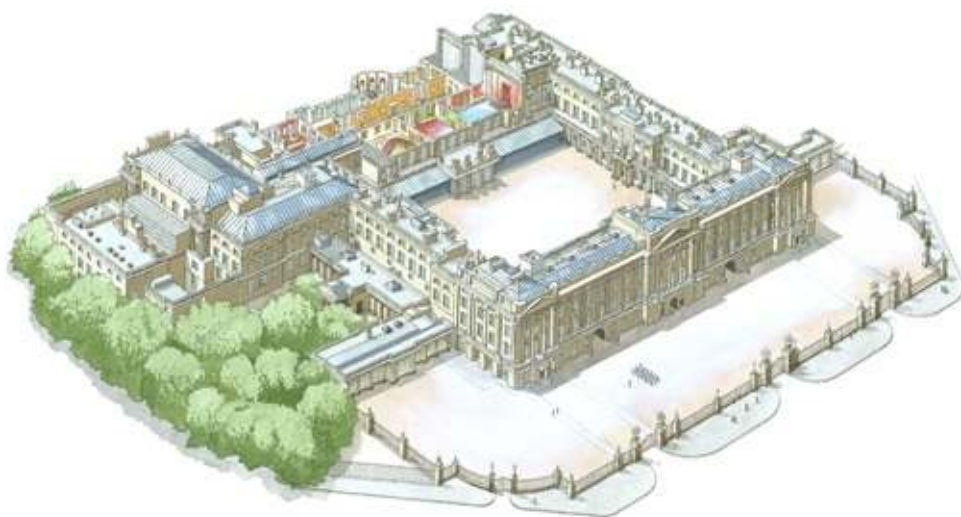
PALACES AND RESIDENCES

BUCKINGHAM PALACE

The Mall SW1. **Tel** 020-7766 7300. **Underground** *St James's Park, Victoria*. **Bus** 2B, 11, 16, 24, 25, 36, 38, 52, 73, 135, C1. **Mainline Stations:** *Victoria*. **State rooms open** *end-Jul–end-Sep: 9.30am–5:30pm daily*. **Admission Charge. No Photography.** **Changing of the Guard:** *May–Jul: 11.30am daily; Aug–Apr: alternate days*. *Tickets not required.* www.royalcollection.org.uk

Buckingham Palace is both office and official London residence of the British monarchy. It is also used for ceremonial state occasions such as banquets for visiting heads of state. About 500 people work at the palace, including officers of the Royal Household and domestic staff.

John Nash converted the original Buckingham House into a palace for George IV (reigned 1820–30). Both he and his brother, William IV (reigned 1830–37), died before work was completed, and Queen Victoria was the first monarch to live at the palace. The present east front, facing *The Mall*, was added to Nash's conversion in 1913. The State Rooms are open to the public in summer.



Magnificent Buckingham Palace viewed from above

ST JAMES'S PALACE

Pall Mall SW1. **Underground** *Green Park*. **Not open to the public.** www.royal.gov.uk

Built by Henry VIII in the late 1530s on the site of a former leper hospital, it was a primary royal residence only briefly, mainly during the reign of Elizabeth I and during the late 17th and early 18th centuries. In 1952 Queen Elizabeth II made her first speech as queen here, and foreign ambassadors are still officially accredited to the Court of St James's. Its northern gatehouse, seen from *St James's Street*, is one of London's most evocative Tudor landmarks. Behind it the palace buildings are now

occupied by privileged Crown servants.



St James's Tudor Gatehouse

CLARENCE HOUSE

Stable Yard SW1. Tel 020-7766 7303. **Underground** Green Park, St James's Park. **Open** 1 Aug–30 Sep: 10am–5:30pm (further dates may be added). **Wheelchair Access** (phone to check details). **Admission Charge. Guided Tours. mandatory.**
www.royalcollection.org.uk

Designed by John Nash for William IV in 1827, this is Prince Charles's London home. Once a year, the public can visit the opulent ground floor.

LANCASTER HOUSE

Stable Yard SW1. **Underground** Green Park, St James's Park. **Not open to the public.**

This royal residence was built for the Duke of York by Benjamin Wyatt, architect of Apsley House, in 1825. In 1848 Chopin played here for Queen Victoria, Prince Albert and the Duke of Wellington. It is now a conference centre.

MARLBOROUGH HOUSE

Pall Mall SW1. Tel 020-7747 6491. **Underground** St James's Park, Green Park. **Open** 3rd Sat in Sep only (phone for details). **Guided Tours. by appt Tue am.**

Marlborough House was designed by Christopher Wren for the Duchess of Marlborough, and finished in 1711. It was substantially enlarged in the 19th century and used by members of the Royal Family. From 1863 until he became Edward VII in 1901, it was the home of the Prince and Princess of Wales and the social centre of London. An Art Nouveau memorial in the Marlborough Road wall of the house commemorates Edward's queen, Alexandra. The building now houses the Commonwealth Secretariat

SPENCER HOUSE

27 St James's Pl SW1. **Tel** 020-7514 1958. **Underground** Green Park. **Open** 10:30am–5:45pm Sun (last adm: 4:45pm). Garden open one Sunday in June 2pm–5pm. **Closed** Jan & Aug. **Admission Charge.** **Children** not under 10. **No Photography.** **Wheelchair Access** (phone to check details). **Guided Tours.** compulsory. www.spencerhouse.co.uk

This Palladian palace, built in 1766 for the first Earl Spencer, an ancestor of the late Princess of Wales, has been completely restored to its 18th-century splendour (thanks to an £18 million renovation project). It contains some wonderful paintings and contemporary furniture; one of the highlights is the beautifully decorated Painted Room. The house is open to the public for guided tours, receptions and meetings.

KENSINGTON PALACE

Kensington Palace Gdns W8. **Tel** 0844-482 7777. **Underground** High St Kensington, Queensway, Notting Hill Gate. **Open** Mar–Oct 10am–6pm daily; Nov–Feb: 10am–5pm daily (last adm: 1 hr earlier). **Closed** 24–26 Dec. **Admission Charge.** **Audio Tours.** **Restaurant.** **Shop.** **Wheelchair Access** (phone to check details). *partial during building works, no lift to Enchanted Palace.* **Exhibitions.** www.hrp.org.uk

Half of this spacious palace is used as royal apartments; the other half, which includes the 18th-century state rooms, is open to the public. When William III and his wife Mary came to the throne in 1689 they bought a mansion, dating from 1605, and commissioned Christopher Wren to convert it into a royal palace. He created separate suites of rooms for the king and queen.

The palace has seen some important royal events. In 1714 Queen Anne died here from a fit of apoplexy brought on by over-eating and, on 20 June 1837, Princess Victoria of Kent was woken at 5am to be told that her uncle William IV had died and she was now queen – the start of her 64-year reign. After the death in 1997 of Diana, Princess of Wales, the gold gates south of the palace became a focal point for mourners in their thousands, who turned the surrounding area into a field of bouquets.

A £12 million renovation project has closed parts of the palace, which is expected to re-open in time for the Olympics and the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in 2012. In place of the usual exhibitions in the state rooms, visitors can now explore the Enchanted Palace. This mysterious wonderland uses modern art and fashion to take visitors on a journey through the stories of past inhabitants, focusing on the seven princesses who once lived here.

KEW PALACE AND QUEEN CHARLOTTE'S COTTAGE

Royal Botanic Gdns, Kew Green, Richmond. **Tel** 0844-482 7799. **Underground Kew Gdns. Mainline Stations:** Kew Bridge, Kew Gdns. *Palace: call for opening times; Cottage: open during the summer.* **Admission Charge.** (free under 17 yrs). **Wheelchair Access** (phone to check details). **Guided Tours. Restaurant. Café. Shop.** www.hrp.org.uk

The smallest royal palace, Kew was built in 1631 and used as a residence by George III and Queen Charlotte. Nearby Queen Charlotte's Cottage was used for picnics and housing royal pets. The palace is set in Kew Gardens.

HAMPTON COURT

Surrey KT8 9AU. **Information** 0844-482 7777. **Bus R68** from Kew, Richmond or Twickenham. **Mainline Stations:** Hampton Court **River Bus** Hampton Court pier. **Open** Apr–Oct: 10am–6pm daily; Nov–Mar: 10am–4.30pm daily (last adm: 1 hour before closing) **Closed** 24–26 Dec. **Admission Charge. Wheelchair Access** (phone to check details). **Guided Tours. Café. Restaurant. Shop.** www.hrp.org.uk

Cardinal Wolsey, powerful Archbishop of York to Henry VIII, began building Hampton Court in 1514. Originally it was not a royal palace, but was intended as Wolsey's riverside country house. Later, in 1528, in the hope of retaining royal favour, Wolsey offered it to the king. After the royal takeover, Hampton Court was twice rebuilt and extended, first by Henry himself and then, in the 1690s, by William and Mary, who employed Christopher Wren as architect.

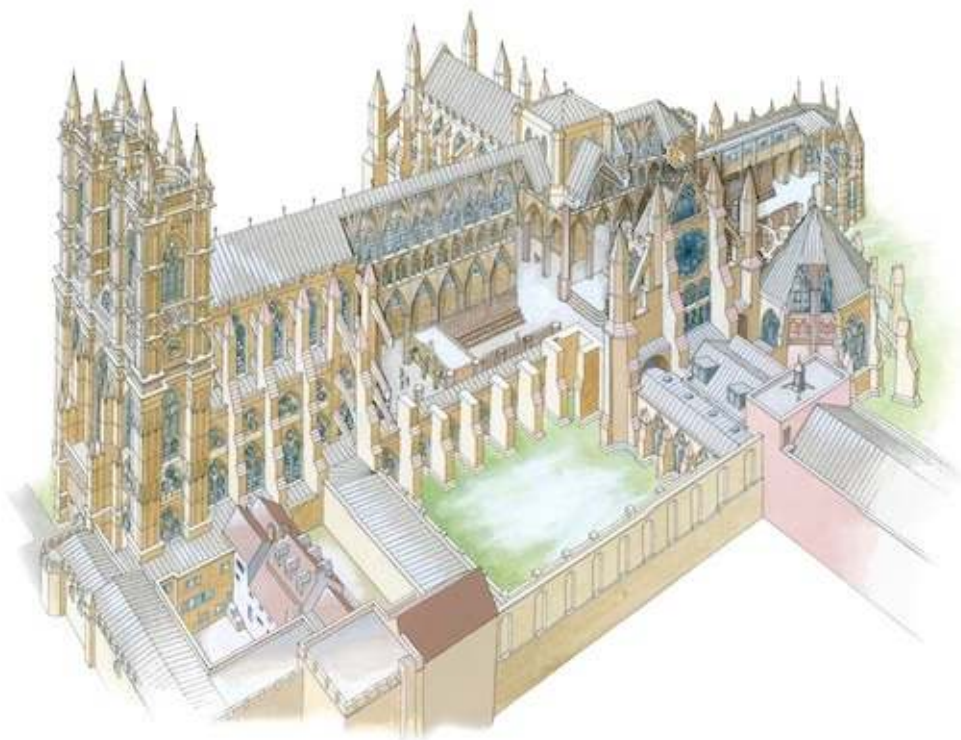
There is a striking contrast between Wren's Classical royal apartments and the Tudor turrets, gables and chimneys elsewhere. The inspiration for the gardens as they are today comes largely from the time of William and Mary, who created a vast, formal Baroque landscape, with radiating avenues of majestic limes and many collections of exotic plants.

CHURCHES, ABBEYS AND CATHEDRALS

WESTMINSTER ABBEY

Broad Sanctuary SW1. Tel 020-7222 5152. **Underground** St James's Park, Westminster. **Bus** 3, 11, 12, 24, 29, 53, 70, 77, 77a, 88, 109, 148, 159, 170, 211. **Mainline Stations:** Victoria, Waterloo. **River Bus** Westminster Pier. **Cloisters open** 8am–6pm daily. **Abbeys including Royal Chapels, Poets' Corner, Quire, Statesmen's Aisle, Nave open** 9:30am–4:30pm Mon, Tue, Thu, Fri (last adm: 3:30pm), 9:30am–7pm (last adm: 6pm) Wed, 9:30am–2:30pm Sat (last adm: 1:30pm). *NB: the abbey is sometimes closed for special events.* **Chapter House, Pyx Chamber and Museum open** 10:30am–4pm Mon–Sat. **Admission Charge.** **College Garden open** Apr–Sep: 10am–6pm Tue–Thu; Oct–Mar: 10am–4pm Tue–Thu. **Evensong** 5pm Mon–Fri, 3pm Sat, Sun. **No Photography.** **Wheelchair Access (phone to check details).** *limited.* **Guided Tours. Audio Tours. Café. Shop. Concerts.** www.westminster-abbey.org

The Abbey is world-famous as the resting-place of Britain's monarchs, and as the setting for coronations and other great pageants, such as the marriage of Prince William in 2011. Within its walls can be seen some of the most glorious examples of medieval architecture in London. It also contains one of the most impressive collections of tombs and monuments in the world. Half national church, half national museum, the Abbey is part of British national consciousness.



Cutaway illustration of splendid Westminster Abbey

The abbey's interior presents an exceptionally diverse array of architectural and sculptural styles. These range from the austere French Gothic of the nave to the stunning complexity of Henry VII's Tudor chapel and the riotous invention of the later 18th-century monuments. Many British monarchs were buried here; some of their tombs are deliberately plain, while others are lavishly decorated. At the same time, there are monuments to a number of Britain's greatest public figures – ranging from politicians to poets – crowded into the aisles and transepts.

QUEEN'S CHAPEL

Marlborough Rd SW1. **Tel** 020-7930 4832. **Underground** Green Park. **Open** during services only. **Church Services.** Easter–Jul: 8:30am, 11:30am Sun.

This exquisite work of the architect Inigo Jones was built for Charles I's French wife, Henrietta Maria in 1627, and was the first Classical church in England. It was initially intended to be part of St James's Palace but is now separated from it by Marlborough Gate. George III married his queen, Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz (who was to bear him 15 children), here in 1761. The interior of the chapel, with its wonderful Annibale Carracci altarpiece and glorious 17th-century fittings is open to both regular worshippers and visitors during the spring and early summer.

ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL

Ludgate Hill EC4. **Tel** 020-7236 4128. **Underground** St Paul's, Mansion House. **Bus** 6, 8, 11, 15, 22, 23, 25, 76. **Mainline Station** City Thameslink **Cathedral open** 8:30am– 4pm Mon–Sat **Galleries open** 9:30am–4:15pm. **Crypt & ambulatory open** 9:15am–4:15pm **Closed for sightseeing on Sun** **Admission Charge.** **Church Services.** times vary. **No Photography.** **Guided Tours.** **Audio Tours.** **Café.** **Shop.** **Wheelchair Access** (phone to check details). **Concerts.** www.stpauls.co.uk

Following the Great Fire of London in 1666, the medieval cathedral of St Paul's was left in ruins. The authorities turned to Christopher Wren to rebuild it, but his ideas met with considerable resistance from the conservative Dean and Chapter. Wren's 1672 Great Model plan was not at all popular with them, and so a watered-down plan was finally agreed in 1675. Wren's determination paid off though, as can be witnessed from the grandeur of the present cathedral.

The visitor to St Paul's will be immediately impressed by its cool, beautifully ordered and extremely spacious interior. The nave, transepts and choir are arranged in the shape of a cross, as in a medieval cathedral, but Wren's Classical vision shines through this conservative floor plan, forced on him by the cathedral authorities. Aided by some of the finest craftsmen of his day, he created an interior of grand majesty and Baroque splendour, a worthy setting for the many great ceremonial events that have taken place here. These include the funeral of Winston Churchill in 1965 and the wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer in 1981.



Mosaics on the ceiling of the choir, St Paul's Cathedral

HISTORIC STREETS AND BUILDINGS

BANQUETING HOUSE

Whitehall SW1. Tel 0844-482 7777 (UK) or 020-3166 6000 (outside UK; possible closures – call ahead). **Underground** Charing Cross, Embankment, Westminster. **Open** 10am–5pm Mon–Sat (last adm 4:30pm). **Closed** Sun, public hols, 24 Dec–1 Jan; for functions (phone first). **Admission Charge. Audio Tours. Shop.** www.hrp.org.uk

This delightful building is of great architectural importance. It was the first in central London to embody the Classical Palladian style that designer Inigo Jones brought back from his travels in Italy. Completed in 1622, its disciplined stone facade marked a startling change from the Elizabethans' fussy turrets and unrestrained external decoration. It was the sole survivor of the fire that destroyed most of the old Whitehall Palace in 1698.

The ceiling paintings by Rubens, a complex allegory on the exaltation of James I, were commissioned by his son, Charles I, in 1630. This blatant glorification of royalty was despised by Oliver Cromwell and the Parliamentarians, who executed King Charles I on a scaffold outside Banqueting House in 1649. Ironically, Charles II celebrated his restoration to the throne here 11 years later. The building is used for official functions.



Panels from the Rubens ceiling, Banqueting House

HORSE GUARDS' PARADE

Whitehall SW1. **Tel** 0906-201 5151. **Underground** Westminster, Charing Cross, Embankment. **Open** 8am–6pm daily. **Changing the Guard** 11am Mon–Sat, 10am Sun. **Dismounting Ceremony** 4pm daily. *Times for both are subject to change (phone for details).*

Once Henry VIII’s tiltyard (tournament ground), nowadays the Changing of the Guard takes place here every morning. The elegant buildings, completed in 1755, were designed by William Kent. On the left is the Old Treasury, also by Kent, and Dover House, completed in 1758 and now used as the Scottish Office. Nearby is a trace of the “real tennis” court where Henry VIII is said to have played the ancient precursor of modern lawn tennis. On the opposite side, the view is dominated by the ivy-covered Citadel. This is a bomb-proof structure that was erected in 1940 beside the Admiralty. During World War II it was used as a communications headquarters by the Navy.



Mounted sentries stationed outside Horse Guards’ Parade

THE MALL

The Mall SW1. **Underground** Charing Cross, Green Park, Piccadilly Circus.

This broad triumphal approach to Buckingham Palace was created by Aston Webb when he redesigned the front of the palace and the Victoria Monument in 1911. It follows the course of the old path at the

edge of St James's Park, laid out in the reign of Charles II when it became London's most fashionable promenade. On the flagpoles down both sides of The Mall fly national flags of foreign heads of state during official visits.

THE TOWER OF LONDON

Tower Hill EC3. **Tel** 0844-482 7799 (*info*); 0870-756 7070 (*advance booking*). **Underground** Tower Hill. **Bus** RV1, 15, X15, 25, 478, 100. **Mainline Stations:** Fenchurch Street. **Docklands Light Railway** Tower Gateway. **Open** Mar–Oct: 9am–6pm Tue–Sat, 10am–6pm Sun & Mon; Nov–Feb: 9am–5pm Tue–Sat, 10am–5pm Sun & Mon. **Tower closed** 1 Jan, 24–26 Dec. **Admission Charge** Ceremony of the Keys 9.30pm daily (*book ahead*). **Wheelchair Access** (*phone to check details*). **Restaurant. Café. Shop.** www.hrp.org.uk

For much of its 900-year history the Tower was an object of fear. Those who had committed treason threatened the throne were held within its dank walls. A lucky few lived in comparative comfort, but the majority had to put up with appalling conditions. Many did not get out alive, and some were tortured before meeting violent deaths on nearby Tower Hill.



Beauchamp Tower at the Tower of London, where many high-ranking officials were held

ROYAL ALBERT HALL

Kensington Gore SW7. **Tel** 020-7589 8212. **Underground** High St Kensington, South Kensington. **Open** for performances. **No Photography. Guided Tours.** to book call 0845-401 5045; charge for tour. **Wheelchair Access** (*phone to check details*). **Restaurant. Café.** www.royalalberthall.com

Designed by an engineer, Francis Fowke, and completed in 1871, this huge concert hall was modelled on Roman amphitheatres and is easier on the eye than most Victorian structures. On the red-brick

exterior the only ostentation is a pretty frieze symbolizing the triumph of arts and science. In plans the building was called the Hall of Arts and Science but Queen Victoria changed it to the Royal Albert Hall, in memory of her husband, when she laid the foundation stone in 1868.

The hall is often used for Classical concerts, most famously the “Proms”, but it also accommodates other large gatherings, such as tennis matches, comedy shows, rock concerts, circus shows and major business conferences.



QUEEN'S HOUSE

Romney Rd SE10. Tel 020-8858 4422. **Underground** Cutty Sark DLR. **Mainline Stations:** Greenwich. **Open** 10am–5pm daily (last adm: 4.30pm). Closes early some Fri & Sat for special events – phone to check. **Closed** 24–26 Dec. **No Photography. Wheelchair Access (phone to check details). Restaurant. Café. Shop.** www.nmm.ac.uk

The house was designed by Inigo Jones and was completed in 1637. It was originally meant to be the home of Anne of Denmark, wife of James I, but she died while it was still being built and it was finished for Charles I's queen, Henrietta Maria. She fell in love with it and called it her house of delights. After the Civil War it was briefly occupied by Henrietta as dowager queen, but was not much used by the royal family after that.

The building has been refurbished, and in 2001 the house opened with galleries displaying the art collection of the National Maritime Museum. On the ground floor is a permanent exhibition, *Historic Greenwich*, which includes two models showing how the house looked in 17th-century Greenwich. The paintings on show include early views of Greenwich and portraits of historical figures associated with the house, including Inigo Jones. Visitors can also see the spiral “tulip staircase”, which curves sinuously upwards without a central support.

MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

THE GUARDS MUSEUM

Birdcage Walk SW1. Tel 020-7414 3428. **Underground** St James's Park. **Open** 10am–4pm daily (last adm: 3.30pm). **Closed** Christmas, ceremonies. **Admission Charge.** (free for under-16s). **No Photography.** **Wheelchair Access** (phone to check details). **Shop.** www.theguardsmuseum.com

Entered from Birdcage Walk, the museum is under the parade ground of Wellington Barracks, headquarters of the five Guards regiments. A must for military buffs, the museum uses tableaux and dioramas to illustrate various battles in which the Guards have taken part, from the English Civil War (1642–8) to the present. Weapons and row after row of colourful uniforms are on display, as well as a fascinating collection of models.

ROYAL MEWS

Buckingham Palace Rd SW1. Tel 020-7766 7302. **Underground** St James's Park, Victoria. **Open** end Mar–Oct: 11am–4pm Sat–Th (27 Jul–29 Sep: 10am–5pm). *Subject to closure at short notice (phone first).* **Admission Charge.** **Wheelchair Access** (phone to check details). **Photography Allowed.** **Shop.** www.royalcollection.org.uk

Although open for only a few hours each day, the Mews is worth catching for all lovers of horses and of royal pomp. The stables and coach houses, designed by Nash in 1825, accommodate the horses and coaches used by the Royal Family on state occasions. The star exhibit is the gold state coach, built for George III in 1761, with fine panels by Giovanni Cipriani. Among the other vehicles are the Irish state coach, bought by Queen Victoria for the State Opening of Parliament; the open-topped royal landau; and the glass coach which was used for royal weddings and for transporting foreign ambassadors. The elaborate horses' harnesses are also on display, and so are some of the fine animals that wear them. The Mews has an exhibition that explains its history and current workings. Visitors may see carriage being prepared for use or limousines in action. A guided route around the mews includes a chance to view the 18th-century riding school where the horses are put through their paces. There is also a shop here selling royal souvenirs, open daily from 9:30am until 5pm.

THE QUEEN'S GALLERY

Buckingham Palace Rd SW1. Tel 020-7766 7301. **Underground** St James's Park, Victoria. **Open** 10am–5:30pm daily (Aug & Sep: 9:30am–5:30pm). *Closed dates vary; call or check website.* **Admission Charge.** **No Photography.** www.royalcollection.org.uk

The Royal Family possesses one of the finest and most valuable art collections in the world, rich in the work of Old Masters, including Vermeer and Leonardo. In 2002 the galleries were expanded in the most extensive addition to Buckingham Palace in 150 years, resulting in three and a half times more display space and an impressive entrance gallery with a striking columned portico.

Among the gallery's seven rooms, one is dedicated to a permanent display of some of the royal collection's masterpieces. Changing exhibitions include fine art, jewels, porcelain, furniture and manuscripts.

VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM

Cromwell Rd SW7. Tel 020-7942 2000. **Underground** South Kensington. **Bus** 14, 74, 414, C1. **Open** 10am–5.45pm daily (10am–10pm Fri). **Closed** 24–26 Dec. **Wheelchair Access** (phone to check details). **Guided Tours. Restaurant. Café. Shop. Lectures, presentations, tours, exhibitions, events.** www.vam.ac.uk

The Victoria and Albert Museum (the V&A) contains one of the world's widest collections of art and design, ranging from early Christian devotional objects to cutting-edge furniture design. Originally founded in 1852 as the Museum of Manufactures to inspire design students, it was renamed by Queen Victoria in 1899 in memory of Prince Albert. The museum is undergoing a dramatic redisplay of some of its collection, including work on a number of galleries and the Sackler Education Centre. To find out if a particular gallery is open, call the bookings office on 020-7942 2211.

The sheer size of the V&A means you should plan your visit carefully to avoid missing a highlight or an area of particular interest. One of the joys of the V&A, however, is stumbling across unexpected treasures. Be sure to visit the museum's original refreshment rooms off rooms 11 and 16a (one of which was designed by the then unknown William Morris), now being used once again for their original purpose as a café. The Photography gallery (room 38a) displays a changing selection of 300,000 photographs from 1856 to the present.

PARKS AND GARDENS

GREEN PARK

Green Park SW1. **Tel** 020-7930 1793. **Underground** Green Park, Hyde Park Corner. **Open** all day, year-round.
www.royalparks.org.uk

Once part of Henry VIII's hunting ground, it was, like St James's Park, adapted for public use by Charles II in the 1660s and is a natural, undulating landscape of grass and trees (with a good spring show of daffodils). It was a favourite site for duels during the 18th century; in 1771 the poet Alfieri was wounded here by his mistress's husband, Viscount Ligonier, but then rushed back to the Haymarket Theatre in time to catch the last act of a play. Today the park is popular with guests staying at the Mayfair hotels as a place to jog.

ST JAMES'S PARK

St James's Park. SW1. **Tel** 020-7298 2000. **Underground** St James's Park. **Open** dawn to dusk daily. **Restaurant. Open** daily. **Wheelchair Access (phone to check details). Concerts** twice daily on summer weekends in good weather. **Bird collection.**
www.royalparks.org.uk

In summer office workers sunbathe between the dazzling flower beds of this, the capital's most ornamental park. In winter overcoated civil servants discuss affairs of state as they stroll by the lake and eye its ducks, geese and pelicans. Originally a marsh, the park was drained by Henry VIII and incorporated into his hunting grounds. Later Charles II redesigned it for pedestrian pleasures, with an aviary along its southern edge (hence Birdcage Walk, the street where the aviary was). It is still a popular place to take the air, with an appealing view of Whitehall rooftops. In the summer there are concerts on the bandstand.



Early summer in St James's Park

HYDE PARK

Hyde Park. W2. Tel 020-7298 2100. **Underground** Hyde Park Corner, Knightsbridge, Lancaster Gate, Marble Arch. **Open** 5am–midnight daily. **Café. Sporting facilities.** www.royalparks.gov.uk

The ancient manor of Hyde was part of the lands of Westminster Abbey seized by Henry VIII at the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1536. It has remained a royal park ever since. Henry used it for hunting but James I opened it to the public in the early 17th century. The Serpentine, an artificial lake used for boating and bathing, was created when Caroline, George II's queen, dammed the flow of the Westbourne River in 1730.

In its time the park has been a venue for duelling, horse racing, highwaymen, demonstrations and music. The 1851 Exhibition was held here in a vast glass palace. The Princess Diana Memorial fountain is to the south of the Serpentine.

During the 2012 Olympic Games, the park will be the setting for the triathlon and marathon

swimming events.



Riding on Rotten Row, Hyde Park

GROSVENOR SQUARE

Grosvenor Square. W1. **Underground** *Bond Street, Marble Arch*. **Open** *daily*.

The hub of high society from the early 18th century until World War II, Grosvenor Square is the only London square that is owned by the Crown. On its west side stands the imposing American Embassy.

KENSINGTON GARDENS

Kensington Gardens. W8. **Tel** *020-7298 2141*. **Underground** *Bayswater, High St Kensington, Queensway, Lancaster Gate*. **Open** *dawn–dusk daily*. **Café.** www.royalparks.gov.uk

The former grounds of Kensington Palace became a public park in 1841. A small part of it has been dedicated as a memorial playground to Diana, Princess of Wales. The gardens are full of charm, starting with Sir George Frampton's statue (1912) of J M Barrie's fictional Peter Pan, the boy who never grew up, playing his pipes to the bronze fairies and animals that cling to the column below. Often surrounded by parents, nannies and their charges, the statue stands near the west bank of the Serpentine, not far from where Harriet, wife of the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, drowned herself in 1816. Just north of here (in Hyde Park) are the ornamental fountains and statues, including Jacob Epstein's *Rima*, at the lake's head. George Frederick Watts's statue of a muscular horse and rider, *Physical Energy*, stands to the south. Not far away is a summer house designed by William Kent in

1735, and the Serpentine Gallery. The Round Pond, created in 1728 just east of the palace, is often packed with model boats navigated by children and older enthusiasts. In winter it is occasionally fit for skating. In the north, near Lancaster Gate, is a dogs' cemetery, started in 1880 by the Duke of Cambridge while mourning one of his pets.



Detail of the Coalbrookdale gate, Kensington Gardens

THE DIANA, PRINCESS OF WALES MEMORIAL PLAYGROUND

Kensington Gardens. Tel 020-7298 2141. **Underground Bayswater, Queensway. Open daily, Feb & Oct: 10am–4:45pm; Mar: 10am–5:45pm; Apr & Sep: 10am–6:45pm; May–Aug: 10am–7:45pm; Nov–Jan: 10am– 3:45pm. Closed 25 Dec. Café. Wheelchair Access (phone to check details).** www.royalparks.org.uk

The newest of Kensington Gardens' three playgrounds was opened in 2000. Dedicated to the memory of the late Princess Diana, it is located close to the Bayswater Road, on the site of an earlier playground funded by Peter Pan's creator, J M Barrie. Diana's innovative adventure playground takes the boy who didn't want to grow up as its theme and is packed with novel ideas and activities including a beach cove with a 50-ft pirates' galleon, a tree house with walkways and ramps and a mermaid's fountain with a half-submerged slumbering crocodile (careful not to rouse him!). Though all children up to the age of 12 must be accompanied by an adult, staff are on hand to make sure the children are safe. Many features of the playground are accessible to children with special needs.

REGENT'S PARK

Regent's Park. NW1. Tel 020-7486 7905. **Underground** Regent's Park, Baker St, Great Portland St. **Open** 5am–dusk daily. **Wheelchair Access** (phone to check details). **Café**. **Open air theatre**. **Zoo**. **Sports facilities**. www.royalparks.gov.uk

This area of land became enclosed as a park in 1812. John Nash designed the scheme and originally envisaged a kind of garden suburb, dotted with 56 villas in a variety of Classical styles, with a pleasure palace for the Prince Regent. In the event only eight villas – but no palace – were built inside the park (three survive round the edge of the Inner Circle).

The boating lake, which has many varieties of water birds, is marvellously romantic, especially when music drifts across from the bandstand in the distance. Queen Mary's Gardens are a mass of wonderful sights and smells in summer, when visitors can enjoy Shakespeare productions at the **Open Air Theatre** nearby.

Nash's master plan for the park continues just beyond its northeastern edge in Park Village East and West. These elegant stucco buildings date from 1828. The park is also renowned for its excellent sports facilities.



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