

# LONDON

## One-Day City Guide

London is one of the most desired travel destinations in the world. Coveted for its rich history and outstanding architecture, featuring landmarks such as the Buckingham Palace, Big Ben and Trafalgar Square, it's no wonder London seems to be on everyone's travel bucket list.

When studying abroad, you want to see as many places as you can possibly squeeze into your short time overseas and your tight budget. With proper planning, you can see some of the world's most famous cities, even in just one day.

The easiest way to get to central London from the three main airports is by coach bus. From experience, **National Express coaches** are the best cost and time wise. Coaches run constantly from all airports to several stops in London. Your best bet is to catch a coach to Victoria Coach Station, where you can easily walk to Victoria tube and bus station. Also, if you buy a coach ticket for a certain time during the day you purchased for, you don't have to stick to that time. If there is space, they will let you on an earlier bus or the next one if you missed your scheduled bus. If you are traveling to or from Heathrow airport, there is a tube that goes directly into and out of central London from Paddington station.

**Book a National Express Coach:** <http://www.nationalexpress.com/home.aspx>

### THE TUBE & OTHER PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Out of all the cities I have been to in my life, London is hands down the easiest to navigate via public transport. If you are traveling to London for even one day, you'll have no problem finding and catching a ride on either a bus, ferry, or more commonly, the underground tube system.

In every tube station you can obtain either a travel pass or Oyster card. Travel passes are paper tickets that can be purchased for one day or more and/or loaded onto an Oyster card. It costs a little bit extra but I recommend purchasing an Oyster card since you cannot get paper travel passes at all stations. Your best bet is to ask a TFL employee in any of the stations. Usually the larger stations will have paper travel passes available at their ticket machines, but it's best just to ask. Also, even though travel passes expire, Oyster cards and any extra money on them never do so hold onto it even after you leave London (I promise you'll want to come back at some point in your life).

Getting a card is super easy. Walk up to any ticket machine and simply follow the prompts. You can buy any of the travel passes and they will load onto your Oyster Card, and you can also load ("top up") specific amounts of pounds onto the card. The machine will ask you to specify which zones you would like your travel pass for. For central London, I recommend buying for zones 1-3. If you know a certain place you would like to go on a tube line, check to see which zone it is in. If you purchase a pass for zones 1-2 and you go somewhere in zone 4 and don't have extra money on your card, beg for mercy from a TFL employee, they shouldn't give you too much of a hard time since your foreign and not familiar with the system. [Note: Unless you are going to a ticket office (the only ones I've been to are in Angel and Euston station), **you**

**must have a credit or debit card to use the ticket machines.** I know they DEFINITELY ACCEPT VISA and they DO NOT ACCEPT DISCOVER.]

When getting both on and off the tube, you have to swipe your card or pass at the turnstiles. You only have to do this when you enter and exit any tube station, you do not have to do this if you are transferring between lines within a station. You can get any tube line from King's Cross / St. Pancras station; if you're ever unsure about where you are or where to go, head there. It's also a really beautiful place where you can shop and eat, and any *Harry Potter* fans can get a pic at Platform 9<sup>3/4</sup>. However, it is arguably the busiest station in London, so just be alert and read the signs and you'll be fine.

Oyster cards and travel passes are good to use on any of the London public transport. That includes the tube and buses. If you have an iPhone, you can open up the phone's Maps app and it loads all London public transport information. This is a literal lifesaver, for example, if you want to go to the Tower of London, all you do is type that into the search and choose transit and you can decide if you want to see the tube, buses, or any other form of public transport to get there. From your current location, the app will tell you which lines in which direction you need to go, and the exact stop and station names for the buses and tubes. There are other apps with that information, such as Journey Planner, but I've tried and tested them and the Maps app is the best. **The website <https://tfl.gov.uk> has all information about public transport in London**, you should definitely check that site before you head to London to see what is going on with the public transport and plan your day accordingly. The site also has a journey planner so if you don't have the Maps app you can use this website on your phone's browser. Also keep in mind that there is no service underground so make sure you know where you're getting off before you head into a tube station.

To get all information about Oyster cards, visit: <https://tfl.gov.uk/fares-and-payments/oyster>

## THE ULTIMATE LONDON LANDMARK WALK

So you've finally made it to London! Now where to first? The following is a revised, self-guided walking tour I received when I first arrived in London when I studied abroad. In its entirety, the walk takes about an hour (if you use the tube) and you'll see all the major landmarks. Keep in mind that this is only meant for you to go and see these places, not necessarily to go in and have a look around. It's a beautiful walk I have taken several times, and I'm going to let you in on the best spots to take amazing pictures so you can be the envy of your friends and family back home.

### OVERVIEW

1. London Bridge / The Shard / The Monument / The Gherkin
2. Tower of London / Tower Bridge
3. Big Ben / London Eye / Westminster Abbey
4. Trafalgar Square
5. St. James's Park / The Horse Guards
6. Buckingham Palace

The walk starts at London Bridge and ends at Buckingham Palace. It doesn't matter where you get on as long as the first place you get off is London Bridge Station (which is on the **Northern**

**Line).** When you get out of London Bridge station, walk across London Bridge. From the bridge you'll have really good view of Tower Bridge and the Shard. Once you're across London Bridge you want to head right (if you stayed on the right hand side of the bridge when you exited the tube station you are on the correct side) at The Monument and follow the side streets all the way down to the bank of the Thames river. There is a really nice walkway on the Thames that will take you straight to the Tower of London and Tower Pier. You don't have to pay admission to walk along the pier and you can get super close to Tower Bridge (which is the direction you want to head next). With shady trees and gorgeous landscaping, the pier in front of the Tower of London is the best spot to take the a photo of Tower Bridge. Ironically, it's actually not the best spot to get a picture of the Tower of London, even though you can see it quite well. For that photo, walk up the hill by the ticket office and take a snap from up there, then walk back down and continue along the front of the Tower.

Once you walk as far as you can next to the Tower (which is on your left if you're still by the river) I'm pretty sure the only way you can go is left toward Tower Hill tube station. There are a few lines that will take you to Westminster station and it doesn't matter which one as long as you get there; I always took the **District Line**. When you get off at Westminster tube station the exit dumps you right at the foot of Elizabeth Tower (Big Ben).

Breathtaking? Yes. Best spot to stop and marvel in the famous clocktower's glory? No. Westminster is a very busy tube station full of either rushing business people or slow tourists with their heads in the clouds. You can take a quick pic there but it's not the spot to have your friends take a picture of you in front of London's most famous landmark. When you get out of the station, take a right and cross the street the first chance you get heading toward Big Ben/ Victoria Palace (Houses of Parliament). Continue walking until you reach Victoria Palace Gardens on your left. Every time I have gone there, there is usually only a few people in this huge chunk of land. You can get right up to the edge of the river and turn your head to the left and there's the London Eye. This is an excellent spot to get a picture of the wheel since it is not a stop on this walk, but there's two more opportunities to sneak it in a picture, though.

Head back the way you came but don't go all the way back up toward the tube station. Across the street on your left is Westminster Abbey and Parliament Square. Be very alert crossing this busy street as there are not many places designated for crossing. Parliament Square has statues of famous British leaders, such as Winston Churchill. If you crossed in the correct spot into Parliament Square, you should be at the corner closest to Westminster Abbey and the gardens you just came from. Around this spot is the best spot to take a picture of Big Ben, and if you move to just the right spot, you can see the London Eye between the clocktower and Westminster tube station. From here navigate your way to Westminster Abbey which should be literally right behind you if you're in Parliament Square. Take your pics and head back toward Westminster tube station.

The next stop on the walk is Trafalgar Square, home to those four enormous lion statues. I'm not sure of the street name but if you put Trafalgar square into your maps app, the road is straight ahead of where you are now. Follow that straight into the square; you won't be able to miss those huge lions with the tall pillar monument in the center. There are a few good places to take photos here, and if you turn around and face the way you came from you should be able to see Big Ben!

From Trafalgar Square, you're now going to head toward Buckingham Palace. Conveniently, since you're in a square, you should see a massive crescent-shaped archway that goes over the main road toward Buckingham Palace. It's called The Mall and that is the road you want to start walking up. On one side (the left I believe) is Saint James's Park. This is my absolute favorite park in all of London. The Mall goes up the right side of the park so you just want to find your way over to the left side because there is an excellent spot right in the middle. I never really walked to Trafalgar Square when I went this route so when you come up on an entrance to the park there should be a little statue or sign telling you where you are. Keep walking and there is a little bridge over the pond. If you're not sure if you're there it is called Blue Bridge and trust me, it's the greatest spot for sightseeing. If you walk right to the center of the bridge and face the Thames, you'll see The Horse Guards and the London Eye; if you turn around you can clearly see Buckingham Palace. Definitely grab some pics and once you're done continue over the bridge and make a left and walk through the park toward the Palace.

Here is where things can get a little hectic. Buckingham Palace is located behind a large roundabout main road with a large monument in the center. The only places to cross are either right, which is difficult since you're on the left side of the road; or left, closer to the palace. So, you're going to go left. There is a main sidewalk that will take you where you need to cross, but if you make a left as soon as you exit the park, there is a little walkway behind a patch of grass and flowers. Go that way, it's less busy and it is the best spot to take a picture of the Palace. Once you walk all the way to the end of that path, you should see a crossing area where you can cross right over to get an up close view of the Queen's crib. It's cool up close, but that picture you took back on the path will be way better than anything you might take up here. Get that selfie though, there's always guards right in front of the building. ;)

That's it! You've now seen a handful of London's most recognizable landmarks in a brief amount of time. So, now what, right? If you want to get on the tube, the closest station in Victoria. The **Victoria Line** will take you to a number of stations, including King's Cross/St.Pancras where you can get any other tube line. You've probably also worked up a hunger, too, so below is a list of some of my go-to eateries for those who want something familiar but unique to London:

## **FOOD**

- 1) **Itsu** - Fresh, tasty sushi on-the-go. They're everywhere and so good. Also they're half price before closing! I recommend the Crab California Rolls.
- 2) **Byron Burger** - Classic cheese and hamburgers, chicken sandwiches, and even vegetarian options. Hands down my favorite place for food in London. They're also SO trendy and cute with a diner-style vibe. Their fries and milkshakes are also to die for.
- 3) **Nando's** - Chicken, chicken, and more chicken. Probably the most well-known restaurant in the UK. You can get a ton of different flavors and sides. I ate their mashed potatoes at least once a week... should I be proud of that?

**FOOD IN HOXTON** - So when I was in London, I lived in an area near Shoreditch and Hackney called Hoxton. Besides Nando's, Hoxton (or the immediate area surrounding it within walking distance) has all of these restaurants (some exclusive to the area)\*. The tube station closest is Old Street which is on the Northern Line. Hoxton Square is home to several amazing restaurants and amazing street art. This whole area is full of street art actually. Street artist, Stik, calls Pitfield Street home to his studio, which ironically is the same street I lived on while studying at the University of Westminster.

- 4) The Breakfast Club (Hoxton Square)\* - You guessed it, breakfast... and some other options, too. Pancakes, bacon, sausage, eggs; you name it, they have it.
- 5) Friends of Ours\* (Pitfield Street) - A super hip cafe with unique and tasty treats. It's a little pricier than other cafes, but I swear it is worth it. The french toast is seriously out of this world, with candied pears and sugar cookies on top - you're welcome. (If you walk all the way from Great Eastern Street to here and head back in the same direction, you can see the Shard in the distance!)
- 6) The University of Westminster Cafe (Regent Street) - HOT CHOCOLATE. THE BEST. EVER.

London is full of amazing restaurants, so be adventurous and try something new! These aforementioned restaurants are great because not only are they cheap, but they all offer take-away for those who just want to head back to their hotel, air bob, or dorm and snuggle down and pig out. Yelp is your friend when you are hungry.

## **SHOPPING**

When in London, it's hard not to want to blow some cash in one of the trendiest places on Earth. So I'm not going to stop you, but if you're studying abroad or have a valid student ID or email address, you can get some pretty sweet discounts in almost every store you can think of. I recommend signing up for UNiDAYS or Student Beans (student discount sites) BEFORE you leave, so when you're ready to shop, your coupons are too.

The number one place to shop in all of London is Oxford Street. That being said, it's literally mobbed all the time. Luckily there are more than one of each store (mostly) peppered all the way down the street.

If you don't want to spend too much money, I recommend Primark. Be warned, Primark is very affordable, full of amazing items, and full of bargain shoppers just like you. It is amazing though, there is one at each end of Oxford Street. Another place to bargain shop if you're into beauty is Boots or Superdrug. Boots is basically a high-end drugstore, carrying your basic necessities, first-aid and toiletries to drug-store and high-end makeup and fragrances. Superdrug is more beauty oriented than Boots, but both are very addictive to shop at.

One can't-miss store is Topshop. If you come out of Oxford Circus station it basically smacks you in the face. Four levels of the trendiest fashions, accessories, and the greatest pair of jeans you'll ever wear.

There are way too many shops for me to mention that are located on Oxford Street and Regent Street. If you want to see everything on this street, start at either Tottenham Court Road station (northern and central) or Marble Arch Station (central). Also, if you don't feel like walking anymore, there are four tube stations along Oxford Street that all run on the Central Line: Tottenham Court Road, Oxford Circus, Bond Street, and Marble

Arch. This whole area (Soho) is so great to just walk around, so just wander a bit and I'm sure you'll find something awesome.

## **MUSEUMS, MARKETS & OTHER PLACES TO SEE IN LONDON**

Obviously, I can't mention everything London has to offer in this already very lengthy guide. But if you have extra time or don't think you want to go to the places I've already mentioned, here is a list of other London must-sees that I loved going on a regular basis, all within a tube ride of central London (the **purple-highlighted** locations are DEF must-sees, if you have the time, do them!):

- **Camden/Camden Lock Market**
- Borough Market
- Notting Hill
- **Regents Park & Primrose Hill**
- **Hyde Park & Kensington Palace/Gardens**
- Leadenhall Market
- **Covent Garden**
- **Leicester Square & Piccadilly Circus**
- Shakespeare's Globe Theater
- Natural History Museum (feat. Ice Rink)
- The British Museum
- Harrods & South Kensington
- **Saint Paul's Cathedral & Millennium Bridge**
- The London Eye
- Tate Modern
- O2 Arena
- **Greenwich (The Prime Meridian)**
- Somerset House (Ice Skating in Winter)
- Shoreditch (street art)

If you have any questions about this guide or about London in general, please feel free to contact me at [stefaugnhan@yahoo.com](mailto:stefaugnhan@yahoo.com)!