



LONDON SIGHTSEEING TOUR



For as long as there have been kings and queens in Britain there have been magnificent royal palaces to house them and today many of them survive as national treasures. They are glorious monuments to a fascinating history of our sovereign state.

The Palace of Westminster

The Palace (now our Houses of Parliament) was originally built by the last Saxon King, Edward the Confessor, before the Battle of Hastings. It has witnessed many historic events from the trial of King Charles I to the lying in state of Her Majesty the Queen Mother in 2002.



The Tower of London

First constructed by William the Conqueror in 1081 it has seen many distinguished prisoners held and beheaded as enemies of the Crown. The first state prisoner was the Bishop of Durham in 1100 then, notably, Henry VIII's unfortunate Queens, and the last person sent to the Tower was Rudolf Hess, Adolf Hitler's deputy in 1941.

Buckingham Palace

Originally built and owned by the Duke of Buckingham it was later purchased by George III in 1762 for the grand sum of £28,000. The Queen's Gallery houses the finest and most valuable privately owned art collection in the world. The Gallery has a rotating programme of exhibitions enabling an all year round display of masterpieces and decorative arts. The Royal Mews houses the State carriages still used on official royal occasions, the most magnificent of which is the ornate gold carriage built by George III in 1762.



The Banqueting House

The Main Hall in Whitehall is all that remains of the Great Whitehall Palace. Built in 1619 for James I its crowning glory is the Rubens ceiling commissioned by Charles I. Ironically it was under this painted heaven that Charles I walked to his execution at the Palace in 1649.

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St James's Palace

The hospital of St James's in the Fields, a sanatorium for female lepers occupied the site where St James's Palace now stands. It was acquired and restructured in 1532 by Henry VIII. Today Christopher Wren's palatial throne room is still used to welcome visiting heads of state. It is still home to several members of the royal family and houses the official offices of HRH Prince of Wales.



Kensington Palace

The Palace was formerly known as Nottingham House and was purchased by William III who renamed it Kensington Palace. It has been the principal royal residence until the 1760s when George III moved into Buckingham Palace. In 1714 Queen Anne died in the Palace from excessive overeating. The young Princess Victoria was awakened in 1837 to be told that her uncle William IV had died and that she was now Queen of England – beginning her sixty-four year reign. After the death of Princess Diana in 1997 the Palace became a focal point for mourners who gathered in their thousands and turned the gardens into a sea of flowers. As it was Diana's last residence a new exhibition celebrating her life opened on June 30th 2007.



Hampton Court Palace

This extraordinary palace was created by Cardinal Wolsey in 1514 and given to Henry VIII in 1528 to retain his royal favour. It was built on the original foundations of the Manor House owned by the Knights of St John and contains one thousand rooms in eighteen hundred acres. Many of the royal state apartments are decorated with paintings from the royal collection and the baroque gardens with avenues of majestic limes and collections of rare plants have been painstakingly restored.



Windsor Castle

The oldest continuously inhabited castle in Britain, it was originally built of wood by William the Conqueror in 1070 to guard London against invasion from the West. Since then it has been remodelled by successive monarchs to create the architectural masterpiece we see today. Ten monarchs are buried in its St George's Chapel and the round Tower now houses the Royal Archives. The State Apartments contain many royal treasures and works of art by Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci amongst others. In 1917 King George V chose the name Windsor as the royal family surname and to this day the House of Windsor is the preferred home of Queen Elizabeth II.

The two most iconic architectural religious buildings are:



St Paul's Cathedral

When destroyed by the Great Fire of London in 1666 St Paul's as we know it was the fifth place of worship to be built on this site. Sir Christopher Wren was commissioned to build the cathedral along with fifty-one new churches in London. Wren died aged ninety-one and is buried here along with Lord Nelson and Wellington.

Westminster Abbey

The Abbey has been the burial place of Britain's monarchs since the eleventh century and host for coronations and royal weddings since Christmas Day 1066. A treasure house of paintings, stained glass and medieval artefacts, this Gothic building comprises the most significant collection of monumental sculptures anywhere in the United Kingdom.

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A couple of my favourite lesser known treasures:

St John's Gate and Priory Church together with Temple Church

Everyone's talking about the Knights Templar and the Knights Hospitaller the two monastic orders that fought in the Crusades and were famously featured in the best selling book and subsequent movie The Da Vinci Code. The Temple Church and St John's gate were respectively part of the medieval headquarters of the Knights Templar and the Knights Hospitaller in England. Together they form an exciting insight into a world of medieval devotion, conflict and mystery. A visit to these sites is a must for Da Vinci Code fans.



St Bartholomew the Great

This is one of London's best-kept secrets. A Norman church concealed in the narrow back streets of Smithfield dating back to 1100. The arch where King Richard II confronted Wat Tyler in 1381 still stands, as does the church where in more recent times the movies Shakespeare in Love and Four Weddings and a Funeral were filmed.

All the following attractions can be enjoyed in your bespoke tour:



The Cabinet War Rooms and Churchill Museum
Bombproof rooms of Sir Winston Churchill's government in World War II.

The Royal Academy of Arts
Founded in 1768 by 34 artists with Joshua Reynolds as President

Apsley House and Museum
Former home of the Duke of Wellington

Somerset House and the Gilbert Collection
Britain's first purpose-built office block now houses fine art collections

Downing Street
Official residence of the Prime Minister

Tate Britain
The gallery of British art since 1897



Piccadilly Circus
The Statue of Eros at the very hub of London

The London Eye
The world's largest observation wheel at 443 feet high

Trafalgar Square
Statue of Lord Nelson guarded by the Lions of Edwin Landseer

The Mall
The broad triumphal approach to Buckingham Palace



The Piazza and Covent Garden Market
The central market/small shops, restaurants, bars, street entertainers

Brompton Oratory
A lavish monument to the catholic revival

The National Gallery and Portrait gallery
A beautiful collection of Western European paintings / 9000 portraits

Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens
Created from ancient land of the Crown

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The Natural History Museum
Contains a 150 million-year-old dinosaur skeleton, animatronic models etc.

The Science Museum
Centuries of scientific development

The Victoria and Albert Museum
Founded in 1852 contains the world's largest collection of art and design

The Royal Albert Hall
Opened in 1870 as a concert hall and modelled on a roman amphitheatre

The Albert Memorial
Built in memory of Queen Victoria's husband who died in 1861

The British Museum
The oldest public museum in the world, established in 1753

The Wallace Collection
The world's finest collections of European art (Great Tea Room!)

Abbey Road Studios
Where the Beatles recorded their greatest albums

HMS Belfast
The famous World War II battleship

Monument
Wren's monument to commemorate the Great Fire of London in 1666

The Old Operating Theatre
Britain's oldest operating theatre of 1822

Tower Bridge
The 1894 Victorian symbol of London

Shakespeare's Globe Theatre
The 1997 faithful reproduction of the Elizabethan theatre

Sir John Soane's Museum
The most eccentric museum in London

Tate Modern and Millennium Bridge
The world's premier collection of modern art

St Stephen Walbrook
Probably the finest Wren church in striking white stone

Southwark Cathedral
A twelfth century part medieval cathedral

Clink Prison
This museum in Clink Street recreates the real prison

Museum of London
Tracks the life of London from prehistoric times

Royal Observatory Greenwich
The world's time has been measured here since 1884

The Chelsea Physic Garden
Famous for cultivating medicinal herbs

Wren's Royal Hospital
Built in 1692 as a retirement home for war veterans

Notting Hill and Portobello Road
Fashionable area of restaurants and antique shops

Chiswick House
A splendid 1729 Palladian villa



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Syon House

The only large mansion in Greater London still in its hereditary ownership

Kew Gardens

The most complete botanical gardens in the world

Handel House Museum

Where Handel lived and composed from 1723 - 1759



Spencer House

A Palladian palace and former home of the family of Lady Diana

Horseguards

The mounted sentries guard Henry VIII former tournament ground



Cleopatra's Needle

From the land of the Pharaohs 1500BC