

London Snap Guide

TO / FROM THE AIRPORT

Gatwick and Heathrow Express Trains

Gatwick (LGW): 845/850-1530, gatwickexpress.com

Heathrow (LHR): 845/600-1515, heathrowexpress.com

These two high-speed rail services connect the main airports with central London. Heathrow Express runs about every 15 minutes from 5 A.M. until 12 A.M. daily; £14 one way, £26 round trip; the journey lasts around 15 minutes and terminates at Paddington Station. Gatwick Express runs every 15 minutes or so from 5 A.M. to 1:30 A.M. daily; £12 one way, £23.50 round trip; the journey lasts half an hour and terminates at Victoria Station.

London Underground

20/7222-1234, tfl.gov.uk

At Heathrow, a slower but cheaper option is to hop on the London Underground's Piccadilly line. It costs £3.80 one way to get into central London. The downside is the duration (budget at least an hour for the journey) and current engineering works related to the construction of Heathrow's Terminal 5, which means that a free shuttle bus replaces the Tube at the line's final stop at Terminal 4.

Bus

870/580-8080, nationalexpress.com

National Express bus service runs from central London's Victoria Station to Heathrow, though it's not as handy as the express trains (see above). It leaves roughly every 30 minutes from 7 A.M. to 11:30 P.M. daily and costs £10 each way.

GETTING AROUND

Underground and Bus

20/7222-1234, tfl.gov.uk

The London Underground network comprises 12 lines; it runs from 5 A.M. until at least 12 A.M. The bus network runs 24 hours. London is divided into six zones; a one-way ticket within central London (Zones 1 and 2) costs £2.30. A one- or three-day Travelcard allows unlimited journeys after 9:30 A.M. on bus and Tube. One-day Travelcards cost £4.70, and the three-day version £15. Pick up Travelcards at any London Underground station.

London Rail

20/7222-1234, tfl.gov.uk

The overground rail network that connects London to the rest of England is also handy within the city limits, especially if you're exploring south of the river. Travelcards are also valid on these services within the same zones.

Taxis

871/871-8710

The minimum fare for a ride in a black cab—a misnomer, since they're often wrapped in multicolored adverts—is £2.20; rates are then variable by mileage and speed, but expect a premium of 60p to £1 on nights and weekends.

WHAT'S GOING ON A ROUND TOWN

Free in Tube Stations *Metro* newspaper, Mon.–Fri.

At Newsstands *Time Out* magazine, timeout.co.uk

MetroLife magazine, free with the *Evening Standard* newspaper every Thursday, thisislondon.co.uk

The Guide magazine, free with *The Guardian* newspaper every Saturday, guardian.co.uk

TOURS

The Original London Walks

20/7624-9255, walks.com

Exhaustive, wide-ranging selection of historical tours on foot. The Jack the Ripper walk is arguably the best known, but it's worth exploring some of the more esoteric options: Shakespearean actor Edward Petherbridge still leads occasional theatrical jaunts, for example. Price: £5.50.

“A man who can dominate a London dinner table can dominate the world.”

—Oscar Wilde

Original London Sightseeing Tour

20/8877-1722, theoriginaltour.com

Traditional tour by bus—in a double-decker, no less—which hits all the city's major sights in 90 minutes or so. You can hop on and off at any point on the route; tickets are available at most hotels or London Transport offices. Price: £15.

Silvercane Tours

772/071-5295, silvercanetours.com

Simon Rodway is a qualified Blue Badge guide, with unbeatable historical knowledge; what sets him apart is his wit and the offbeat topics of his tours, which range from Bridget's Big Knickers Walk to the forgotten bohemian enclave of Fitzrovia. Price: £100 for private individual or group tours

NUMBERS TO KNOW

Directory inquiries 118-500

Emergencies Police, fire, ambulance, 999

Theater See Tickets, 871/220-0260

Sports & concert tickets Ticketmaster, 870/534-4444

Tourist info 20/7234-5800

International access code 011

Country code 44

City code 20

All London phone numbers start with “7” (central) or “8” (outer neighborhoods). Add a “0” before numbers when dialing within the U.K.

Sleep

Budget Travel

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BAYSWATER

Vancouver Studios

30 Prince's Sq., 20/7243-1270, vancouverstudios.co.uk

The large but simple rooms are self-contained apartments, with full kitchens and antique-style decor, but the real draw is the secluded, leafy garden out back—a fountain-filled oasis away from the bustle of the streets nearby. Friendly staff, doubles from £90.

BLOOMSBURY

Harlingford Hotel

61-63 Cartwright Gardens, 20/7387-1551, harlingfordhotel.com

Recently spruced-up budget hotel with a vaguely heraldic vibe (and even a roaring fire in the lounge). Bedrooms are smart but small, while the snazzy bathrooms boast brand-new, hyper-designed fixtures. Breakfast includes a full English fry-up. Doubles from £99.

BLOOMSBURY

The Jenkins Hotel

45 Cartwright Gardens, 20/7387-2067, jenkinshotel.demon.co.uk

Comfy, traditional B&B in a Georgian town house with a low-key, friendly vibe; large, if overly floral bedrooms; and an affable owner who'll happily help with tips on London. Doubles from £85.

“London is
the epitome of our
times, and the
Rome of today.”

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

CLERKENWELL

The Zetter Restaurant & Rooms

86-88 Clerkenwell Rd., 20/7324-4444, thezetter.com

London's trendiest hotel du jour, the Zetter was fashioned from a disused warehouse, so think minimalist, industrial chic in the smallish rooms. But it's smart touches, like vending machines dispensing gin and tonics in the corridors, that really count. Rooms from £158.

EARL'S COURT

Rushmore Hotel

11 Trebovir Rd., 20/7370-3839, rushmore-hotel.co.uk

Gorgeous, gloriously over the top, and like the boudoir of an Italian princess: Walls are covered with trompe l'oeil paintings, while beds are festooned with heavy drapes. Great fun and great value. Doubles from £79.

HYDE PARK

Pavilion Hotel

34-36 Sussex Gardens, 20/7262-0905, pavilionhoteluk.com

Release your inner rock star at this kitschy hotel. Rooms have different names and themes—try the Honky Tonk Afro (disco ball, heart-shaped headboards) or the Highland Fling (tartan, tartan, and more tartan). Doubles from £100.

MARYLEBONE

Sherlock Holmes Hotel

108 Baker St., 20/7486-6161, sherlockholmeshotel.com

Rooms look like a Savile Row tailor's pied-à-terre: pin-striped sheets, plenty of leather, and a neutral color scheme—Sherlock Holmes would be proud. The snazzy on-site bar is a great place for a drink or two. Doubles from £133.

SOUTH BANK

The Mad Hatter Hotel

3-7 Stamford St., 20/7401-9222, fullershoteles.com

This no-fuss, homey spot close to the Tate Modern is owned by a brewery and pub chain. Rooms are large, if a little too reliant on chintz. Prices often drop on weekends. Doubles from £95.

SOUTH KENSINGTON

Hotel 167

167 Old Brompton Rd., 20/7373-0672, hotel167.com

Stashed in a Victorian town house, this artsy, offbeat hotel combines modern touches—black-and-white tiling, contemporary art—with ramshackle pine-and-wicker furniture for a Sloaneey, boho vibe. Doubles from £99.

HOT GOSSIP

Forget *Us Weekly* and *People*: The real home of celebrity gossip is London. A raft of celeb-tastic weeklies documents the loves, lives, and misbehaviors of every B- and C-list star imaginable. Pick up a copy or two to learn about England's celebrity obsession.

Heat is the granddaddy of them all, with a mischievous sense of fun and a witty, ironic take on even the most sacrosanct movie stars—its “Celebrities Uncensored” section spotlights unflattering and revealing paparazzi shots.

With page after page of “at home with...” celebrity photo spreads, **Hello!** and **OK!** are like valentines to the stars they feature: adoring, uncritical, and soft-focused. Most Brits, though, read them for the unintentionally hilarious interviews.

Zoo and **Nuts** are both aimed at men—an unusual target for celeb weeklies. Soft-core photo shoots and sports coverage are standard fare.

As for **Closer** and **Now**, they're by far the trashiest options, usually packed with D-list TV stars and reality-show types.

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SEE Carnaby Street

The trendy center of Swinging London in the 1960s, thanks to a raft of funky boutiques. After falling from favor—by the 1980s, the boutiques were mostly replaced with tacky souvenir stalls—it's enjoyed a recent revival. There's now a new crop of interesting, offbeat clothing stores that are both browsable and affordable, especially near Foubert's Place.

SEE Leicester Square

This hub of London's entertainment district is lined with cinemas—including the massive UCI Empire and Odeon outposts—and has a handy half-price theater ticket outlet (a squat stone booth on the south side of the square). The once-tawdry green space at the center of the square was spiffed up in the 1990s.

SEE Gerrard Street

Wander down Gerrard Street for the sights and smells of London's bustling Chinatown. Sure, it's a little artificial—especially the cutesy temple-style phone booths and garish red gateways at either end—but the largely Cantonese restaurants are always packed.

EAT Andrew Edmunds

46 Lexington St., 20/7437-5708

A romantic hideaway amid the bustle, this ramshackle electric eatery's a low-key place for star-spotting because of the dozens of film companies headquartered nearby.

EAT Bar Italia

22 Frith St., 20/7437-4520, baritaliasoho.co.uk

Since the 1950s, this 24-hour café has been pulling espressos for locals and tourists alike. Stop here for some chocolate cake and a frothy cappuccino at 2 A.M.

EAT Busaba Eathai

106-110 Wardour St., 20/7255-8686

A burgeoning Thai chainlet that's a smart budget stop in the center of town. Designed like a canteen—expect to share a table—the decor is all dark afrosia wood set off by paper lamp shades.

§ SPLURGE Sketch

9 Conduit St., 870/777-4488

A white-hot, all-white restaurant that's gained notoriety for wallet-busting prices as well as an experimental menu, overseen by Michelin-superstar Pierre Gagnaire—think chocolate cake with black pepper ice cream. But its appeal doesn't end with the food—at 11 P.M., tables are cleared in the informal Gallery area so that guests can dance. Don't miss the sparkling, Swarovski-sponsored bathrooms, inspired by jewelry boxes.

TIP

Using the "loo" Many public restrooms enforce a pay-to-use policy—either with attendants or coin-operated stall doors. Have at least 20p (pence) at all times to avoid unfortunate accidents.

DRINK Floridita

100 Wardour St., 20/7314-4000, floriditalondon.com

New Cuban-style restaurant and bar based on Hemingway's favorite hangout in Havana: Order a mojito to banish a bout of London's standard summer-rain or winter blues.

DRINK Milk & Honey

61 Poland St., 20/7292-9949, mlkhny.com

Old-school cocktails mixed to perfection in a dimly lit, speakeasy-style space: You have to ring ahead to make a reservation; press the buzzer on the unmarked door for entry. Closed Sun.

SHOP Concrete

35a Marshall St., 20/7434-4546, concretelondon.com

One of the hottest, hipper-than-thou concept stores in London, decked out like a louche living room, and stocking many a rising name in fashion and homewares. Closed Sun.

“When a man is
tired of London,
he is tired of life.”

—*Samuel Johnson*

SHOP Foyles

113-119 Charing Cross Rd., 20/7437-5660, foyles.co.uk

In the heart of booksellers' row in London, Foyles is one of the largest independent booksellers in the world. Thanks to a recent overhaul, it's now a joy to browse.

PLAY Prince Charles Cinema

7 Leicester Pl., 20/7494-3654, princecharlescinema.com

Bargain cinema that shows first-run movies at a few months' lag—and at a significant savings (£3 to £10 a film). There's also a long-running rep season with arty classics, foreign films, and campy favorites.

ESCAPE Cambridge

906/586-2526 (toll number), visitcambridge.org

Hop on the train at Liverpool Street Station in London, and it's barely an hour's ride to the historic city of Cambridge. It's a much better option than Oxford, whose ancient buildings and collegiate vibe are overrun by the huge town surrounding it. Since Cambridge is much smaller, you'll gain a better sense of the university's history and hallowed halls. The enormous chapel attached to King's College is a world-famous Gothic masterpiece, while the smaller chapel at Pembroke College is a little-known work by Sir Christopher Wren, the designer of St. Paul's Cathedral.

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SEE **Geffrye Museum**

136 Kingsland Rd., 20/7739-9893, geffrye-museum.org.uk
One of London's hidden gems, the Geffrye was set up just before WWI as a museum of interior design to train craftsmen working in London's furniture industry nearby. Now it's a greatest hits of decorating, showcasing period rooms from the 1600s to the present day—there's even a minimalist '90s loft. Tues.–Sat., 10 A.M.–5 P.M.; Sun., noon–5 P.M. Free.

SEE **Hoxton**

The unofficial headquarters of the artsy Cool Britannia movement, thanks to the White Cube gallery and a raft of artists such as Rachel Whiteread snapping up studio space. Spend an afternoon browsing the dozens of independent galleries along Charlotte Road, then grab a drink at one of the restaurants that rim the square.

SEE **St. John's Gate**

St. John's Ln. at Clerkenwell Rd., 20/7324-4073, sja.org.uk
Medieval priory once home to the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, better known as the Knights Hospitallers, who defended the Holy Land. All that's left is this stone gate at the southern edge, which houses an intriguing museum of Middle Ages ephemera describing the history of the voluntary first-aid organization the St. John Ambulance. Mon.–Fri., 10 A.M.–5 P.M.; Sat., 10 A.M.–4 P.M. Free.

EAT **St. John Restaurant**

26 St. John St., 20/7251-0848, stjohnrestaurant.com
A pioneer in reviving the derelict neighborhood of Smithfield, St. John's whitewashed walls and rugged wooden fixtures are a nod to its past as a smokehouse. Nowadays, expect to eat a hearty selection of all-English cuisine: plenty of offal (spleen, brains, and liver are staples), plus long-neglected desserts like Eccles currant-filled puffed pastries. Closed Sun.

EAT **Smiths of Smithfield**

66-77 Charterhouse St., 20/7251-7950, smithsofsmithfield.co.uk
Warehouse-style, four-floor eating megaplex serving traditional British grub: snacks and beer on the first floor, champagne and cocktails on the second. There's a brasserie on the third floor, and a swanky, pricey restaurant at the top. Brasserie and champagne bar closed Sun.

DRINK **Cargo**

83 Rivington St., 20/7739-3440, cargo-london.com
Hip Shoreditch hybrid bar/club/restaurant: late-night live acts are reliable and eclectic, while both food and drink are Latin-inflected street snacks like tangy quesadillas and freshly made caipirinhas.

DRINK **Loungelover**

1 Whitby St., 20/7012-1234, loungelover.co.uk
Campy, over-the-top lounge, decked out like the love child of a pawn shop and a brothel, with red velvet drapes, mismatched stools, and huge chandeliers. Allow time to browse the 16-page cocktail list; if in doubt, try the Mrs. Robinson (Cognac and Drambuie). Closed Sun.

DRINK **Match EC1**

45-47 Clerkenwell Rd., 20/7250-4002, matchbar.com
Sleek steel bi-level cocktail bar that's buzziest in the early evening with the after-work crowd. Order a Dark and Stormy or a classic martini—cocktail king Dale de Groff was behind the drink list. Closed Sun.

SHOP **Family Tree**

53 Exmouth Mkt., 20/7278-1084, familytreeshop.co.uk
Artsy and eclectic boutique: The owners and their friends make much of the wares, which includes sleek jewelry, hand-screened T-shirts, and handmade purses. Closed Sun.

SHOP **Microzine**

66-67 Colebrooke Row, Islington, 20/7704-6667, microzine.co.uk
Take a short Tube ride north into Islington to find what's likely the hottest store in London: the men's megastore known as Microzine. It's a hybrid boutique and magazine: Its stock changes every month like a new issue, and everything is for sale, even the fixtures. Open Mon.–Fri., 11 A.M.–6 P.M.; Sat., 10 A.M.–7 P.M.; Sun., noon–6 P.M.

SHOP **SCP**

135-139 Curtain Rd., 20/7739-1869, scp.co.uk
A contemporary furniture showroom that commissions big names such as Michael Sodeau but also stocks products by local artisans working in the Hoxton studios. Stop by to browse for big items, or pick up more-affordable goodies like lighting, books, and accessories.

SHOP **Spitalfields Market**

103-117 Commercial St., at Lamb & Brushfield Sts.
20/7247-8556

This historic, wrought-iron market building is bustling again after falling into disrepair in the 1980s. These days, the stalls are individually owned and heavy on crafts—dyed sheepskin rugs, handmade clothes, and lashings of aromatherapy-inflected home products. General market Mon.–Fri. and Sun., 10 A.M.–5 P.M.; fashion and art markets Fri., 10 A.M.–4 P.M.

PLAY **Fabric**

77a Charterhouse St., 20/7336-8898, fabriclondon.com
Onetime meat cellar turned superclub, a mecca for dance music snobs: Its three separate spaces are inventively programmed. Nostalgic types should head for the warehouse-like space that resembles a late-1980s rave. Fri. and Sat. only.

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SEE Tate Modern

Bankside in Southwark, near the Millennium Bridge

20/7401-5120, tate.org.uk/modern

Museum in a converted power station was an instant hit on opening five years ago. It houses the Tate Gallery's collection of contemporary art, arranged by theme, as well as its always-excellent temporary exhibits. The vast hall at its center is used for show-stopping, space-specific single installations. Open Sun.–Thurs., 10 A.M.–6 P.M.; Fri. and Sat., 10 A.M.–10 P.M. Free.

SEE The Saatchi Gallery

County Hall, Belvedere Rd., 20/7823-2363, saatchi-gallery.co.uk

Adman-turned-art collector Charles Saatchi championed the rebellious YBAs (Young British Artists), including Damien Hirst and Tracey Emin, in the early 1990s, and has now opened a public space to showcase his holdings. The traditional, wood-paneled rooms are a strong contrast to the conceptual, off-beat art. Open Sun.–Thurs., 10 A.M.–8 P.M.; Fri. and Sat., 10 A.M.–10 P.M. Admission: £8.75.

SEE British Airways London Eye

Riverside Building, next to County Hall

870/500-0600, ba-londoneye.com

For the best views of London, book a 30-minute flight in one of the pods that slowly trundle around this 450-foot-tall Ferris wheel. To check for times and minimize the wait in line, buy a ticket in advance at londoneye.com. Hours vary throughout the year. Closed in Jan. and on Christmas Day. Admission: £12.50.

EAT Anchor & Hope

36 The Cut, 20/7928-9898

Waterfront gastropub serving traditional British ales and a list of affordable wines and sherries alongside inventive, unusual dishes such as preserved rabbit. Desserts are a high point; try the creamy rhubarb pudding. Open for lunch and dinner Tues.–Sat., dinner only Mon., and closed Sun.

\$ SPLURGE Le Pont de la Tour

36d Shad Thames, Butler's Wharf, 20/7403-8403, conran.com

Classic Terence Conran megaplex—with a bakery, food shop, and bar and grill—though the best part is the summertime outdoor seating, which has an unbeatable view of Tower Bridge. Warning: The game-heavy menu is expensive, but it's worth every penny.

DRINK Baltic

74 Blackfriars Rd., 20/7928-1111

The food at this eastern European eatery is so-so, but most people come for the astonishingly wide selection of homemade vodkas—try them either in cocktails, or better, as shots. It's especially lively late at night, when the restaurant empties out, the bar fills up, and the music pumps.

DRINK Royal Oak

44 Tabard St., 20/7357-7173

A 19th-century alehouse that boasts vintage fixtures, classic Sussex ales, and what looks like a few of its original clients, too.

SHOP Oxo Tower Wharf

Barge House St., 20/7401-2255, oxotower.co.uk

Beneath the restaurant (see listing below), you'll find a sprawling complex of shoebox-size studios and retail spaces offering ceramics and handmade textiles, all beautifully chic and understated. There's an art gallery on the ground floor.

PLAY National Theatre

South Bank next to the Waterloo Bridge

The Cut, 20/7452-3400, nationaltheatre.org.uk

Sure, the building is monstrously ugly—a relic of 1970s urban planning—but the programming more than makes up for it: Instead of the jukebox musicals taking over the West End, the three auditoriums are a rotating selection of plays, both classics and premieres. (The latest hit was an adaptation of Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy.) Ticket prices from £10. Come summer, the central concrete piazza is used for free performances every night but Sunday.

PLAY Old Vic Theatre

Waterloo Rd., 870/060-6628, oldvictheatre.com

Kevin Spacey has brought cachet and Hollywood glamour to the Old Vic during his tenure as artistic director—pity the productions have been so hit-and-miss. Even so, it's worth checking out his latest offering, as it's guaranteed to feature prestigious screen names slumming it on the stage. Ticket prices from £10.

\$ SPLURGE Oxo Tower Restaurant, Bar and Brasserie

Eighth Fl., Oxo Tower Wharf, Barge House St.

20/7803-3888, oxotower.co.uk

Loud and brash, but the views from this elevated eatery can't be beat, especially from the terrace. The modern European food is pricey but tasty, so limit yourself to a glass of wine at the bar if you're on a tight budget.

ESCAPE Brighton

906/711-2255 (toll number), visitbrighton.com

There are plenty of reasons to spend a day on England's south coast—only an hour or so by train from Victoria Station. For one thing, the shopping in Brighton—the best outside London—is mostly independent boutiques crammed into the network of cobbled alleys known as **The Lanes**. Another draw is the impressive Regency folly known as the **Royal Pavilion**, with its bizarre Eastern-influenced architecture. And lastly, crowds flock to Brighton for the town's nightlife: Clubs are often cooler than in London, and usually feature fierce up-and-coming bands and DJs.

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SEE Madame Tussauds

Marylebone Rd., at Baker St.

870/400-3000, madame-tussauds.co.uk

Irresistible kitsch and fun, Tussauds is London's premier tourist draw. Skip the Clooney and Pitt-dominated Garden Party at the start and head for the Great Hall, where there's an impressive selection of historical figures, or linger in the gory Chamber of Horrors. Go late in the day: The crowds are thinner and the entry price is lower, too. Open Mon.–Fri., 9:30 A.M.–5:30 P.M.; weekends, 9 A.M.–6 P.M. Admission: £13–£22, depending on time of day.

SEE Wallace Collection

Hertford House, Manchester Sq., 20/7563-9500

wallacecollection.org

Stashed in a quiet square, this French château-style mansion is full of antiques and paintings inherited and collected by the illegitimate, art-loving heir of the Marquess of Hertford. There's a heavy emphasis on French finery—Sèvres porcelain, Louis XIV furniture—as well as Boucher and Fragonard canvases, and a smattering of English work by the likes of Reynolds and Gainsborough. Open daily, 10 A.M.–5 P.M. Free.

“London is a roost
for every bird.”

—Benjamin Disraeli

EAT Eat and Two Veg

50 Marylebone High St., 20/7258-8595

Airy vegetarian restaurant with ample seating and a refreshingly varied menu, from meatless burgers to tofu sausage 'n' mash or hotpot. Weekend brunch is especially buzzy and fun.

EAT Golden Hind

73 Marylebone Lane, 20/7486-3644

Is there such a thing as chic fish and chips? Yes, if you stop by this retro joint in Marylebone's gourmet ghetto, complete with vintage Bakelite fryer. Alongside standard cod and chips, expect offbeat extras such as deep-fried mussels. Closed Sun.

SHOP Daunt Books

83 Marylebone High St., 20/7224-2295

Book-lovers' mecca, with piles of new releases arranged by the door. A vast selection of travel books (including guides, memoirs, and maps) fills three floors at the back of the store.

SHOP Get Up Boutique

9 Ashbridge St., 20/7725-9694, weardowney.com

Cute and quirky independent boutique run by a pair of designers who live and knit on site. Wrap dresses, knickers, and cardigans for women, and a few pairs of handmade cotton boxer shorts for men. Closed Sun.

PLAY Royal Academy of Music

Marylebone Rd., 20/7873-7300, ram.ac.uk

The alma mater of composers such as Arthur Sullivan and Michael Nyman combines an on-site instrument museum (you can hear the Stradivarius etc playing on headphones nearby) with a regular series of free lunchtime and evening concerts. Call or check the website for schedules.

DRINK Salt Whisky Bar

82 Seymour St., 20/7402-1155, saltbar.com

Dram-downing whiskey lovers should make a pilgrimage to this dark and cozy bar with its thick plastic Perspex counter and its flickering tealights. The range of available whiskies is staggering, taking in everything from Islay malts to Japanese-made concoctions.

DRINK The Social

5 Little Portland St., 20/7636-4992

On Marylebone's southern outskirts, a reliable DJ bar serving a short menu of comfort staples like beans on toast, as well as the usual range of draft beers. But most people come to listen to the eclectic, unusual roster of turntablists, who play everything from hard-core house to retro salsa.

\$ SPLURGE The Providores and Tapa Room

109 Marylebone High St., 20/7935-6175, theprovidores.co.uk

London's legendary palace of fusion food, run by the affable New Zealander Peter Gordon. The two-story space boasts a downstairs spot known as the Tapa Room, which offers tasting portions of its Pacific Rim menu; upstairs is a clean all-white space for pricier, larger portions of globe-trotting gourmet food. The steamed sugar snap peas are delicious.

ESCAPE Hampton Court Palace

870/752-7777, hrp.org.uk

Forget Windsor Castle—it's little more than a white turret with a few fusty staterooms attached (the Queen's rarely spotted, a n y w a y). True monarchy maniacs should head to Hampton Court. A schizophrenic palace, it was built in two eras and two sections: From one side, it's an ornate, multi-chimneyed Renaissance sprawl (and residence of wife-swapper Henry VIII in the 16th century), while from the other, it's a pale-granite neo-Classical palace (thanks to husband-and-wife team William and Mary, who remodeled it nearly 200 years later). Poke around and see if you spot one of the many ghosts said to haunt the corridors here, but make sure to leave plenty of time to explore the fiendish yew maze on the grounds. Admission: £12.

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SEE Theatre Museum

Russell St., 20/7943-4700, theatremuseum.org

Unfairly neglected in favor of the market nearby, this outpost of the Victoria & Albert celebrates the lives of acting legends such as David Garrick with more than three centuries' worth of trinkets. Saturday's an interactive day with workshops and makeup classes for kids. Open Tues.–Sun., 10 A.M.–6 P.M. Free.

EAT The Ivy

1 West St., 20/7836-4751, caprice-holdings.co.uk

Still the best place in London to spot a celeb or two—note the hordes of paparazzi permanently stationed out front. As worthwhile for its food as for its scene, its menu's heavy on comfort staples like crab cakes. Booking ahead is essential.

EAT Rules

35 Maiden Lane, 20/7836-5314

The place where time stands still: Rules seems much the same as it was when Dickens was a regular 200 years ago. Expect to eat lots and lots of game (in season, from the northern England estate the restaurant owns). The dining room is like a gentleman's club, so dress up if you want to feel you belong.

DRINK Punch & Judy

40 The Market, 20/7379-0923

Packed every night, often with yuppie office workers, and the beer's overpriced. But that's not the point: On a summer's night, the terrace balcony overlooking the piazza is the best place for a drink in central London.

SHOP Bailey

5-11 Shorts Gardens, 20/7836-6097

Christopher Bailey's menswear is a design insider's choice, from his slim-fit shirts—often emblazoned with his trademark curlicue B—to his roomy jeans and offbeat accessories (silver knuckle-dusters and huge cuff watches).

SHOP Dress Circle

57-59 Monmouth St., 20/7240-2227, dresscircle.co.uk

The store sells anything show-related. There are the standard CDs and posters, as well as scores, programs, and even specialist magazines. The staff's exhaustive knowledge—and gossipy know-how on the current West End scene—is a major plus.

SHOP Muji

135 Long Acre, 20/7379-0820, muji.co.uk

Minimalist Japanese chain selling stationery, homewares, furniture, and clothing. It's all simple and smartly designed—heavy on unbleached paper and Perspex. What's more, prices are always reasonable. The pocket screwdriver sets are particularly nifty.

\$ SPLURGE Koh Samui

65-67 Monmouth St., 20/7240-4280

Lush and hushed, this smallish boutique is the go-to choice for glamour girls in London. There's barely a rack that isn't packed with must-haves: Chloé, Balenciaga, and Missoni, as well as a smattering of rising fashion stars. Cash in the mortgage and splash out.

RAISING THE BRA

The buzziest blog in London isn't media-centric or political-scandal-rousing—it's by an anonymous, high-class call girl (belledejour.co.uk). With the nom de plume Belle de Jour, in honor of the classic film, she's just snagged a book deal to reprint her exploits. If you'd rather have your fun than read about it, head for one of these high-end lingerie shops for a real souvenir to remember.

Agent Provocateur

6 Broadwick St., 20/7439-0229, agentprovocateur.com

Run by the son of original fashion rebel Vivienne Westwood, this shop kick-started the upscale lingerie trend in Britain, and is still a reliable choice: The pink-and-black boxes are to marabou thongs and half-cup bras what robin's-egg blue is to diamonds.

Myla

77 Lonsdale Rd., 20/7221-9222, myla.com

Stocks designer lingerie (the pearl-encrusted G-string is a popular choice) as well as a signature line of accessories reimaged as art objects by designers like Tom Dixon.

Rigby & Peller

22a Conduit St., 20/7491-2200, rigbyandpeller.com

Bra-fitters to the Queen, but non-HRH types can come for a free fitting—the women who work here are experienced enough to size you up without even measuring. Splurge on a new bra in your new size (it's almost guaranteed you're wearing the wrong one) and never look back. Closed Sun.

London Snap Guide

SEE The Brompton Oratory

Brompton Rd., 20/7808-0900, bromptonoratory.com

This London pompworthy Catholic church is often overlooked—a pity, since its ornate, late-19th-century neo-Baroque interior is eye-popping, and the Old Masters statuary (mostly pilfered from Tuscany and Rome) is outstanding in its own right. Believers can catch mass in Latin daily at 6 P.M.

SEE King's Road

A swanky shopping strip designed by Charles II as a shortcut to his mistress's house, bookended by World's End and Sloane Square. The best place to spy London's moneyed elite browsing for a baby carriage, or to pretend you're James Bond. (Royal Avenue is where Fleming sited Bond's London pad.)

SEE V&A (Victoria & Albert) Museum

Cromwell Rd., 20/7942-2000, vam.ac.uk

The world's priciest and most-impressive collection of bric-a-brac, this catch-all museum's stunning holdings range from a set of monolithic Raphael cartoons to a National Fashion Collection that boasts jackets from both Queen Elizabeth's era and current designer Alexander McQueen. Open Mon., Tues., Thurs.–Sun., 10 A.M.–5:45 P.M.; Wed. and last Fri. of month, 10 A.M.–10 P.M. Free; special exhibitions and events from £10.

EAT The Cow

89 Westbourne Park Rd., 20/7221-0021

Gastropub owned by Tom (son of Terence) Conran, with chic, retro fixtures—imagine an upscale tea room from the 1950s—and a menu heavy on seafood. Try a pint of Guinness, the house tippie—as Madonna did during her early days as an adoptive Londoner.

EAT Lisboa Patisserie

57 Golborne Rd., 20/8968-5242

Tucked away in West London, a pilgrimage-worthy Portuguese patisserie, with an on-site bakery that churns out heavenly *pastéis de nata* (custard tarts).

EAT The Wolseley

160 Piccadilly, 20/7499-6996, thewolseley.com

The newest spot from the creators of The Ivy is a large, brasserie-style restaurant with plenty of seating and long hours, so almost anyone can snag a table. The best (and cheapest) scene is breakfast, when media and fashion types nibble gingerly on housemade date-and-pecan twists or pain au chocolat. Open daily for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

DRINK Apartment 195

195 King's Rd., 20/7351-5195, apartment195.co.uk

Cozy, dim bar with overstuffed leather seating and, on occasion, roaring open fires in the winter. Its hidden location—in apartment no. 195—means that passing riffraff don't disturb the friendly, local vibe. Closed Sun. in summer.

DRINK Trailer Happiness

177 Portobello Rd., 20/7727-2700, trailerhappiness.com

Kitschy California-inspired bar, with a 1960s decor (bean bags, lurid prints) and drinks list (Mai Tais and Zombies never went out of style here). Graze on snacks called TV dinners and groove to the low-key DJ.

SHOP Harvey Nichols

109-125 Knightsbridge, 20/7235-5000, harveynichols.com

Harrods may lure the tourists, but Harvey Nick's is the real fashion mecca: a vast, luxurious cosmetics department, two floors of menswear in the basement, and an unbeatable selection of high-end haute couture. Refuel with a glass of bubbly at the Fifth Floor Café.

SHOP J&M Davidson

42 Ledbury Rd., 20/7313-9532, jandmdavidson.co.uk

Artisanal leathers designed by husband-and-wife team John and Monique: women's and men's accessories, plus homewares, and even fashion. Classic but not fusty.

SHOP Olivia Morris

355 Portobello Rd., 20/8962-0353, oliviamorrisshoes.com

Morris is the punky enfant terrible of London's cobbling clique (Jimmy Choo, Manolo Blahnik, et al). She makes a range of weird but wearable shoes, from African-inspired wedges to velvet boots. Closed Mon. and Tues.

PLAY The Electric Cinema

191 Portobello Rd., 20/7908-9696, the-electric.co.uk

At last, an alternative to lukewarm popcorn and rock-hard seats: Here, enjoy a movie while lounging in an overstuffed armchair (complete with footstool), sipping a glass of wine, and nibbling on gourmet snacks. There are a couple of secluded two-seater sofas in the back row. Admission from £5.

\$ SPLURGE Gordon Ramsay

68 Royal Hospital Rd., 20/7352-4441, gordonramsay.com

London's answer to New York's Jean-Georges Vongerichten, Ramsay is as famous for his fiery temper—showcased on several hit TV cooking shows—as for his food. A shame, since his take on British staples is tasty and refreshing. With three Michelin stars and only 14 tables, save up for a year or so, and book at least a month in advance. Closed Sat. and Sun.

TIP

Avoid fines on the Tube Be sure to take your paper ticket after you pass through the Tube's electronic turnstile. If you're caught without your ticket (many people forget it), fines can reach as high as £20. Transit bobbies roam the underground, regularly stopping riders to demand proof that they've paid.