

London Trip

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General Information

We flew to London for a week's stay. I lived in London for 1.5 years so it was an opportunity to visit previous and new places. This was Beverly's first time.

The original location was established by the Romans in 43 AD as Londinium. As the Roman empire collapsed, they moved out about 500AD. The simple version - the Anglo-Saxons moved in and London stabilized about 886AD.

Here is a link to Wikipedia for LOTS of history - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_London

We went to many places in and around London. It is mind-boggling for North Americans to see churches, castles and other structures built over 1,500 years ago and many still in use.

Bev fell in love with London.

Places

Here are some places we went to.

London Eye

This is over the Thames River close to a pedestrian bridge at Northumberland Rd and between the Westminster and Waterloo bridges. We walked from Trafalgar Square for 0.8 miles.

I suggest buying tickets from their website or reputable online companies (we use Viator and Expedia). Even with a reservation, there can be a bit of wait. The Eye has a moving entry, so it does not stop unless a passenger needs assistance like a wheelchair

The cars are enclosed, and we had lots of room to walk around to see and take pictures. It takes about 30 minutes to do a rotation. There was a couple from New Zealand with a stuffed animal Kiwi being used in pictures.

You can easily see the House of Parliament and the Tower (wrongly called Big Ben). You can see most of Buckingham Palace. The River Thames curves around so could not see the Tower Bridge (many wrongly called it London Bridge). London Bridge is close by with a flat platform structure.

Near the Eye are many shops and a very nice-looking Carousel. On a subsequent cruise we bought a Thomas Kincaid painting with a view across the river to the Parliament Building from the Carousel – minus the Eye.



Tower of London and Crown Jewels

The history goes back to William the Conqueror in 1078 – like Windsor Castle.

It was used as a prison primarily with notorious torture and executions during the 16 and 17th centuries. The prison closed in 1952.

Today we can see all the buildings, the museums including some of the Crown Jewels, used for ceremonies, the Yeoman Warders still live here with their family, displays some of the Crown Jewels.

Here is a link to Wikipedia for LOTS of history - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tower_of_London



We did a guided tour with a Yeoman Warder – aka **Beefeaters** with no definitive answer on how the name started. They are official guards of the tower and live here with their family. They are retired military people. He shared a lot of information and was very funny at times. If you go, take the guided tour. After the guided tour, we are on our own and when to see the Crown Jewels – incredible!

Here was our guide. This is their official attire.



There is a “Changing of the Keys” tour involving the dungeons. It has been a daily ceremony for over 700 years. I tried booking tickets over a month in advance but already sold out. Will try again if we when return London.

River Thames cruise

Our tour of the London Eye included a cruise on the river. Being below the ground level limits the view to the sides of buildings and the bridges. It was a nice tour with commentary.

St Paul Cathedral

The original church was built in 640AD and was damaged or destroyed several times due to fire, including the Great Fire of London fire in 1666. The church had to do a major restoration from 1924 to 1930. It was damaged but not destroyed during WW2. Some claim it was an aerial landmark. There have been more restorations throughout the 1960s.

More history can be found on Wikipedia - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Paul%27s_Cathedral



Across the street, we went to Franco Manga pizza. They use an oven to bake the pizza. It was very good and worth trying if you are in the area.



Beatles Abby Rd Album Crosswalk

The Beatle's Abbey Road album from 1969 has them walking across a crosswalk on Abbey Road. This made the crosswalk famous and people want to replicate the walk. It is close to the St. John Wood tube station with a short walk. There were about 30 people at this crosswalk. People would take your picture in exchange for you taking theirs. The recording studio is just down the street.

Here is our feeble attempt to imitate,



Churchill War Rooms

Hitler attacked Poland as a start of WW2. He continued to attack and occupy other European countries. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain "appeasement" for Germany did not work. Germany attacked Poland on September 1, 1939 and Winston Churchill became Prime Minister in May 1940.

The primary government needed a secret area to live and work. They picked a basement under the Whitehall building. They installed about a 10-foot-thick concrete slab in the ceiling and steel support for reinforcement.

After the war, different government agencies controlled the site with different names. Access remained highly restricted until late 1970s. In 1984 the main area was available to the public. In 2003 the restoration work was completed. They did an excellent job preserving the working and living quarter rooms as they would have been during the war, including wall maps. In 2010 the name was shortened to Churchill War Rooms.

The museum is very extensive in size, the artifacts and videos - including some people who worked here. During its use, there was poor air circulation and considering people smoked made for an unpleasant environment.



Stonehenge

This was a bus tour from London and included other stops. When I lived in London, people could walk all around the stones and now people can only walk around them from about 50 feet away.

This remaining part of this site is a mystery of who, how, and why it was built. Experts believe the stones are arranged to track the sun and stars.

It is estimated to have started about 3,100 BC and expanded over the next 1,500 years. Through time people have removed stones for buildings, people could use a chisel to take pieces and structures have collapsed. It became a World Heritage Sites in 1986.

I lived in London in the early 70's and people could walk all around and touch it. In 1977 it roped off and a path going around it is about 50 feet away to protect it.

This is like so many other historic sites worldwide built thousands of years ago by people and methods that are foreign to us. Even with all our technology, we are amazed at why and how they were built.

If I was given a superpower, I would want to go back in time a billion years and be able to fast forward through time to see the earth grow, see the Grand Canyon be formed, see the building of these incredible thousand-year-old structures, ice ages come and go, and SO many other events.



Windsor Castle

The castle was founded by William the Conqueror in the 11th century and is the oldest and largest occupied castle in the world serving 40 monarchs.

More history can be found on Wikipedia - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Windsor_Castle

Here is a picture inside the castle walls.



Bath - City

This is pronounced 'Baaa th' like an extended soft "a".

It is an old Roman bath going back to 60AD even before the city existed. It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. with the hot springs open periodically. It was not open when we were here.



Lacock Village

We had lunch at the George Inn Wadworth Pub in Lacock Village as part of our Stonehenge tour. It dates back to 1361.

We enjoyed Fish and Chips as a common British meal. One thing that has changed from many years ago is the meal is not served on newspaper. A very good idea now considering the consequence of ingesting ink.



Lamb and Flag Pub

There are pubs going back centuries. The original pub was built in 1683 and renamed Lamb and Flag in 1883. It is the oldest in Covent Garden area.

Google Maps took us down a small street and into an alley with trash cans. Then walked past an old wagon to the front of the pub. As we left, we found a straight alley from James St north of Oxford St.

It is cozy with friendly staff. Of course, we needed to have a Pint of beer to celebrate finding it. There were some sayings engraved in wood. "To die in a Pub..."



Harrods

This London institution store takes up an entire block off Brompton Road. When my family lived in London, Harrods could look after you from birth with mid-wives to death with a funeral department. I'm not sure if this is still true.

The departments are exclusive companies such as Channel, Carier, Gooch, Tiffany and SO MANY more.

I am a TRUE CHOCOHOLIC so my favorite was the Chocolatier area including an onsite Harrods brand.

The Kerridge's Fish & Chips restaurant inside Harrods is said to have the best Fish and Chips anywhere. It was superb and a bit pricy.



Sherlock Holmes museum

This is interesting touring all the items in a multiple story house he lived and worked in – considering he is a fictional character of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.



Pictures of iconic places

Tower Bridge (not London Bridge)



London Bridge (flat, picture from the Thames cruise)



Changing of the Guards at Buckingham Palace



Parliament House and Elizabeth Tower with the Big Ben clock and bell (not the actual tower)



Speaker's Corner in Hyde Park - people can share their views and probably get into a debate.



Plays

London West End and New York Broadway are some of the best in the world – there are some disagreements over which is better. I imagine it depends on where you are from and who the cast is.

Mousetrap

We saw Mousetrap which was written by Agatha Christie. It is a who-done-it play. It has been going on for 72 years (yes, years). It is in the Guinness Book of World Records.

Our seats were on the lowest level 2 rows from the very back. There is only one stage set and we could only see half of it with the second level blocking the top half. Fortunately, we could see all the players.



Les Misérables

This has been running since 1985. I watched the movie and an online play to become familiar with the story and music. There were multiple very good sets.

It is a French historical novel by Victor Hugo published in 1862. It is a story of a personal struggle that transforms into a success with conflicts and consequences.

Like Mousetrap and Rocky Horror, our seats were on the lowest level at the back of the theater. Part of the stage set was blocked by the second level. Some of the sets were tall and we could not see some sets and players.



Phantom of Opera

This is fiction with some elements based on a real event. The play indicates the chandelier falls to disfigure the character. In real, a counterweight fell killing someone and injuring others.

Our seats this time were on the second level so we could see everything.



Rocky Horror Show

Beverly has seen the play in San Clemente and Roseville California. Now she saw it in London where it started.

I'm not a big live theater person, so my experience has this as the MOST audience participation. A large number of people were dressed as characters in the play – some were so good they could have been on the

stage. Throughout the play, the audience would respond with quips and comments, as well as everyone standing at their seats to do the time warp. It was my first time, but I did an amazing job, if I do say so myself!

Like Mousetrap, our seats were on the lowest level at the back of the theater. Part of the stage set was blocked by the second level. Again, we could see all the players.



Personal Places

Great Grandfather's Shoe store

My Great Grandfather made and repaired shoes from 1890 to 1907 at 27 Brecknock Rd. His family then immigrated to North Battleford, Saskatchewan, Canada where my dad was born.

Our family album had a store postcard. We took the tube and bus to find it. We had no idea if the building was still there or if there was some type of business or it was boarded up like some of the places we saw coming in.

There was a very nice store here selling clothes, accessories and SHOES. The women owner was very friendly and amazed with postcard and story. The business is The Third Estate. We exchanged contact information. We took some pictures including the postcard view.

I sent some pictures and information to my family in the US and Canada. When we get back home, I'll look for more information to send her.

His business postcard



My picture



Melbury Court

This is where my family lived while my dad worked in London. We spoke with the manager, and he let me go to our apartment to take a picture of the door – so nostalgic being here. The building is undergoing cleaning so could not get an unobstructed view.

The ground level stores are more upscale. I worked part time in a small grocery store which is gone. The Commonwealth Institute with its duck pond (site of Truth or Dare escapades) is now condos.

American School London

We kids attended ASL and my sister and I graduated high school – 50 + years ago. I was able to do a tour. The school has grown so much I did not recognize very much - recognized the gym, theater (although it has been expanded) and classroom layout.

Leave London

Express Train to Paris

There are several ways to travel to Paris. We took the high-speed train under the English Channel (Chunnel). Travels about 100 mph, but not sure what speed is under the Channel. The total trip took about 2.5 hours and is far easier and cheaper than flying. Going through the tunnel was about 35 minutes.

I was surprised how smooth and quiet the ride was.

There are assigned seats. We packed very light for several reasons, including trains not having luggage cars. There is some space at the end of the car for large luggage and some space overhead for carry-on size items. It would be a challenge if you are the type of person taking 3 suitcases for a weekend trip.

Traveling Around

General Information:

Money

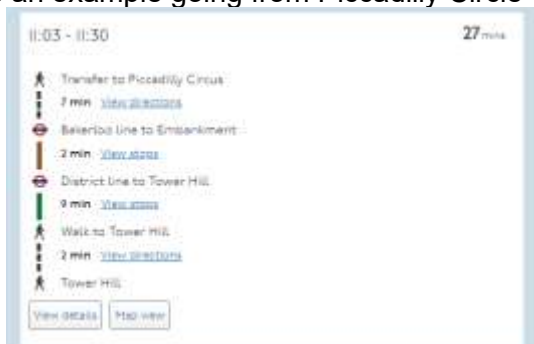
One question about traveling to a country with a different currency is, do I need to exchange money. The first factor is how prevalent the local businesses take major credit or debit cards. We exchanged enough for tips, buying inexpensive items and for local businesses that do not take cards.

Another factor is minimizing how much cash you carry. You do not want to pull out a large amount of cash for a small purchase. Split the cash in different pockets so show a minimal amount. You should consider if your debit or credit card financial charges an “international fee”. I learned our debit card charged a 3% fee and a poor exchange rate, so we switched to our credit card with no fee and fair exchange rate.

Getting Around

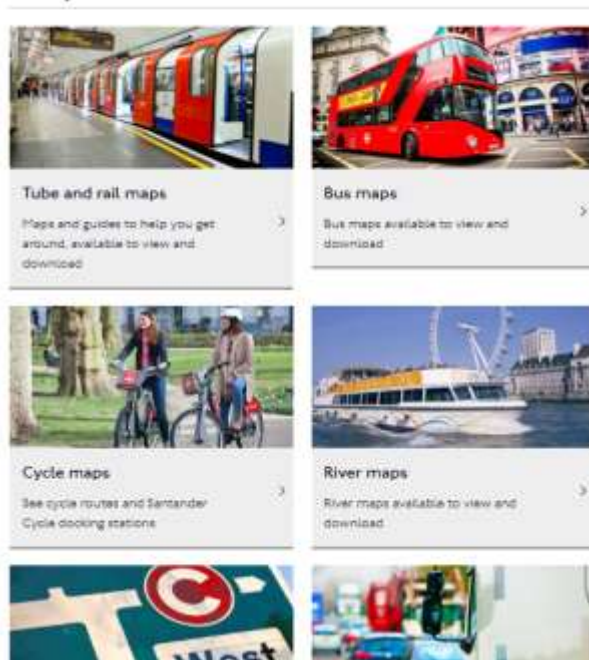
To help find a route, London has a website to enter where you are, using your location or entering a place and then enter the destination and click Plan Your Journey -- <https://tfl.gov.uk/plan-a-journey/>

Here is an example going from Piccadilly Circle Underground to the Tower of London



Another website for maps - <https://tfl.gov.uk/maps/>

Maps



Some things to consider about travelling around are your mobility, the route, timing, finances, weather and you driving.

Depending on where you want to go, mobility can be a factor. The transportation systems could pose a challenge in some locations if in a wheelchair or if you have a challenge walking a distance. For mobility constraints, a taxi could be the easiest option with the least amount of walking.

There are many ways to get around in London. There are taxis or Uber, buses (public and private like site-seeing tours and Big Bus), the Tube (underground), trains, walking, or a combination.

Taxis are very plentiful. We took one from Harrods (incredible store) to the building I lived in going to high school. We took a bunch of side streets to avoid the very slow-moving main street. It was a couple of miles and cost about \$25. This was convenient.

We got lucky taking a bus in front of the building to a block from our hotel. It took about 45 minutes and cost a few dollars.

The underground and bus systems have numerous lines with some intersection at various stops. The fare is based on zones.

The underground has fewer stops and being “underground” moves FAR faster. Sometimes you walk a couple of blocks to where you want to go and other places are not close so add other method(s).

Here is an example of the Tubes for a part of London. A single white circle shows an intersection of different Lines within the station, although a little walking and/or escalators to a different depth.



There are some circles with lines. These are where different Tube Lines meet and require walking to other platforms. This example of Baker Street which has 5 interesting Lines with a fairly long walk between a few of them.



The bus system is slower with all the traffic but can be closer to places with many more stops. Overall, we found using the Tube to be the fastest. You may need to do transfers. You use a smart debit or credit card to get on and do not use it when you exit.

Here is an example of bus routes. This shows 5 lines with some common streets branching out to other areas.



We stayed between Piccadilly Circus and Trafalgar Square. We walked to all the places within a mile of the hotel. We used the Tube and bus to the stop near places and walked the remaining distance, as well as walking from the hotel to and from the Piccadilly Circus Tube station and a few bus routes. There was also a Big Bus stop not far from the hotel.

The available routes may not get to you where you want or require multiple methods. Try the London App mentioned above or look at maps.

The time to get to some place is similar to most large cities. The amount of time to get to some place can determine which method and route is best. Some factors include the time of day including weekday rush hours, tourist season, construction, etc. Walking distances within your ability can be the fastest and cheapest (obviously).

Financing is another factor in deciding how to get around. In London, as with many other major cities, it has a great public transportation system. All the methods we used accepted major brand debit or credit cards - Visa and Master Card are the best. Therefore, no need to exchange money into Pounds to pay for transportation.

We are frugal with our money. We will walk less than a mile given the timing and weather. The next is to use public transportation – when good enough for people living here, we can too. Even when coming or going to the airport or train station – we travel fairly light.

Weather can alter your method. We may walk a short distance in light rain with a jacket or umbrella. We deter from walking in heavy rain. May wait it out or find another method including spending money on a taxi.

Driving is not a good idea in central London with small streets, driving on the left side of the road (can be confusing to some people), very limited parking and extremely few multi-story parking lots. Out of the city could be an option remembering they drive on the left side of the road.