



TRAVEL

London, England



By **Richard Levy**

My grandfather was born in Minsk, then part of Russia. In 1886 the Cossacks ravaged my grandfather's village or "shtetl," and he quickly fled. After a harrowing journey, he somehow made it to London, where my father was born, in 1905. My family later emigrated to America, settling on the Lower East Side, in 1914. But no matter how many years passed, my father always carried "a small piece of London" inside of him. Of course I absorbed a bit of



Yeoman Warder outside the Tower of London wearing the iconic blue undress uniform with royal livery introduced in 1858. © VisitBritain.com

his London nostalgia. So as you can imagine, my initial visit to London was a very moving experience. On my first day in London, I handed my taxi driver the address where my dad was born. He turned to me and in his cockney accent said, "Ohh, that was in the 'Old Jewish Section,' don't think it's there any more." And when we got there, just as he told me, my dad's house and entire neighborhood no longer existed; in its place, a mini-mall. I looked around, briefly, then got back in my taxi and tearfully looked at the small faded photo of my dad at the age of six, in front of his father's cobblers shop.

Now let me tell you why you should go to London. First of all, it's "the British." You'll absolutely love the

Brit's out-going, jovial, accommodating and positive energy everywhere you go. Despite the fact that everyone does speak English, you will find that sometimes you just can't understand what they are saying and you will wish they had subtitles. Then of course, there's The Queen, the Royalty and all their fabulous extravagant fanfare.

The best one-week's itinerary will be different for each person, based upon what interests you the most, so I've put together an a la carte menu. This way, you decide what works best for you.

If museums and history are your cup of tea, my three favorites are The British Museum, The Albert & Victoria Museum and The Natural History Museum. Each is very special, in many different ways. My favorite is the Albert and Victoria because it's much more than "just a museum." With an eclectic collection of thousands of unique items ranging from historical artifacts to high fashion and cutting-edge design throughout the ages, it captures everything that has impacted culture and civilization for centuries, right up to the present.



Ensign of the Coldstream Guards carrying the colours during The Changing of the Guard ceremony outside Buckingham Palace, Westminster, London, England. Photo © VisitBritain.com

The best way to see any city is to walk it. But I suggest that on your first day in London take a delightful double-decker "Hop-On, Hop-Off Bus Tour"



The view of the East End from No1 New Change - Photo: Graham Lachao.jpg Photo Courtesy of St. Paul's Cathedral

to get a good feel of this magnificent city and sit upstairs. At sunset take a very special ride on the spectacular, giant "Golden Eye" Ferris Wheel. The panoramic vistas of London will blow you away, as will the high winds when you get to the top. Buy tickets in advance to avoid waiting on the long line. Pick up a seven-day unlimited "Oyster Card" for the Metro, the best way to get around London. Instead of exploring London everyday on your own, consider taking a tour with FreeToursByFoot.com/London or NewLondon-Tours.com, offering many, very affordable tours of London; even an evening Jack the Ripper tour.

Be sure to visit the Tower Bridge, the largest of its kind in the world and magnificent Westminster Abbey, the largest church in the world. You must see the infamous Tower of London, where enemies of the crown were held prisoner. The Tower once housed the royal Mint and the Crown Jewels are on display here.

One day do what I always do, no matter what city I visit, make NO plans at all, sleep late, call room service and order a huge traditional English breakfast of eggs, Banger sausages, mushrooms, baked beans, fried bread

and lots of strong coffee. Then spend the day wandering about this magnificent city's very colorful neighborhoods. Since you're in London, be sure to devour their deliciously crunchy Fish & Chips as often as possible. Wash them down the way the Brit's do, with a bottle of "Shandy", a combo of beer and ginger ale. (One of my dad's fondest memories growing up, was when his dad would take him out for Fish & Chips and give him a taste of his foamy beer.)

My favorite area is Covent Garden, with its artsy, unique shops, fabulous market and high-end boutiques. Stop for a leisurely lunch at an outdoor restaurant along the Thames and feast your eyes on the wonderful views as you enjoy your lunch.

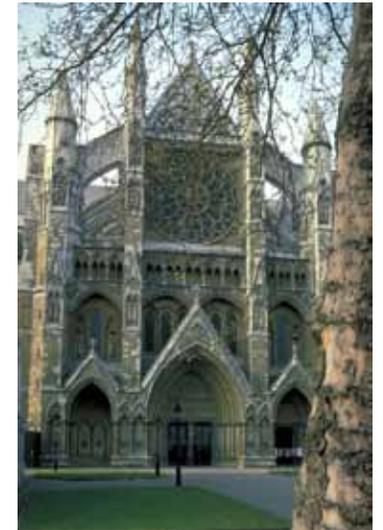
At about 4PM, as Londoners have done for centuries, you'll want to enjoy my favorite English tradition, "High Tea," which includes a wide variety of teas served on fine English bone china. Tea is served with a three-tier tray of assorted delectable tea sandwiches, such as: smoked salmon with a dollop of clotted cream; cucumber with cream cheese and dill; and smoked chicken with a dollop of guacamole. Claridges (the store) has been serving afternoon tea for 150 years; make reservations.



Roman Baths, Bath England Photo © VisitBritain.com

Or go to Brown's Hotel's Tea-Tox, who have been serving tea since the reign of Queen Victoria. These days, they've become health conscious and offer a wide variety of low-calorie, low-sugar and low-fat free items. If you budget allows, take High Tea at the Dorchester Hotel, where world leaders, celebs and the upper crust go for their High Tea. (Worth every shilling.)

Afterwards stroll over to the West



Westminster Abbey, Londres © VisitBritain Photo © VisitBritain.com

End for dinner at one of my favorite places, the beautiful *Brasserie Zedel*, reminiscent of an old Paris Bistro. Order their Coquilles St. Jacques: seared scallops in a brandied sauce with tomato vinaigrette. Afterwards, check the theater guide and book tickets for one of the West End's new shows: your hotel will make reservations. People used to joke about British food, but it's come a very long way. My favorite restaurants include the Michelin starred *Chiltern Firehouse*, the hottest and one of the best. Try their char-roasted marinated Iberian Pork loin with collard greens, or their maple-glazed salmon crowned with a huge puff of seared skin. While waiting for your meal you might spot Elton, Mick or William and Kate at the next table. (Don't stare.) Or try *Kitchen W8*, also Michelin starred. Order their grilled ox tongue in a shallot puree and foie gras baked potato. Or for a view as grand as the food, go to *Rhodes 24* and try their Sea Trout with a tempura of scallops, oyster mushrooms and sweet corn puree with tarragon butter sauce. For a Michelin starred Indian restaurant, go to *Amaya* and order their delicious kabobs stuffed with Lobster,

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Venison or King Prawn. (OMG) Three other restaurants that won't disappoint are: *Five Fields*, *Le Gavroche* and *Wild Honey*. London also has many fabulous (and very affordable) Indian, Chinese, Italian or Vegan Restaurants.

You must spend time in a few of London's fabulous markets. The lovely

foods from all over the world. At Brick Lane Market you'll find everything from vintage clothes, to the latest fashions, to antiques, old records and whatever.

Make plans to watch the Changing of the Guards Ceremony at Buckingham Palace that takes place every day at 11:30 AM; arrive there by 9:30 for a good spot. Afterwards, I would head over to Harrod's world-famous department store, unlike any other. (It makes Bloomingdale's look

hustle and bustle and vitality of any city and London is no exception. I suggest you stay in Covent Garden, the perfect location. For romantic, lovely hotels my choices would be One Aldwych Hotel, the St. Erinin's Hotel or the Covent Garden Hotel. If budget permits, spoil yourself and stay at the luxurious Dorchester or Ritz Hotels.

No trip to London would be complete without a pub crawl, so I suggest hitting these very colorful, historic Pubs: Ye Olde Mitre, Ye Olde



Covent Garden is a vibrant place with restaurants and shops, in the redeveloped market buildings, and is a very popular place for shopping and eating, near theatreland. Photo © VisitBritain.com



A couple walking with their bikes past a traditional red phone box, in Milton Keynes Village. Photo © VisitBritain.com

Covent Garden indoor market has a magnificent collection of fashionable boutiques and unique small shops. Foodies should head for the Borough's Market, a gourmet's delight, filled with hundreds of booths filled with exotic

like a trendy boutique.)

Two side trips I emphatically suggest you make time for are: a one-day trip to Stonehenge and also a one-day tour to the ancient city of Bath. A well preserved Roman city, Bath has a 500 year-old Abbey and medieval stone baths; you'll feel as if you arrived in a time machine, not a bus.

Where should you stay in London? You should always stay as close to the

Cheshire Cheese and the Lamb & Flag in Covent Gardens. Tennis buffs should make plans to go to the Wimbledon Tennis Championships, from June 29 to July 12: ticketcity.com.

By the time you leave London, you might subliminally pick up a slight British accent. It won't last very long, but it's sure to impress your kids. On your last day, you might want to go back to place you loved the most, do some last



The Tower of London is a historic royal palace, former prison and fortress and national landmark on the banks of the River Thames in London. The White tower. UNESCO world heritage site. A Bee-feater or Yeoman of the Guard, a military guard in traditional uniform Photo © VisitBritain.com



Tourists outside The West Front of Bath Abbey, Bath, Bath and North East Somerset, England Photo © VisitBritain.com



Victoria and Albert Museum Photo © VisitBritain.com



City Cruises Millennium at Tower Bridge Photo © VisitBritain.com

minute shopping, of course have one last High Tea and a spectacular dinner at one of the Guild Michelin restaurants I've suggested.

What is the best way to get to London? British Airways has the most non-stop flights from NY. (Check Google.com/travel for the lowest fares for dates you're considering.) When you arrive, don't take the train from the airport and drag your luggage (that's for students). Take a London taxi to your hotel. Some people say London is the most expensive city in Europe. Rubbish. With the much stronger dollar, it's not expensive anymore. To quickly figure out what you're spending, two English Pounds equals approximately three U.S. dollars. My advice is to apply for a Chase Mileage Plus Credit Card. They'll give you 40,000 free miles when you spend \$2,000 over the first three months. (This is almost enough mileage for a

RT flight, which is 60,000 miles.) There is no 3% foreign conversion fee; you're allowed one piece of luggage free and you get to board first. Put everything on this card to quickly earn miles for your free trip.

If I've managed to entice you to visiting London on your next vacation, I suggest that before you go, you practice your "English" by watching episodes of *Downton Abbey*, Helen Mirren's "The Queen" and Colin Firth's *The King's Speech*. Well cheerio, here's wishing you a lovely and very rewarding journey to London, England.

For more information be sure to check out VisitLondon.com or LondonTourism.com and pick up one of the London Guide Books. VisitBritain.com



Big Ben and Hoses of Parliament, Westminster, London Photo © VisitBritain.com