London Travel Notes

PLAN LONDON LIKE YOU'VE BEEN BEFORE

FREE GUIDE

ITINERARY

The 5-Day London Itinerary

A realistic, step-by-step plan for five days in London, with timings, transport, food stops, rainy-day swaps and what to book ahead.



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Five days in London, beautifully planned

Five days is the sweet spot for a first visit. There's time for the big sights, a few neighbourhoods, a show and a river day, without rushing. Each day stays in one part of the city, so you spend your time exploring, not travelling.

DAY	THEME	HIGHLIGHTS
1	Royal Westminster & South Bank	Westminster Abbey, Big Ben, London Eye, Tate Modern
2	Tower, City & Borough	Tower of London, Tower Bridge, Borough Market, St Paul's
3	Museums & Hyde Park	Natural History Museum, V&A, Hyde Park, Harrods
4	Notting Hill & the West End	Portobello Road, British Museum, Covent Garden, a show
5	Greenwich by river	Thames boat, Cutty Sark, Royal Observatory

Book before you go

- [ ] Westminster Abbey (timed tickets)
- [ ] Tower of London (first entry slot)
- [ ] London Eye (if you're riding it)
- [ ] Sky Garden (free, but slots go weeks ahead)
- [ ] Your West End show
- [ ] Restaurant for your show night

> **GUIDE GUARD'S NOTE**
>
> The free museums (British Museum, National Gallery, Tate Modern, Natural History Museum, V&A, Science Museum and the National Maritime Museum) can save you a lot. Use them as your rainy-day plan and your money-saving plan.

Travel costs

Every day of this plan stays within Zones 1–2, apart from the Greenwich DLR return (Zone 2–3). With contactless, expect about **£8.90–£10.50 a day** at most for unlimited Tube and bus travel. The river boat is extra. See our free *Transport Made Easy* guide for details.

DAY 1

Royal Westminster & the South Bank

AREA	PACE	RAINY-DAY SWAP
Westminster, South Bank	On foot, about 7 km	National Gallery & Churchill War Rooms

1. **09:00 Westminster Abbey.** Start at opening with a pre-booked timed ticket. Allow about 90 minutes.
2. **10:45 Parliament Square & Big Ben.** Walk around Parliament for the classic views.
3. **11:15 Horse Guards & St James's Park.** Walk up Whitehall, then through the park toward Buckingham Palace. On Changing of the Guard days (check the schedule), arrive early.
4. **12:30 Lunch.** Pick up something near St James's Park or Victoria Street, or picnic in the park in good weather.
5. **14:00 Westminster Bridge & the London Eye.** Cross the river. If you're riding the Eye, book a time slot.
6. **15:30 South Bank stroll.** Southbank Centre, the book market under Waterloo Bridge, Gabriel's Wharf and the riverside.
7. **17:00 Tate Modern.** Free entry. Go up to the viewing level, then cross the Millennium Bridge at golden hour.
8. **19:00 Dinner around Bankside or Borough.** Finish with a riverside pub.

> ♛ GUIDE GUARD'S NOTE
>
> Day one is all about getting your bearings. Do everything on foot and you'll understand how central London fits together.

DAY 2

The Tower, the City & Borough

AREA	PACE	RAINY-DAY SWAP
City of London, Southwark	Medium, Tube + walking	British Museum (free)

1. **09:00 Tower of London.** Arrive at opening and head straight to the Crown Jewels before the queues build. Allow 2–3 hours.
2. **11:45 Tower Bridge.** Walk across for the views. The glass-floor walkways are an optional ticketed extra.
3. **12:30 Borough Market.** Walk along the river to the market for lunch (check opening days).
4. **14:00 Southwark Cathedral & the Golden Hinde.** Short stops along the riverside path.
5. **15:00 St Paul's Cathedral.** Cross the river and climb to the dome galleries for the views, or simply admire the outside.
6. **16:30 Sky Garden or Leadenhall Market.** The Sky Garden is free, but book a slot well in advance. Leadenhall's Victorian arcade is next to it.
7. **19:00 Evening in Shoreditch.** About a 10-minute walk north of Liverpool Street: street food, bars and street art.

> ♛ GUIDE GUARD'S NOTE
>
> Book the Tower of London online and choose the first entry time. The first hour is the calmest of the day.

DAY 3

Museums, Hyde Park & Knightsbridge

AREA	PACE	RAINY-DAY SWAP
South Kensington	Relaxed, mostly indoors	This day already is one

1. 10:00 **Natural History Museum.** Free. The main hall alone is worth the visit. Book a free timed slot at busy times.
2. 12:00 **V&A or the Science Museum.** Both are free and next door. Choose by interest.
3. 13:30 **Lunch in South Kensington.** Cafés along Exhibition Road and the museum courtyards.
4. 15:00 **Hyde Park & Kensington Gardens.** The Serpentine, the Albert Memorial and the Italian Gardens.
5. 16:30 **Knightsbridge.** Look around Harrods' food halls even if you're not shopping.
6. 19:00 **Dinner in Chelsea or Kensington.** A calm, elegant evening area.

> ♛ GUIDE GUARD'S NOTE
>
> This is your flexible day. If you're tired, take it slowly. If the weather is perfect, swap it with Day 5 and save the museums for rain.

DAY 4

Notting Hill, the West End & a show

AREA	PACE	RAINY-DAY SWAP
Notting Hill, Covent Garden, Soho	Medium, ends late	Already rain-friendly

1. 09:30 **Notting Hill.** Pastel houses, Portobello Road and coffee. The market is busiest on Saturdays.
2. 12:00 **Lunch near Portobello Road.** Or head into central London and eat there.
3. 13:30 **British Museum.** Free. Focus on two or three galleries rather than trying to see everything.
4. 16:00 **Covent Garden & Seven Dials.** Street performers, the Piazza and the boutiques.
5. 17:30 **Pre-theatre dinner in Soho.** Book ahead on show nights, or choose a set menu.
6. 19:30 **West End show.** Book in advance for the best seats, or try day-seat lotteries for discounts.

> ♛ GUIDE GUARD'S NOTE
>
> Tickets for West End shows are cheapest midweek. Book before your trip if there's a show you really want to see.

DAY 5

Greenwich by river

AREA	PACE	RAINY-DAY SWAP
Greenwich	Easy, half to full day	National Maritime Museum (free)

1. 09:30 **Uber Boat from Westminster or London Eye pier.** About 40–60 minutes of free sightseeing along the Thames.
2. 10:30 **Cutty Sark & Old Royal Naval College.** The Painted Hall is a highlight.
3. 12:00 **Greenwich Market.** Street food and crafts for lunch.
4. 13:30 **Greenwich Park & Royal Observatory.** Stand on the Prime Meridian, then enjoy the hilltop view of the skyline.
5. 15:30 **Back to central London on the DLR or boat.** Or walk under the Thames through the foot tunnel to Island Gardens.
6. 17:30 **Final evening.** A sunset drink with a view, a last stroll on the South Bank, or a classic pub dinner.

> ♛ GUIDE GUARD'S NOTE
>
> Leave time on your final afternoon for anything you missed or want to see again. Every good itinerary needs one buffer.

MAKE IT YOURS

Adjusting the plan

Only 3 days?

Do Days 1, 2 and 4, and fit one museum into Day 4 in place of Notting Hill. Our free 3-day itinerary on the website has the full plan.

Travelling with kids?

Swap Westminster Abbey for the Natural History Museum on Day 1, and add the London Transport Museum in Covent Garden. Under-11s travel free on the Tube and buses with a paying adult.

On a budget?

Lean on the free museums, the Sky Garden, the parks and walking routes. Pay as you go with daily caps keeps transport predictable.

Got a 6th day?

Add a day trip (Windsor, Oxford or Bath), or explore Camden and the Regent's Canal, Hampstead Heath, or Kew Gardens.

Practical reminders

- Opening times and days change seasonally. Check each attraction's official website before you go.
- Many big attractions have security checks. Travel light and allow extra time.
- Wear comfortable shoes. You'll easily walk 15,000–20,000 steps a day.
- Sunday trading laws mean large shops open for about six hours on Sundays.

More free planning help

3-day London itinerary · Neighbourhood guides · Interactive London map · Walking routes

Times are suggestions. Opening hours, prices and schedules (including the Changing of the Guard) change. Always check official sources. Information was checked in November 2026.