London Travel Notes

PLAN LONDON LIKE YOU'VE BEEN BEFORE

FREE GUIDE

GETTING AROUND LONDON

London Transport Made Easy

How to pay, what it costs, how to get in from every airport, and the Tube habits that make you look like a local.



UPDATED NOVEMBER 2026 · LONDONTRAVELNOTES.COM

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London transport, without the stress

London's public transport is one of the best in the world, but it can feel confusing for the first hour. This guide gives you the essentials: how to pay, what things cost, how to get in from the airport, and the habits that will save you time and money.

HOW TO PAY	ZONE 1–2 DAILY CAP	BUS FARE	BEST APPS
Contactless card or phone, tap in and out	£8.90, however much you ride	£1.85, unlimited buses within 1 hour	TfL Go · Citymapper

Inside this guide

1. Paying for travel — Contactless, Oyster, caps
2. Fares cheat sheet — What you will actually pay
3. The network explained — Tube, Elizabeth line, buses, boats
4. Airport transfers — Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted, Luton, City
5. Tube etiquette & smart habits — Travel like a Londoner
6. Quick checklist — Before your first journey

GUIDE GUARD'S NOTE

Fares change once or twice a year. Every price in this guide was checked in November 2026, but always confirm on **tfl.gov.uk** before you travel. The basic rules here change much less often than the prices.

PART 1

Paying for travel

Paper tickets are rarely worth it in London. Most visitors should pay as they go with a **contactless bank card** or a **phone or watch wallet** (Apple Pay, Google Pay). You pay the same fares as with an Oyster card, and you get automatic daily and weekly price caps.

How it works

1. **Tap in** on the yellow card reader at the gate when you start.
2. **Tap out** at the end of your journey on the Tube, Elizabeth line, Overground and DLR. If you forget, you can be charged a maximum fare.
3. **On buses, tap once** when you board. Never tap when you get off.
4. **Use the same card or device all day** so the cap works. Paying with your phone one time and your physical card the next counts as two different cards.

BEST FOR MOST

Contactless / phone

No queue, no deposit, works straight away. Check whether your bank charges foreign transaction fees. Many travel-friendly cards don't.

GOOD ALTERNATIVE

Oyster card

A reusable travel card you top up at stations. Useful if your card charges fees or doesn't support contactless. Under-11s travel free with an adult and need no card.

♛ GUIDE GUARD'S NOTE

One card per person. Two people can't share one contactless card. Each traveller needs their own card or phone, or the system will treat you as one person making repeated journeys.

What is a fare cap?

A cap is the most you can be charged in one day (04:30 to 04:29) or one week (Monday to Sunday) for the zones you travel in. Once you reach it, the rest of your journeys that day are free. This is why pay as you go nearly always beats a paper Travelcard for a short trip.

Peak vs off-peak

Tube and rail fares are higher at peak times: **Monday to Friday, 06:30–09:30 and 16:00–19:00** (excluding public holidays). Off-peak fares apply at all other times, including all weekend. Bus fares are the same at all times.

PART 2

Fares cheat sheet

Adult pay as you go fares with contactless or Oyster. Tube fares from 1 March 2026; bus fares from 1 November 2026.

JOURNEY	PEAK SINGLE	OFF-PEAK SINGLE	DAILY CAP
Within Zone 1	£3.10	£3.00	£8.90
Zones 1–2	£3.60	£3.10	£8.90
Zones 1–3	£3.90	£3.30	£10.50
Zones 1–4	£4.80	£3.60	£12.80
Zones 1–6 (e.g. Heathrow by Tube)	£5.90	£4.00	£16.30
Bus or tram (any distance)	£1.85, with unlimited extra buses within 1 hour (Hopper fare)		£5.55

WEEKLY CAPS (MON–SUN)	AMOUNT
Zones 1–2	£44.70
Zones 1–3	£52.50
Zones 1–6	£81.60

> ♛ **GUIDE GUARD'S NOTE**
>
> Almost every famous sight is in **Zones 1–2**, so budget about **£8.90 a day** for unlimited travel. If you're staying in London from Monday to Sunday, the weekly cap means you'll never pay more than £44.70 for the whole week, even if you travel every day.

What's not included in the caps

- **Heathrow Express** (a separate premium train)
- **Uber Boat by Thames Clippers** (separate fares; discounts with contactless)
- **The cable car** across the Thames (IFS Cloud Cable Car)
- The **Elizabeth line between central London and Heathrow** has its own higher fare (£15.50). It still counts toward your daily cap.

PART 3

The network explained

The Tube

Eleven Underground lines, each with its own colour. Trains every few minutes on most central lines, so there's no need to check timetables. Follow the line colour and the direction (for example "Eastbound" or "towards Cockfosters").

Elizabeth line

The fast purple line. It crosses London east to west via Paddington, Bond Street, Tottenham Court Road, Farringdon and Liverpool Street. Air-conditioned, step-free, and great with luggage.

London Overground & DLR

Overground lines (named Lioness, Mildmay, Windrush, Suffragette, Weaver and Liberty) loop around inner London. The DLR runs driverless trains to Canary Wharf and Greenwich. Sit at the front for the view.

Buses

Red double-deckers go almost everywhere, 24 hours on many routes. They're the cheapest way to sightsee: sit upstairs at the front. Buses are cashless. Tap your card once when you get on.

Uber Boat (Thames Clippers)

River boats between Putney and Woolwich, including Westminster, London Eye, Tower and Greenwich. Slower than the Tube, but a sightseeing trip in itself.

Santander Cycles

Self-service hire bikes from docking stations all over central London. Pay with a card or the app. Best in the parks and along the river. Be cautious in heavy traffic.

The Night Tube

On **Friday and Saturday nights**, the Central, Jubilee, Northern, Piccadilly and Victoria lines run all night on most of their routes. Other nights, the last trains leave central London around midnight, and night buses (numbered with an "N") take over.

♛ GUIDE GUARD'S NOTE

Walk short hops. In central London, many stations are just a few minutes apart. Leicester Square to Covent Garden is a short walk, and so is Charing Cross to Embankment. Walking is often quicker than going down to the platforms, and you'll see more of the city.

PART 4

Airport transfers

Travel times are approximate. Prices were checked in November 2026. Book the premium express trains in advance for the lowest fares.

Heathrow (LHR)

OPTION	TIME TO CENTRE	PRICE (ADULT SINGLE)	BEST FOR
Piccadilly line (Tube)	50–60 min	£5.90 peak / £4.00 off-peak	Lowest cost; direct to Knightsbridge, Piccadilly Circus, Covent Garden, King's Cross
Elizabeth line	30–40 min	£15.50	Best all-rounder; step-free; direct to Paddington, Bond St, Tottenham Ct Rd, Liverpool St
Heathrow Express	15–20 min to Paddington	From about £10 in advance; about £25 on the day	Speed if you're staying near Paddington
Black cab / pre-booked car	45–90 min (traffic)	Varies widely	Families with lots of luggage, late arrivals

Gatwick (LGW)

Gatwick Express goes non-stop to Victoria in about 30 minutes. **Thameslink** trains go to London Bridge, Blackfriars, Farringdon and St Pancras, and are often cheaper and just as fast for those areas. **Southern** trains also run to Victoria. Contactless pay as you go works at Gatwick, but the fare is higher than in central London.

Stansted (STN)

The **Stansted Express** runs to Liverpool Street in about 50 minutes. Buy tickets in advance or in the app for the best price. Coaches to central London are cheaper but slower, depending on traffic.

Luton (LTN)

Take the **Luton DART** shuttle from the terminal to Luton Airport Parkway station (about 5 minutes). From there, Thameslink and East Midlands Railway trains reach St Pancras in about 25–40 minutes. Buy a ticket that includes the DART.

London City (LCY)

The easiest of them all: the **DLR** station is next to the terminal, and Bank is about 25 minutes away. Pay as you go applies, with normal Tube-style fares.

> ♛ **GUIDE GUARD'S NOTE**
>
> At Heathrow, check which line serves your hotel before you choose. The Elizabeth line is great for the West End and the City. The Piccadilly line is better for Kensington, Piccadilly and King's Cross. A cheaper train that drops you at your door often beats a faster one that needs two changes.

PART 5

Tube etiquette & smart habits

Do

- **Stand on the right** on escalators, and walk on the left.
- Let people **off the train first**, then move all the way down inside the carriage.
- Have your card or phone **ready before the gate**.
- Take a backpack off in busy carriages.
- Offer your seat to anyone who needs it more. Look for the "Baby on board" and "Please offer me a seat" badges.

Avoid

- Stopping at the bottom or top of escalators to check your map.
- Rush hour with big suitcases (Mon–Fri, 08:00–09:30 and 17:00–18:30).
- Paper single tickets: they cost far more than pay as you go.
- Switching between your phone and your card in the same day.
- Getting on the train while the doors beep. Another one is coming in a couple of minutes.

Step-free and accessible travel

Not every station has step-free access. Look for the wheelchair symbol on the Tube map, or use the step-free filters in the TfL Go app. The Elizabeth line, the DLR and all buses are fully accessible, so they're often the easiest options with a buggy or luggage.

Planning journeys

Use **TfL Go** (the official app, with live status and step-free routes) or **Citymapper** (great door-to-door comparisons). Check live service updates on weekends, when parts of some lines close for engineering works.

PART 6

Before your first journey

- [ ] Check that your bank card works for contactless payments abroad, and whether it charges foreign transaction fees.
- [ ] Set up your phone wallet (Apple Pay or Google Pay) as a backup.
- [ ] Download TfL Go or Citymapper, and save your hotel's nearest station.
- [ ] Decide how you'll get in from the airport (see Part 4), and book an express train in advance if you plan to use one.
- [ ] Remember: tap in and out on trains, but only tap in on buses.
- [ ] Plan your sightseeing in Zones 1–2 and expect to pay about £8.90 a day.
- [ ] Check weekend engineering works before Saturday and Sunday trips.
- [ ] Plan one journey by river boat for the views.

Plan the rest of your trip

Combine this guide with our free **3-day itinerary**, **neighbourhood guides** and **interactive map**:

londontravelnotes.com/london-in-3-days
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Fares and services were checked in November 2026 and can change. Always confirm on tfl.gov.uk and with airport rail operators before you travel. London Travel Notes is an independent guide and is not affiliated with Transport for London.