

6 things to do in London by Allison Stuart

I would like to first list two tools that were very beneficial to navigating London.

1. A to Z (they pronounce the Z like “Zed”). This is a pocket guide of the whole metropolitan area of London, and it includes over 30,000 streets. It will take some time learning how to use the maps, but there is a chart of the numbered pages in the front, as well as an index for all the streets of London in the back. It also has a map of the Underground on the back cover, which is particularly handy. You can find these map books at most convenience stores. Even the real ‘Londoners’ carry the A to Z, so if you use this you won’t stand out as such a tourist.

2. Frommer’s Guide to London. This book was very helpful in planning the things I wanted to see before the trip. It details the museums, restaurants, and attractions in the specific districts of London. It is also wonderful about providing operating hours of museums as well as estimating cost. The two weeks over there flew by, and it was nice to plan out some itinerary, based on which nights things were open late, as well as consult once we arrived.

Six Cool Things to do in London:

1. Tower of London

The Tower of London is iconic, it’s a must stop on your tour of London. It has that wonderful medieval charm, the allure of torture, and a rich historical significance. The easiest way to get to the Tower is to take the Circle line to the Tower Hill tube station. Once you get out of the Underground you’ll see the Tower, and be ready for the masses of people. The Tower is a big tourist site. I believe its worth walking around the perimeter of the Tower, especially to get a view of the Thames and the gorgeous Tower Bridge (which is not the famous London Bridge, but the most iconic bridge in London). It is also wonderful to get the fish and chips special and sit and eat it while watching the Thames. The entrance lines to the Tower are long, and the fee is around £ 13 for students. Once you’re inside the Tower complex, the highlights are the Armory and the Crown Jewels. The lines to see the Crown Jewels are long, but well worth it, you can see diamonds larger than eggs and opulence that is impossible to imagine. You won’t be able to stare too long though, the masses are moved through on a moving sidewalk. The Armory holds the armor of King Henry VIII as well as the battle instruments of the medieval times. I recommend that you don’t try and complete your tour of the Tower in a few hours, it at least deserves an afternoon and evening. There is a lot to see!

Open: March-October Tues-Sat 9-6 and Sun-Mon 10-6

2. St. Paul's Cathedral

St. Paul's is another symbol that is synonymous with London, it is the location of Princess Diana's wedding. St. Paul's is easy to locate, just take the Central line to St. Paul's tube station and you are right there. It is wonderful to walk around, but you really should pay the £ 8.50 to get in. The Cathedral itself is gorgeous! You could stare at the vaulted ceiling for hours! Your eyes will be dazzled with all the gold! Once you've sufficiently discovered the main floor, you must begin your journey up to the overlook of London. The stairs of St. Paul's are very narrow and twisty, so store up your energy before you begin. The panoramic view of London from the overlook is a wonderful way to see the city. I took some of my best photographs from here. The climb back down is slightly worse, be careful not to get dizzy. You can also tour the gift shop and the café in the crypt (the café is actually quite good).

Open: Mon – Sat 8:30- 4; Closed Sunday for services

3. The British Museum

This museum holds the glory and the spoils of the British Empire. It is a mammoth museum, so it will deserve a large block of time. I found that it was best to break up my visits to the museum into a few hours at a time. The treasures include the Rosetta stone, the Parthenon Sculptures, Chinese porcelain, and Roman-British collections. It is really beneficial to get a map of the museum and see the things that peak your interest, because you won't be able to take in the whole museum. The museum also has excellent gift shops!

The nearest tube station to get the Museum is Holborn or Russell Square

Open: Sat-Wed 10-5:30, Thurs-Fri 10-8:30

4. Porter's English Restaurant

This is a wonderful British pub/restaurant near the Covent Garden area. This restaurant had a great selection of the truly British foods: Old English fish pie, mushroom pie, Sunday roast and Yorkshire puddings, and terrific bangers and mash. I was very intrigued by the dessert the 'spotted dick' which is a sponge cake with raisins. This restaurant had a good atmosphere, but was a little expensive, ranging from £ 15 - £ 20. It was a wonderful treat!

Located 17 Henrietta St. with the nearest tube station being Covent Garden.
Open Mon-Sat noon-11:30 and Sun noon -10:30

5. The British Library

The glory of the academic legacy of Britain is housed in this library. Over 12 million books, manuscripts, and other writings are kept in this magnificent library. It has a fascinating collection of books in its treasure's room such as: Shakespeare's first folio, writings of Jane Austen, Keats, Dickens, and Charlotte Bronte, as well as the Magna Carta, original lyrics of the Beatles' songs, and beautiful selection of medieval Bibles. The admission is free!

You can also enter the main portion of the library, after applying for a card, but beware you can not apply on a Sunday. That's a mistake that I made.

Hours: Mon, Wed, Fri: 9:30-6 Tues, Thurs: 9:30-8 Sat: 9:30-5, Sun: 11-5

6. The Victoria and Albert Museum

This is another of London's amazing museum, but with a slightly different flavor. This museum houses such a wide range of materials, described as the "decorative arts." Some of the highlights include Raphael's cartoons (for tapestries), Islamic arts, stained glass gallery, and a fantastic dress and fashion collection. This museum is beyond mammoth, it has over five level and 200+ galleries! I found that the free guided tours were especially helpful (which occur at 1:30 and 3:30 daily). The tour was of a few number, less than five, and we saw some of the highlights of the museum as well as learned about their interesting history. The museum is located in the South Kensington area, a beautiful and rich part of town. After exploring some in the museum it is worth the time to stroll up Exhibition Road and explore Kensington Park and see the Prince Albert Memorial.

Open: Daily 10-5:45 (Wed: 10-10)

Tube: South Kensington and walk up Exhibition Road until it intersects with Cromwell Road (you really can't miss it)