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London Calling

By Susan B. Barnes

There's so much to see and do in London, any visit is nearly a whirlwind. When your time comes to an end, you'll surely wind up with minds filled with priceless images and memories.

"All the world's a stage...", Shakespeare wrote hundreds of years ago in *As You Like It*. With the recent Royal Wedding and the upcoming 2012 Summer Olympics, that sentiment couldn't be more true than it is right now for London, and the city's shining bright in the spotlight.

In preparation for the events that have thrust the city into the limelight, famous landmarks are being buffed and polished to take center stage. Now is the perfect time to cross the pond and visit London!

Planning a visit to London can be challenging, however. Just how does one choose what to see and do in a city bursting at the seams with world-class museums, theatres, restaurants and shopping; historical sites that span hundreds of years; and so much more? Well, you could do what my husband and I, along with our friends, did on a recent visit—a taste of everything!

Where Art Thou

The National Gallery on Trafalgar Square could take a week to enjoy in its own right. Works by Cézanne, Michelangelo, Monet, Rembrandt, Renoir, Seurat—the list goes on and on—adorn the walls of more than 60 galleries. It's mind-blowing! On our visit, we stumbled in without a plan—what a mistake that was! After wandering aimlessly for an hour or so, we left overwhelmed. That night we consulted one of our guide books—"I didn't know van Gogh's *Sunflowers* was there!," exclaimed our friend—and set up an itinerary for a subsequent visit. The gallery is so massive, so impressive, that it does indeed warrant its own specialized plan.



previous page: National Gallery on Trafalgar Square; clockwise: Spring at Buckingham Palace, the London residence of the Queen of England; Kew Palace, in Kew Gardens, is one of Prince Charles' favorites; Kensington Palace is where Princess Diana lived; Hampton Court Palace transports you back to the 16th century.

Live Like a King ... or Queen!

For a taste of the royal life, Historic Royal Palaces are sprinkled throughout London and the surrounding countryside, each with its own distinct personality, and each steeped in history.

The Tower of London, right on the River Thames in London's City Center with the iconic Tower Bridge in the distance, was the site of many gruesome tales. During a visit, be sure to get in on a tour with a Yeoman Warder—a fun and informative way to learn all about the Tower

and its residents over the years. You'll see the spot where Queen Anne Boleyn was beheaded for not giving her husband King Henry VIII a male heir; the breathtaking Crown Jewels; 500 years of royal armor in *Fit For a King*; and even catch a glimpse of the Tower ravens. Legend has it that "the kingdom and the Tower will fall if the six resident ravens ever leave the fortress." Once you see how the ravens are doted upon by the Raven Master, you have to wonder why they'd ever leave!

Originally inhabited by King William III and Queen Mary II in the late 1600s, Kensington Palace is famously known as Princess Diana's home, both during and after her marriage to Prince Charles. The palace is undergoing major renovations in preparation for a 2012 reopening, but there is plenty to see and do, including "The Enchanted Palace," a maze of rooms inspired by the seven princesses who lived in the palace. Do note, however, that Princess Diana's apartments are not part

of the visitor experience and are still in use by the Royal Family.

Kew Palace, in Kew Gardens, is a quaint (as far as palaces go!) palace where King Edward III and Queen Caroline lived in the early 1700s. Ten years of extensive renovations, completed in 2006, revealed the original paint and wallpaper used to decorate the palace, all of which was lovingly restored to its original splendor. After its renovation, Prince Charles, who was keen on the renovations, held Queen Elizabeth II's 80th birthday party in the palace.

For a true walk through royal history, visit Hampton Court Palace in Surrey. A relaxing train ride will deposit you back to the 16th century, when King Henry VIII roamed the halls, followed by six other monarchs. Henry VIII's Kitchens, the Chapel Royal, the Great Hall and the Great Vine are all highlights of the palace, and not to be missed are the architectural highlights and astounding attention to details, from the ceilings to the chimneys to the furniture and artwork.

Whatever the weather, stroll through the gardens, including the Privy Garden, carefully tended to by 42 full-time gardeners—talk about a horticulturalist's dream job! The royals took their gardens seriously, and you'll reap the visionary rewards! For a real twist, meander through the Hampton Court Maze, begun in 1690 as a form of entertainment for William III. Let your mind wander to all the royals who have crossed the paths before you.

Tea for Two

Afternoon tea is a tradition throughout the United Kingdom, made popular in the 1660s by Catherine of Braganza, "... a Portuguese princess, and a tea addict." It is estimated that 120 million cups of tea are enjoyed every day in the UK, and there are plenty of places to find the perfect "cuppa" throughout London.

Sip tea like the royals at The Orangery at Kensington Palace, built in the early 1700s for Queen Anne. The bright and airy



Housing in the infamous Notting Hill.

building overlooking the gardens is the perfect place to sit back, relax and reflect upon all you've seen and done. Just last month, Claridge's The Foyer was named London's Top Afternoon Tea Place for 2011 by the UK Tea Council; the award is considered the "Oscar" of the tea world! Awards of Excellence were also awarded to The Athenaeum, The Savoy and The Ritz, among 13 other notable establishments.

Drop by Twinings Tea, established in 1706, and pick your favorite flavor to take some with you to recreate the afternoon tea experience when you return home.

Shop 'til You Drop—In Just One Store!

After seeing how the royals lived for hundreds of years, you may feel inclined to make yourself feel like royalty, too! What better way than shopping!

Make plans to visit Knightsbridge, where world-famous Harrods has stood since 1834. Four-and-a-half acres over seven floors are filled with the finest goods, from the latest designer clothes to glinting jewels to shoes you'll drool over—and so much more! On the ground floor, be sure to walk through the Food Halls, and come hungry... you'll definitely want to taste the offerings here. Afternoon tea is offered, as well!

Princess and the Pea

With seemingly thousands of hotels and accommodations to choose from throughout the city, it can be overwhelming finding a place to stay. To feel like true Londoners, my group opted to rent a two-bedroom flat in Notting Hill. With hundreds to choose from, varying in location, size and price, Ivy Lettings is the agency we went through, and Kate was a dream to work with! There's nothing quite like "going home" to your "own" flat each night to really feel a part of the city!

There's so much to see and do in London, any visit is nearly a whirlwind. When your time comes to an end, you'll surely wind up like our group—minds filled with priceless images and memories, and plans for the next visit. **TR**

Famous shopping spots Paul and Harrods.



British Airways offers non-stop flights from Tampa to London Gatwick; other major airlines fly to London Gatwick and London Heathrow with a layover. From either airport, hire a car or take high-speed train into London. Public transportation within London and its surrounding areas is prevalent, including bus, Tube and taxi; renting a car is unnecessary.

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