

lifestyleasia
travel

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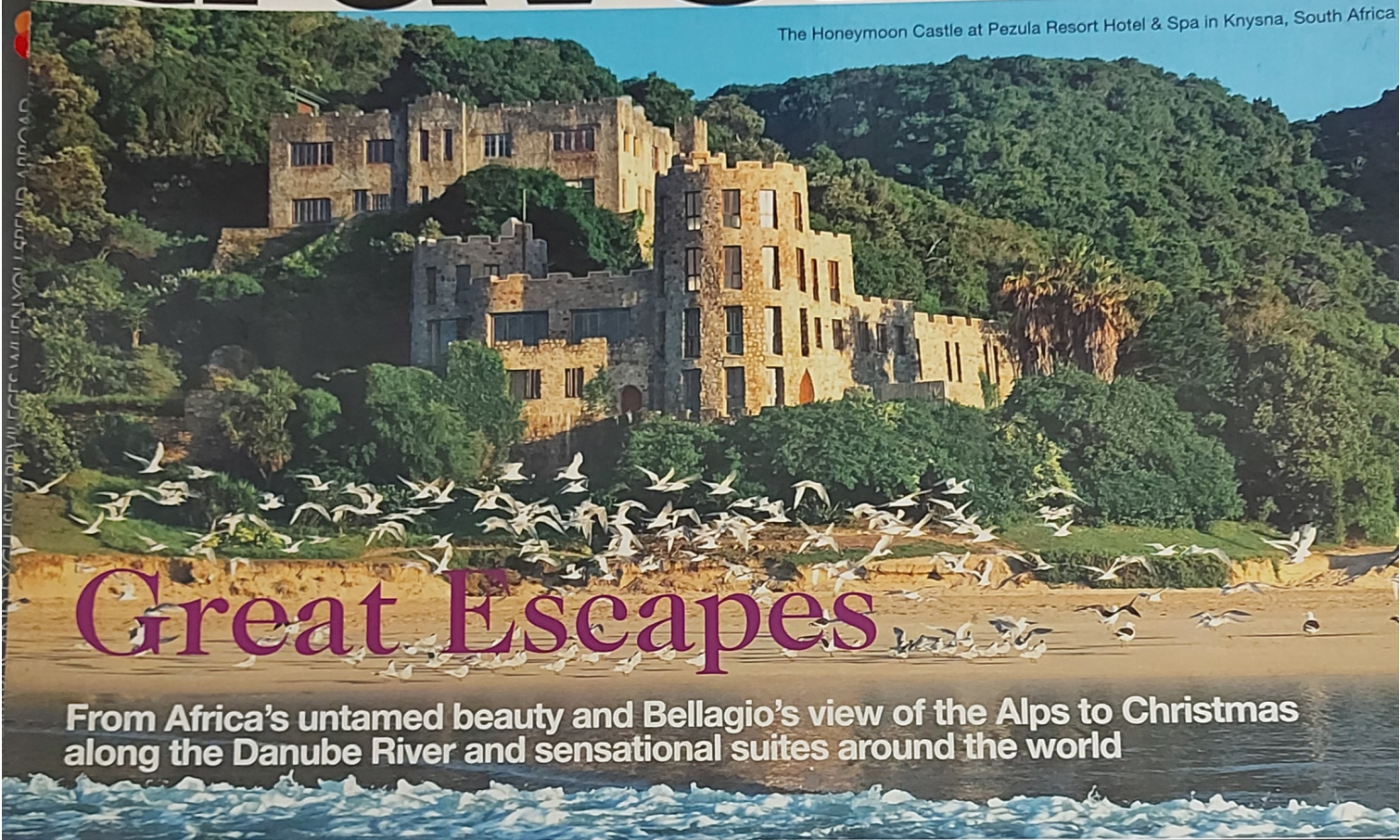
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The Honeymoon Castle at Pezula Resort Hotel & Spa in Knysna, South Africa

PHOTO: MICHAEL MANNING / GETTY IMAGES



Great Escapes

From Africa's untamed beauty and Bellagio's view of the Alps to Christmas along the Danube River and sensational suites around the world

ANVAYA COVE
Morong, Bataan

COLORS OF ILOCOS
Island spice and bold dresses

ZIMBALI LODGE & COUNTRY CLUB
Northern Coast, South Africa





The iconic Tower Bridge is right beside the Tower of London

London's Top 10 A-List

Kitty Espiritu-Ricafort reports on a traveler's to-do list in the United Kingdom's cosmopolitan capital

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Whether London is at the start of your Great European Tour or at the end of it, this city offers more than meets the eye. We list the 10 best sights and activities first-time travelers shouldn't miss while in the Land of the Queen.

Best Historical Site: Tower of London

If London's historic culture is a top priority, a good place to start would be England's most notorious venue. Located right beside the River Thames and its celebrated bridges (London Bridge and Tower Bridge), the Tower of London is worth its £16.50 admission fee. Built in the

1070s by William the Conqueror, the Tower has been a residence, a palace, a prison, a zoo and a Royal Mint. Marked by a macabre past, specifically by the infamous beheadings of three queens of England—Anne Boleyn, Catherine Howard and Lady Jane Grey—this historic structure also serves as steward to the royal family's Crown Jewels, including the famous Koh-i-Noor diamond. A tour of beautiful handcrafted diamond-encrusted crowns, orbs, swords, scepters and other regalia spanning centuries of the English monarchy will lead one through this country's remarkable past and how it helped shape its future.

Guided tours by a resident Beefeater

PHOTOGRAPHED BY KITTY ESPIRITU-RICAFORT AND MAYEN CADD



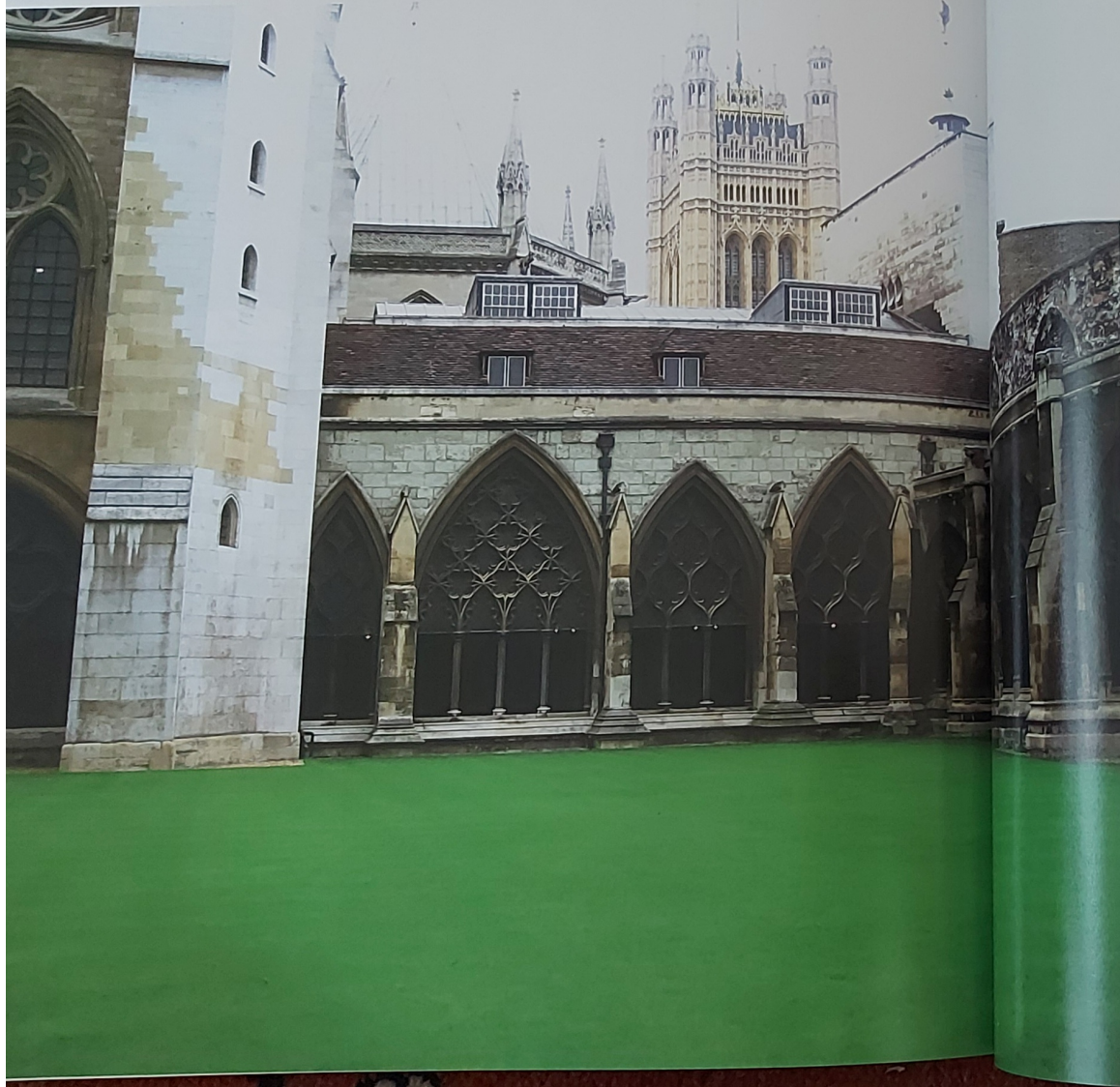
Above: The Jewel House, home of the Crown Jewels. Left, clockwise from top: The Tower of London; The Jewel House, home of the Crown Jewels; Buckingham Palace's changing of the guard is still a crowd pleaser

or Tower guard (every 30 minutes) take visitors through the cluster of buildings, cobbled paths and an entertaining string of facts and insiders' lore—the final resting places of monarchs, the foreboding site of Traitors Gate, the torture chamber, and the oldest Chapel Royal in England (St. Peter in Chains). Also visit the royal armory for an interesting peek at medieval armor, a point of interest is Henry VIII's rather rotund armor.

Open Tuesdays to Saturdays from nine AM to 5:30 PM, Sundays to Mondays from 10 AM to 5:30 PM. For tickets, visit <hrp.org.uk>, phone (+44 0) 844 482 7799 or purchase in person.

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Below: A place of solitude within the Abbey
Opposite page, right: Gothic Westminster Abbey
has seen every coronation since 1066

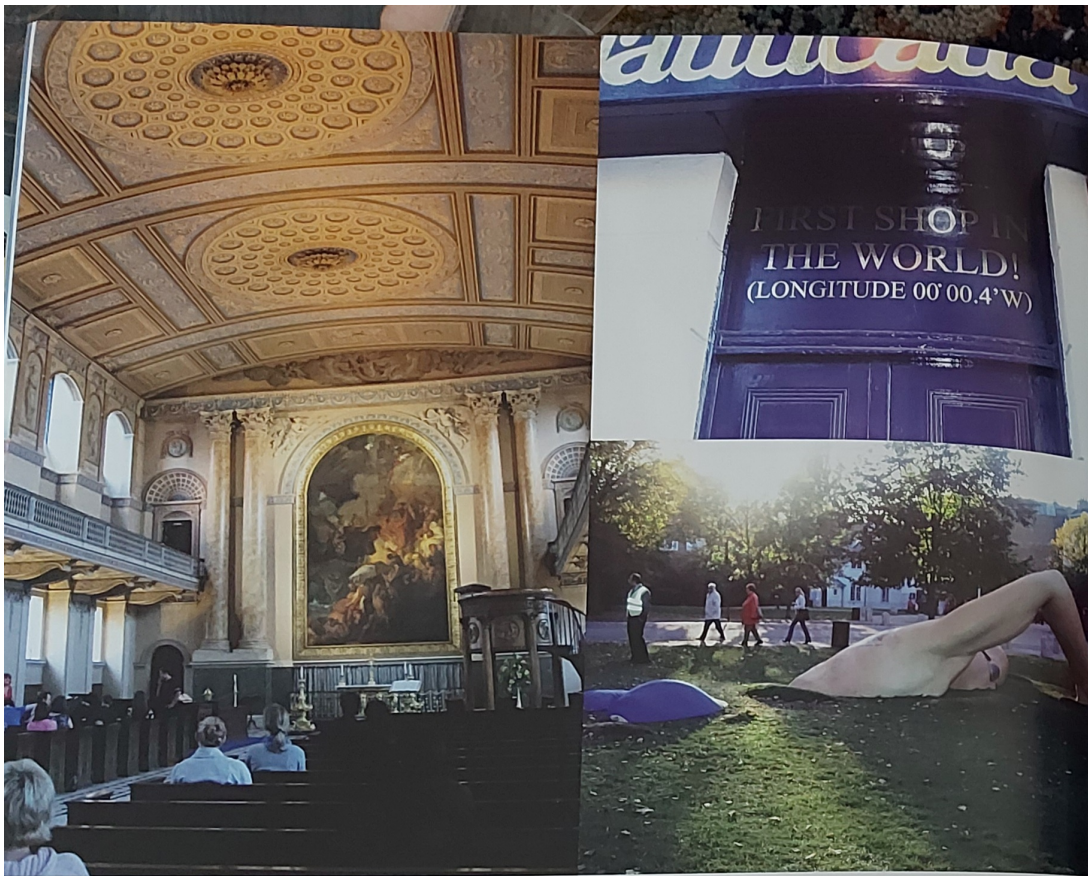


Best Church: Westminster Abbey

No trip to England is complete without a visit to its most famous church. Nestled at the heart of London beside Parliament Square, Westminster Abbey has seen every coronation since 1066. Home to an impressive collection of priceless paintings, stained glass, original pavements, medieval textiles and valuable artifacts, the Abbey also has the distinction of being the site of many of England's most important historical burials (notably Elizabeth I and Saint King Edward the Confessor) and commemorations through the centuries—most recently, Queen Elizabeth's coronation and Princess Diana's interment.

Massive in size, beautiful in structure and overwhelming in history, it is best to hone in on points of interest—Elizabeth I's tomb, the original Coronation Chair, the spectacular fan-vaulted Lady Chapel, the tomb of the Unknown Soldier and the Museum—to keep from drowning in information.

Open Mondays to Saturdays from 9:15 AM to 4:30 PM. Price of admission: £12. Entrance to Sunday services is free.



Clockwise, from left: Class is now in session inside one of the "classrooms" in the Royal Naval College; The "first" store in the world at Longitude 0°; A "swimmer" in Greenwich Park

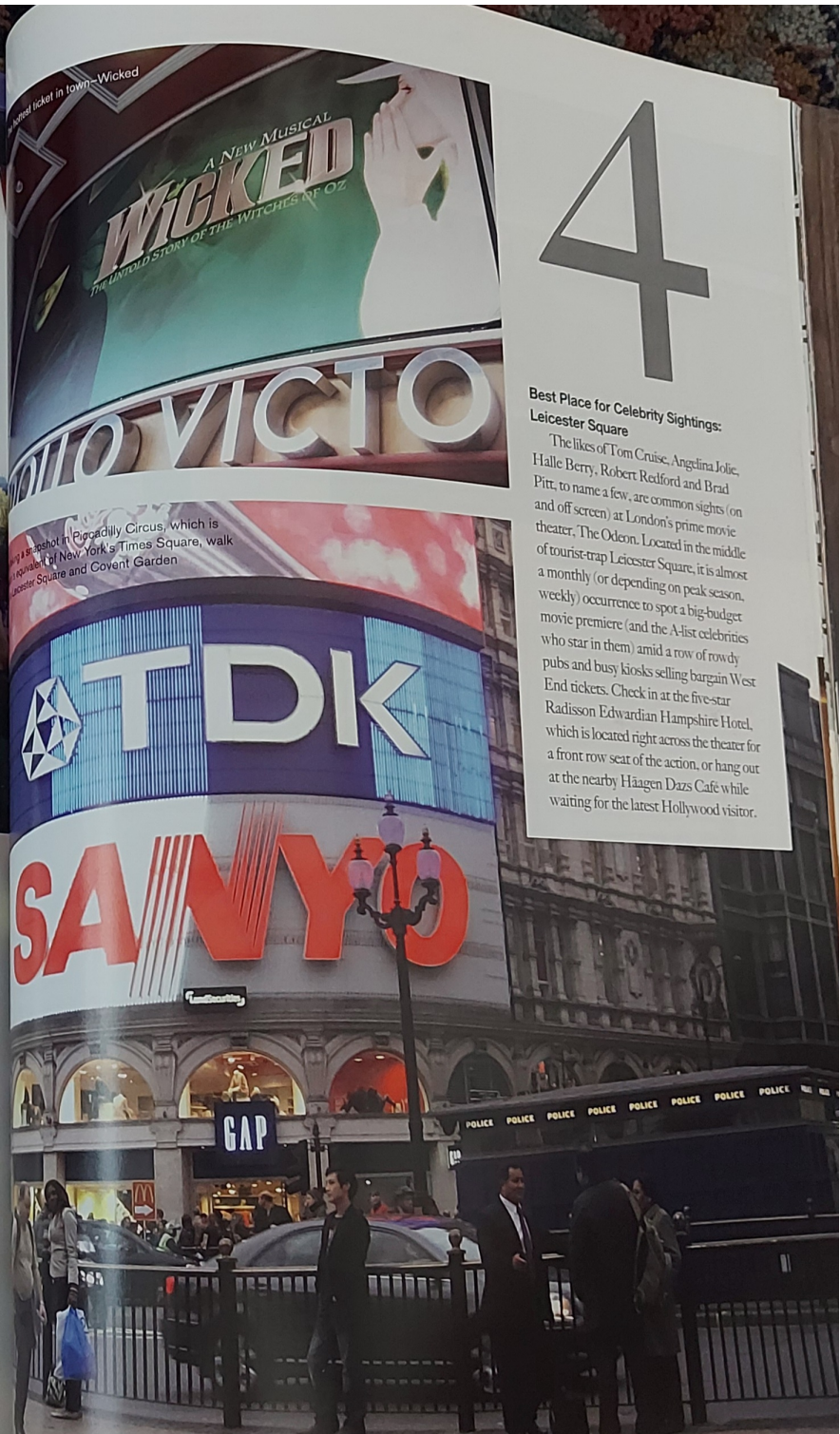
Best Day-Trip Destination: Greenwich

Declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1997, a whole day can be spent walking in this scenic piece of real estate. Known for its sprawling parks, quaint shops, picture-perfect views and 18th-century architecture, Greenwich (pronounced GREN-ich) is a destination in itself.

Start off at Greenwich Market (open Thursdays to Sundays, 9:30 AM to 5:30 PM), one of London's best sources for handcrafted items, original artwork, unique collectibles and precious antiques. It also converts into a food market on weekends. Further down is Cutty Sark docked at port, the world's last tea clipper (unfortunately under renovation until 2010). Have lunch in a variety of easy restaurants in the vicinity offering Thai, Japanese, Chinese or homegrown English fare to prepare you for

the 15-minute hike up Greenwich Park to reach the Royal Observatory at the top of the hill. Unique to Greenwich alone, the Royal Observatory boasts of Greenwich Mean Time (or GMT) and the Prime Meridian Line (also known as Longitude 0°)—the only place in the world where you can stand on both hemispheres (east and west) at the same time and set your watch against the world's standard! So check your watch, stand on both hemispheres and take in a sprawling view of the River Thames, the Royal Naval College, St. Paul's Cathedral and beyond.

For a more in-depth Greenwich experience, a daily walking tour starts from the Greenwich Tourist Information Center at 12:15 PM and 2:15 PM, or phone (+44 0) 870 608 2000 for a special group tour.



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Best Place for Celebrity Sightings: Leicester Square

The likes of Tom Cruise, Angelina Jolie, Halle Berry, Robert Redford and Brad Pitt, to name a few, are common sights (on and off screen) at London's prime movie theater, The Odeon. Located in the middle of tourist-trap Leicester Square, it is almost a monthly (or depending on peak season, weekly) occurrence to spot a big-budget movie premiere (and the A-list celebrities who star in them) amid a row of rowdy pubs and busy kiosks selling bargain West End tickets. Check in at the five-star Radisson Edwardian Hampshire Hotel, which is located right across the theater for a front row seat of the action, or hang out at the nearby Häagen Dazs Cafe while waiting for the latest Hollywood visitor.



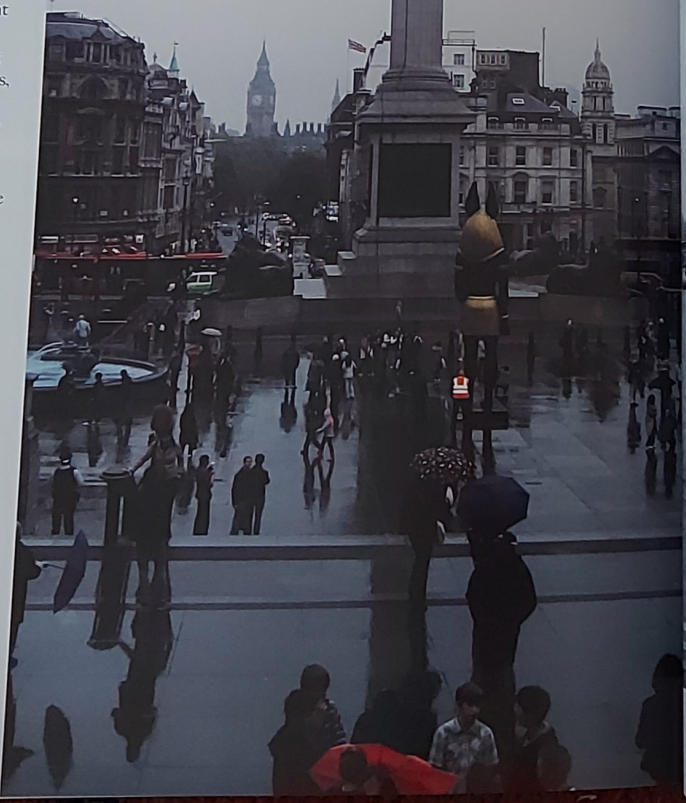
5 Best Hub for Local Entertainment: Covent Garden

Just a stone's throw away from Leicester Square, this open-air piazza is always abuzz with activity. At the center of London's West End and the only area in the city licensed for street entertainment, Covent Garden is alive with jugglers, mimes, puppeteers and musicians. Surrounding the piazza are shops, cafés, bars, restaurants, theaters and the Royal Opera House. Covent Garden definitely has something for everybody. Tip: this is a one-stop destination for a variety of activities: to watch a play, take in an opera, have a taste of novelty tea (try the Chocolate Truffle flavor) at The Tea House along Neal Street, rifle through arts and crafts at the market or simply take in all the revelry.

For schedules and events, visit <coventgardenlife.com>.

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Typical British weather in Trafalgar Square Above: An aptly named pub at the heart of London

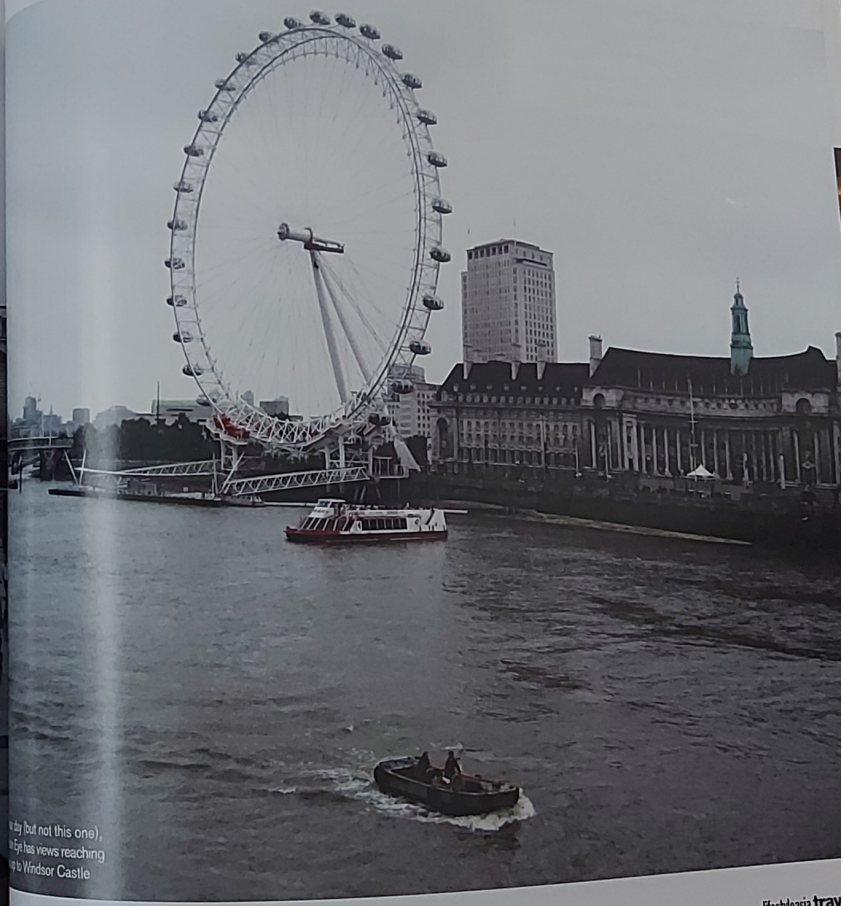


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Best Ride: The London Eye

A ferris wheel like no other, the London Eye truly lives up to its name. Like a gigantic moving platform from which to view the city's prime landmarks and vistas, the Eye sees all—the Big Ben, Parliament, Westminster Abbey, St. Paul's Cathedral, Tower Bridge, the River Thames, and a bird's-eye view of London in all its striking, structural beauty. Surprisingly thrilling, this 30-minute, 360-degree, 135-meter high sky tour rotates leisurely and provides 32 roomy steel passenger capsules for all those panoramic pictures usually only possible via helicopter or airplane.

Important tip: check the local weather for clear skies or sunset times (for spectacular views of city lights) before advance bookings. Admission: £15.50 for a standard ride. Opens daily from 10 AM to nine PM during summer months (June to September), and from 10 AM to eight PM from October to May. For more information, visit <londoneye.com>.



...day (but not this one), the Eye has views reaching up to Windsor Castle

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Best Posh Shopping Destination: Harrods

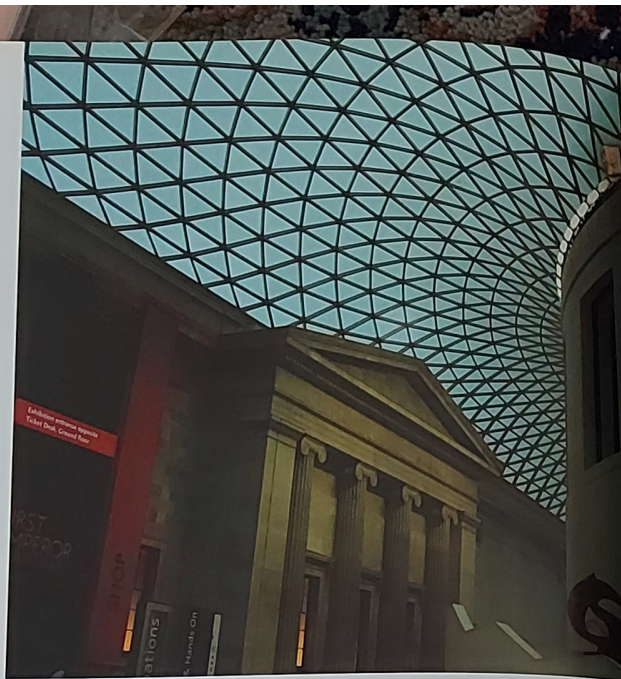
What started out as a local grocery has turned into one of London's most famous chi-chi hotspots. With a motto that promises "Everything for Everybody Everywhere," Harrods is a store that takes customer service to the next level. With over 155 years of retail experience, 4.5 acres and over one million square feet of selling space, the store sells everything from candied treats to theater tickets to £1 million diamond-encrusted shoes!

A prime destination not just for shopping, but a feast for the eyes and senses as well, its lavish décor (check out the Egyptian Escalator), wide assortment of merchandise (from 300 kinds of cheese to the latest in fashion to wax sculptures), in-house specialties (Urban Retreat is Europe's largest health and beauty salon) and legendarily outrageous customer service (Ronald Reagan received a baby elephant as a gift from an anonymous Harrods customer once) all make Harrods the premier shopping experience.

Controversial tributes built by present owner Mohamed Al-Fayed for his son Dodi and fiancée Princess Diana add a touch of notoriety to the otherwise elegant establishment.

Harrods is located along Brompton Road, Knightsbridge, London.

Right: The famous façade of one of London's landmarks and shopping meccas—Harrods



The web-like glass ceiling of the Great Court in the British Museum shelters over 71,000 artworks and artifacts

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Best Retail Shopping Strip: Oxford Street

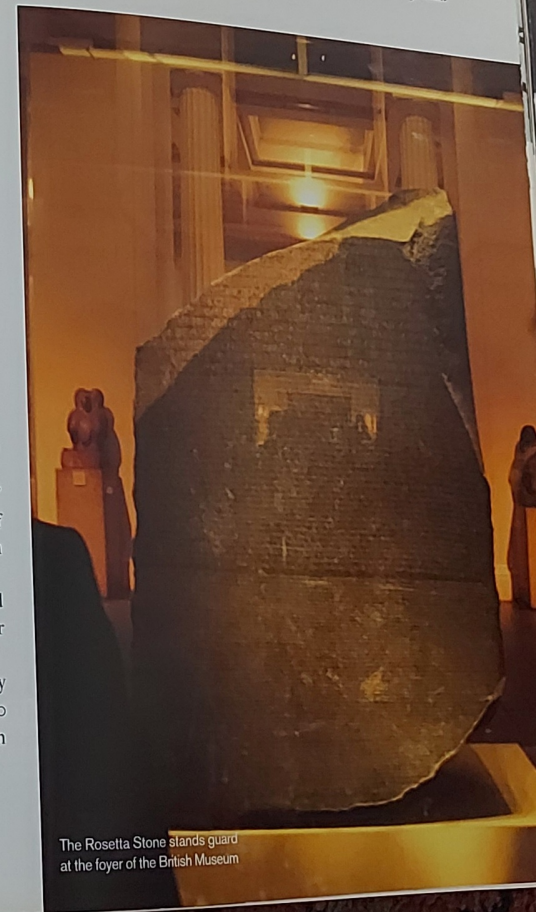
Get down to serious shopping business and stretch the British pound to its maximum along this strip of paradise, touted as "Europe's largest high street." Over 300 stores on one street, finding a variety of bargains to cover gifts for anyone are all within reach of walking distance. Start ticking off names off your wish list by getting off at the Marble Arch station and heading your way down to Tottenham Court Road for home purchases from retail favorites Zara, Topshop, H&M, Miss Selfridge, Wallis, Mango, Dorothy Perkins and Shelleys, to name a few. Shops open at 10 AM and close between six to eight PM depending on the store. Banks, cafés and restaurants are all within walking distance.

Best Museum: British Museum

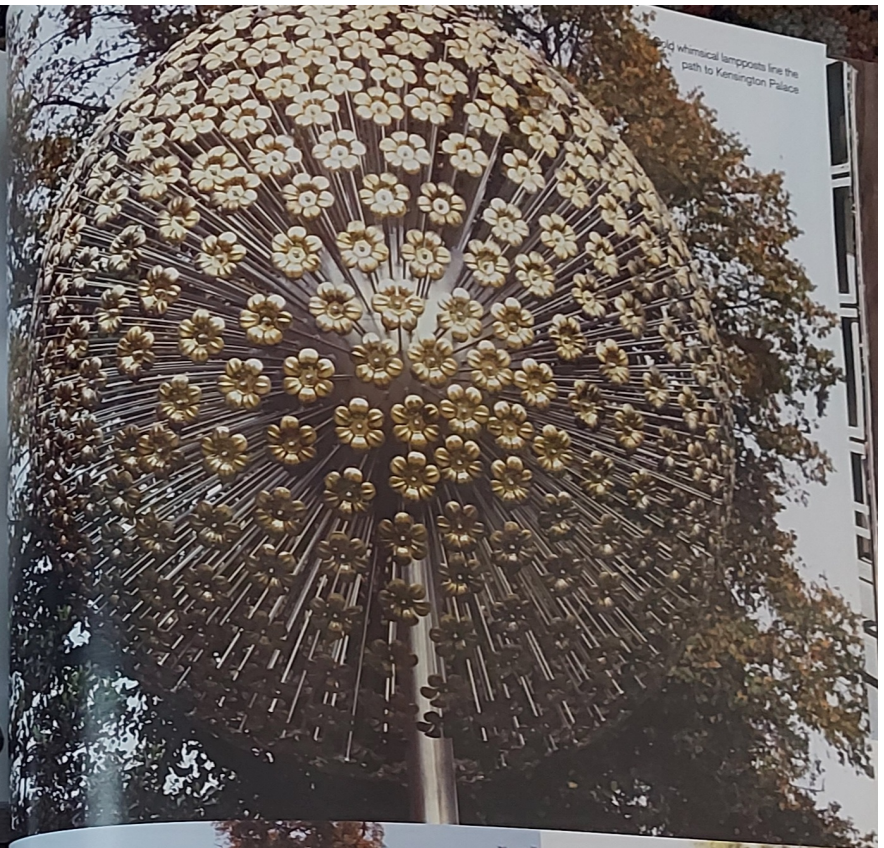
If New York has the Metropolitan Museum of Art, then London has the British Museum. Unlike other local museums—the stodgy National Portrait Gallery, the famous National Gallery and the edgy Tate Modern—the British Museum has a complete cross-section and a varied selection of artwork and artifacts to satisfy any museum hound in one afternoon. With organized guided tours beginning at 11 AM at 15-minute intervals, one can maximize touring time by selecting sections that best interest them for the countries and themes. Sections are categorized according to Asia, Europe and thematic exhibits. The museum is open to the public at no cost, however, special roving exhibits from around the world may charge entrance fees. Before closing hours, live music usually fills the museum's Great Court. With a spectacular glass roof covering the two-acre square, the Great Court is the largest covered public square in Europe.

For exhibit schedules and details, visit britishmuseum.org. For groups of 10 people or more, email groups@britishmuseum.org. Open daily from 10 AM to 5:30 PM, Thursdays and Fridays until 8:30 PM.

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The Rosetta Stone stands guard at the foyer of the British Museum



Whimsical lampposts line the path to Kensington Palace

10

Best Park: Kensington Gardens

Once part of the expansive Hyde Park, Kensington Gardens, in comparison, is a humble 111 hectares of majestic trees, manmade lakes and lush landscaping with a special attraction separating it from its famous cousin. Built especially for a beloved former resident, who lived in nearby Kensington Palace, The Diana Princess of Wales Memorial Playground was created specifically for the children the princess campaigned for and loved. A huge pirate ship, teepees, a built-in beach and various playful props and child-friendly sculptures are set against a lush storybook backdrop.

Not just for kids, Kensington Gardens also offers serene views dotted with live swans, scenic trails, calm lakes and picnic-perfect greens to compete with any idyllic English countryside scene. Other notable sights and common movie and literary settings are the Italian Gardens, the Albert Memorial, the Serpentine Gallery, and the Peter Pan statue (it is, after all, the setting of JM Barrie's book *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*). Bandstand Concerts, Scottish Country Dancing and Guided Walks are some of the free activities scheduled for the public later this year in the Bandstand area.

Above: One of the carved tributes seen at The Albert Memorial in Kensington Gardens

For more information, visit royalparks.org.uk.



The Peter Pan statue commissioned by JM Barrie himself still stands in Kensington Park

Well-fed swans graze leisurely on one of the park's many manicured lawns