

# LONDON 101 GUIDE

Important things you **MUST** know  
for your first visit to London



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- Jess

## A Note from Jess

How exciting that you're planning a trip to London, the city I've called home since 2013 🇬🇧🥰

While you might already know that me and the team at Love and London pride ourselves on showing tourists how to experience London like us locals do, there are still some "London basics" you need to know before your first visit to London, all of which are covered in this e-book. Read it now, save it to your phone or iPad, and then read it again a few days before your trip so you're fully prepared.



For environmental reasons, PLEASE don't print this guide. It's meant to be digital, and works best as such.

If you have more questions about London beyond what you're about to read, there are a few more resources listed at the end.

Ok, that's it... happy planning 😎

♥ *Jess and the Love and London team*

## Chapter 1: The Basics

### **National currency:**

GBP, called “pounds”

### **Currency sign:**

£

### **Time zone:**

GMT

### **Language:**

English

### **Driving and cycling:**

Left-hand side

### **Measurement:**

Metric (but miles for distance)

### **Average costs (relative to rest of world):**

Expensive

### **Credit or debit card acceptance level:**

Extremely high, some venues don't accept cash

### **Minimum drinking age:**

18 (or younger with parents present)

### **ID required at all times:**

No

### **Phone / eSIM:**

I highly recommend [Airalo](#) for phone connectivity in the UK.

## Chapter 2: Money

In England, the currency is the pound (£) which is sometimes shown as GBP (Great British Pound). There are 100 pence in one pound, and they're sometimes called “p”, as in, “the total is 1 pound and 30 p”.

If you hear someone say “quid”, this is slang for pound. A “fiver” is £5 pounds, and a “tenner” is £10.

The value of the pound, as with any currency, fluctuates daily, so make sure you have a currency converter app on your phone so that you know what the current rate is—although “approximately” is just fine when doing quick calculations in your head.



### How to get GBP in cash before arriving to London

You might want to have some pounds, in cash, on you when you step off the plane, just in case you need it for a taxi, food or something of the sort. It's not mandatory however, as even small street vendors and all taxis can take credit and debit cards these days. To put it into perspective, I rarely have cash with me when I'm around the city, because there are very few times when I would need it.

But if you want to have some cash with you before you leave for London, typically, your bank is going to be a good place to get a fair rate on buying currency. Order your cash in advance, at least a couple of weeks ahead. How much cash to get depends on many factors, but around £25 per person is more than sufficient.

You can also just wait until you get to London. In the city it's quite easy to withdraw cash using your own debit card, and it's not too difficult to find cash machines that don't charge for withdrawals.



## Credit and debit cards in London

As mentioned, London is incredibly card-friendly, so you probably will not need cash beyond the first £25 for the rest of your trip.

You'll want to check with your bank before your trip to see if they will charge you additional fees for using your card abroad. If they will, it's probably worth doing some research and getting a credit card that caters to international travellers and has lower fees, as they can add up. I have [an article recommending some great ones here](#).

Another advantage of having a credit card for your travels is that it's not linked to your bank account, so if it's stolen, you won't have to worry about your account being drained.

Finally, make sure you alert your bank and credit card companies that you'll be traveling abroad, so your card doesn't get flagged and shut down due to "fraudulent charges".



## Tipping in London

When eating at a restaurant or pub with wait staff who've taken your order at your table, it's customary to tip about 10-12.5% for decent service. When you get the bill, double check to see if a service charge has already been added (which is common), and if it has, then there's no need to tip any more than that. Know that in most cases it will say "optional service charge", and already be included in the total, but if you've had quite bad service that you think doesn't warrant a tip, you only need to pay the subtotal without the service charge or a tip.

In pubs and bars, there's no need to tip bartenders, even if they've taken your food order at the bar. You're of course welcome to, but it's not expected. If you had table service, you should tip 10% if the service was acceptable, but again, check if there was a service charge already added.

It's polite to tip taxi drivers by rounding up to the nearest pound. You can do this easily when paying directly to the driver or in apps like [FreeNow](#).

## Chapter 3: Transportation

Use an app like [CityMapper](#) or [Google Maps](#) to figure out how to get from place to place via public transport, whether by train, the tube, bus, taxi, bike or any other option.

You can also ask TFL staff for help if you get confused about anything—you can usually find them around the major stations.

To pay for public transportation in London, the easiest ways are to use a debit or credit card with the contactless payment feature. Google Pay and Apple Pay can also be used.

If neither of those are an option, you can buy an Oyster Card for a £7 non-refundable fee. You can easily buy these at the airport when you arrive or at a convenience shop. You then have to top up your Oyster once it runs out of money, which you can do at the self-service machines at most stations.

But again, only get an Oyster if you don't have a contactless debit or credit card or Google or Apple Pay. Everyone has to have their own card, and make sure you use the same card everytime you travel and tap in/out.

If you've got kids with you and you don't have enough debit/credit cards to go around, then Oyster Cards will be a good option.

If you want to find out more about the transport system in London, as well as how to pay for tickets and more, then it's worth considering our [London Transport Guide](#) that covers how to use all our transport like a pro.





## Taxis and Black Cabs

Black cabs are very iconic in London, and the newest ones are electric. They accept both cash and card. To call one, just put your hand out if you see one pass you with its light on.

I usually call taxis using an app called Gett which is very similar to Uber but I prefer it because you can specifically order electric vehicles AND black taxis (electric and not). Prices are straightforward and reasonable. Uber and FreeNow work well too though! [Download Gett](#) and use the discount code **GTILQJQ** to get some cash off your first trip.

I also highly recommend [Welcome Pickups](#) if you need airport transfers.



## Costs for using public transport

Our system is set up in “zones” and generally speaking, the further you travel, the more you will be charged for your journey. Bus rides are just £1.75 and any subsequent rides are free for sixty minutes.

At the time of publishing, the “daily cap” is £8.90 if you stay in zones 1-2 (central London), which means that after you’ve taken £8.90 worth of rides on public transportation, then the rest of your travel is free for that day. The cap increases the more zones you travel through, if you decide to travel further outside the centre of the city. And if you only take buses throughout a day, the cap is only £5.25. The cap works no matter how you pay, but make sure you always use the same card in a day.

You can grab our [London Transport Guide](#) for more information on how to pay for public transport.

Confused? Don't worry. It's hard to really mess this up. The system calculates it all itself and if you're going from point A to point B, that's all you need to focus on. Just be sure to always tap your card on the reader when you start a tube journey, and then tap it again when you've finished the journey, at the last station. When on a bus, you only need to tap when you get on, and that's it.

You can also just ask for help from someone nearby.

## Chapter 4: Weather

London's weather is quite unpredictable. It could be unseasonably hot one day, and very cold and rainy the next.

For packing and planning, I recommend this— a couple of months before your trip, use Google to find out what the average weather is like for when you'll be visiting, so you can start to plan your packing. You'll also find all of this info in the [London Packing Guide](#).

Then, when you're packing on the day before you leave, check the weather forecast to see what's being predicted, and pack according to that. Take an extra piece of clothing or two to account for if it's colder or warmer than was originally predicted.

Luckily, if you really misjudged while packing, we have tons of shops here where you can buy anything you need.

If you're still struggling with packing, don't forget that I have seasonal, printable packing guides and clothing suggestions in the [London Packing Guide](#).



## Chapter 5: Accommodation

There are tons of great areas to stay in in London, and even more hotels to choose from, so it can be a little overwhelming to find and book something for your trip.

I've got some really solid resources to help you choose the area and hotel that will work for your taste and budget.

Have a browse of our [accommodation](#) section on the Love and London website for our most recent tips and advice, including articles such as [great London hotels for families](#) or [with adjoining rooms](#), [budget hotels](#), or even if you are looking for something [luxurious](#) or [with great views](#).



### Best areas to stay

If you're wanting to stay by the major sites and attractions and are happy to shell out the cash for it, then read my article about [3 Great Areas to Stay in \(By the Big Attractions\)](#). It includes some hotel recommendations for all budgets.

If that's not your vibe and you'd rather stay somewhere with more of a neighborhood vibe and that's relatively a bit cheaper, then read my article [3 Great Areas to Stay in \(For Local Vibes\)](#). It includes hotel recommendations for all budgets. And once you decide on the area, check out these selections of hotels in [North](#), [South](#), [East](#), [West](#) and [Central](#) London.

By the way-- just because an area is NOT part of those articles doesn't mean it's bad! This is just a curated list of my recommendations.



### Why I don't recommend Airbnb

I personally do not recommend you to stay in an Airbnb or another type of "holiday flat" in London. There are a few reasons why, as [covered in this article](#).

We have so many fantastic hotels to choose from no matter what your budget, and we also have some [great apart-hotels](#) that are a great alternative to Airbnb.

## Chapter 6: Accessibility in London

If you have any disabilities or access requirements, Visit London has a great resource with useful tips, information and websites to help make your trip as fun and comfortable as possible. Some of their info includes:

- [Accessible hotels](#)
- [Tube maps for the blind and colour-blind](#)
- Info about [wheelchair hire](#).

[See Accessible London on Visit London](#)

I also have [plenty of articles](#) on the Love and London website with great accessibility information including tours, bars and attractions that are wheelchair accessible, plus so much more.



### Other helpful resources

[AccessAble](#) is a website where you can find accessible ANYTHING in the UK.

Many venues will have accessibility info on their websites, otherwise do call up and ask what they have available. I've also put "wheelchair accessible" indicators across our content.

Unfortunately, many restaurants and bars are fully accessible except for the toilets which may be located up or down stairs. But they sometimes have ground-level toilets hidden away so call or ask ahead of time.

*\*Our London guides have indicators telling you whether or not each recommendation is wheelchair accessible and there are plenty of options for those who need to avoid stairs. [Explore our shop](#).*

## Chapter 7: What to Do

### Food and Drink

Welp, this is my favourite thing to do here in London. The great thing is that no matter your budget, you can eat well and have a few drinks without breaking the bank.

#### Two traditional food experiences: Sunday roast and afternoon tea

While there are lots of traditionally English dishes you could try while in London, two experiences I think are totally worth making happen while in London is Sunday roast and afternoon tea.



#### What is Sunday Roast?

Served on Sundays (obviously) at local pubs around the UK, you'll choose your roast "main", which is usually a meat (chicken, pork, beef, etc.) or a veggie or vegan option. Along with that you'll get a smattering of comfort food, including crunchy roast potatoes, a mix of vegetables, gravy and a Yorkshire Pudding (a pastry you can use to soak up any extra gravy.)

You can have this for lunch, dinner or in-between, and make sure you go hungry, as portion sizes are massive. One of our favourites is from [The Spaniard's Inn](#) (pictured left).



#### What is Afternoon Tea?

A rather lovely experience, usually hosted at hotels around the city is afternoon tea. Order one and you'll be served your choice of looseleaf tea and be brought a three-tiered tray of finger sandwiches, scones and sweet treats. The nicer the hotel, the more luxurious your afternoon tea experience will be. Londoners tend to save afternoon tea for special occasions as it's not cheap. Make sure you don't plan any food before or after as you'll be stuffed afterwards. Fortnum & Mason hosts a great one in their [Diamond Jubilee Tea Salon](#) (pictured left).



## What's the deal with pub culture?

In much of London, pubs are family affairs during the day. The Sunday roast mentioned above draws groups of adults with children to their favourite local pub, to eat well and to catch up with friends and family.

In the evenings, pubs move to a more adult atmosphere and the popular ones will draw crowds ready to blow off some steam.

Definitely hit up a pub when you're in London, it's almost a rite of passage. No need to dress up, all pubs are casual.



## What types of food should you try in London?

If you don't think you can stomach a week of fish and chips, pie and mash, and full English breakfast, not to worry. London's food scene is incredibly diverse and one of the best in the world, so I highly recommend trying as many different cuisines as you can while you're in London.

Since I have TONS of food recommendations, I can't include them all here, so you can either scour the [Food and Drink section](#) of our site or get all of my best recommendations in our [London guides](#).

## Activities and sights

Honestly, there are soooooo many things to see and do in London that I really can't do them justice by trying to cover them here. So I'll point you in the direction of some of the content we already have that will help you narrow down your options.



### Sights and museums

We don't do a TON of coverage on Love and London of the main sights and museums because you could find that anywhere, and to be honest, most Londoners don't spend their time hanging around the British Museum (thousands of people on a Saturday? eek). In [this article](#), we tell you about some amazing underrated museums totally worth a visit.

And if you DO want to hit up the main tourist attractions, you can get the [London Pass](#) which might help you save money. [Here's how to figure out if the London Pass is worth it for you.](#)



### Markets

If you only plan on going to Borough Market, you're missing out. Have a read of [this article where we tell you about our favourite lesser-known markets](#) around the city which are totally worth a visit.



### Unique tours and experiences

I'm always testing unique things to do and see in London, so that I can share them with the Love and London community so you can experience the city like how locals do.

If you'd like to do some activities while in London but think you'll be bored by the classics attractions, have a look at these [Unique Experiences To Try in London](#).

Beyond this, there are tons of other cool experiences you can do, and [this section of our website covers some great ones](#) that you won't find in the usual, boring travel guide.

## Seasonal and monthly recommendations

There might be some special events happening while you're in London that you should try to experience on your trip.

I don't want you to miss out, so we've written an article for each month of the year. Click below on the month of your visit to read it:

[January](#)

[February](#)

[March](#)

[April](#)

[May](#)

[June](#)

[July](#)

[August](#)

[September](#)

[October](#)

[November](#)

[December](#)



## Our Guides and Itineraries

I have more guides that will help make your trip easy and magical...

### London itineraries

Your three, four, five or six (incredible) days in London sorted 🐾

To save you hours of research and planning for a city you've never even been to, I created four comprehensive, flexible itineraries for your first three to six days in London, which includes a digital map. It covers some of the most famous sights of London, along with showing you which hidden gems nearby you shouldn't miss. And yes... you'll eat very, very well, even if you have dietary restrictions. It's like having me as your personal itinerary planner!

[Learn more about the London Itineraries](#)



### Casual Tourist Guides

The Casual Tourist Guides are for anyone wanting to explore London's locally-loved spots and hidden gems. You won't find touristy things like the Tower of London and Westminster Abbey in these guides, but rather, local cafes, interesting activities and tours, independent restaurants, sexy cocktail bars, and more.

These guides are a good for people who don't need a plan but want to explore each area of London with a local's advice at their finger tips. Each Casual Tourist Guide includes a Digital Map for your phone, Notion template, and more.

[Learn more about the Casual Tourist Guides](#)



## London Spending Guide

Struggling to figure out the budget for your London trip?

The London Spending Guide is a tool that does just that. Figure out how much you might spend on your London trip, and then calculate your budget and keep track of your spending while in London so you don't overspend. You'll get the London Cost Guide, which tells you how much to expect to spend on each aspect of your trip depending on your travel style, plus the London Budget Tracker, a comprehensive but easy to use Google Sheet that will handle ALL of your trip finances.



[Learn more about the London Spending Guide](#)

## London Packing Guide

Instead of trying to scour the internet to find some slapped-together London packing lists that don't take into account seasonality or anything else important, get the London Packing Guide. It includes my recommendations for what to wear in London (including links to items you can buy), a complete weather guide, London packing lists for each season, and more. Packing is the last thing you should be worrying about...



[Learn more about the London Packing Guide](#)

## London Transport Guide

Feeling lost about London transport? I've got you.

I know you're buzzing for your trip—ready to dive into everything London has to offer. But if navigating the Tube, buses and trains feels overwhelming, don't stress. My London Transport Guide breaks it all down: how to get from the airport, the best ticket options and insider tips to make getting around easy.



[Learn more about the London Transport Guide](#)

## London in 2025 Planning Masterclass - Recording and PDF

London is constantly buzzing with plenty of new things to do and consider, meaning there's SO much to keep in mind while planning your trip to ensure an amazing experience with minimal hassle or surprises.

To streamline the process, you can get the recording of my LIVE London in 2025 Planning Masterclass and explore the answers to 40+ key questions sent in by YOU, our followers.

[Learn more about the London in 2025 Planning Masterclass](#)



## London Colouring Book

Adult colouring books have been helping me relax and shut out the world for years now, so I teamed up with a local London illustrator to bring a digital colouring book to you.

Relax your mind, have something creative to do, and feed your love for London. Makes for a great gift!

[Learn more about the London Colouring Book](#)



[EXPLORE THE REST OF OUR SHOP](#)



**Thanks for downloading the guide, and enjoy your trip!**