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Exploring London

It was nothing short of amazing. In 2001, after months of wheeler-dealing and changes to the tax regulations, London's major national museums dropped their admission charges. Now you can indulge in sci-fi fantasy at the Science Museum for free. You can inhale the aroma of cheesy socks and close-confined unwashed bodies in the Imperial War Museum's submarine simulator for free. At the Natural History Museum you can experience an earthquake and see a fabulous dinosaur collection for free. Without shelling out a pence you can visit, but not bounce on, the Great Bed of Ware in the V&A's remodeled British Galleries. And for nothing more than the cost of your transportation to Greenwich, you can see the original model for Nelson's Column, and the Admiral's bullet-pierced coat, at the National Maritime Museum.

There hasn't been such a museum and gallery boom since the era of the great Victorian philanthropists. All those now-free attractions have recently sprouted new extensions and wings, or had elaborate refurbishes. In less than 3 years, the fabulous new Tate Modern opened on Bankside and the Tate Britain embarked on a centenary spruce-up. The Museum of London has also begun a long and complicated renovation. Even the ill-fated Millennium Bridge connecting the Tate Modern to St. Paul's has had its wobbles re-engineered and is ready to take on your pounding feet.

1 How to Spend Less and See More

London will never be a cheap thrill, but fortunately, in addition to the top-dollar tourist draws there are now scads of free museums, galleries, and historic buildings. And remember, London's major national museums are now free.

2 London's Top Attractions

British Airways London Eye ★★★ *Kids* "Passengers" on the Eye can see straight into the Buckingham Palace garden, much to the Queen's annoyance. And both the Ministry of Defense and Shell

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have spent thousands spy-proofing their offices after discovering that someone with the right gadgetry could look in and pinch their secrets. At 443 feet high, this is the world's tallest observation wheel (don't say "Ferris," it's a dirty word to these guys). On the south bank, next to County Hall, the ½-hour, very slow-mo "flight" gives a stunning 25-mile view over the capital. It's better when the sun isn't shining, as the glare makes it difficult to see out. And the pod should have a map of the landmarks running round the inside—instead you have to pay £4.50 (\$7) for a guidebook. Book your "boarding ticket" in advance to avoid too much hanging about. The Eye will keep spinning at least through December 2003, and probably longer, but they've jacked the prices up in a kind of "last call."

Jubilee Gardens, SE1. © 0870/500-0600. www.ba-londoneye.com. Admission £11 (\$18) adults, £10 (\$16) seniors, £5.50 (\$9) children 5-15. Open daily 9:30am; last admission varies seasonally (May 8 or 9pm; June 9 or 10pm; July–Aug 10pm; Oct–Dec 8pm). Tube: Waterloo, Westminster. River services: Festival Pier.

British Museum ★★ To get the maximum visual kerpow from your first sight of the **Great Court**, use the main south entrance into the museum—the one with the too-white portico made of the wrong kind of stone. Except for that embarrassing blunder, the £100 million redevelopment of the British Museum, designed by Lord Norman Foster, has won high praise. The 2-acre Great Court used to serve as a giant store cupboard. Now covered by a stunning steel-and-glass roof, it has become the light-filled hub of the Bloomsbury complex, staying open after the galleries close, with an education center, restaurants where you can have supper Thursday through Saturday, and coffee shops. Call for details of talks, performances, and workshops.

But the real excitement is that for the first time, visitors can enter the copper-domed **British Library Reading Room**. The giant drum in the middle of the Great Court is clad in the same too-white stone, while the interior has been restored to its Victorian blue, cream, and gold glory. Designed by Robert Smirke and completed in 1857, it inspired Thomas Carlyle, Virginia Woolf, Mahatma Gandhi, Lenin, George Bernard Shaw, Karl Marx (who wrote *Das Kapital* here), and a host of other great names. It houses the museum's books on the upper floors, with a public reference library and media center down below (the rare books, maps, manuscripts, and historic documents that were once in the Reading Room and museum vaults are now at the British Library, described later in this chapter).

From a collection purchased from Sir Hans Sloane in 1753, the British Museum has grown into one of the richest storehouses of

Central London Attractions

Apsley House
Wellington Museum **10**

British Airways
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The British Library **22**

British Museum **21**

Buckingham Palace **11**

Cabinet War Rooms **15**

Dickens's House **24**

Houses of Parliament **14**

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Kensington Palace
State Apartments and
Royal Ceremonial
Dress Collection **6**

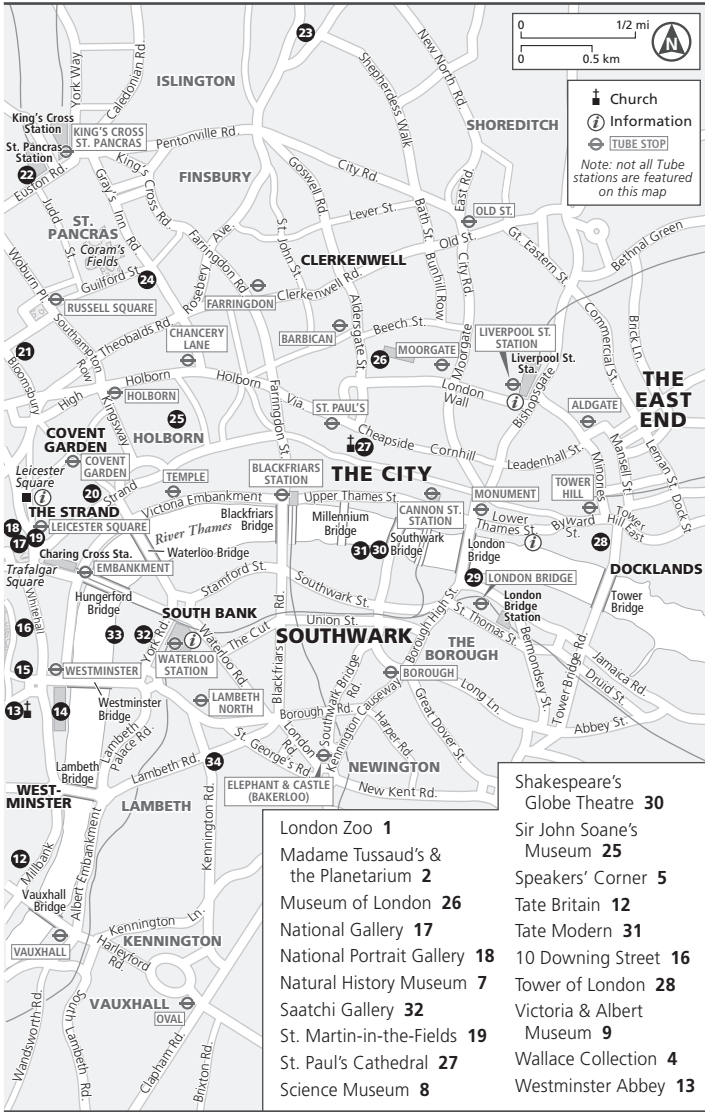
Little Angel Theatre **23**

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antiquities, prints, drawings, manuscripts, and *objets d'art* in the world, rivaled only by the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C. There are 2½ miles of galleries, so you'll need to weed out what really interests you and make a plan of attack. The £2.50 (\$4) *Visit Guide* will help. Otherwise, let the museum take the stress out of deciding: the 90-minute Highlight tour takes place daily at 10:30am, 1pm, and 3pm and costs £8 (\$13) for adults, £5 (\$8) concessions and under-11s. There are also free single gallery tours, EyeOpeners, which last 50 minutes and take place from 11am to 3pm. You can also rent audio guides for £3.50 (\$6).

If you only have time or interest for “the greatest hits,” pop in to see the much fought-over **Parthenon Sculptures** formerly known as the Elgin Marbles. The Egyptian antiquities are also a must—they include **mummies**, sarcophagi, and the **Rosetta Stone**. It would also be a shame not to take in a bit of local history, like the leathery remains of garroted **Lindow Man**, or the glittering Anglo-Saxon silver and gold of the **Sutton Hoo treasure**. Then wander into the new **Sainsbury African Galleries**, a modern imaginative exhibition a far cry from the dusty trophy rooms of empire days. Check out the fabulous 1950s fantasy coffins from Ghana: my favorite is one that looks like a white Mercedes, with the number plate RIP2000.

Great Russell St., WC1. ☎ 020/7323-8000, or 020/7323-8299 info desk. www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk. Main galleries free; £2 (\$3.20) donation requested. Special exhibitions £4–£8 (\$6–\$13) adults, £2–£4 (\$3.20–\$6) seniors and students, free under-11s. Galleries Sat–Wed 10am–5:30pm; Thurs–Fri 10am–8:30pm. Great Court Sun–Weds 9am–6pm; Thurs–Sat 9am–11pm. Tube: Russell Sq., Holborn, Tottenham Court Rd.

Buckingham Palace ★ *Overrated* This is Her Maj's official London residence, and supposedly the one she likes least of all her palatial homes. You know she's there when the royal standard is flying. The Queen and her husband, the Duke of Edinburgh, occupy only 12 of the palace's 600 rooms. The rest are used by the royal household as offices and for royal functions, banquets, and investitures.

King George III and Queen Charlotte bought the house from the Duke of Buckingham in 1762, but it was George IV who converted it into a palace. He commissioned John Nash to pump up the grandeur, which he did by adding wings at the front and extending those at the back, all for £700,000. Neither George nor his brother William IV actually lived here, and by the time Queen Victoria came to the throne, doors wouldn't close, windows wouldn't open, bells wouldn't ring, and the drains were clogged. Victoria sent Nash packing and Edward Blore completed the repairs. But it quickly

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became too small for an official residence. So, in 1847, the queen had the East Front built, facing The Mall, and moved Marble Arch from the palace forecourt to the top of Park Lane. Sir Aston Webb designed the facade in 1913.

The Queen first opened the 18 formal **State Rooms**, including the **Throne Room**, in 1993 to help raise money to repair Windsor Castle after a fire. Overlooking the 45-acre gardens, where she gives her famous summer parties, they contain priceless pictures, tapestries, and a few pieces of furniture from the royal collections. Queen Victoria's vast ballroom—the ceilings are 45 feet high and there's room to park 35 double-decker buses—is part of the self-guided tour. Although you have to pay an exorbitant price to get in the palace, don't expect a fly-on-the-wall glimpse of royal home life. For a start, you can only visit during August and September when the family is on holiday. And these rooms are not where the Royals put their feet up with a reviving cup of tea—it could be almost any un-lived-in stately home or grand private collection. Tickets can be purchased in person, from 9am on the day: Eager tourists start queuing at sunrise, and an hour-long wait is the rule. Booking a fixed-time ticket by phone, or asking the Visitor Office for an application form, is less hassle, but only the regular £12 (\$19) adult rate is available in advance.

Much better value is the **Royal Mews** (★★) (entrance in Buckingham Palace Road). These superb working stables house the royal carriages, including the gold state coach used at every coronation since 1831, and the horses that draw them. By tradition, the Queen always has greys.

The newly revamped **Queen's Gallery** (★) displays hundreds of items from the Royal art collection in changing exhibitions.

The Mall, SW1. ☎ 020/7839-1377, 020/7799-2331 recorded info, 020/7321-2233 credit-card bookings, 020/7839-1377 for visitors with disabilities. www.royalresidences.com. State Rooms £12 (\$19) adults, £10 (\$16) seniors, £6 (\$10) under-17s, £30 (\$48) family ticket. Aug 1–Sept 28 daily 9:30am–4:15pm (last admittance 3:15pm). Royal Mews £5 (\$8) adults, £4 (\$6) seniors, £2.50 (\$4) under-17s, £12.50 (\$20) family ticket. March–July 11am–4pm (last admission 3:15pm); Aug–Sept 10am–5pm (last admission 4:15pm). Queen's Gallery £6.50 (\$10), £5 (\$8) over 60 and student, £3 (\$4.80) under 17. Daily 10am–5:30pm (last admittance 4:30pm). Tube: Victoria, St. James's Park, Green Park.

Hampton Court Palace (★★★) (Kids) Bring a picnic because a visit to Hampton Court makes a splendid day out. You'll need 2 to 3 hours to look round the palace itself, plus time to wander through the 60 acres of gardens. And then there's the famous **maze**, with its

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half a mile of twisting paths—most people take 20 minutes or so to extricate themselves from its green clutches.

Hampton Court is about 15 miles southwest of London on the banks of the Thames. Henry VIII's pleasure-loving Lord Chancellor, Cardinal Wolsey, took the house in 1515 as a retreat from the city's poisonous air and water. His grandiose remodeling plan called for 280 rooms, new courtyards and gardens, and 500 staff. When the cardinal fell into disfavor in 1528, the greedy king confiscated his property. Henry spent a whopping £18 million in today's money and turned Hampton Court into a very sophisticated palace with bowling alleys, tennis courts (yes, really), a chapel, pleasure gardens, a hunting park, The Great Hall for dining, and a 36,000-square-foot kitchen.

His daughter, Queen Elizabeth I, planted the gardens with new discoveries, such as tobacco and potatoes brought back by Sir Francis Drake and Sir Walter Raleigh from South America. Under the Stuarts, the palace collections grew with hundreds of new paintings and other lavish objets d'art. Charles II banished the gloom of Cromwell's brief stay here with his lively court and many mistresses. William and Mary found the palace apartments old-fashioned and uncomfortable, so they commissioned Sir Christopher Wren to make improvements and asked such artists as Grinling Gibbons, Jean Tijou, and Antonio Verrio to decorate the rooms. George III ended royal occupation—his grandfather used to box his ears in the State Apartments, so he hated the place.

The highlights for visitors to Hampton Court are the **Tudor Kitchens** and the **King's Apartments**, as well as the **Wolsey Rooms** and **Renaissance Picture Gallery**. One of Henry VIII's wives, the hapless (and ultimately headless) Catherine Howard, has reputedly been sighted several times in the **Long Gallery**, where she ran, terrified, to pound on the king's locked door and plead desperately for her life. Throughout the palace, costumed guides bring the centuries of history to life, as does the full calendar of special events and festivals.

East Molesey, Surrey. ☎ **0870/752-7777** or 0870/753-7777 (tickets by phone). www.hrp.org.uk. Admission £11 (\$18) adults, £8.25 (\$13) students and seniors, £7.25 (\$11) under-16s, £33 (\$53) family ticket. Apr–Oct Mon 10:15am–6pm, Tues–Sun 9:30am–6pm (last admission 5:15pm); Nov–Mar Mon 10:15am–4:30pm, Tues–Sun 9:30am–4:30pm (last admission 3:15pm). Park 7am–dusk. Closed Dec 24–26. Train: Waterloo to Hampton Court, 30-min. journey time. River services from Westminster pier (☎ **020/7930-2062**; www.wpsa.co.uk), 3- to 4-hr. journey time; £18 (\$29) standard adult return fare; schedules vary seasonally.

Houses of Parliament ★★ This neo-Gothic extravaganza, with its trademark clock tower, is the ultimate symbol of London.

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Edward the Confessor built the first palace here, and the site was home to the monarchy and court until Henry VIII's time. In 1834 a fire lit to burn the Exchequer's tally sticks got out of control, sparing only Westminster Hall (1097), which is not open to the public, and the Jewel Tower. Charles Barry designed the Houses of Parliament (1840) you see today. Augustus Welby Pugin created the paneled ceilings, tiled floors, stained glass, clocks, fireplaces, umbrella stands, and even inkwells. There are more than 1,000 rooms, 100 staircases, and 2 miles of corridors. Big Ben, by the way, is not the clock tower itself, as many people think, but the largest bell (14 tons) in the chime.

The parliamentary session runs from mid-October to the end of July, with breaks at Christmas and Easter. Visitors can watch debates from the **Strangers' Galleries** in both houses. Most visitors are struck by how small the **Commons chamber** is. It was rebuilt in precise detail in 1950 after being destroyed during the Blitz of 1941. Only 437 of the 651 MPs can sit at any one time; on the rare occasions when most of them turn up, the rest crowd noisily around the door and the Speaker's chair. The ruling party and opposition sit facing one another, two sword lengths apart, though from the volume of the arguments you'd think it was more like 2 miles. The Mace, on the table in the middle, is the symbol of Parliament's authority. The queue for the **House of Lords** is usually shorter, as debates here are less crucial (some might say inconsequential) and a lot more polite. The Lords' chamber is fantastically opulent, decorated with mosaics and frescoes. The Lord Chancellor presides over proceedings from his seat on the Woolsack, a reminder of the days when wool was the source of Britain's wealth. You'd think such tradition would make the place sacrosanct. Yet, in 2000, New Labour made all the hereditary peers pitch to keep their privileges and ousted 600 of them. And in 2001 it appointed the promised "people's peers," though the prominent professionals chosen seemed scarcely more representative of the general population than the aristocracy.

During the recess (usually mid-July–late Aug or early Sept, and mid-Sept–early Oct; see www.parliament.uk for recess dates), you can take a 75-minute tour of the Houses of Parliament for £7 (\$11). It isn't really suitable for young children as rest-stops are limited. You must be there 10 minutes before your timed-entry tour starts. Call ☎ **0870/906-3773** or visit www.firstcalltickets.com for tickets and information.

Bridge St. and Parliament Sq., SW1. ☎ **020/7219-3000** House of Commons or ☎ **020/7219-3107** House of Lords. www.parliament.uk. Free admission to Strangers'

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Galleries, subject to recess and sitting times. House of Commons: Mon 1:30–8:30pm, Tues–Wed 11:30am–7:30pm, Thurs–Fri 9:30am–3pm. House of Lords: Mon–Wed from 2:30pm, Thurs and occasionally Fri from 11am. Queue at St. Stephen’s entrance, near the statue of Oliver Cromwell. Tube: Westminster. River services: Westminster Pier.

Kensington Palace State Apartments and Royal Ceremonial Dress Collection ★★

The palace has been a pilgrimage site ever since Princess Diana died in August 1997, when people flocked to the gates and carpeted the ground with floral tributes. Several of her best-known designer frocks are now on permanent display here, as are dozens of dowdy dresses, shoes, and hats worn by the Queen over the past 50 years.

The asthmatic William and his wife Mary bought this house from the Earl of Nottingham in 1689 to escape from the putrid air enveloping Whitehall. Then they commissioned Sir Christopher Wren to remodel the modest Jacobean mansion. Queen Anne, who came to the throne in 1702, laid out the gardens in English style, had the Orangery built after designs by Nicholas Hawksmoor, and died here in 1714 from apoplexy brought on by overeating. The first two Georges lived at Kensington Palace. George III abandoned it in favor of Buckingham House (now Palace). But his fourth son, Edward Duke of Kent, did have apartments here. Queen Victoria was his daughter. The Archbishop of Canterbury and the Lord Chamberlain roused her from sleep here on June 27, 1837, with news of the death of her uncle, William IV, and her succession to the throne. That night was the first she had ever slept outside her mother’s room. Three weeks later, aged 18, she moved into Buckingham Palace.

Princess Margaret lived at Kensington Palace until her death in 2002. Today, the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester and Princess Michael of Kent have apartments there. Only the **State Apartments**, filled with art treasures from the Royal Collection, and the display of court fashions and uniforms from 1760 in the **Royal Ceremonial Dress Collection** are open to the public. See the Cupola Room, where Queen Victoria was baptized, and marvel at William Kent’s magnificent trompe l’oeils and paintings in the King’s Drawing Room, Presence Chamber, and on the King’s Staircase. The audio guide that comes with your ticket is a good way to self-guide yourself through the palace. And you can have lunch or tea in The Orangery (p. 114).

Kensington Gardens. © 020/7937-9561. www.hrp.org.uk. Admission £10 (\$16) adults, £7.50 (\$12) seniors and students, £6.50 (\$10) under-16s, £28 (\$45) family ticket. Nov–Feb daily 10am–5pm; Mar–Oct daily 10am–6pm. Tube: Queensway, High St. Kensington.

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Madame Tussaud's & the Planetarium *Overrated* Madame Tussaud had an extraordinary life. Born Marie Grosholtz, she learnt her craft from her mother's doctor employer, who had a talent for wax modeling. Such was her renown that Louis XIV and Marie Antoinette appointed her as their children's art tutor. In an ironic turn of events, in order to prove her loyalty to the revolution and get out of Laforce Prison, Marie had to make the royal couple's death masks after their executions in 1793. You can see several casts from her original molds—a spooky Voltaire, for instance—at this "museum." But most of its space is devoted to modern superstars of dubious fame, from Saddam Hussein to Mel Gibson (the staff once found a pair of ladies underpants in his pockets). Craftsmen take more than 200 measurements from each star sitter. And stars know they're on the wane when Tussaud's boils their figure down and uses the wax to make someone else. The dungeon-level Chamber of Horrors is the stuff tourist traps are made of. It "honors" psychopathic murderers like Charles Manson and Jack the Ripper, offers a rendition of Joan of Arc burning at the stake, and shows the grisly unmentionables done to Gunpowder Plotter Guy Fawkes. Madame Tussaud's is expensive and overrated, but it attracts more than 2.5 million visitors a year. So it has introduced a fast-track system whereby you pre-book time slots. Use it or you may end up queuing for longer than the 2 hours or so it takes to go round.

If you're into stars of the celestial variety, it's worth spending the extra couple of pounds for a combined ticket to Madame Tussaud's and the **London Planetarium** next door. This copper-domed London landmark is the largest planetarium in Europe. Its state-of-the-art Digistar II projection system re-creates an earth-based view of 9,000 stars and planets scattered across the night sky, and takes you on a *Starship Enterprise* journey past exploding nebulae right to the edge of the universe. There are also interactive exhibits to play with.

Marylebone Rd., NW1. ☎ 020/7935-6861 or 0870/400-3000 advance reservations. www.madame-tussauds.com. Madame Tussaud's £14.95 (\$24) adults, £11.80 (\$19) seniors, £10.50 (\$17) under-16s. Combined ticket with planetarium £16.95 (\$27) adults, £13.50 (\$22) seniors, £12 (\$19) under-16s. Madame Tussaud's: opening time varies by season and weekday or weekend (9, 9:30, and 10am), closing at 5:30pm. Planetarium daily 10am–5:30pm. Shows run every 40 min., 12:20–5pm, weekends/holidays from 10:20am. Closed Dec 25. Tube: Baker St.

National Gallery *★* Britain's national art collection comprises more than 2,300 paintings dating from 1260 to 1900, supplemented by masterpieces on loan from private collectors. The gallery is arranged in four time bands. The **Sainsbury Wing** shows work

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from 1260 to 1510 by such artists as Giotto, Botticelli, Leonardo da Vinci, Piero della Francesca, and Raphael. The **West Wing** takes on the next 90 years, with El Greco, Holbein, Bruegel, Michelangelo, Titian, and Veronese. The **North Wing** holds the 17th-century masters, Rubens, Poussin, Velázquez, Rembrandt, and Vermeer. Van Dyck's *The Abbé Scaglia* entered the collection in 1999, given by a private owner in lieu of inheritance tax. Works by Stubbs, Gainsborough, Constable, Turner, Canaletto, van Gogh, Corot, Monet, Manet, Renoir, and Cézanne are all in the **East Wing**. From May to September, the National Gallery lets natural daylight illuminate many of the paintings, particularly in the Sainsbury Wing, to magical effect—the colors are truer, and it cuts down on flare and shadow from the frames. You'll need to choose a sunny day for your visit, though, because artificial help steps in if it gets too gloomy. Weekday mornings and late on Wednesday are the quietest times.

There's a free (donation invited) audio guide to every painting on the main floor, and free guided tours start at 11:30am and 2:30pm every day, plus at 6:30pm on Wednesday evenings. Most of the gallery talks are also free. There are two eateries: the Crivelli's Garden Restaurant and Italian Bar (☎ 020/7747-2869) on the first floor of the Sainsbury Wing, and the Gallery Cafe sandwich cafe in the basement of the main building.

Trafalgar Square, WC2. ☎ 020/7747-2885. www.nationalgallery.org.uk. Main galleries free; Sainsbury wing, £3–£7 (\$6–\$11) for some special exhibitions. Daily 10am–6pm (Wed until 9pm). Closed Jan 1, Dec 24–26. Tube: Charing Cross, Leicester Sq.

Natural History Museum 🦖🦖 Kids It roars. It opens its jaws and moves its head. And it's the biggest hit the museum has ever had: a **robotic Tyrannosaurus Rex** hovering over a fresh dino-kill. It's worth a trip just to watch the 12-foot-tall toothy beast, driven by motion sensors, react to the appearance of each new human meal (not suitable for young kids). Before you see "T" you'll encounter two cunning-looking animatronic raptors eyeing you from atop a perch. All this takes place in a Victorian hall full of **dinosaur skeletons** and exhibitions about the life of the 'saurs. Head to the **Earth Galleries** for earthquake and volcano simulations that hint at the terror of the real thing. Kids also love the slithery and slimy critters in the **Creepie-Crawlies** exhibit.

Sir Hans Sloane was such a prolific collector that his treasures overflowed the British Museum. Hence the decision to build this palatial building (1881), with its towers, spires, and nave-like hall,

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fit “for housing the works of the Creator.” Yet it, too, can display only a fraction of its specimens—animal, vegetable, and mineral. An exciting project is set to revolutionize all that, opening both the storerooms and the science labs, with their 300 white-coated experts, to public view. The £28 million first phase of the Darwin Centre opened in summer 2002. The museum already has the new Clore Education Centre, where kids can use video microscopes and bug-hunting magnifying glasses, build their own websites, and take part in regular events. Highlight and themed tours start near the entrance to the Life Galleries.

Cromwell Rd., SW7. ☎ 0207942-5000. www.nhm.ac.uk. Free admission. Mon–Sat 10am–5:50pm; Sun 11am–5:50pm. Clore Education Centre Mon 10:30am–5pm (school holidays); Tues–Fri 2:30–5pm (term-time); Sat 10:30am–5pm; Sun 11:30am–5pm. Closed Dec 23–26. Tours: 45-min introduction to Life and Earth Galleries daily, £3 (\$5) adults, £1.50 (\$2.40). Tube: South Kensington.

St. Paul's Cathedral ✠ No one who saw the wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana in 1981 will ever forget the image of the royal carriages approaching St. Paul's. In 2002, the Queen had a ceremony of thanksgiving here to celebrate her Golden Jubilee.

This magnificent cathedral is 515 feet long and 360 feet high to the cross on the famous dome, which dominated the skyline until ugly office buildings rose around it after World War II. Christopher Wren laid out the whole base first to thwart interference from his paymasters, who harassed him constantly over the 35 years it took to complete the building (1675–1710). Wren was buried in the crypt; his epitaph reads: “*Lector, si monumentum requiris, circumspice*” (“Reader, if you seek his monument, look around you”). Many artists worked on the decoration, most notably Grinling Gibbons, who carved the choir screens and stalls. Frescoes depicting the life of St. Paul line the inner dome. You can see them best from the **Whispering Gallery**, famous for its amazing acoustics, which can project a murmur right across the void. A second steep climb leads to the Stone Gallery, and a third to the highest Inner Golden Gallery. In all, it's 530 steps to the top, with the views ever more awe-inspiring.

Ninety-minute “Supertours” of the cathedral and crypt take place at 11, 11:30am, 1:30, and 2pm, and cost £2.50 (\$4) for adults, £2 (\$3.20) concessions, £1 (\$1.60) children, plus admission. Audio guides are available in five languages until 3pm: £3.50 (\$6) for adults, £3 (\$4.80) seniors and students. “Triforium” tours take in the library, geometric staircase, the West End gallery, and Trophy

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Room where Wren's Great Model is on display. Tickets are £11 (\$18), including admission. Call Monday to Friday, 9am to 4pm, to book. There are often organ recitals at 5pm on Sunday, at no charge. Fuel up at the Crypt Café first.

St. Paul's Churchyard, EC4. ☎ **020/7246-8348** or 020/7246-8319. www.stpauls.co.uk. Admission £6 (\$10) adults, £5 (\$8) students and seniors, £3 (\$4.80) under-16s. Mon–Sat 8:30am–4pm; Sun for worship only. Tube: St. Paul's, Mansion House.

Science Museum ★★ *Kids* This is one of the best science museums in the world. The striking new £45 million **Wellcome Wing** houses six new exhibitions presenting the latest developments in science, medicine, and technology. Find out what the kids might look like in 30 years in the **Who am I?** gallery. For a more intimate portrait, check out the gory digital cross-sections in **The Visible Human Project**. This is fantasyland for gadget geeks, who'll love all the interactivity. There's a 450-seat IMAX cinema on the first floor and another huge new gallery, **Making the Modern World**, links the Wellcome Wing to the old museum. Using some of the most iconic treasures of the permanent collection—the Apollo 10 space capsule, an early train known as Stephenson's Rocket, and a fleece from famous Scottish clone, Dolly the Sheep—it charts 250 years of technological discoveries and their effects on our culture.

The new galleries are stunning, but don't let them dazzle you into forgetting the rest of this marvelous museum. It is home to many pioneering machines: Arkwright's spinning machine, for instance, and the Vickers "Vimy" aircraft, which made the first Atlantic crossing in 1919. The basement is dedicated to children, with water, construction, sound and light shows, and games for 3 to 6 year olds in the **garden**, and the **Launch Pad** for 7 to 15 year olds. Of course, the Wellcome Wing is even more ambitious: its first-floor **Pattern Pod** aims to convert kids to science from the age of 3 months!

Exhibition Rd., SW7. ☎ **020/7942-4000** or 0870/870-4771. www.sciencemuseum.org.uk. Free admission. Daily 10am–6pm. Closed Dec 24–26. Tube: South Kensington.

Somerset House ★★ The late Queen Mother once remarked how sad it was that the courtyard at Somerset House had become an Inland Revenue car park. It was just the spur needed by the long-running campaign to open up the 1,000-room civil service palace, designed by Sir William Chambers (1724–96), to the public. The government moved its workers out and the Heritage Lottery Fund coughed up the millions needed to restore the buildings, the courtyard with its new fountains, and the river terrace, where there's now

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a summer cafe (it's cheaper than the new restaurant indoors). A heady mix of high culture and street entertainment, the "new" Somerset House contains three major museums and hosts a program of open-air performances, talks, and workshops (☎ 020/7845-4670, box office). The restoration is proceeding in phases and you can already visit the **Seamen's Waiting Hall**, where naval officers came to collect their commissions. The 45-minute tours at 11am and 3:15pm on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday cost £2.75 (\$4.40).

The **Courtauld Gallery** ☎ (☎ 020/7848-2526; www.courtauld.ac.uk) has been in Somerset House since 1989. Its chief benefactor, textile mogul Samuel Courtauld, collected impressionist and post-impressionist paintings, which are still the gallery's main strength—Manet's *Bar at the Folies Bergères*; Monet's *Banks of the Seine at Argenteuil*; *Lady with Parasol* by Degas; *La Loge* by Renoir; Van Gogh's *Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear*; and several Cézannes, including *The Card Players*. But you'll find work by most great names (lots of Rubens), right up to modern greats Ben Nicholson, Graham Sutherland, and Larry Rivers. At noon on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, 1-hour tours cost £7.50 adults (\$12), £7 (\$11) concessions.

The **Gilbert Collection** ☎☎ (☎ 020/7420-9400; www.gilbert-collection.org.uk) is also in the South Building, as well as in the vaults beneath the river terrace. The glittering gold, silver, and mosaics were valued at £75 million when Arthur Gilbert donated the 800-piece collection to the nation in 1996. There are objects here from Princess Diana's old home, Althorp. The 1-hour tour on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday costs £5.50 (\$9) adults, £5 (\$8) concessions.

The last and most extraordinary of the treasures of Somerset House are the **Hermitage Rooms** ☎ (☎ 020/7845-4630; www.hermitagerooms.com). This offshoot of the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg exhibits pieces from the Russian Imperial collections in changing shows. The Russians are so desperate for money that they're "lending" their national treasures to this and similar museums around the world. Half the tickets are sold in advance (☎ 020/7413-3398; www.ticketmaster.co.uk), half at the door, for half-hourly timed entry.

Strand, WC2. ☎ 020/7845-4600. www.somerset-house.org.uk. Somerset House free. Courtauld Gallery £5 (\$8) adults, £4 (\$6) seniors, free under-18s; free Mon 10am–2pm. Gilbert Collection £5 (\$8) adults, £4 (\$6) seniors, free under-18s. Hermitage Rooms £6 (\$10) adults, £4 (\$6) concessions, free under-5s. Same-day admission to 2 collections,

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save £1 (\$1.60), all 3, save £2 (\$3.20). Courtyard 7:30am–11pm (7pm in winter). Galleries and exhibitions daily 10am–6pm (last admittance 45 min–1 hr earlier). Closed Jan 1, Dec 24–26. Tube: Temple, Covent Garden, Charing Cross.

Tate Britain ★★ The new Tate Modern at Bankside hogs most of the limelight, but the shifting around of the Tate collections has also seen a huge overhaul at the original gallery, founded in 1897. The refurbished Tate Britain reopened in November 2001 with more exhibition space and a suite of airy new galleries. Having handed International Modernism over to Bankside, Tate Britain now concentrates on British work dating back to 1500. It ditched the chronological displays for a thematic approach. **Art Now** focuses on new media and experimental work by foreign artists living in London and Brits based here and abroad; **Private and Public** includes portraits and scenes of daily life; **Artists and Models** explores nudes and self-portraiture; **Literature and Fantasy** is for visionary artists such as William Blake and Stanley Spencer; and **Home and Abroad** looks at the landscape artist at home and abroad. Juxtaposing very different kinds of work isn't always successful, but the vibrancy of the place can't help but give you a rush. Important artists, like Gainsborough, Constable, Hogarth, and Hockney, get their own rooms, which should pacify the traditionalists.

Guided tours, gallery talks (Mon–Fri 11:30am, 2:30, and 3:30pm, and Sun 3pm), auditorium lectures, and films are mostly free. Tate Britain also has shops, a good cafe and espresso bar, and a well-regarded but pricey restaurant.

Millbank, SW1. ☎ 020/7887-8000, 020/7887-8888 for events. www.tate.org.uk. Permanent collection free; temporary exhibitions £6.50–£8.50 (\$10–\$14). Daily 10am–5:50pm. Closed Dec 24–26. Tube: Pimlico. River services: Millbank Pier.

Tate Modern ★★★ The Tate Modern, London's new and wildly popular cathedral of modern art, occupies the defunct Bankside Power Station on the South Bank of the Thames opposite St. Paul's Cathedral. Except for a 2-story glass addition on the roof, the vast bunker-like facade looks much as it ever did, right down to the London grime. Then you enter the building, down a ramp into the huge old turbine hall, left empty, and three floors of ultra-plain white galleries. The work is arranged thematically rather than chronologically: **Landscape/Matter/Environment**, **Still Life/Object/Real Life**, **History/Memory/Society**, and **Nude/Action/Body**. In some rooms, paintings are next to sculptures next to installations. Others are devoted to a single artist—like the marvelous Joseph Beuys sculptures. The display concept is certainly challenging, but the themes

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often seem spurious, lacking the quirky spirit of a mixed private collection where one person's taste is the guide.

There's no such thing as a flash visit to Tate Modern. Set aside half a day if you can. Free guided tours start daily at 10:30, 11:30am, 2:30, and 3:30pm, each focusing on one of the four themes. There's also a busy talks program (usually £6/\$10; free talks weekdays at 1pm); music; and children's workshops and storytelling sessions. But if you only do one thing at Tate Modern, go up to the glass-roofed level seven to see the spectacular views across the Thames. The cafe there is often mobbed so time your visit for early mealtimes and during the week. It is also open for dinner until 9:30pm on Friday and Saturday but doesn't take reservations.

Bankside, SE1. ☎ **020/7887-8000**, 020/7887-8888 for events. www.tate.org.uk. Permanent collection free; temporary exhibitions £5.50–£8.50 (\$9–\$14). Sun–Thurs 10am–6pm; Fri–Sat 10am–10pm; galleries open at 10:15am. Closed Dec 24–26. Tube: Southwark, Mansion House, St. Paul's (cross over Millennium Bridge). River services: Bankside Pier.

Tower of London ★★ ★ *Kids* This is the most perfectly preserved medieval fortress in Britain and you'll need at least 2 or 3 hours for your visit, especially since the restored New Armouries building has opened as a delicious and good-value cafe.

Over the centuries, the Tower has served as a palace and royal refuge; a prison, military base, and supplies depot; home to the Royal Mint and the Royal Observatory; and finally, a national monument. It has only twice come into practical use since the late 19th century: in World War I, 11 spies were executed here; then, in World War II, Rudolph Hess was a prisoner here for 4 days, and another spy was executed. The oldest part is the massive **White Tower**, built in 1078 by the Norman king, William the Conqueror, to protect London and discourage rebellion among his new Saxon subjects. Every king after him added to the main structure, so that when Edward I completed the outer walls in the late 13th century, they enclosed an 18-acre square. Walk round the top of them for a bird's-eye view of how the Tower of London would have looked in its heyday.

The **Crown Jewels**, glittering in the Jewel House in Waterloo Barracks, are the real must-see. No words can do justice to the Imperial State Crown, encrusted with 3,200 precious stones, including a 317-carat diamond. A moving walkway is meant to keep visitors flowing through, but it can still be a long wait. The **Martin Tower** exhibition tells the stories of two of the world's most famous diamonds, the

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Koh-i-Noor and Cullinan II, as well as of a botched attempt to steal the State regalia in the late 17th century.

Visitors with a more ghoulish bent should start at **The Chapel Royal of St. Peter ad Vincula**, which contains the graves of all the unfortunates executed at the Tower. The Scaffold Site, where the axeman dispatched seven of the highest-ranking victims, including Henry VIII's wives, Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard, is just outside. Everyone else met their end on **Tower Green**. Imagine their terror as they arrived by boat at the dread **Traitors' Gate**. The **Bloody Tower** was where Richard of Gloucester locked up his young nephews while he usurped his crusading brother Edward IV. The princes' bodies were later mysteriously found by the White Tower. Today, an exhibit re-creates how Sir Walter Raleigh might have lived during his 13-year imprisonment after the Gunpowder Plot against James I.

The royal menagerie moved out in 1834 to form the new London Zoo—all except the **ravens**. Legend has it Charles II was told that if they ever left the Tower the monarchy would fall. Ever since, a few birds with clipped wings have been kept in a lodging next to Wakefield Tower, looked after by a yeoman warder. The **yeoman warders**, or Beefeaters, have guarded the Tower for centuries. Now usually retired soldiers, they lead tours every half hour from 9:30am to 3:30pm and give vivid talks at 9:30, 10:15, 11:30am, 2:15, 4:30, and 5:15pm (the first one on Sun is at 10:30am). Costumed guides also re-create historic happenings.

As well as the daily **Ceremony of the Keys**, there's a schedule of State events and gun salutes. Call for info. **Beating the Bounds** takes place every third year on Ascension Day, the Thursday 40 days after Easter. The Chief Yeoman Warder leads 31 choirboys around the 31 parish boundary marks in the surrounding streets, beating each one with willow wands, to signal the Tower's independence from the jurisdiction of the city. Now *that's* tradition.

Tower Hill, EC3. © 0870/756-6060 or 0870/756-7070 (box office). www.hrp.org.uk. Admission £11.50 (\$18) adults, £8.75 (\$14) students and seniors, £7.50 (\$12) under-16s, £34 (\$54) family ticket. Mar–Oct Tues–Sat 9am–6pm, Sun–Mon 10am–6pm; Nov–Feb Tues–Sat 9am–5pm, Sun–Mon 10am–5pm. Last tickets sold 1 hr. before closing. Last entry to buildings 30 min. before closing. Closed Jan 1, Dec 24–26. Tube: Tower Hill. DLR: Tower Gateway. River services: Tower Pier.

Victoria & Albert Museum ★★ Even the staff drop bread crumbs to find their way around this labyrinthine treasure house. Recent plans to extend the 7 miles of galleries devoted to the decorative and fine arts with an ultra-modern, and ultra-controversial,

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new building by Daniel Libeskind had to be scaled down, but the **British Galleries** reopened in late 2001 after a £31-million overhaul. The revamped galleries reflect a new, non-traditional approach to museum curatorship: instead of showing off dazzling treasures protected in glass cases, there are pieces to handle, video re-creations of how they were used, and commentaries on taste by historical figures and today's top designers. Iconic objects, such as the Great Bed of Ware, which Shakespeare mentions in *Twelfth Night*, tell the story of Britain's 400-year rise (1500–1900) to world power and cultural authority.

Once you've "done" the British Galleries, you'll want to cherry-pick the highlights from the rest of the V&A's collections: the designer dresses in the **Costume Gallery**, textiles, sculpture, furniture, prints, paintings, photographs, silver, glass, ceramics, and jewelry, from Britain and all over the world. Not only is the museum worth a good long visit, but there are so many regular activities you'll want to keep coming back. Free guided tours take place daily every hour, 10:30am to 3:30pm, plus 4:30pm on Wednesday.

Cromwell Rd., SW7. ☎ 020/7942-2000, 020/7942-2209 events. www.vam.ac.uk. Free admission. Thurs–Tues 10am–5:45pm; Wed and last Fri each mo. 10am–10pm. Closed Dec 24–26. Tube: South Kensington.

Westminster Abbey ★★★ This ancient building is neither a cathedral nor a parish church, but a "royal peculiar," under the jurisdiction of the dean and chapter, and subject only to the sovereign. It's also one of the most popular tourist attractions in London and tends to be packed in the high-tourist summer months.

Largely dating from the 13th to 16th centuries, Westminster Abbey has played a prominent part in British history—most recently with the funeral of Princess Diana and, in 2002, of the Queen Mother. All but two coronations since 1066 have taken place here. The oak **Coronation Chair**, made in 1308 for Edward I, can be seen in the **Chapel of Edward the Confessor**. From 1266 when the English seized it until 1998 when it was finally returned to St. Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh, the coronation chair held the ancient Stone of Scone, on which the kings of Scotland were crowned. Visit the **Norman Undercroft** to see the replica coronation regalia.

Five kings and four queens, including half-sisters Queen Elizabeth I and Mary Tudor and Elizabeth's rival for the throne, Mary Queen of Scots, are buried in the beautiful, fan-vaulted **Chapel of Henry VII**.

In 1400, Geoffrey Chaucer became the first literary celebrity to be buried in **Poets' Corner**—in his case, though, it was because he

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worked for the abbey. Ben Jonson is there, as well as Dryden, Samuel Johnson, Sheridan, Browning, and Tennyson. The practice of putting up literary memorials began in earnest in the 18th century with a full-length figure of Shakespeare, but the sinner Oscar Wilde didn't get a memorial window until 1995.

The **Tomb of the Unknown Soldier** honors the fallen of World War I. The nameless man lies under Belgian stone in soil brought back from the battlefields of France. Above the West Door, on the outside, you'll see the tradition of commemoration still continues with the **statues of 20th-century martyrs** such as Martin Luther King and Maximilian Kolbe, the Catholic priest who died at Auschwitz.

Guided tours of the abbey, lead by the vergers, cost £3 (\$4.80). These start at 10, 10:30, 11am, 2, 2:30, and 3pm during the week April through October; at 10, 11am, 2, and 3pm on winter weekdays; and at 10, 10:30, and 11am on Saturday year-round. It's best to reserve ahead. Audio guides are only £2 (\$3.20). With both, you get discounted entry to the **Chapter House** (1245–55) in the east cloister, the nearby **Pyx Chamber**, and the **Abbey Museum**, all of which are now administered by the English Heritage organization. Call to find out if any concerts are scheduled; hearing music in this space is a memorable experience. *Note:* The Pyx Chamber and Abbey Museum were closed as of press time, but will hopefully reopen in 2004.

Dean's Yard, SW1. © 020/7222-5152, 020/7222-5897 Chapter House, or 020/7233-0019 Pyx Chamber and Abbey Museum. www.westminster-abbey.org. Admission £5 (\$7.20) adults, £3 (\$4.35) seniors and students, £2 (\$2.90) under-16s, £10 (\$14.50) family ticket. Chapter House, Pyx Chamber, and Abbey Museum £2.50 (\$3.65) adults, £1.90 (\$2.75) seniors and students, £1.30 (\$1.90) under-16s; reduced with Abbey admission, free with guided and audio tour. Cloisters, College Garden, St. Margaret's Church free. Abbey Mon–Fri 9:30am–4:45pm; Sat 9:30am–2:45pm; last admission 1 hr. before closing, Sun for worship. Chapter House Apr–Sept 9:30am–5:30pm; Oct 10am–5pm; Nov–Mar 10am–4pm. Pyx Chamber and Abbey Museum daily 10:30am–4pm. Cloisters 8am–6pm. College Garden Apr–Sept 10am–6pm; Oct–Mar 10am–4pm. St. Margaret's Church Mon–Fri 9:30am–3:45pm; Sat 9:30am–1:45pm; Sun 2–5pm. Tube: Westminster.

3 More Museums, Galleries & Historic Buildings

Apsley House, The Wellington Museum ⚡ Once known as “No. 1 London” because it was the first house outside the tollgate, Apsley House has been the magnificent city residence of the dukes of Wellington since 1817. (The name comes from its first owner, the Earl of Bathurst, Baron Apsley.) Wellington moved in on his

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return from a triumphant military career in India, Spain, and Portugal, culminating in the victory at Waterloo. He entertained extravagantly, dining off the gorgeous Sèvres Egyptian Service that Napoléon had commissioned for Josephine, and a vast silver Portuguese service with a 26-foot-long centerpiece. Wellington's heroic military success earned him lavish gifts as well as royal respect. No wonder the original Robert Adam house (1771–78) had to be enlarged to house the duke's treasures. Today, it is crammed with silver, porcelain, sculpture (note the nude glamorized statue of Napoléon by Canova on the main staircase), furniture, medals, hundreds of paintings by Velázquez, Goya, Rubens, Brueghel, and other masters. It's one of the few great London town houses where such collections remain intact and the family is still in residence: The eighth Duke of Wellington and his son have private apartments.

149 Piccadilly, Hyde Park Corner, W1. © 020/7499-5676. www.apsleyhouse.org.uk. Admission (includes audio guide) £4.50 (\$7) adults, free seniors and under-18s. Tues–Sun 11am–5pm. Closed Jan 1, Good Friday, May 1, and Dec 24–26. Tube: Hyde Park Corner (exit 3).

Cabinet War Rooms ✨ ✨ This warren of underground rooms served as Prime Minister Winston Churchill's nerve center and the secret HQ of the British government during World War II. It is preserved exactly as it was back then: the Cabinet Room, where the PM, his ministers, and military men made their crucial decisions; the Map Room, where they plotted out the progress of the war; the Telephone Room, where so many calls were placed to and received from FDR; even the PM's Emergency Bedroom. In 1995, the Heritage Lottery Fund bought the Churchill Papers for the nation. The core of the collection is held in Cambridge, but there are always pieces on display here. It is eerie and oddly exciting imagining the great man and his staff living their tense subterranean life.

Clive Steps, King Charles St., SW1. © 020/7760-0121. www.iwm.org.uk. Admission £5.80 (\$9) adults, £4.20 (\$7) students and seniors, free under-16s. Apr–Sept daily 9:30am–6pm, Oct–Mar daily 10–6pm; last admission 5:15pm. Closed Dec 24–26. Tube: Westminster, St. James's Park.

British Library ✨ ✨ If you love English literature, make it a point to visit the British Library, housed in a new building in St. Pancras designed by Colin St. John Wilson and opened in 1998. This is the national research library responsible for Britain's printed archive. Legally, publishers must send in one copy of everything they produce. The library has three exhibition spaces. The **John Ritblat Gallery** displays the permanent collection of treasures brought from

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the library's old home, the British Museum: the *Magna Carta*, Shakespeare's first folio, the handwritten manuscript of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, and dozens of others. Throughout, there are audio stations where visitors can listen to poets and writers reading from their works—James Joyce from *Finnegan's Wake*, for example, or Virginia Woolf giving a lecture on the BBC. Truly amazing, though, are the interactive exhibits that allow you to flip through an illuminated manuscript, such as Leonardo's *Notebooks*. A second gallery is used for temporary exhibitions, and the third, The Workshop of Words, Sounds & Images, traces the history of book production from the earliest written documents to the current digital revolution—and there are regular free book-craft demonstrations. Also in the busy events schedule are free Monday lunchtime talks, based on the collections, and Friday lunchtime author visits and discussions held in the excellent British Library shop. There's also a very pleasant and reasonably priced cafeteria, right next to a six-story glass tower that houses George III's library, given to the nation in 1823.

96 Euston Rd., NW1. © 020/7412-7332. www.bl.uk. Free admission. Galleries and public areas Mon and Wed–Fri 9:30am–6pm; Tues 9:30am–8pm; Sat 9:30am–5pm; Sun 11am–5pm. Tours of public areas: Mon, Wed, Fri 3pm, Sat 10:30am and 3pm; tickets £6 (\$10) adults, £4.50 (\$7) seniors and students. Tours including a reading room: Tues 6:30pm, Sun 11:30am and 3pm; tickets £7 (\$11), £5.50 (\$9) seniors and students. Tube: Euston, King's Cross.

The Dickens House Museum This terraced house on the edge of Bloomsbury was home to Victorian London's quintessential chronicler for only 2 years (1837–39). In that time, though, the prolific Dickens produced some of his best-loved works, including a portion of *The Pickwick Papers*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, and *Oliver Twist*. His letters, furniture, and first editions are on display in rooms restored to their original appearance.

48 Doughty St., WC1. © 020/7405-2127. www.dickensmuseum.com. Admission £4 (\$6) adults, £3 (\$4.80) students and seniors, £2 (\$3.20) children, £9 (\$14) families. Mon–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun 11am–5pm. Tube: Russell Sq., Chancery Lane.

Imperial War Museum ★★ *Kids* The IWM excels in explaining and re-creating 20th-century conflicts, to honor those who fought in them and to make sure they never happen again. A clock in the basement keeps a grim tally of the human cost of war—over 100 million people now. The Holocaust Exhibition, opened in 2000, continues that tradition. Four years in the making, it uses historical material—a funeral cart from the Warsaw Ghetto, victims' diaries and photograph albums, part of a deportation railcar—to tell the

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story of Nazi persecution. Eighteen survivors have given their testimony, while other exhibits explain the spread of anti-Semitism across Europe after the First World War. This exhibit is not recommended for under-14s. Life in the trenches during World War I is the subject of another exhibit, as is the Blitz of World War II, which dramatically re-enacts an air raid with special effects, sound, and scents—clinical disinfectant, dusty old buildings, burnt wood, and cooking at the tea stands serving the rescuers. The curators, who collect a lot of witness reminiscences, say that smells are often the strongest memories. So they often use them to heighten reality, like the cheesy feet and body odor in the simulated submarine, which kids will love. There are tales of espionage and dirty tricks in the Secret War section, plus a German Enigma machine, invisible ink, and a re-creation of the SAS operation to break the Iranian Embassy siege in 1980. *Women and War* is scheduled to open in Fall 2003 and run through Summer 2004. Call to find out about gallery talks, history evenings, and children's workshops.

Lambeth Rd., SE1. ☎ 020/7416-5320. www.iwm.org.uk. Free admission. Daily 10am–6pm. Closed Dec 24–26. Tube: Lambeth North, Waterloo.

London Transport Museum ⚙️ ⚙️ *Kids* This enjoyable museum, in the old Covent Garden flower market, traces the 200-year history of public transport in London, from the days when cabs were horse-drawn. Like a Noah's Ark for machinery, it has examples of just about everything Londoners have used to get around, from omnibuses to trams to Tube trains, as well as paintings, posters, working models, and interactive exhibits. Kids love it. Actors play characters like a 1906 tunnel miner and a World War II clippie (bus conductor). There's lots of stuff to pull and push. The museum even organizes guided London tours, with a transport bent, on the river, Tube, or bus (£10/\$16). The shop is terrific, selling models, posters, and other original gifts.

The London Transport Museum can only display about 400 of the 370,000 items in its massive collection, so it has taken over a defunct Tube shed in West London for storage and as somewhere to work on conservation. On the last Friday of the month, there are guided tours of **The Depot**. Tickets cost £10 (\$16), and you must book ahead. There are also a few open weekends each year, when you can explore the main shed and its vehicles, machinery, signs, and shelters, as well as enjoy the stalls and themed displays. Tickets cost £6.95 (\$11). No need to book, just call for dates and take the Tube to Acton Town.

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The Piazza, Covent Garden, WC2. ☎ 020/7565-7299 recorded info, or 020/7379-6344. www.ltmuseum.co.uk. Admission £5.95 (\$10) adults, £3.95 (\$6) seniors and students, free under-16s. Sat–Thurs 10am–6pm; Fri 11am–6pm (last admission 45 min. before closing). Closed Dec 24–26. Tube: Covent Garden, Charing Cross.

Museum of London ★★ Kids The first phase of this museum's 5-year redevelopment plan was the opening of the new **World City Gallery**, which opened in 2001 and traces London's development between 1789 and 1914 into the first great metropolis of the industrial age. In 2002, **London Before London** opened and rewound history to look at life before the Romans, when hippos and elephants roamed Trafalgar Square.

Not only is this the biggest and most comprehensive city museum in the world, but it is genuinely engaging and creative. Among the highlights are a reconstruction of a Roman interior; a bedroom in a merchant's house from the Stuart period; the lord mayor's coach; a brilliant, audio-visual, dioramic presentation on the Great Fire with a voiceover reading diarist Samuel Pepys' account; a Victorian barber's shop; and the original elevators from Selfridges department store. The museum's archaeologists get called in at the start of most big building projects in London and their finds generally go on display once the study and conservation process is completed. Every year, there are three big temporary exhibitions, often looking at the social culture of the modern city. Many of the resident experts take part in the talks, museum tours, and workshops program (ranging in cost from free to £5/\$8), as well as leading London walks and outside visits (£3–£10/\$4.80–\$16). In 2002, the “open-door” policy began at the museum's storage facility in East London. The huge former warehouse is like a 3-D reference library, with curators explaining their work and leading tours.

150 London Wall, EC2. ☎ 020/7600-3699. www.museumoflondon.org.uk. Free admission. Mon–Sat 10am–5:50pm; Sun noon–5:50pm; last admission 5:30pm. Tube: St. Paul's, Moorgate, Barbican.

National Portrait Gallery ★★ Celebrity vanity and the paparazzo spirit are clearly nothing new, evidenced by this gallery of 10,000 paintings and 250,000 photographs. The portrait gallery charts the history of the nation through its famous faces. The curators have consigned Helmut Newton's portrait of Margaret Thatcher, among others, to the historical section, to make room for such nanosecond icons as David Beckham (Posh Spice's footballer husband) and mega-bucks celeb J. K. Rowling, author of *Harry Potter*. The flow through the gallery is much improved by the bright white

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Ondaatje Wing, built in a courtyard pinched from the neighboring National Gallery. The permanent collection is displayed chronologically. You'll find Henry VII, Henry VIII, and Sir Thomas More, all painted by Holbein; the only extant portrait of Shakespeare; and T. S. Eliot by Sir Jacob Epstein. There are endearing amateur daubs, too, including one of Jane Austen by her sister, and the three talented Brontë sisters painted by their untalented brother Branwell. Temporary exhibitions take on big themes and single artists.

The NPG puts on free lectures and events, on a huge range of topics, on Tuesday and Thursday lunchtimes and weekend afternoons. Thursday evening lectures mostly start at 7pm (free—£3/\$4.80). On Friday at 6:30pm, there are free musical events. As well as the cafe, there is the stunning **Portrait Restaurant & Bar** (☎ 020/7312-2490), looking out across the rooftops from under the Ondaatje Wing's glass roof.

St. Martin's Place, WC2. ☎ 020/7306-0055. www.npg.org.uk. Free admission; Special exhibitions £5 (\$8) adults, £3 (\$4.80) seniors and students. Sat—Wed 10am—6pm; Thurs—Fri 10am—9pm. Closed Jan 1, Good Friday, Dec 24—26. Tube: Leicester Sq., Charing Cross.

Saatchi Gallery Charles Saatchi certainly knows how to create a sensation. He was the force behind the ultra-controversial show of the same name (Sensation) that was shown at the Brooklyn Museum and caused city officials to wet their pants in fury. In our opinion a lot of the Saatchi collection is self-publicizing crap. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't have a look at the art trends of the second. The ex-adman Saatchi has amassed one of the largest independent collections of contemporary British and international art in the world. He is famous for launching new British artists and for creating brand trends (Neurotic Realism). In April 2003, after a predictable flurry of publicity, the Saatchi Gallery moved to County Hall (former home of the Greater London Council) on the south bank, right next to the British Airways London Eye observation wheel. It exhibits art from its own collections and also hosts exhibitions from other international collections and museums.

County Hall, Southbank, SE1. ☎ 020/7825-2363. www.saatchigallery.org.uk. Admission £8.50 (\$14), £6.50 (\$11) seniors and students. Sun—Thurs 10am—6pm; Fri—Sat 10am—10pm. Tube: Waterloo, Westminster.

St. Martin-in-the-Fields ✨ This church is one of the best-loved in London. The current building dates from 1726. Designed by James Gibbs, the intricate plasterwork ceiling enhances the simple nave. Curiously, the parish boundary passes through the middle of

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Buckingham Palace, and the names of many royal children appear on the baptismal registry. St. Martin's is famous for its music: Handel played the organ here, though not the current 3,637-pipe instrument, which was installed in 1990. There are free concerts at 1:05pm on Monday, Tuesday, and Friday. Evening recitals take place from Thursday to Saturday. Many are by candlelight, and the program leans heavily toward the baroque. The choral music during the three Sunday services is sublime. Evensong is the most quintessentially Anglican, usually at 5pm, but call ahead for specific times.

In the crypt of St. Martin's is the **London Brass Rubbing Centre**, which has replicas of about 100 medieval and Tudor church brasses as well as unusual Celtic patterns and early woodcuts of the zodiac. Materials and instruction are provided, and it's great fun. If you have time, take a break for tea or a delicious meal at the **Café in the Crypt** (p. 105).

Trafalgar Sq., WC2. ☎ 020/7766-1100 for church info, 020/7839-8362 for box office, or 020/7930-9306 London Brass Rubbing Centre. www.stmartin-in-the-fields.org. Free admission to church and lunchtime recitals; evening concerts £6–£17 (\$10–\$27). Brass rubbings £2–£15 (\$3.20–\$24), £1 (\$1.60) discount under-12s. Church daily 9am–6pm (except during services); London Brass Rubbing Centre Mon–Sat 10am–6pm, Sun noon–6pm. Tube: Charing Cross, Leicester Sq.

Sir John Soane's Museum ★★ The son of a bricklayer, Sir John Soane (1753–1837) apprenticed himself to George Dance the Younger and Henry Holland before opening an architectural practice of his own. He married into great wealth and began collecting the objects displayed in this house, which he both designed and lived in. It's a marvelous hodgepodge, stuffed full of architectural fragments, casts, bronzes, sculpture, and cork models. The sarcophagus of Seti I (Pharaoh 1303–1290 B.C.) is also here. Soane used colored glass and mirrors to create reflections of architectural details and other dramatic effects—magical during evening opening when the rooms are candlelit. The collection includes works by Turner, three Canalettos, and two series of paintings by Hogarth, *An Election* and *The Rake's Progress*. Others, including a wonderful group of Piranesi drawings, are ingeniously hung behind movable panels in the Picture Room. Meanwhile, the gallery displays changing exhibitions from Soane's collection of over 30,000 architectural drawings, which includes works by Dance, Sir Christopher Wren, Sir William Chambers, and Robert and James Adam. There's a tour every Saturday at 2:30pm. Tickets cost £3 (\$4.80) and go on sale half an hour before. Be early—there are only 22 spaces.

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13 Lincoln's Inn Fields, WC2. ☎ 020/7405-2107. www.soane.org. Free admission (£1 (\$1.60) donation requested). Tues–Sat 10am–5pm; first Tues of each month also 6–9pm. Tube: Holborn.

Wallace Collection ✨ According to the terms of Lady Wallace's bequest, this collection must remain "unmixed with other objects of art." So the collection remains a perfect time capsule of 19th-century Anglo-French taste. Sir Richard Wallace was the illegitimate heir of the Marquis of Hertford, and the fifth generation to add to the acquisitions of exquisite furniture, armor, paintings, and decorative arts in the family's London home. There's much to delight the eye—Sèvres porcelain, Limoges enamels, 17th-century Dutch paintings, 18th-century French (Watteau, Fragonard, and Boucher) and British art, and Italian majolica. The new sculpture garden and cafe under a glass roof covering the internal courtyard is a real boon. For free tours, come at 1pm any weekday, 11:30am on Wednesday and Saturday, or 3pm on Sunday.

Hertford House, Manchester Sq., W1. ☎ 020/7563-9500. www.the-wallace-collection.org.uk. Free admission. Mon–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun noon–5pm. Closed Dec 24–26, Jan 1, Good Fri, May Day. Tube: Bond St.

4 Especially for Kids

The top kid-picks are: touring the **Tower of London**, seeing the **Changing of the Guard** at Buckingham Palace, taking a "flight" in the **British Airways London Eye**, climbing aboard old Tube trains at the **London Transport Museum**, and quaking in front of the life-size animatronic T-Rex in the ever-popular Dinosaur exhibit at the **Museum of Natural History**. **Madame Tussaud's** is always a hit. You should also try the **London Brass Rubbing Centre** in the crypt at St. Martin-in-the-Fields.

Little Angel Theatre This magical theater is the only one like it in London. It puts on a huge variety of puppet shows from fairy tales to adaptations of children's books, by its own company and visiting masters of the art. Performances take place on weekends at 11am and 3pm, from late July through August, and during half-terms and school holidays. It's not for children under 3, and every show is designated for a specific age group.

14 Dagmar Passage, Islington, N1. ☎ 020/7226-1787. www.littleangeltheatre.com. Tickets £5.50–£8 (\$10–\$13). Box office Sat–Mon 9am–5pm; Tues–Fri 9:30am–5:30pm. Tube: Angel, Highbury, Islington.

London Dungeon ✨ This state-of-the-art horror chamber has huge appeal for kids with a taste for the gruesome and ghoulish, but

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it will frighten the little ones, so be careful. You have to deal with things like warty actors with wild hair leaping out at you in the dark. The dungeon re-enacts the goriest events from British history: one bloody night in the life of Jack the Ripper, the passing of a death sentence that sends you by barge through Traitors' Gate at the Tower of London, a medieval city ransacked by invaders, a roaring red tableau of the Great Fire of London, and so on. Rank smells and a smoke machine ratchet up the atmosphere. Much more fun than Madame Tussaud's.

28–34 Tooley St., SE1. ☎ 09001/600-0666. www.thedungeons.com. Admission £10.95 (\$18) adults, £9.50 (\$15) students, £6.95 (\$11) under-15s (must be accompanied by an adult). Apr–Sept daily 10am–6:30pm; Oct–Mar daily 10am–5:30pm; late openings July–Aug. Closed Dec 25. Tube: London Bridge. River services: London Bridge City Pier.

London Zoo Animal experts from the zoo went on safari in north London last year after a reported sighting of a Big Cat, which turned out to be an endangered European lynx. They rushed it back to hospital to recover from its adventure. London Zoo already looks after more than a hundred endangered species. It also takes part in 146 breeding programs, so there are always cute baby animals to see, as well as the perennial favorites: penguins, lions, tigers, hippos, chimps, and so on. There's something going on every hour of the day, from chow-time to the elephants' bath-time, so pick up a copy of the daily guide. The newest attraction is Web of Life, a state-of-the-art education center promoting conservation and biodiversity. The zoo opened in 1827 and is like a 36-acre architectural theme park.

Regent's Park, NW1. ☎ 020/7722-3333. www.londonzoo.co.uk. Admission £11 (\$18) adults, £9 (\$14) seniors and students, £8 (\$13) children 3–15, £30 (\$48) family. Daily Mar–Oct 10am–5:30pm, Nov–Feb 10am–4pm. Closed Dec 25. Tube: Camden Town. London Waterbus: From Camden Lock or Little Venice; for joint boat trip/zoo entry tickets, see "Boat Trips," below.

5 Parks & Gardens

Behind Kensington High Street, **Holland Park** is a pretty oasis of woods and gardens set around the ruins of Holland House. That's where the open-air theater and opera (☎ 020/7602-7856; see chapter 7) take place in the summer. Take the Tube to High Street Kensington or Holland Park.

Hyde Park (☎ 020/7298-2100) is the largest (350 acres) and most popular of all London's parks. The aptly named Serpentine Lake, created in the 1730s, is its most notable feature. On Sundays, the northeast corner near Marble Arch becomes **Speaker's Corner**.

Anyone can stand on a soapbox here and spout their opinions and grievances.

Kensington Gardens (☎ 020/7298-2117) abuts the western perimeter of Hyde Park. Laid out in the early 18th century, the trees, lawns, and criss-crossed paths stretch over to Kensington Palace (p. 124) on the opposite side. There, you can wander around the sunken gardens, enjoy a bite at the Orangery, and wile away the time on a bench near the Round Pond, where enthusiasts make their model boats buzz between the ducks. Near the Long Water, you'll find the famous bronze statue of Peter Pan with his rabbits. And, on the south side of the park, near Queen's Gate, is the overpoweringly neo-gothic Albert Memorial.

Regent's Park (☎ 020/7486-7905) was once Henry VIII's private hunting ground but it was formally laid out in 1811 by the Prince Regent and John Nash as part of an elaborate remodeling of London. Now, it's the people's playground. Besides the zoo, Regent's Park is famous for the boating lake, summer open-air theater (☎ 020/7486-2431, brass band concerts on Holme Green, and Queen Mary's Rose Garden.

Opposite Buckingham Palace, **St. James's Park**, The Mall (☎ 020/7930-1793), is perhaps the most beautiful of all of London's parks. It was landscaped by Le Notre and John Nash. The famous lake and Duck Island are a waterfowl sanctuary for lots of species, including pelicans, descendants of a feathered present given by a 17th-century Russian ambassador.

Named for its absence of flowers (except for a short time in spring), **Green Park** (☎ 020/7930-1793) provides ample shade from tall trees that make it an ideal picnic bower.

6 Organized Tours

GUIDED WALKS

The **Original London Walks**, P.O. Box 1708, London NW6 4LW (☎ 020/7624-3978, or 020/7625-9255; www.walks.com), has been going since 1965. It boasts an unrivalled schedule of themed tours, from spies to royalty to rock-'n'-roll legends, all led by experts, actors, and top Blue Badge guides. You can even go on a historic Thames-side pub crawl. The famous "Jack the Ripper" walk leaves daily at 7:30pm from Tower Hill Tube station. Tours cover up to 1½ miles and take around 2 hours: £5 (\$8) adults, £4 (\$6) seniors and students. No need to book.

BUS TOURS

The Big Bus Company (☎ 020/7233-9533; www.bigbus.co.uk) leaves from Green Park, Victoria, and Marble Arch daily, from 8:30am to 7pm (4:30pm in winter) on three different routes that take anything from 1½ to 2½ hours. Tickets include a river cruise and walking tours, and cost £16 (\$26) for adults and £6 (\$10) children. Valid for 24 hours, they let you hop on and off at 54 locations.

BOAT TRIPS

The fabulously loopy **London Frog Tours** (☎☎ 020/7928-3132; www.frogtours.com) has adapted several World War II amphibious troop carriers and now runs 80-minute road and river trips. Tours start behind County Hall (site of the British Airways London Eye giant observation wheel). You're picked up on Chicheley Street, then rumble through Westminster and up to Piccadilly before the vehicle splashes into the Thames at Vauxhall for a 30-minute cruise up as far as the Houses of Parliament. The high ticket price of £16.50 (\$26) for adults, £13 (\$21) seniors, £11 (\$18) children, and £49 (\$78) for families is worth it in vacation-snap value alone.

Crown River Cruises (☎ 020/7936-2033) run boats from Westminster to St. Katherine's Dock, stopping by the South Bank Centre and London Bridge, from 11am to 6:30pm in summer (until 3pm in winter). A return ticket costs £6.30 (\$10) for adults, £5.30 (\$8) seniors, and £3.15 (\$5) under-16s. The round-trip takes 1 hour but the ticket is valid all day, so you can hop on and off to sightsee.