

Planning Your Trip to London

If your documents are in order, flying into London is one of the most effortless undertakings in global travel. There are no shots to get, no particular safety precautions, no unusual aspects of planning a trip. With your passport, airline ticket, and enough money, you just go. In general, if you're not bringing any illegal item into the British Isles, Customs officials are courteous and will speed you through entry into their country.

Of course, before you lift off the ground in your native country, you can do some advance preparation as will be detailed in this chapter and in the appendix. That could mean checking to see if your passport is up-to-date (or obtaining one if you don't already possess one), or taking care of your health needs before you go, including medication. In the case of London, you might want to make reservations at some highly acclaimed restaurants or even buy tickets in advance to hit plays in London's West End.

In the pages that follow, you'll find everything you need to know about the practicalities of planning your trip in advance.

1 Visitor Information

Before you go, you can obtain general information from **Visit Britain** (www.visitbritain.com):

- In the United States: 551 Fifth Ave., 7th Floor, New York, NY 10176-0799 (☎ **800/462-2748** or 212/986-2266).
- In Canada: Call ☎ **888/VISITUK** (847-4885).
- In Australia: Level 2, 15 Blue St., North Sydney 2060 (☎ **02/9021-4400**).
- In New Zealand: Fay Richwite Blvd., 17th Floor, 151 Queen St., Auckland (☎ **0800/700-741**).

For a full information package on London, write to **Visit London**, 2 More London Riverside, 6th Floor, Bermondsey SE1 2RR (☎ **020/7234-5800**; www.visitlondon.co.uk).

The London Tourist Board's **London Visitor Centre**, 1 Lower Regent St., London SW1Y 4XT (☎ **8701/566-366**; www.visitlondon.com; Tube: Piccadilly Circus), can help you with almost anything, from the most superficial to the most serious. Located within a 10-minute walk from Piccadilly Circus, it deals chiefly with procuring accommodations in all price categories through an on-site travel agency (www.lastminute.com), and you can also book transit on British Rail or with bus carriers throughout the U.K. There's a kiosk for procuring theater or group tour tickets, a bookshop loaded with titles dealing with travel in the British Isles, a souvenir shop, and a staff that's pleasant, helpful, and friendly. It's open year-round Monday 9:30am to 6:30pm, Tuesday to Friday 9am to 6:30pm, and Sunday 9am to 5pm. Between October and May, Saturday hours are 10am to 4pm, and between June and September, Saturday hours are 9am to 5pm.

A roughly equivalent organization that was conceived to help foreign visitors with their inquiries and confusion about London is the **London Information Centre**, at Leicester Square, W1 (☎ **020/7292-2333**; www.londoninformationcentre.com; Tube: Leicester Sq.). The London Information Centre is a privately owned, commercially driven organization that may have a vested interest in steering you toward a particular venue.

An option that might help you navigate your way through the logistics of one of the world's biggest cities involves your call to ☎ **0800/LONDON** (566-366) for city information and to book sometimes discounted rates for London hotels, theaters, sightseeing tours, and airport transfers. A sales staff is available daily from 8am to midnight.

WHAT'S ON THE WEB? The most useful site was created by a very knowledgeable source, the British Tourist Authority itself, with U.S. visitors targeted. A wealth of information can be tapped at **www.visitbritain.com**, which lets you order brochures online, provides trip-planning hints, and even allows e-mail questions for prompt answers. All of Great Britain is covered.

Go to **www.baa.com** for a guide and terminal maps for Heathrow, Gatwick, and Stansted airports, including flight arrival times, duty-free shops, airport restaurants, and info on getting from the London airports to downtown London. Getting around London can be confusing, so you may want to visit **www.tfl.gov.uk** for up-to-the-minute info. For the latest on London's theater scene, consult **www.officiallondontheatre.co.uk**. For directions to specific places in London, consult **www.streetmap.co.uk**.

MAPS At www.multimap.com, you can access detailed street maps of the whole United Kingdom—just key in the location or even just the postal code, and a map of the area with the location circled will appear. For directions to specific places in London, consult www.streetmap.co.uk.

2 Entry Requirements

PASSPORTS

To enter the United Kingdom, all U.S. citizens, Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders, and South Africans must have a passport valid through their length of stay. No visa is required. A passport will allow you to stay in the country for up to 6 months. The immigration officer will also want proof of your intention to return to your point of origin (usually a round-trip ticket) and of visible means of support while you're in Britain. If you're planning to fly from the United States or Canada to the United Kingdom and then on to a country that requires a visa (India, for example), you should secure that visa before you arrive in Britain.

Your valid driver's license and at least 1 year of driving experience are required to drive personal or rented cars.

For information on how to get a passport, see "Passports" in the "Fast Facts: London" section of the appendix (p. 195). The websites listed provide downloadable passport applications as well as the current fees for processing passport applications. For an up-to-date, country-by-country listing of passport requirements around the world, go to the "Foreign Entry Requirement" Web page of the U.S. Department of State at www.travel.state.gov.

CUSTOMS

WHAT YOU CAN BRING INTO BRITAIN

Non-E.U. nationals 18-plus can bring in, duty-free, 200 cigarettes, or 100 cigarillos, or 50 cigars, or 250 grams of smoking tobacco. This amount is doubled if you live outside Europe. You can also bring in 2 liters of wine and either 1 liter of alcohol more than 22% or 2 liters of wine less than 22%. In addition, you can bring in 60cc (2 oz.) of perfume, a quarter liter (250mL) of eau de toilette. Visitors 15 and older may also bring in other goods totaling £145 (\$290); the allowance for those 14 and younger is £73 (\$146). (Customs officials tend to be lenient about general merchandise, realizing the limits are unrealistically low.)

You can't bring your pet to Britain. Six months' quarantine is required before it is allowed in. An illegally imported animal may be destroyed.

WHAT YOU CAN TAKE HOME FROM BRITAIN

U.S. Citizens

For specifics on what you can bring back and the corresponding fees, download the invaluable free pamphlet *Know Before You Go* online at www.cbp.gov. Or contact the **U.S. Customs & Border Protection (CBP)**, 1300 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20229 (☎ 703/526-4200), and request the pamphlet.

Canadian Citizens

For a clear summary of Canadian rules, write for the booklet *I Declare*, issued by the **Canada Border Services Agency** (☎ 800/461-9999 in Canada, or 204/983-3500; www.cbsa-asfc.gc.ca).

U.K. Citizens

For information, contact **HM Revenue & Customs** at ☎ 0845/010-9000 (from outside the U.K., 02920/501-261), or consult their website at www.hmrc.gov.uk.

Australian Citizens

A helpful brochure available from Australian consulates or Customs offices is *Know Before You Go*. For more information, call the **Australian Customs Service** at ☎ 1300/363-263, or log on to www.customs.gov.au.

New Zealand Citizens

Most questions are answered in a free pamphlet available at New Zealand consulates and Customs offices: *New Zealand Customs Guide for Travellers, Notice no. 4*. For more information, contact **New Zealand Customs Service**, The Customhouse, 17–21 Whitmore St., Box 2218, Wellington (☎ 04/473-6099 or 0800/428-786; www.customs.govt.nz).

3 When to Go

THE WEATHER

Yes, it rains, but you'll rarely get a true downpour—it's heaviest in November (2½ in. on average). British temperatures can range from 30° to 110°F (−1° to 43°C), but they rarely drop below 35°F (2°C) or go above 78°F (26°C). Evenings are cool, even in summer. Note that the British, who consider chilliness to be wholesome, like to keep the thermostats about 10°F below the American comfort level.

Hotels have central heating systems, which are usually kept just above the goose bump (in Britspeak, “goose pimple”) margin.

LONDON CALENDAR OF EVENTS

For an exhaustive list of events beyond those listed here, check <http://events.frommers.com>, where you'll find a searchable, up-to-the-minute roster of what's happening in cities all over the world.

January

January Sales. Most shops offer good reductions at this time. Many sales start as early as late December to beat the post-Christmas slump.

London Parade. Bands, floats, and carriages contribute to the merriment as the parade wends its way from Parliament Square to Berkeley Square in Mayfair. January 1. Procession starts around noon.

March

Oranges and Lemons Service, at St. Clement Danes, the Strand, WC2. As a reminder of the nursery rhyme “Bells of St. Clements,” children are presented with the fruits during the church service, and the church bells ring out the rhyme (part of which is “Oranges and Lemons, Say the bells of St. Clements”) at 9am, noon, and 6pm; call ☎ **020/7242-8282**; www.st-clement-danes.co.uk for information. Third week of March.

April

Easter Parade. Floats, marching bands, and a full day of Easter Sunday activities enliven Battersea Park. Free. Easter Sunday.

Flora London Marathon. Thirty thousand competitors run from Greenwich Park to Buckingham Palace. Call ☎ **020/7902-0200** or visit www.london-marathon.co.uk for more information or to register for the marathon. Mid- to late April.

The **Queen's Birthday.** The Queen's birthday is celebrated with 21-gun salutes in Hyde Park and by troops in parade dress on Tower Hill at noon. April 21.

National Gardens Scheme. More than 3,000 private gardens in London are open to the public on set days, and tea is sometimes served. Pick up the NGS guidebook from most bookstores, or contact the National Gardens Scheme Charitable Trust, Hatchlands Park, East Clandon, Guildford, Surrey GU4 7RT (☎ **014/8321-1535**; fax 014/8321-1537; www.ngs.org.uk). Late April to early May.

May

The **Royal Windsor Horse Show**, Home Park, Windsor Castle, outside London. You might spot a royal at this multiday horse-racing and horse-showing event. Call ☎ **01753/860-633** or visit www.royal-windsor-horse-show.co.uk for more details. Mid-May.

Chelsea Flower Show, Chelsea Royal Hospital. This show exhibits the best of British gardening, with displays of plants and flowers from all seasons. The show runs from 8am to 8pm. Tickets must be purchased in advance; they are available through the Royal Horticultural Society (www.rhs.org.uk). Call ☎ **0845/260-5000** for information. Four days in May.

June

Trooping the Colour. This is the Queen's official birthday parade, a quintessential British event, with exquisite pageantry and pomp as she inspects her regiments and takes their salute, while they parade their colors before her at the Horse Guards Parade, Whitehall. Tickets for the parade and two reviews, held on preceding Saturdays, are allocated by ballot. Applicants must write between January 1 and the end of February, enclosing a self-addressed stamped envelope or International Reply Coupon to the Ticket Office, HQ Household Division, Horse Guards, Whitehall, London SW1X 6AA. Tickets are free. The ballot is held in mid-March, and only successful applicants are informed in April. Call ☎ **020/7414-2479**; www.trooping-the-colour.co.uk for more details. Held on a day designated in June (not necessarily the Queen's actual birthday).

Lawn Tennis Championships, Wimbledon, London. Ever since players took to the grass courts at Wimbledon in 1877, this tournament has attracted quite a crowd, and there's still an excited hush and a certain thrill at Centre Court. Savor the strawberries and cream that are part of the experience. Early bookings for the world's most famous tennis tournament are strongly advised. Acquiring tickets and overnight lodgings during the annual tennis competitions at Wimbledon can be difficult to arrange independently. Two outfits that book both hotel accommodations and tickets to the event are **Steve Furgal's International Tennis Tours**, 11305 Rancho Bernardo Rd., Ste. 108, San Diego, CA 92127 (☎ **800/258-3664** or 858/675-3555; www.tours4tennis.com); and **Championship Tennis Tours**, 13951 N. Scottsdale Rd., Ste. 133, Scottsdale, AZ 85254 (☎ **800/468-3664** or 480/429-7700; www.tennistours.com). Tickets for Centre and Number One courts are obtainable through a lottery. Write in from August to December to **All England Lawn Tennis Club**, P.O. Box 98,

Church Road, Wimbledon, London SW19 5AE (☎ 020/8944-1066; www.wimbledon.org). Outside court tickets are available daily, but be prepared to wait in line. Late June to early July.

Shakespeare Under the Stars, Open Air Theatre, Inner Circle, Regent's Park, NW1 4NU. If you want to see *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, or *Romeo and Juliet* (or any other Shakespeare play), our advice is to bring a blanket and a bottle of wine to watch the Bard's works performed at the Open Air Theatre. Performances are Monday through Saturday at 8pm, plus Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturday at 2:30pm. Call ☎ 0844/826-4242 or visit www.openairtheatre.org.uk for more information and to buy tickets. There is an on-site box office, but it's best to purchase tickets in advance. Previews begin in late June, and the season lasts until early September.

July

Kenwood Lakeside Concerts, north side of Hampstead Heath. Fireworks and laser shows enliven the excellent performances at these annual outdoor concerts on Hampstead Heath. Classical music drifts across the lake to the fans every Saturday and Sunday in summer from early July to late August. Call ☎ 020/7413-1443 for a schedule and information and to buy tickets. Tickets are popular, so buy yours in advance. Early July to late August.

Hampton Court Palace Flower Show, East Molesey, Surrey. This 5-day international flower show is eclipsing its sister show in Chelsea; here, you can purchase the exhibits on the last day. Call ☎ 0845/260-5000 or visit www.rhs.org.uk for exact dates and details. Early to mid-July.

The **Proms**, Royal Albert Hall. "The Proms"—the annual Henry Wood Promenade Concerts at Royal Albert Hall—attract music aficionados from around the world. Staged daily, the concerts were launched in 1895 and are the principal summer venue for the BBC Symphony Orchestra. Banners, balloons, and Union Jacks on parade contribute to the festive summer atmosphere. Call ☎ 020/7589-8212 or visit www.bbc.co.uk/proms for more information and for tickets. Tickets should be bought in advance. Mid-July to mid-September.

August

Notting Hill Carnival, Ladbroke Grove, London. Notting Hill is the setting for one of the largest annual street festivals in Europe, attracting more than half a million people. There's live reggae and soul music, plus great Caribbean food. Call ☎ 020/7727-0072, or see www.nottinghillcarnival.biz for information. Two days in late August.

September

Raising of the Thames Barrier, Unity Way, SE18. Once a year, in September, a full test is done on the flood barrier. All 10 of the massive steel gates are raised out of the river for inspection, and you can get a close look at this miracle of modern engineering. Call ☎ **020/8854-8888** for the exact date and time (usually a Sun near the end of Sept).

The **Ascot Festival**, Ascot, Berkshire, SL5 7JN. This is Britain's greatest horse-racing weekend, providing the grand finale to the summer season at Ascot. The 3-day "meeting" combines some of the most valuable racing of the year with other entertainment. A highlight of the festival is the £250,000 (\$500,000) Watership Down Stud Sales race restricted to 2-year-old fillies. Other racing highlights include the Queen Elizabeth II Stakes, with the winning horse crowned champion miler in Europe. To book tickets, call ☎ **0870/727-1234** or visit www.ascot.co.uk. Last weekend in September.

November

Guy Fawkes Night. On the anniversary of the Gunpowder Plot, an attempt to blow up King James I and his Parliament, huge bonfires are lit throughout the city and Guy Fawkes, the most famous conspirator, is burned in effigy. Free. Check *Time Out* for locations. November 5.

Lord Mayor's Procession and Show, from the Guildhall to the Royal Courts of Justice, in The City of London. This annual event marks the inauguration of the new lord mayor of The City of London. The Queen must ask permission to enter the City—a right jealously guarded by London merchants during the 17th century. You can watch the procession from the street; the show is by invitation only. Call ☎ **020/7222-4345** or visit www.lordmayorshow.org for more information. Second Saturday in November.

4 Money & Costs

London is becoming one of the most expensive cities on the planet, far more expensive than New York (Brits now view the Big Apple as a bargain basement). London is not as expensive as Tokyo or Oslo, but even an average hotel rate can cost £100 (\$200) or more—in many cases, much, much more.

You'll avoid lines at airport ATMs by exchanging at least some money—just enough to cover airport incidentals and transportation to your hotel—before you leave home (though don't expect the

exchange rate to be ideal). You can exchange money at your local American Express or Thomas Cook office or at your bank. American Express also dispenses traveler's checks and foreign currency via www.americanexpress.com or ☎ **800/673-3782**, but they'll charge a \$15 order fee and additional shipping costs.

POUNDS & PENCE

Britain's decimal monetary system is based on the pound (£), which is made up of 100 pence (written as "p"). Pounds are also called **quid** by Britons. There are £1 and £2 coins, as well as coins of 50p, 20p, 10p, 5p, 2p, and 1p. Bank notes come in denominations of £5, £10, £20, and £50.

As a general guideline, the price conversions in this book have been computed at the rate of £1 = \$2. Bear in mind, however, that exchange rates fluctuate daily.

ATMs & Cashpoints

ATMs are widely available in London. The easiest and best way to get cash away from home is from an ATM, sometimes referred to as a "cash machine" or a "cashpoint." The **Cirrus** (☎ **800/424-7787**; www.mastercard.com) and **PLUS** (☎ **800/843-7587**; www.visa.com) networks span the globe; look at the back of your bank card to see which network you're on, then call or check online for ATM locations at your destination. Be sure you know your personal identification number (PIN) and daily withdrawal limit before you depart.

There are problems involved in the use of ATMs. For example, if you make a mistake and punch your secret code wrong into the machine three times, that machine will swallow your card on the assumption that it is being fraudulently used.

Users with alphabetical rather than numerical PINS may be thrown off by the lack of letters on London cash machines. If your PIN is longer than four digits, check with your bank to see if you can use the first four digits or will you have to get a new number for use in Britain.

To get cash advance by using a credit card at an ATM, ask for a PIN from your credit card company such as Visa before leaving your home country.

Note: Remember that many banks impose a fee every time you use a card at another bank's ATM, and that fee can be higher for international transactions (up to \$5 or more) than for domestic ones (where they're rarely more than \$2). In addition, the bank from which you withdraw cash may charge its own fee. For international withdrawal fees, ask your bank.

CREDIT CARDS

Credit cards are another safe way to carry money, but their use has become more difficult, especially in London (see below). They also provide a convenient record of all your expenses, and they generally offer relatively good exchange rates. You can usually withdraw cash advances from your credit cards at banks or ATMs, provided you know your PIN. Keep in mind that you'll pay interest from the moment of your withdrawal, even if you pay your monthly bills on time. Also, note that many banks now assess a 1% to 3% "transaction fee" on **all** charges you incur abroad (whether you're using the local currency or your native currency).

There is almost no difference in the acceptance of a debit or a standard credit card.

Chip and PIN represents a change in the way that credit and debit cards are used. The program is designed to cut down on the fraudulent use of credit cards. More and more banks are issuing customers Chip and PIN versions of their debit or credit cards. In the future, more and more vendors will be asking for a four-digit personal identification or PIN that will be entered into a keypad near the cash register. In some cases, a waiter will bring a hand-held model to your table to verify your credit card.

Warning: Some establishments in London might not accept your credit card unless you have a computer chip imbedded in it. The reason? To cut down on credit card fraud.

Major Change in Credit Cards

In the interim between traditional swipe credit cards and those with an embedded computer chip, here's what you can do to protect yourself.

- Get a four-digit PIN from your credit card's issuing bank before leaving home. Or call the number on the back of each card and ask for a four-digit PIN.
 - Keep an eye out for the right logo displayed in a retailer's window. You want Visa or MasterCard, not Maestro, Visa Electron, or Carte Bleue.
 - Know that your AmEx card will work where an AmEx logo is displayed (but the card is not as widely accepted as Visa and MasterCard).
 - As a last resort, make sure you have enough cash to cover your purchase.
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More and more places in London are moving from the magnetic strip credit card to the new system of Chip and PIN. In the changeover in technology, some retailers have falsely concluded that they can no longer take swipe cards or signature cards that don't have PINs.

For the time being both the new and old cards are used in shops, hotels, and restaurants regardless of whether they have the old credit and debit cards machines or the new Chip and PIN machines installed. Expect a lot of confusion when you arrive in England or elsewhere.

TRAVELER'S CHECKS

You can buy traveler's checks at most banks, and they are widely accepted in London, although frankly merchants prefer cash. Because of difficulties with credit cards (see above) or ATMs that can reject your card for no apparent reason, travelers are once again buying traveler's checks for security in case something goes wrong with their plastic. They are offered in denominations of \$20, \$50, \$100, \$500, and sometimes \$1,000. Generally, you'll pay a service charge ranging from 1% to 4%.

The most popular traveler's checks are offered by **American Express** (☎ 800/528-4800, or 800/221-7282 for cardholders—this number accepts collect calls, offers service in several foreign languages, and exempts AmEx gold and platinum cardholders from the 1% fee); **Visa** (☎ 800/732-1322)—AAA members can obtain Visa checks for a \$9.95 fee (for checks up to \$1,500) at most AAA offices or by calling ☎ 866/339-3378; and **MasterCard** (☎ 800/223-9920).

American Express, Thomas Cook, Visa, and MasterCard offer **foreign currency traveler's checks**, which are useful if you're traveling to one country, or to the euro zone; they're accepted at locations where dollar checks may not be.

If you carry traveler's checks, keep a record of their serial numbers separate from your checks in the event that they are stolen or lost—you'll get your refund faster.

5 Specialized Travel Resources

TRAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES

Many London hotels, museums, restaurants, and sightseeing attractions have wheelchair ramps, less so in rural England. Persons with disabilities are often granted special discounts at attractions, called "concessions" in Britain, and, in some cases, nightclubs. Free information and advice is available from **Holiday Care Service**,

The Hawkins Suite, Enham Place, Andover SP11 6JS (☎ 0845/124-9971; fax 0845/124-9972; www.holidaycare.org.uk).

Many bookstores in London carry *Access in London* (www.accessinlondon.org; £12/\$24), a publication listing facilities for persons with disabilities, among other things.

The transport system, cinemas, and theaters are still pretty much off-limits, but **Transport for London** publishes a leaflet called *Access to the Underground*, which gives details of elevators and ramps at individual Underground stations; call ☎ 020/7222-1234 or visit www.tfl.gov.uk. And **London Black Cab** (☎ 0845/108-3000; www.londonblackcab.com) is perfectly suited for those in wheelchairs; the roomy interiors have plenty of room for maneuvering.

London's most visible organization for information about access to theaters, cinemas, galleries, museums, and restaurants is **Artsline**, 54 Chalton St., London NW1 1HS (☎ 020/7388-2227; fax 020/7383-2653; www.artsline.org.uk). It offers free information about wheelchair access, theaters with hearing aids, tourist attractions, and cinemas. Artsline mails information to North America, but it's more helpful to contact Artsline once you arrive in London; the line is staffed Monday to Friday 9:30am to 5:30pm.

Many travel agencies offer customized tours and itineraries for travelers with disabilities. **Flying Wheels Travel** (☎ 507/451-5005; www.flyingwheelstravel.com) offers escorted tours and cruises that emphasize sports and private tours in minivans with lifts. **Access-Able Travel Source** (☎ 303/232-2979; www.access-able.com) offers extensive access information and advice for traveling around the world with disabilities. **Accessible Journeys** (☎ 800/846-4537 or 610/521-0339; www.disabilitytravel.com) caters specifically to slow walkers and wheelchair travelers and their families and friends.

Organizations that offer assistance to travelers with disabilities include **MossRehab** (☎ 800/CALL-MOSS [2255-6677]; www.mossresourcenet.org), which provides a library of accessible-travel resources online; the **American Foundation for the Blind (AFB)**; ☎ 800/232-5463 or 212/502-7600; www.afb.org), a referral resource for the blind or visually impaired that includes information on traveling with Seeing Eye dogs; and **SATH** (Society for Accessible Travel & Hospitality; ☎ 212/447-7284; www.sath.org), which offers a wealth of travel resources for all types of disabilities and informed recommendations on destinations, access guides, travel agents, tour operators, vehicle rentals, and companion services. **AirAmbulanceCard.com** (☎ 877/424-7633) allows you to pre-select top-notch hospitals in case of an emergency.

The “Accessible Travel” link at **Mobility-Advisor.com** (www.mobility-advisor.com) offers a variety of travel resources to persons with disabilities.

Check out the quarterly magazine *Emerging Horizons* (www.emerginghorizons.com), published by SATH.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

London has one of the most active gay and lesbian scenes in the world. Gay bars, restaurants, and centers are plentiful.

Lesbian and Gay Switchboard (☎ 020/7837-7324; www.ligs.org.uk) is open 24 hours a day, providing information about gay-related activities in London or advice in general. London’s best gay-oriented bookstore is **Gay’s the Word**, 66 Marchmont St., WC1N 1AB (☎ 020/7278-7654; www.gaystheword.co.uk; Tube: Russell Sq.), the largest such store in Britain. The staff is friendly and helpful and will offer advice about the ever-changing scene in London. It’s open Monday through Saturday from 10am to 6:30pm and Sunday from 2 to 6pm. At Gay’s the Word and other gay-friendly venues, you can find a number of publications, many free, including the popular *Boyz*. Another free publication is *Pink Paper* (with a good lesbian section), and check out *9X*, filled with data about new clubs and whatever else is hot on the scene.

The **International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association** (IGLTA; ☎ 954/630-1637; www.iglta.org) is the trade association for the gay and lesbian travel industry, and offers an online directory of gay and lesbian-friendly travel businesses.

Many agencies offer tours and travel itineraries specifically for gay and lesbian travelers. **Above and Beyond Tours** (☎ 800/397-2681; www.abovebeyondtours.com) is a gay and lesbian tour operator. **Now, Voyager** (☎ 800/255-6951; www.nowvoyager.com) is a well-known San Francisco-based gay-owned and -operated travel service. **Gay.com Travel** (☎ 415/834-6500; www.gay.com/travel or www.outandabout.com) is an excellent online successor to the popular *Out & About* print magazine. It provides regularly updated information about gay-owned, -oriented, and -friendly lodging, dining, sightseeing, nightlife, and shopping establishments in every important destination worldwide.

The following travel guides are available at many bookstores, or you can order them from any online bookseller: *Spartacus International Gay Guide* (Bruno Gmünder Verlag; www.spartacusworld.com) and *Odyseus: The International Gay Travel Planner* (Odyseus

Enterprises, Ltd.); and the *Damron* guides (www.damron.com), with separate, annual books for gay men and lesbians.

For more gay and lesbian travel resources, visit frommers.com.

SENIOR TRAVEL

Many discounts are available to seniors. Be advised that in Britain you often have to be a member of an association to get discounts. Public-transportation discounts, for example, are available only to holders of British Pension books. However, many attractions do offer discounts for seniors (women 60 or older and men 65 or older). Even if discounts aren't posted, ask if they're available.

If you're 61 and older, you're eligible for special 10% discounts on **British Airways (BA)** through its Privileged Traveler program. You also qualify for reduced restrictions on APEX cancellations. Discounts are also granted for BA tours and for intra-Britain air tickets booked in North America. **BritRail** offers seniors discounted rates on first-class rail passes around Britain.

Don't be shy about asking for discounts, but carry some kind of identification that shows your date of birth. Also, mention you're a senior when you make your reservations. Many hotels offer seniors discounts. In most cities, people 61 and older qualify for reduced admission to theaters, museums, and other attractions, and discounted fares on public transportation.

Members of **AARP**, 601 E St. NW, Washington, DC 20049 (☎ **888/687-2277**; www.aarp.org), get discounts on hotels, airfares, and car rentals. AARP offers members a wide range of benefits, including *AARP The Magazine* and a monthly newsletter. Anyone 51 and older can join.

Many reliable agencies and organizations target the 50-plus market. **Elderhostel** (☎ **800/454-5768**; www.elderhostel.org) arranges worldwide study programs for those ages 55 and older.

Recommended publications offering travel resources and discounts for seniors include the quarterly magazine *Travel 50 & Beyond* (www.travel50andbeyond.com); *Unbelievably Good Deals and Great Adventures That You Absolutely Can't Get Unless You're Over 50* (McGraw-Hill), by Joann Rattner Heilman.

Frommers.com offers more information and resources on travel for seniors.

AFRICAN-AMERICAN TRAVELERS

Black Travel Online (www.blacktravelonline.com) posts news on upcoming events and includes links to articles and travel-booking

sites. **Soul of America** (www.soulofamerica.com) is a comprehensive website, with travel tips, event and family-reunion postings, and sections on historically black beach resorts and active vacations.

Agencies and organizations that provide resources for black travelers include **Rodgers Travel** (☎ 888/823-1775; www.rodgerstravel.com). For more information, check out the following collections and guides: *Go Girl: The Black Woman's Guide to Travel & Adventure* (Eighth Mountain Press), a compilation of travel essays; *The African American Travel Guide* by John Haggins; *Steppin' Out* by Carla Labat (Avalon); and *Pathfinders Magazine* (☎ 215/438-2140; www.pathfinderstravel.com), which includes articles on everything from Rio de Janeiro to Ghana, as well as information on upcoming ski, dive, golf, and tennis trips.

SINGLE TRAVELERS

Many people prefer traveling alone, and for independent travelers, solo journeys offer infinite opportunities to make friends and meet locals. Unfortunately, if you like resorts, tours, or cruises, you're likely to get hit with a "single supplement" to the base price. Single travelers can avoid these supplements, of course, by agreeing to room with other single travelers on the trip. An even better idea is to find a compatible roommate before you go, from one of the many roommate locator agencies.

Travel Buddies Singles Travel Club (☎ 800/998-9099; www.travelbuddiesworldwide.com), based in Canada, runs small, intimate, single-friendly group trips and will match you with a roommate free of charge and save you the cost of single supplements. **TravelChums** (☎ 212/787-2621; www.travelchums.com) is an Internet-only travel-companion matching service with elements of an online personals-type site, hosted by the respected New York-based Shaw Guides travel service.

Many reputable tour companies offer singles-only trips. **Singles Travel International** (☎ 877/765-6874; www.singlestravelintl.com) offers singles-only trips to London. **Backroads** (☎ 800/462-2848; www.backroads.com) offers more than 160 active trips to 30 destinations worldwide, including England.

For more information on traveling single, go to www.frommers.com.

6 Staying Connected

TELEPHONES

To call England from North America, dial **011** (international code), **44** (Britain's country code), the local area codes (usually three or four digits and found in every phone number we've given in this book), and the local phone number. The local area codes found throughout this book all begin with "0"; you drop the "0" if you're calling from outside Britain, but you need to dial it along with the area code if you're calling from another city or town within Britain. For calls within the same city or town, the local number is all you need.

For **directory assistance** in London, dial ☎ **142**; for the rest of Britain, ☎ **192**.

There are three types of **public pay phones**: those taking only coins, those accepting only phone cards (called Cardphones), and those taking both phone cards and credit cards. At coin-operated phones, insert your coins before dialing. The minimum charge is 10p (20¢).

Phone cards are available in four values—£2 (\$4), £4 (\$8), £10 (\$20), and £20 (\$40)—and are reusable until the total value has expired. Cards can be purchased from newsstands and post offices. Finally, the credit card pay phone—Access (MasterCard), Visa, American Express, and Diners Club—is most common at airports and large railway stations.

To make an **international call** from Britain, dial the international access code (**00**), then the country code, then the area code, and finally the local number. Or call through one of the following long-distance access codes: **AT&T USA Direct** (☎ 1800/CALL-ATT [2255-288]), **Canada Direct** (☎ 0800/890016), **Australia** (☎ 0800/890061), and **New Zealand** (☎ 0800/890064). Common country codes are: USA and Canada, **1**; Australia, **61**; New Zealand, **64**; and South Africa, **27**.

For calling **collect** or if you need an international operator, dial ☎ **155**.

Caller beware: Some hotels routinely add outrageous surcharges onto phone calls made from your room. Inquire before you call! It may be a lot cheaper to use your own calling-card number or to find a pay phone.

CELLPHONES

The three letters that define much of the world's wireless capabilities are GSM (Global System for Mobiles), a big, seamless network that

makes for easy cross-border cellphone use throughout England and dozens of other countries worldwide. In general reception is good. But you might need a Scriber Identity Module (SIM) card. This is a small chip specific for England that plugs you into a regional network. In the U.S., T-Mobile, AT&T Wireless, and Cingular already use this quasi-universal system—just call your provider or go online to register your phone, and you'll be able to make calls while abroad. In Canada, Microcell and some Rogers customers are GSM, and all Europeans and most Australians use GSM. Unfortunately, per-minute charges can be high—usually \$1 to \$1.50 in western Europe and up to \$5 in many international destinations. Calls to the U.S. average 70p (\$1.40) per minute.

For many, **renting** a phone is a good idea. Even worldphone owners will have to rent new phones if they're traveling to non-GSM regions. While you can rent a phone from any number of overseas sites, including kiosks at airports and at car-rental agencies, we suggest renting the phone before you leave home. North Americans can rent one before leaving home from **InTouch USA** (☎ 800/872-7626 or 703/222-7161; www.intouchglobal.com) or **RoadPost** (☎ 888/290-1616 or 905/272-5665; www.roadpost.com). InTouch will also, for free, advise you on whether your existing phone will work overseas.

Buying a phone can be economically attractive, as many nations have cheap prepaid phone systems. Once you arrive at your destination, stop by a local cellphone shop and get the cheapest package; you'll probably pay less than \$100 for a phone and a starter calling card. Local calls may be as low as 10¢ per minute, and in many countries incoming calls are free.

Wilderness adventurers might consider renting a **satellite phone** (*satphone*). It's different from a cellphone in that it connects to satellites and works where there's no cellular signal or ground-based tower. You can rent satellite phones from RoadPost (see above). InTouch USA (see above) offers a wider range of satphones but at higher rates. Per-minute call charges can be even cheaper than roaming charges with a regular cellphone, but the phone itself is more expensive. Satphones are outrageously expensive to buy, so don't even think about it.

INTERNET & E-MAIL WITH YOUR OWN COMPUTER

More and more hotels, cafes, and retailers are signing on as Wi-Fi (wireless fidelity) "hot spots." Mac owners have their own networking

technology: Apple AirPort. **T-Mobile Hotspot** (www.t-mobile.com/hotspot or www.t-mobile.co.uk) serves up wireless connections at coffee shops nationwide. **Boingo** (www.boingo.com) and **Wayport** (www.wayport.com) have set up networks in airports and high-class hotel lobbies. iPass providers (see below) also give you access to a few hundred wireless hotel lobby setups. To locate other hot spots that provide **free wireless networks** in cities in England, go to www.jiwire.com.

For dial-up access, most business-class hotels offer dataports for laptop modems, and a few thousand hotels in England now offer free high-speed Internet access. In addition, major Internet service providers (ISPs) have **local access numbers** around the world, allowing you to go online by placing a local call. The **iPass** network also has dial-up numbers around the world. You'll have to sign up with an iPass provider, who will then tell you how to set up your computer for your destination(s). For a list of iPass providers, go to www.ipass.com and click on "Individuals Buy Now." One solid provider is **i2roam** (☎ **866/811-6209** or 920/233-5863; www.i2roam.com).

Wherever you go, bring a **connection kit** of the right power and phone adapters, a spare phone cord, and a spare Ethernet network cable—or find out whether your hotel supplies them to guests.

WITHOUT YOUR OWN COMPUTER

To find cybercafes check www.cybercaptive.com and www.cybercafe.com. Cybercafes are found in all large U.K. cities, especially London. But they do not tend to cluster in any particular neighborhoods because of competition. They are spread out, but can be found on almost every business street in London. **easyInternet cafes** (☎ **020/7241-9000**; www.easyeverything.com) has several Great Britain locations.

Aside from formal cybercafes, most **youth hostels** and **public libraries** have Internet access. Avoid **hotel business centers** unless you're willing to pay exorbitant rates.

Most major airports now have **Internet kiosks** scattered throughout their gates. These give you basic Web access for a per-minute fee that's usually higher than cybercafe prices.

7 Getting There

BY PLANE

The major airport for arrivals from North America is **Heathrow** (LHR) outside London. This is the hub of most airlines, including

British Airways and American carriers, and has the best transportation links to London. **Gatwick** (LGW) is the second major airport outside London, but it is much farther from the heart of the city, requiring longer and often more expensive hauls into the city.

Chances are you will not land at London's minor airports, certainly not if you're making a transatlantic crossing; however, you might land at one of these airports if you're winging in from the Continent. They include **Stansted** (STN), **London City** (LCY), **London Luton** (LTN), and **London Southend** (SEN).

THE CARRIERS

British Airways (☎ 800/247-9297; www.britishairways.com) offers flights from 19 U.S. cities to Heathrow and Gatwick airports, as well as many others to Manchester. Nearly every flight is nonstop. With more add-on options than any other airline, British Airways can make a visit to Britain cheaper than you may have expected. Ask about packages that include both airfare and discounted hotel accommodations in Britain.

Known for consistently offering excellent fares, **Virgin Atlantic Airways** (☎ 800/821-5438; www.virgin-atlantic.com) flies daily to either Heathrow or Gatwick from Boston, Newark, New York's JFK, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Washington's Dulles, Miami, Orlando, and Las Vegas.

American Airlines (☎ 800/433-7300; www.aa.com) offers daily flights to Heathrow from half a dozen U.S. gateways—New York's JFK, Chicago, Boston, Miami, Los Angeles, and Dallas.

Depending on the day and season, **Delta Air Lines** (☎ 800/221-1212; www.delta.com) runs either one or two daily nonstop flights between Atlanta and Gatwick. Delta also offers nonstop daily service from Cincinnati.

Northwest Airlines (☎ 800/225-2525 or 800/447-4747; www.nwa.com) flies nonstop from Minneapolis and Detroit to Gatwick.

Continental Airlines (☎ 800/231-0856; www.continental.com) has daily flights to London from Cleveland, Houston, Newark, Orlando, and San Francisco.

United Airlines (☎ 800/241-6522; www.united.com) flies nonstop from New York's JFK and Chicago to Heathrow two or three times daily, depending on the season. United also offers nonstop service from Dulles Airport, near Washington, D.C.; Newark; Los Angeles; and San Francisco.

For travelers departing from Canada, **Air Canada** (☎ 888/247-2262; www.aircanada.com) flies daily to London's Heathrow

nonstop from Vancouver, Montreal, and Toronto. There are also frequent direct flights from Calgary, Ottawa, and St. John's. **British Airways** (☎ 800/247-9297) has direct flights from Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver.

For travelers departing from Australia, **British Airways** (☎ 1300/767-177) has flights to London from Sydney, Melbourne, Perth, and Brisbane. **Qantas** (☎ 612/131313; www.qantas.com) offers flights from Australia to London's Heathrow. Direct flights depart from Sydney and Melbourne. Some have the bonus of free stopovers in Bangkok or Singapore.

Departing from New Zealand, **Air New Zealand** (☎ 800/262-1234 in the U.S., or 0800/737-000 in New Zealand; www.airnz.co.nz) has direct flights to London from Auckland. These flights depart daily.

Short flights from Dublin to London are available through **British Airways** (☎ 800/247-9297), with four flights daily into London's Gatwick airport, and **Aer Lingus** (☎ 800/IRISH-AIR [47474-247]; www.aerlingus.com), which flies into Heathrow. Short flights from Dublin to London are also available through **Ryan Air** (☎ 35301/249-7791; www.ryanair.com) and **British Midland** (☎ 0870/6070555; www.flybmi.com).

8 Neighborhoods in Brief

While **Central London** doesn't formally define itself, most Londoners today would probably accept The Underground's Circle Line as a fair boundary.

The City (the financial district) is where London began; it's the original square mile that the Romans called *Londinium*, and it still exists as its own self-governing entity. Rich in historical, architectural, and social interest, the City is one of the world's great financial areas. Even though the City is jeweled with historic sights, it empties out in the evenings and on weekends, and there are lots of better places to stay if you are looking for a hopping nightlife scene.

The West End, where most of London's main attractions are found, is unofficially bounded by the Thames to the south, Farringdon Road/Street to the east, Marylebone Road/Euston Road to the north, and Hyde Park and Victoria Station to the west. Most visitors will spend their time in The West End, whether at Buckingham Palace, the British Museum, or the shops and theaters of Soho. You'll find the greatest concentration of hotels and restaurants in The West End. Despite attempts to extend central London's nocturnal life to the south side of the Thames (notably the ambitious South Bank Arts

Centre—London's energy fades when it crosses the river. Still, the new urban development of Docklands, the tourist attraction of the new Globe Theatre, and some up-and-coming residential neighborhoods are infusing energy into the area across the river.

Farther west are the upscale neighborhoods of Belgravia, Kensington, Knightsbridge, Chelsea, Paddington and Bayswater, Earl's Court, and Notting Hill. This is also prime hotel and restaurant territory. To the east of the City is the **East End**, which forms the eastern boundary of **Inner London** (Notting Hill and Earl's Court roughly form the western boundary). Inner London is surrounded, like a doughnut, by the sprawling hinterland of **Outer London**.

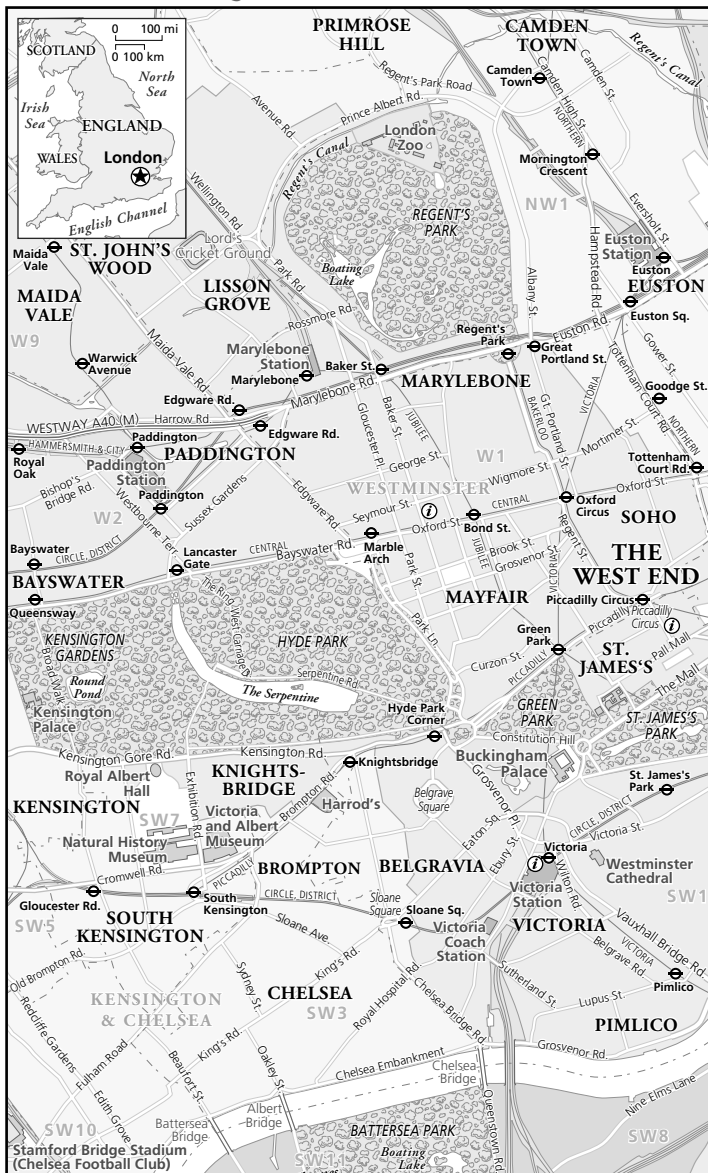
The City & Environs

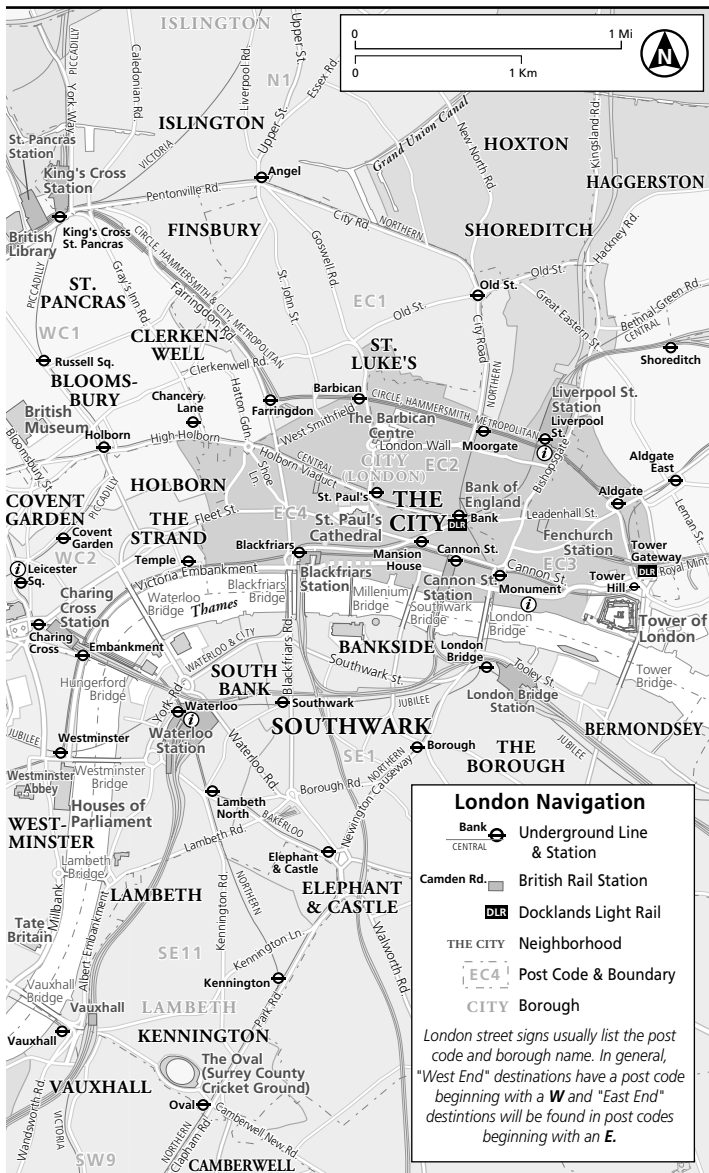
The City When Londoners speak of "the City" (EC2, EC3), they mean the original square mile that's now the British version of Wall Street. The buildings of this district are known all over the world: the Bank of England, the London Stock Exchange, and famed insurance company Lloyd's of London. The City was the original site of *Londinium*, the first settlement of the Roman conquerors. Despite its age, the City doesn't easily reveal its past. Although it retains some of its medieval character, much of the City has been swept away by the Great Fire of 1666, the bombs of 1940, the IRA bombs of the 1990s, and the zeal of modern developers. Landmarks include Sir Christopher Wren's masterpiece, **St. Paul's Cathedral**, which stood virtually alone in the surrounding rubble after the Blitz. Some 2,000 years of history unfold at the City's **Museum of London** and at the **Barbican Centre**, opened by Queen Elizabeth in 1982.

Following the Strand eastward from Trafalgar Square, you'll come to Fleet Street. In the 19th century, this corner of London became the most concentrated newspaper district in the world. William Caxton printed the first book in English here, and the *Daily Consort*, the first daily newspaper printed in England, was launched at Ludgate Circus in 1702. In recent times, however, most London tabloids have abandoned Fleet Street for the Docklands across the river. Where the Strand becomes Fleet Street stands Temple Bar, where the actual City of London begins. The Tower of London looms at the eastern fringe of the City, shrouded in legend, blood, and history, and permanently besieged by battalions of visitors.

The average visitor will venture into the City during the day to sample its attractions or to lunch at pubs such as **Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese**, then return to The West End for evening amusement. As a hotel district, the City wasn't even on the map

Central London Neighborhoods





until recent times. The opening of the **Great Eastern Hotel** has brought a lot of business clients who prefer to stay here to avoid the traffic jams involved in getting into and out of the City. Stay in the City if you would prefer a hotel in a place like New York's Wall Street instead of a midtown address. If you can't afford the Great Eastern, consider the cheaper **Rookery** in newly fashionable Smithfield. The City lures hotel guests who prefer its quirky, quiet, offbeat flavor at night, when it's part ghost town, part movie set. There is some nightlife here, including pubs and restaurants. It's fun to wander the area when all the crowds are gone, pondering the thought that you're walking the same streets Samuel Johnson trod so long ago.

The City of London still prefers to function on its own, separate from the rest of London. It maintains its own **Information Centre** at St. Paul's Churchyard, EC4 (☎ **020/7332-1456**), which is open daily from 10am to 5:50pm.

The East End Traditionally, this was one of London's poorest districts, nearly bombed out of existence during World War II. In the words of one commentator, Hitler created "instant urban renewal" here. The East End extends east from the City Walls, encompassing Stepney, Bow, Poplar, West Ham, Canning Town, and other districts. The East End is the home of the cockney. To be a true cockney, it's said that you must be born within the sound of the Bow Bells of **St. Mary-le-Bow** church, an old church rebuilt by Sir Christopher Wren in 1670.

These days, many immigrants to London make their homes in the East End. London is pushing eastward, and the East End may even become fashionable someday soon. Today you'll find lots of trendy bars, clubs, restaurants, and boutiques or vintage clothing outlets. Much of the fashionable life is found around Hoxton Square and its peripheries, such as Shoreditch and the northern half of Brick Lane. There is an array of contemporary galleries in the area. Brick Lane, incidentally, is a great place for some curry dishes if you can deal with all those waiters on the street trying to hustle you into their restaurants. Attractions you may want to visit if you're in the area include St. Clement Danes church, the Temple of Mithras, and Sir Christopher Wren's Monument to the Great Fire of 1666.

Docklands In 1981, in the most ambitious scheme of its kind in Europe, the London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC) was formed to redevelop Wapping, the Isle of Dogs, the Royal Docks, and Surrey Docks. The area is bordered roughly by Tower Bridge to the west and London City Airport and the Royal

Docks to the east. Many businesses have moved here; Thames-side warehouses have been converted to Manhattan-style lofts and museums, entertainment complexes, shops, and an ever-growing list of restaurants have popped up at this 21st-century river city in the making.

Canary Wharf, on the Isle of Dogs, is the heart of Docklands. This 28-hectare (69-acre) site is dominated by a 240m-high (787-ft.) tower, which is the tallest building in the United Kingdom, and was designed by César Pelli. The Piazza of the tower is lined with shops and restaurants. On the south side of the river at Surrey Docks, Sir Terence Conran has converted the Victorian warehouses of Butler's Wharf into offices, workshops, houses, shops, and restaurants. Butler's Wharf is also home to the **Design Museum**. Chances are, you'll venture here for sights and restaurants, not for lodging, unless you've got business in the area. The area is fun during the day and home to some of London's finest restaurants, offering good food and a change of pace from The West End—this is postmillennium London, whereas The West End is the essence of tradition. See our recommendations in chapter 3, "Where to Dine." To get to Docklands, take The Underground to Tower Hill and pick up the **Docklands Light Railway** (☎ 020/7222-1234), which operates Monday to Saturday from 5:30am to 12:30am, from 7am to 11:30pm Sunday.

South Bank Although not officially a district, this is where you'll find the **South Bank Arts Centre**, the largest arts center in western Europe and still growing. Reached by Waterloo Bridge (or on foot by Hungerford Bridge), it lies across the Thames from the Victoria Embankment. Culture buffs flock to its galleries and halls, which encompass the **National Theatre**, **Queen Elizabeth Hall**, **Royal Festival Hall**, and the **Hayward Gallery**.

Although its day as a top hotel district in London may come in a decade or so (since there's no room left in The West End), that hasn't happened yet. The South Bank is a destination for daytime adventures and for evening cultural attractions. You may want to dine here during a day's or evening's exploration of the area. See our recommendations in chapter 3, "Where to Dine."

Nearby are such neighborhoods as Elephant and Castle, and Southwark, home to **Southwark Cathedral**. To get here, take the Tube to Waterloo Station.

West End Neighborhoods

Bloomsbury This district, a world within itself, is bound roughly by Euston Road to the north, Gower Street to the west, and Clerkenwell to the east. It is, among other things, the academic

heart of London. There are three colleges in Bloomsbury, including **University College London**, the grandest and the oldest. A branch of the **University of London** is also here. Writers like Virginia Woolf, who lived in the area (it figured in her novel *Jacob's Room*), have fanned the neighborhood's reputation as a place devoted to liberal thinking, arts, and "sexual frankness." The novelist and her husband, Leonard, were unofficial leaders of a group of artists and writers known as the Bloomsbury Group. However, despite its student population, Bloomsbury is a fairly staid neighborhood. The heart of Bloomsbury is **Russell Square**, whose outlying streets are lined with moderately priced to expensive hotels and B&Bs. It's a noisy but central place to stay. Most visitors come to see the **British Museum**, one of the world's greatest repositories of treasures from around the globe. The **British Telecom Tower** (1964) on Cleveland Street is a familiar landmark.

Of all the areas described so far, this is the only one that could be called a hotel district. Hotel prices have risen dramatically in the past decade but are nowhere near the levels of those in Mayfair and St. James's. Bloomsbury's hotels are comparable in price to what you'll find in Marylebone to the west. But Bloomsbury is more convenient—at its southern doorstep lie the restaurants and nightclubs of Soho, the theater district, and the markets of Covent Garden. If you stay here, it's a 5-minute Tube ride to the heart of the action of The West End.

At the western edge of Bloomsbury you'll find **Fitzrovia**, bounded by Great Portland, Oxford, and Gower streets, and reached by the Goodge Street Tube. Goodge Street, with its many shops and pubs, forms the heart of the village. Fitzrovia was once the stamping ground for writers and artists like Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and George Orwell, among others. The bottom end of Fitzrovia is a virtual extension of Soho, with a cluster of Greek restaurants.

Holborn The old borough of Holborn (*Ho-burn*), which abuts the City southeast of Bloomsbury, encompasses the heart of legal London—this is where you'll find the city's barristers, solicitors, and law clerks. Still Dickensian in spirit, the area preserves the Victorian author's literary footsteps in the two Inns of Court (where law students perform their apprenticeships and where barristers' chambers are located), featured in *David Copperfield*, and as the Bleeding Heart Yard of *Little Dorrit* fame. The **Old Bailey** courthouse, where judges and lawyers still wear old-fashioned wigs, has stood for English justice through the years—Fagin went to the gallows from this site in *Oliver Twist*. You might come here

for some sightseeing, perhaps quenching your thirst in a historic pub. Everything in Holborn is steeped in history. For example, as you're downing a half-pint of bitter at the **Viaduct Tavern**, 126 Newgate St. (Tube: St. Paul's), you can reflect on the fact that the pub was built over the notorious Newgate Prison.

Covent Garden & the Strand The flower, fruit, and "veg" market is long gone (since 1970), but memories of Professor Higgins and his "squashed cabbage leaf," Eliza Doolittle, linger on. **Covent Garden** contains the city's liveliest group of restaurants, pubs, and cafes outside Soho, as well as some of the city's hippest shops. The restored marketplace here, with its glass and iron roofs, has been called a magnificent example of urban recycling. London's **theater district** begins in Covent Garden and spills over into Leicester Square and Soho. Inigo Jones's **St. Paul's Covent Garden** is known as the actors' church; over the years, it has attracted everybody from Ellen Terry to Vivien Leigh. The **Theatre Royal Drury Lane** was where Charles II's mistress, Nell Gwynne, made her debut in 1665 and was also where Irish actress Dorothea Jordan caught the eye of the Duke of Clarence, later William IV. The **Strand** forms the southern border of Covent Garden. It's packed with theaters, shops, first-class hotels, and restaurants. Old pubs, **Dr. Johnson's House**, and tearooms fragrant with brewing Twinings English tea evoke memories of the rich heyday of this district as the center of London's activity. The Strand runs parallel to the Thames River, and to walk it is to follow in the footsteps of Charles Lamb, Mark Twain, Henry Fielding, James Boswell, William Thackeray, and Sir Walter Raleigh, among others. The Strand's **Savoy Theatre** helped make Gilbert and Sullivan household names.

You'll probably come here for theater or dining rather than for a hotel room. Covent Garden has few hotels (although those few are very nice). We recommend the best ones (beginning on p. 46). Expect to spend a lot for the privilege of staying in such a central zone. The Strand, of course, has always been known for its swank Savoy Hotel.

Piccadilly Circus & Leicester Square Piccadilly Circus, with its statue of Eros, is the heart and soul of London. Its traffic, neon, and jostling crowds make *circus* an apt word to describe this place. Piccadilly, which was the western road out of London, was named for the "picadil," a ruffled collar created by Robert Baker, a 17th-century tailor. If you want grandeur, retreat to the Regency promenade of exclusive shops, the **Burlington Arcade**, designed in 1819. The English gentry—tired of being mud-splashed by horses

and carriages along Piccadilly—came here to do their shopping. Some 35 shops, offering a treasure-trove of expensive goodies, await you. A bit more tawdry is **Leicester Square**, a hub of theaters, restaurants, movie palaces, and nightlife—it's London's equivalent of New York's Times Square. Leicester Square changed forever in the Victorian era, when four towering entertainment halls were opened. Over time, the old entertainment palaces changed from stage to screen; today three of them still show films. In another sign of the times, the old Café de Paris is no longer a chic cabaret—now it's a disco.

There are a few hotels here, although they're invariably expensive. Stay here if you'd want a hotel in Times Square in New York. It's convenient for those who want to be at the center of the action. The downside is the noise, congestion, and pollution.

Soho A nightclubber's paradise, Soho is a confusing grid of streets crammed with restaurants. It's a great place to visit, but you probably won't want to stay here (there aren't many hotels, anyway). These densely packed streets in the heart of The West End are famous for their cosmopolitan mix of people and trades. A decade ago, much was heard about the decline of Soho with the influx of sex shops; even the pub where Dylan Thomas used to drink himself into oblivion became a sex cinema. Since then, non-sex-oriented businesses have returned, and fashionable restaurants and shops prosper. Soho is now the heart of London's expanding gay scene.

Soho starts at Piccadilly Circus and spreads out, more or less bordered by Regent Street to the west, Oxford Street to the north, Charing Cross Road to the east, and the **theaters along Shaftesbury Avenue** to the south. Carnaby Street, a block from Regent Street, was the center of the universe in the Swinging '60s but is now a schlocky tourist trap, though a few quality stores have opened recently. Across Shaftesbury Avenue is London's **Chinatown**, centered on Gerrard Street. It's small, authentic, and packed with good restaurants. Soho's heart—featuring great delicatessens, butchers, fish stores, and wine merchants—is farther north, on Brewer, Old Compton, and Berwick streets (Berwick St. features a wonderful open-air fresh-food market). To the north of Old Compton Street, Dean, Frith, and Greek streets have fine restaurants, pubs, and clubs. The British movie industry is centered on Wardour Street. The average visitor comes to Soho to dine because many of its restaurants are convenient to the theater district. Most travelers don't stay in Soho, but a certain action-oriented visitor prefers the *joie de vivre* of the neighborhood as compared to staid

Bloomsbury or swank Mayfair. Does this sound like you? Check out Soho's accommodations, starting on p. 47.

Marylebone West of Bloomsbury and Fitzrovia, Marylebone extends north from Marble Arch, at the eastern edge of Hyde Park. Most first-time visitors head here to explore **Madame Tussaud's** waxworks or walk along **Baker Street** in the footsteps of Sherlock Holmes. The streets form a near-perfect grid, with the major ones running north-south between Regent's Park and Oxford Street. Architect Robert Adam laid out **Portland Place**, one of the most characteristic squares in London, from 1776 to 1780. At **Cavendish Square**, Mrs. Horatio Nelson waited for the return of Admiral Nelson. Marylebone Lane and High Street retain a bit of small-town atmosphere, but this is otherwise a rather anonymous area. Dickens wrote nearly a dozen books while he resided here. At **Regent's Park**, you can visit Queen Mary's Gardens or, in summer, see Shakespeare performed in an open-air theater. **Marylebone** has emerged as a major "bedroom" district for London, competing with Bloomsbury to its east. It's not as convenient as Bloomsbury, but the hub of The West End's action is virtually at your doorstep if you lodge here, northwest of Piccadilly Circus and facing Mayfair to the south. Once known only for its town houses turned into B&Bs, the district now offers accommodations in all price ranges, catering to everyone from rock stars to frugal family travelers.

Mayfair Bounded by Piccadilly, Hyde Park, and Oxford and Regent streets, this is the most elegant, fashionable section of London, filled with luxury hotels, Georgian town houses, and swank shops. The area is sandwiched between Piccadilly Circus and Hyde Park. It's convenient to London's best shopping and close to The West End theaters yet (a bit snobbily) removed from the peddlers and commerce of Covent Garden and Soho.

One of the curiosities of Mayfair is **Shepherd Market**, a village of pubs, two-story inns, restaurants, and book and food stalls, nestled within Mayfair's grandness. The hotels of Mayfair, especially those along Park Lane, are the most expensive and grand in London. This is the place if you're seeking sophisticated, albeit expensive, accommodations close to the **Bond Street** shops, boutiques, and art galleries. If "address" is important to you, and you're willing to pay for a good one, Mayfair has a bed waiting for you.

Grosvenor Square (pronounced *Grov-nor*) is nicknamed "Little America" because it's home to the American Embassy and a statue of Franklin D. Roosevelt. **Berkeley Square** (*Bark-ley*) was made famous by the song "A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square." You'll want to dip into this exclusive section at least once.

St. James's Often called "Royal London," St. James's basks in its associations with everybody from the "merrie monarch" Charles II to Elizabeth II, who lives at its most famous address, **Buckingham Palace**. The neighborhood begins at **Piccadilly Circus** and moves southwest, incorporating **Pall Mall**, the **Mall**, **St. James's Park**, and **Green Park**. It's "frightfully convenient," as the English say; within its confines are American Express and many of London's leading department stores. This is the neighborhood where English gentlemen seek haven at that male-only bastion of English tradition, the gentlemen's club, where poker is played, drinks are consumed, and pipes are smoked (St. James's Club is one of the most prestigious of these institutions). Be sure to stop in at **Fortnum & Mason**, 181 Piccadilly, the world's most luxurious grocery store. Launched in 1788, the store sent hams to the Duke of Wellington's army and baskets of tinned goodies to Florence Nightingale in the Crimea. Hotels in this neighborhood tend to be expensive, but if the Queen should summon you to Buckingham Palace, you won't have far to go.

Westminster Westminster has been the seat of the British government since the days of Edward the Confessor (1042–66). Dominated by the **Houses of Parliament** and **Westminster Abbey**, the area runs along the Thames to the east of St. James's Park. **Trafalgar Square**, one of the city's major landmarks, is located at the area's northern end and remains a testament to England's victory over Napoleon in 1805. The square is home to the landmark National Gallery, which is filled with glorious paintings. Whitehall is the main thoroughfare, linking Trafalgar Square with **Parliament Square**. You can visit Churchill's Cabinet War Rooms and walk by **Downing Street** to see **Number 10**, home to Britain's prime minister (though the street itself is fenced in and guarded these days). No visit is complete without a call at **Westminster Abbey**, one of the greatest Gothic churches in the world. It has witnessed a parade of English history, beginning with William the Conqueror's coronation here on Christmas Day 1066.

Westminster also encompasses **Victoria**, an area that takes its name from bustling Victoria Station, "the gateway to the Continent." Many B&Bs and hotels have sprouted up here because of the neighborhood's proximity to the rail station. Victoria is cheap and convenient if you don't mind the noise and crowds.

Welfare recipients occupy many hotels along Belgrave Road. If you've arrived without a hotel reservation, you'll find the pickings better on the streets off Belgrave Road. Your best bet is to walk along Ebury Street, east of Victoria Station and Buckingham Palace Road. Here you'll find some of the best moderately priced

lodgings in central London. Since you're near Victoria Station, the area is convenient for day trips to Oxford, Windsor, or Canterbury.

Beyond The West End

Knightsbridge One of London's most fashionable neighborhoods, Knightsbridge is a top residential, hotel, and shopping district just south of Hyde Park. **Harrods** on Brompton Road is its chief attraction. Founded in 1901, Harrods has been called "the Notre Dame of department stores." Right nearby, **Beauchamp Place** (*Bee-cham*) is one of London's most fashionable shopping streets, a Regency-era, boutique-lined street with a scattering of restaurants. Most hotels here are deluxe or first class.

Knightsbridge is one of the most convenient areas of London, ideally located if you want to head east to the theater district or the Mayfair shops, or west to Chelsea or Kensington's restaurants and attractions.

Belgravia South of Knightsbridge, this area has long been an aristocratic quarter of London, rivaling Mayfair in grandeur. Although it reached its pinnacle of prestige during the reign of Queen Victoria, the Duke and Duchess of Westminster still live at **Eaton Square**, and Belgravia remains a hot area for chic hotels. The neighborhood's centerpiece is **Belgrave Square**. When town houses were built from 1825 to 1835, aristocrats followed—the Duke of Connaught, the Earl of Essex, and even Queen Victoria's mother.

Belgravia is a tranquil district. If you lodge here, no one will ever accuse you of staying on the "wrong side of the tracks." The neighborhood is convenient to the little restaurants and pubs of Chelsea, which is located to Belgravia's immediate west. Victoria Station is located to its immediate east, so Belgravia is convenient if you're planning to take day trips from London.

Chelsea This stylish Thames-side district lies south and to the west of Belgravia. It begins at **Sloane Square**, with **Gilbert Ledward's Venus fountain** playing watery music. The area has always been a favorite of writers and artists, including Oscar Wilde (who was arrested here), George Eliot, James Whistler, J. M. W. Turner, Henry James, and Thomas Carlyle (whose former home can be visited). Mick Jagger and Margaret Thatcher (not together) have been more recent residents, and the late Princess Diana and her "Sloane Rangers" (a term used to describe posh women, derived from Chelsea's Sloane Square) of the 1980s gave the area even more recognition. There are some swank hotels here and a scattering of modestly priced ones. The main drawback to Chelsea is inaccessibility. Except for Sloane Square, there's a dearth of Tube

stops, and unless you like to take a lot of buses or expensive taxis, you may find getting around a chore.

Chelsea's major boulevard is **King's Road**, where Mary Quant launched the miniskirt in the 1960s and where the English punk look began. King's Road runs the length of Chelsea; it's at its liveliest on Saturday. The outrageous fashions of the King's Road boutiques aren't typical of otherwise upmarket Chelsea, an elegant village filled with town houses and little mews dwellings that only successful stockbrokers and solicitors can afford to occupy. On the Chelsea/Fulham border is **Chelsea Harbour**, a luxury development of apartments and restaurants with a marina. You can spot its tall tower from far away; the golden ball on top moves up and down to indicate the tide level.

Kensington This Royal Borough (W8) lies west of Kensington Gardens and Hyde Park and is traversed by two of London's major shopping streets, **Kensington High Street** and **Kensington Church Street**. Since 1689, when asthmatic William III fled Whitehall Palace for Nottingham House (where the air was fresher), the district has enjoyed royal associations. In time, Nottingham House became Kensington Palace, and the royals grabbed a chunk of Hyde Park to plant their roses. Queen Victoria was born here. Kensington Palace, or "KP," as the royals say, was home to the late Princess Margaret (who had 20 rooms with a view) and is still home to Prince and Princess Michael of Kent, and the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester. Kensington Gardens is now open to the public, ever since George II decreed that "respectably dressed" people would be permitted in on Saturday—provided that no servants, soldiers, or sailors came (as you might imagine, that rule is long gone). During the reign of William III, Kensington Square developed, attracting artists and writers. Thackeray wrote *Vanity Fair* while living here. With all those royal associations, Kensington is a fashionable neighborhood. If you're a frugal traveler, head for South Kensington (see below) for moderately priced hotels and B&Bs. Southeast of Kensington Gardens and Earl's Court, primarily residential **South Kensington** is often called "museumland" because it's dominated by a complex of museums and colleges, including the **Natural History Museum**, **The Victoria and Albert Museum**, and the **Science Museum**; nearby is **Royal Albert Hall**. South Kensington boasts some fashionable restaurants and town-house hotels. One of the neighborhood's curiosities is the **Albert Memorial**, completed in 1872 by Sir George Gilbert Scott; for sheer excess, this Victorian monument is unequaled in the world.

A hotel room in Kensington is a prestigious address. But as Princess Margaret may have told you, you're at the far stretch of The West End, lying some 20 minutes by Tube from the heart of the theater district. As for South Kensington, it was once considered the "boondocks," although with the boundaries of The West End expanding, the neighborhood is much closer to the action than it has ever been before.

Paddington & Bayswater **Paddington** radiates out from Paddington Station, north of Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens. It's one of the major B&B centers in London, attracting budget travelers who fill the lodgings in Sussex Gardens and Norfolk Square. After the first railway was introduced in London in 1836, a circle of sprawling railway terminals, including Paddington Station (which was built in 1838), spurred the growth of this middle-class area. Just south of Paddington, north of Hyde Park, and abutting more fashionable Notting Hill to the west is **Bayswater**, also filled with a large number of B&Bs that attract budget travelers. Inspired by Marylebone and elegant Mayfair, a relatively prosperous set of Victorian merchants built terrace houses around spacious squares in this area.

Paddington and Bayswater are sort of "in between" areas of London. If you've come to London to see the attractions in the east, including the British Museum, the Tower of London, and the theater district, you'll find yourself commuting a lot. Stay here for moderately priced lodgings (there are expensive hotels, too) and for convenience to transportation. Rapidly gentrifying, this area ranges from seedy to swank.

On the other (north) side of Westway/Marylebone Road are **Maida Vale** and **St. John's Wood**, two villages that have been absorbed by central London. Maida Vale lies west of **Regent's Park**, north of Paddington, and next to the more prestigious St. John's Wood (home to the Beatles' Abbey Road Studios). The area is very sports-oriented; if you take the Tube to Maida Vale, you'll find Paddington Recreation Ground, plus a smaller "green lung" called Paddington Bowling and Sports Club. The area is also home to some of the BBC studios.

Notting Hill Increasingly fashionable Notting Hill is bounded on the east by Bayswater and on the south by Kensington. Hemmed in on the north by Westway and on the west by the Shepherd's Bush ramp leading to the M40, it has many turn-of-the-20th-century mansions and small houses sitting on quiet, leafy streets, plus a growing number of hot restaurants and clubs.

Gentrified in recent years, it's becoming an extension of central London. Hotels are few, but increasingly chic.

Even more remote than Paddington and Bayswater, Notting Hill lies at least another 10 minutes west of those districts. In spite of that, many young professional visitors to London wouldn't stay anywhere else.

In the northern half of Notting Hill is the hip neighborhood known as **Notting Hill Gate**, home to Portobello Road, which boasts one of London's most famous street markets. The area Tube stops are Notting Hill Gate, Holland Park, and Ladbroke Grove.

Nearby **Holland Park**, an expensive residential neighborhood, promotes itself as "10 minutes by Tube from practically anywhere," a bit of an exaggeration.

9 Getting Around

ARRIVING BY PLANE

LONDON HEATHROW AIRPORT West of London in Hounslow (☎ 0870/000-0123; www.baa.co.uk), Heathrow is one of the world's busiest airports. It has four terminals, each relatively self-contained. Terminal 4, the most modern, handles the long-haul and transatlantic operations of British Airways. Most transatlantic flights on U.S.-based airlines arrive at Terminal 3. Terminals 1 and 2 receive the intra-European flights of several European airlines.

Getting to Central London from Heathrow It takes 45 to 50 minutes by The Underground (Tube) and costs £4 (\$8) to make the 24km (15-mile) trip from Heathrow to the center of London. A taxi is likely to cost from £50 to £70 (\$100–\$140). For more information about Tube or bus connections, call ☎ 020/7222-1234 or go to www.tfl.gov.uk.

The British Airport Authority now operates **Heathrow Express** (☎ 0845/600-1515; www.heathrowexpress.com), a 161kmph (100-mph) train service running every 15 minutes daily from 5:10am until 11:40pm between Heathrow and Paddington Station in the center of London. Trips cost £15 (\$30) each way in economy class, rising to £46 (\$92) in first class. Children 14 and younger pay £7.20 (\$14) in economy, £23 (\$46) in first class. You can save £1 (\$2) by booking online or by phone. The trip takes 15 minutes each way between Paddington and Terminals 1, 2, and 3; 23 minutes from Terminal 4. The trains have special areas for wheelchairs. From Paddington, passengers can connect to other trains and The Underground, or you can hail a taxi. You can buy tickets on the train with

a £2 (\$4) surcharge, or at self-service machines at Heathrow Airport. (Tickets are also available from travel agents.)

GATWICK AIRPORT While Heathrow still dominates, more and more scheduled flights land at relatively remote **Gatwick** (☎ 0870/574-7777; www.baa.co.uk), located some 40km (25 miles) south of London in West Sussex but only a 30-minute train ride away.

Getting to Central London from Gatwick From Gatwick, the fastest way to get to London is via the **Gatwick Express trains** (☎ 0845/850-1530; www.gatwickexpress.co.uk), which depart approximately every 15 minutes, daily between 4:35am and 1:35am. The round-trip fare between Gatwick and Victoria Rail Station is £27 (\$54) for adults and £13 (\$26) for children age 10 and younger. (One-way fares cost £16/\$32 for adults and £7.95/\$16 for children.) The travel time each way is 30 minutes Monday to Saturday, and 35 minutes on Sunday.

A **taxi** from Gatwick Airport to central London costs from £95 (\$190). Fares vary according to a printed price list that defines the fare from Gatwick to whichever neighborhood of London you're traveling to. Meters in this case don't apply because Gatwick lies outside the Metropolitan Police District. For further transportation information pertaining to either Gatwick or any other location within London, call ☎ 020/7222-1234.

LONDON CITY AIRPORT Positioned 5km (3 miles) east of the bustling business community of Canary Wharf, the Docklands, and the ExCel convention center, the viability of **London City Airport** (☎ 020/7646-0088; www.londoncityairport.com) has rendered commutes from other parts of Britain and parts of continental Europe faster and more convenient than equivalent flights into Heathrow, Gatwick, or Stansted. Accepting flights from 23 cities throughout western Europe and Scandinavia, it services airlines that include British Airways, Cirrus Airlines, Luxair, KLM, CityJet, OLT, Lufthansa, Scot Airways, Air France, Eastern Airways, SAS, Darwin Airlines, Swiss International Airlines, and VLM.

Trains on the Docklands Light Railway make runs at 10-minute intervals from City Airport to The Underground station known as "Bank" (short for "Bank of England") in the heart of London's financial district, which is known locally as "The City." One-way passage costs £4 (\$8) for adults and £1 (\$2) for children 15 and younger.

As a final means of getting from the airport to central London, consider boarding London Transport's bus no. 473 or 474, which makes frequent runs between the airport and various points in East London,

Tips **Getting from One London Airport to the Other**

Some visitors will need to transfer from one airport to the other. One bus company offers these transfers. **National Express** (☎ 020/8593-771 or 0870/574-7777; www.nationalexpress.com) buses leave from both terminals at Gatwick and Terminals 1, 3, and 4 at Heathrow. Trip time is about an hour, with a one-way fare costing £20 (\$40).

including the Plaistow Tube (Underground) station. From here, you can make connections to virtually any other point in London.

LONDON STANSTED AIRPORT Located some 80km (50 miles) northeast of London's West End, **Stansted**, in Essex (☎ 0870/000-0303; www.baa.co.uk), handles mostly flights to and from the European continent.

Getting to Central London from Stansted From Stansted, your best bet to central London is the **Stansted Express train** (☎ 08457/484950; www.stanstedexpress.co.uk) to Liverpool Street Station, which runs every 15 minutes from 6am to 11:45pm and every 30 minutes in the early mornings on weekends. It costs £15 (\$30) for a standard ticket and £24 (\$48) for first class, and takes 45 minutes.

By bus, you can take the **A6 Airbus** (☎ 0870/580-8080), which runs regular departures 24 hours a day to many central London locations and costs £15 (\$30). If you prefer the relative privacy of a taxi, you'll pay dearly for the privilege. For a ride to London's West End, a taxi will charge from £85 to £100 (\$170–\$200). Expect the ride to take around 75 minutes during normal traffic conditions, but beware of Friday afternoons when dense traffic may double your travel time. Our advice: Stick to the Express.

BY TRAIN

Each of London's train stations is connected to the city's vast bus and Underground network, and each has phones, restaurants, pubs, luggage storage areas, and Transport for London Information Centres.

St. Pancras International (<http://stpancras.eurostar.com>) is the new London hub for Eurostar, replacing Waterloo Station as the arrival point from the Continent. Restored and opened in 2007, it is the point where the high-speed Eurostar pulls into London, connecting England with Belgium and France through the Channel Tunnel.

The station boasts Europe's longest champagne bar, a daily farmer's market, all the Wi-Fi you'll ever need, plus dozens of boutiques—and some of the world's fastest trains. It is also served by six Underground (the Tube) branches, including Victoria, Northern, Piccadilly, Circle, Hammersmith & City, and Metropolitan, as well as seven other rail companies. With such a vast network of transport, you can head virtually anywhere in Greater London.

BY PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

The London Underground and the city's buses operate on the same system of six fare zones. The fare zones radiate in rings from the central zone 1, which is where most visitors spend the majority of their time. Zone 1 covers the area from Liverpool Street in the east to Notting Hill in the west, and from Waterloo in the south to Baker Street, Euston, and King's Cross in the north. To travel beyond zone 1, you need a multizone ticket. Note that all single one-way, round-trip, and 1-day pass tickets are valid only on the day of purchase. Tube and bus maps should be available at any Underground station. You can download them before your trip from the excellent **London Transport (LT)** website www.tfl.gov.uk/tfl. There are also **LT Information Centres** at several major Tube stations: Euston, King's Cross, Oxford Circus, St. James's Park, Liverpool Street Station, and Piccadilly Circus, as well as in the British Rail stations at Euston and Victoria and in each of the terminals at Heathrow Airport. Most of them are open daily (some close Sun) from at least 9am to 5pm. A 24-hour public-transportation information service is also available at ☎ **020/7222-1234**.

DISCOUNT PASSES If you plan to use public transportation a lot, investigate the range of fare discounts available. **Travelcards** offer unlimited use of buses, Underground, Docklands Light Railway, and National Rail services in Greater London for any period ranging from a day to a year. Travelcards are available from Underground ticket offices, LT Information Centres, main post offices in the London area, many newsagents, and some newsstands. Children 10 and younger generally travel free on the Tube and buses.

The **1-Day Travelcard** allows you to go anywhere throughout Greater London. For travel anywhere within zones 1 and 2, the cost is £6.80 (\$14) for adults or £3.40 (\$6.80) for children 5 to 15. The **Off-Peak 1-Day Travelcard**, which is valid after 9:30am on weekdays is even cheaper. For two zones, the cost is £5.30 (\$11) for adults and £3.30 (\$6.60) for children 5 to 15.

The system now features a **3-Day Travel Card**, allowing adults to travel within zones 1 and 2 for £17 to £22 (\$34–\$44), and allowing children to go for £8.70 to £9.50 (\$17–\$19).

1-Week Travelcards cost adults £24 (\$48) and children £12 (\$24) for travel in zones 1 and 2.

Consider purchasing the **Oyster Card** (www.oystercard.com), a travel discount card that's all the rage. You can prepay for single fares, which cost considerably less than a paper ticket—usually about half the price. Oysters are valid on the Tube, DLR, tram, and National Rail services within your chosen zones and across the entire London bus network. For 24-hour information, call the Oyster hot line at ☎ **0871/2301100**. The card has a daily price cap, meaning you never pay more than £3 (\$6) regardless of how many trips you make in 1 day. You can buy an Oyster Card at any ticket office.

THE UNDERGROUND

The Underground, or Tube, is the fastest and easiest way to get around. All Tube stations are clearly marked with a red circle and blue crossbar. Routes are conveniently color-coded.

If you have British coins or a credit card, you can get your ticket at a vending machine. Otherwise, buy it at the ticket office. You can transfer as many times as you like as long as you stay in The Underground. Children 4 and younger travel free if accompanied by an adult.

Slide your ticket into the slot at the gate and pick it up as it comes through on the other side and hold on to it—it must be presented when you exit the station at your destination. If you're caught without a valid ticket, you'll be fined £20 (\$40) on the spot. If you owe extra money, you'll be asked to pay the difference by the attendant at the exit. The Tube runs roughly from 5am to 12:30am (7:30am–10:30pm Sun). After that you must take a taxi or night bus to your destination. For information on the London Tube system, call the **London Underground** at ☎ **020/7222-1234**, but expect to stay on hold for a good while before a live person comes on the line. Information is also available on www.tfl.gov.uk.

The Jubilee Line Extension has been extended eastward to serve the growing suburbs of the southeast and the Docklands area. This east-west axis helps ease traffic on some of London's most hard-pressed underground lines. The line also makes it much easier to reach Greenwich.

BY TAXI

London cabs are among the most comfortable and best-designed in the world. You can pick one up either by heading for a cab rank or

by hailing one in the street. (The taxi is available if the yellow taxi sign on the roof is lit.) To **call a cab**, phone ☎ **0871/871-8710**.

The meter starts at £2.20 (\$4.40), with increments of £2 (\$4) per mile thereafter, based on distance or time. Surcharges are imposed after 8pm and on weekends and public holidays. All these tariffs include VAT: Tip 10% to 15%.

If you call for a cab, the meter starts running when the taxi receives instructions from the dispatcher, so you could find that the meter already reads a few pounds more than the initial drop of £2.20 (\$4.40) when you step inside.

Minicabs are also available, and they're often useful when regular taxis are scarce or when the Tube stops running. These cabs are meterless, so you must negotiate the fare in advance. Unlike regular cabs, minicabs are forbidden by law to cruise for fares. They operate from sidewalk kiosks, such as those around Leicester Square. If you need to call one, try **Brunswick Chauffeurs/Abbey Cars** (☎ **020/8969-2555**) in west London or **Newham Minicars** (☎ **020/8472-1400**) in south London. Minicab kiosks can be found near many Tube or BritRail stops, especially in outlying areas.

If you have a complaint about taxi service or if you leave something in a cab, contact the **Public Carriage Office**, 15 Penton St., N1 9PU (Tube: Angel Station). If it's a complaint, you must have the cab number, which is displayed in the passenger compartment. Call ☎ **0845/602-7000** or 020/7222-1234 with complaints.