Planning Your Trip to London

This chapter tackles the how-to’s of your trip to London—tips for getting your trip together and getting on the road, whether you’re a frequent traveler or a first-timer.

1 Visitor Information & Maps

Visit Britain maintains a website at www.visitbritain.com. You can also get information from Visit Britain offices. There’s one in the United States at 551 Fifth Ave., 7th Floor, New York, NY 10176-0799 (© 800/462-2748 or 212/986-2266). In Canada call © 888/VISITUK. In Australia, Level 2, 15 Blue St., North Sydney 2060 (© 02/9021-4400). In New Zealand, go to the Fay Richwhite Building, 17th Floor, 151 Queen St., Auckland 1 (© 0800/700-741; fax 09/377-6965). For a full information packet on London, write to Visit London Tourist Board, Glen House, Stag Place, Victoria, SW1E 5LT (© 020/7234-5800; www.visitlondon.co.uk). You can call the recorded-message service.

WHAT’S ON THE WEB? The most useful site was created by a very knowledgeable source, namely Visit Britain. A wealth of information is available at www.visitbritain.com, which lets you order brochures online, provides trip-planning hints, and even grants prompt answers to e-mail questions. This site covers all of Great Britain. Visit London, the official visitor organization for the city, offers more specific information about the city on its website, www.visitlondon.com. The site gives users the opportunity to organize their trip online by booking discounted rail tickets, accommodations, restaurants, and a London Pass that offers free or reduced entry to more than 50 London attractions. The Visit London website includes both comprehensive information on what’s new in town and more specific sections, including Kids Love London, Gay London, and London by Night. Go to www.baa.com for a guide and terminal maps for Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted, and other London-area airports, including flight arrival times, duty-free shops,
airport restaurants, and info on getting from the airports to downtown London. Getting around London can be confusing, so you might want to visit www.tfl.gov.uk for up-to-the-minute transit info. For the latest details on London’s theater scene, consult www.officiallondontheatre.co.uk or www.londontheatre.co.uk.

FINDING 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 & Customs

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS
Citizens of the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa require a passport to enter the United Kingdom, but not a visa (for information on obtaining a passport, go to “Passports” in the “Fast Facts” section of chapter 2). Irish citizens and citizens of European Union countries need only an identity card. The maximum stay for non–European Union visitors is 6 months. Some Customs officials request proof that you have the means to leave the country (usually a round-trip ticket) and, if you don’t have a return ticket, means of support while you’re in Britain (someone in the U.K. will have to vouch that they are supporting you, or you may be asked to show documents that indicate that you have an income). If you’re planning to fly on from the United Kingdom to a country that requires a visa, it’s wise to secure the visa before you leave home.

CUSTOMS REGULATIONS
For information on what you can bring into and take out of London, go to “Customs” in the “Fast Facts” section of chapter 2.

3 When to Go

CLIMATE
Charles Dudley Warner once said the trouble with the weather is that everybody talks about it but nobody does anything about it. Well, Londoners talk about weather more than anyone—and they’ve actually done something about it: Air-pollution control virtually eradicated the pea-soup fogs that once blanketed the city.

A typical London-area weather forecast for a summer day predicts “scattered clouds with sunny periods and showers, possibly heavy at
“Times.” Summer temperatures seldom rise above 78°F (25°C), and rarely drop below 35°F (2°C) in winter. London, being in one of the mildest parts of the country, can be pleasant in the spring and fall. Yes, it rains, but you’ll rarely get a true downpour. Rains are heaviest in November, when the city averages 2½ inches.

The British consider chilliness wholesome and usually try to keep room temperatures about 10° below the American comfort level, so bring sweaters year-round if you tend to get cold.

HOLIDAYS
In England, public holidays include New Year’s Day, Good Friday, Easter Monday, May Day (first Mon in May), spring and summer bank holidays (last Mon in May and Aug, respectively), Christmas Day, and Boxing Day (Dec 26).

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 and many sales start as early as late December.

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

February


Great Spitalfields Pancake Race, Old Spitalfields Market, Brushfield Street, E1. Teams of four run in relays, tossing pancakes. To join in, call © 020/7375-0441 or visit www.alternativearts.co.uk. At noon on Shrove Tuesday (last day before Lent).

April


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. Pick up the NGS guidebook for £8 ($15) from most bookstores, or contact the National Gardens Scheme Charitable Trust, Hatchlands Park, East Clandon, Guildford, Surrey GU4 7RT (☎ 01483/21-1535; www.ngs.org.uk). Late April to early May.

May

The Royal Windsor Horse Show, Home Park, Windsor Castle. You might spot a royal at this multiday horse-racing and horse-showing event. Call ☎ 01753/860-633-0633 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 are £18 to £40 ($34–$76). 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, Horse Guards Parade, Whitehall. The official birthday of the Queen (as opposed to her actual birthday, which is Apr 21) is held on a designated date in June. Seated in a carriage, the monarch inspects her regiments and takes their salute as they parade their colors. It’s a quintessentially British event, with exquisite pageantry and pomp. Tickets for the parade and for two reviews, held on preceding Saturdays, are allocated by ballot. Those interested in attending must apply for tickets between January 1 and the end of February, enclosing a stamped, self-addressed envelope or International Reply Coupon—exact dates and ticket prices are supplied later. The drawing is held in mid-March, and successful applicants only are informed in April. For details, and to apply for tickets, write to HQ Household Division, Horse Guards, Whitehall, London SW1X 6AA, enclosing a self-addressed envelope and International Reply Coupon (available at any post office). Call ☎ 020/7976-0850; www.trooping-the-colour.co.uk for more information.

Lawn Tennis Championships, Wimbledon, Southwest London. Ever since players in flannels and bonnets took to the grass courts at Wimbledon in 1877, this tournament has drawn a socially
prominent crowd. Tickets for Centre and Number One courts are handed out through a lottery; write to **All England Lawn Tennis Club**, P.O. Box 98, Church Road, Wimbledon, London SW19 5AE (© 020/8944-1066) between August and December. Include a self-addressed and stamped envelope with your letter. A number of tickets are set aside for visitors from abroad, so you may be able to purchase some in spring for this year’s games; call to inquire. Outside court tickets are available daily, but be prepared to wait in line. Call © 020/8944-1066 or visit www.wimbledon.org. Late June to early July.

**City of London Festival.** This is an annual arts celebration held throughout the city. Call © 0845/120-7502 or visit www.colf.org for information about programs and venues. 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), 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 © 0845/673-2154 or visit www.openairtheatre.org.uk for more information and 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 © 0870/156-6366 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, Notting Hill. This is one of the largest street festivals in Europe, attracting more than a half-million people annually. You’ll find live reggae and soul music combined with great Caribbean food. Free. Call ☎ 020/7727-0072 or visit www.portowebbo.co.uk for information. Two days in late August (usually the last Sun and Mon).

September

Chelsea Antiques Fair, Chelsea Old Town Hall, King’s Road, SW3. A gathering of England’s best antiques dealers. Call ☎ 018/2574-4074 or visit www.penman-fairs.co.uk. Mid-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 ☎ 020/8854-1373 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 is the £250,000 ($475,000) Watership Down Stud Sales race, restricted to 2-year-old fillies. Other 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 Getting There

### BY PLANE

Don’t worry about which airport, Heathrow versus Gatwick, to fly into unless you are extremely pressed for time. Heathrow is closer to central London, but there is fast train service from both of the airports to the West End (see “Getting into Town from the Airport,” below). **High season** on most airlines’ routes to London is usually from June to the beginning of September. This is the most expensive and most crowded time to travel. **Shoulder season** is from April to May, early September to October, and December 15 to 24. **Low season** is from November 1 to December 14 and December 25 to March 31.

**FROM THE UNITED STATES**

**American Airlines** (☎ 800/433-7300; www.aa.com) offers daily nonstop flights to London’s Heathrow Airport from eight U.S. gateways: New York’s JFK (nine times daily), Chicago’s O’Hare (once a day), Boston’s Logan (once daily), Miami International (twice daily), Los Angeles International (two to three times daily), Newark and LaGuardia (three times daily), and Dallas (once daily).

**British Airways** (☎ 800/247-9297; www.britishairways.com) offers mostly nonstop flights from 19 U.S. cities to Heathrow and Gatwick. With more add-on options than any other airline, British Airways can make a visit to Britain cheaper than you might expect. Of particular interest are the “Value Plus,” “London on the Town,” and “Europe Escorted” packages that include airfare and discounted accommodations throughout Britain.

**Continental Airlines** (☎ 800/231-0856; www.continental.com) flies daily to Gatwick Airport from Newark, Houston, and Cleveland.

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.

Although **Air India** (☎ 800/223-7776 or 212/407-1300; www.airindia.com) doesn’t immediately come to mind when you think of flying from the U.S. to London, it’s a viable option and is competitively priced. Air India offers daily flights from New York’s JFK and three flights a week—Tuesday, Friday, and Sunday—from Chicago to London’s Heathrow Airport.
Northwest KLM Airlines (☎ 800/225-2525; www.nwa.com) flies nonstop from Minneapolis and Detroit to Gatwick.

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

Virgin Atlantic Airways (☎ 800/821-5438; www.virgin-atlantic.com) flies daily to either Gatwick or Heathrow from Boston; Newark; New York’s JFK; Los Angeles; San Francisco; Washington, D.C.’s Dulles; Miami; Orlando; and Las Vegas.

FROM CANADA For travelers departing from Canada, Air Canada (☎ 888/247-2262; www.aircanada.com) flies daily to London Heathrow nonstop from Vancouver, Montreal, and Toronto. There are also frequent direct flights from Calgary and Ottawa.

FROM AUSTRALIA Qantas (☎ 612/13-13-13; www.qantas.com) flies from both Sydney and Melbourne daily. British Airways (☎ 1300-767-177; www.britishairways.com) has five to seven flights weekly from Sydney and Melbourne. Both airlines have a stop in Singapore.

FROM SOUTH AFRICA South African Airways (☎ 011/978-5313; www.flysaa.com) schedules two daily flights from Johannesburg and two daily flights from Cape Town. From Johannesburg, both British Airways (☎ 011/441-8600; www.britishairways.com) and Virgin Atlantic Airways (☎ 011/340-3400; www.virgin-atlantic.com) have daily flights to Heathrow. British Airways flies five times weekly from Cape Town.

GETTING INTO TOWN FROM THE AIRPORT

LONDON HEATHROW AIRPORT Located west of London in Hounslow (☎ 087/0000-0123 for flight information; www.heathrowairport.co.uk), Heathrow is one of the world’s busiest airports. It has four terminals, each relatively self-contained. Terminal 4 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.

It takes 35 to 40 minutes by the Underground (Tube) and costs £3.50 ($6.65) to make the 24km (15-mile) trip from Heathrow to the center of London. A taxi is likely to cost from £46 to £50
($87–$95). For more information about Tube or bus connections, call ☎ 020/7222-1234.

The British Airport Authority now operates **Heathrow Express** (☎ 084/5600-1515; www.heathrowexpress.com), a 100mph 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 £7 ($13) each way. Children under 15 go for free (when accompanied by an adult). The trip takes 15 minutes each way between Paddington and Terminals 1, 2, and 3, and 23 minutes from Terminal 4. The trains have special areas for wheelchairs. From Paddington, passengers can connect to other trains and the Underground, or they can hail a taxi. You can buy tickets on the train or at self-service machines at Heathrow Airport (they’re also available from travel agents).

**GATWICK AIRPORT** While Heathrow still dominates, more and more scheduled flights land at relatively remote **Gatwick** (☎ 087/0000-2468; www.gatwickairport.com for flight information). It’s located some 40km (25 miles) south of London in West Sussex, but it’s only a 30-minute train ride away. From Gatwick, the fastest way into London is via the **Gatwick Express trains** (☎ 084/5850-1530; www.gatwickexpress.co.uk), which leave for Victoria Station in London every 30 minutes during the day and every hour at night. The one-way charge is £15 ($29) Express Class for adults, £23 ($44) for First Class, half-price for children 5 to 15, and free for children under 5. There are also Airbus **buses** from Gatwick to Victoria Coach Station (which is adjacent to Victoria Rail Station) operated by **National Express** (☎ 087/0580-8080; www.nationalexpress.com), approximately every hour from 4:15am to 9:15pm; the round-trip fare is £13 ($25) per person, and the trip takes approximately 1½ hours. A **taxi** from Gatwick to central London usually costs £77 to £97 ($146–$184). However, you must negotiate a fare with the driver before you enter the cab; the meter doesn’t apply because Gatwick lies outside the Metropolitan Police District. For further information, call ☎ 0800/747-737.

**LONDON CITY AIRPORT** Located just 5km (3 miles) east of the bustling business community of Canary Wharf and 9.5km (6 miles) east of the City, **London City Airport** (☎ 020/7646-0088; www.londoncityairport.com) is served by 14 airlines (Air Wales, British Airways, Cirrus Airlines, CityJet, Fly Be, Jet Magic, KLM, Lufthansa, Luxair, OLT, Scot Airways, Swiss International Airlines, and VLM) that fly from 18 cities in western Europe and Scandinavia.
The nearest Underground station is Canning Town on the Jubilee line where you can connect directly to the London Airport by the Docklands Light Railway (trip time: 10 min.).

A shuttle bus can take you to Canary Wharf, where trains from the Dockland Line Railway make frequent 10-minute runs to London's financial district, known as “the City.” Here, passengers can catch the Underground from the Bank Tube stop. In addition, London Transport bus no. 473 goes from the City Airport to East London, where you can board any Underground at the Plaistow Tube stop.

**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.national express.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 £19 ($36).

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The nearest Underground station is Canning Town on the Jubilee line where you can connect directly to the London Airport by the Docklands Light Railway (trip time: 10 min.).

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**5 Money**

It’s always advisable to bring money in a variety of forms on a vacation: a mix of cash, credit cards, and traveler’s checks. You should also exchange enough petty cash to cover airport incidentals, tipping, and transportation to your hotel before you leave home, or withdraw money upon arrival at an airport ATM.

In many international destinations, ATMs offer the best exchange rates. Avoid exchanging money at commercial exchange bureaus and hotels, which often have the highest transaction fees.

**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. Banknotes 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 = $1.90 (U.S.). Bear in mind, however, that exchange rates fluctuate daily.
ATMs

The easiest and best way to get cash away from home is from an ATM (automated-teller machine), sometimes referred to as a “cash-point.” The Cirrus (© 800/424-7787; www.mastercard.com) and PLUS (© 800/843-7587; www.visa.com) networks span the globe. Go to your bank card’s website to find ATM locations at your destination. Be sure you know your daily withdrawal limit before you depart. **Note:** 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.

**Note:** Banks that belong to the Global ATM Alliance charge no transaction fees for cash withdrawals at other Alliance member ATMs; these include Bank of America and Barclays (U.K. and parts of Africa).

**CREDIT CARDS**

Credit cards are another safe way to carry money. They also provide a convenient record of all your expenses, and they generally offer relatively good exchange rates. You can withdraw cash advances from your credit cards at banks or ATMs, but high fees make credit-card cash advances a pricey way to get cash. 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). Most major credit cards are accepted in London.

**TRAVELER’S CHECKS**

These days, traveler’s checks are less necessary because most English cities and towns, especially London, have 24-hour ATMs, allowing you to withdraw small amounts of cash as needed. But if you prefer the security of the tried and true, you might want to stick with traveler’s checks—provided you don’t mind showing an ID every time you want to cash a check. **Note:** Exchange rates are more favorable at your destination. Nevertheless, it’s often helpful to exchange at least some money before going abroad (standing in line at the exchange bureau in the London airport could make you miss the next bus leaving for downtown after a long flight).
You can buy traveler’s checks at most banks. 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 (© 800/807-6233 or, for cardholders, 800/221-7282—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).

Be sure to keep a record of the traveler’s checks’ serial numbers separate from your checks in the event that they are stolen or lost. You’ll get a refund faster if you know the numbers.

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

Another option is the new prepaid traveler’s check cards, reloadable cards that work much like debit cards but aren’t linked to your checking account. The American Express Travelers Cheque Card, for example, requires a minimum deposit, sets a maximum balance, and has a one-time issuance fee of $14.95. You can withdraw money from an ATM (for a fee of $2.50 per transaction, not including bank fees), and the funds can be purchased in dollars, euros, or pounds. If you lose the card, your available funds will be refunded within 24 hours.

6 Specialized Travel Resources

TRAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES
Most disabilities shouldn’t stop anyone from traveling. There are more options and resources out there than ever before. Many London hotels, museums, restaurants, and sightseeing attractions have wheelchair ramps. Persons with disabilities are often granted special discounts at attractions and, in some cases, nightclubs. These discounts are called “concessions” in Britain. It always pays to ask. Free information and advice are available from Holiday Care Service, The Hawkins Suite, Enham Place, Andover SP11 6JS (© 0845/124-9971; fax 0845/124-9972; www.holidaycare.org.uk).

Bookstores in London often carry Access in London, a publication listing hotels, restaurants, sights, shops, and more for persons with disabilities. It costs £12 ($23).
The transport system, cinemas, and theaters are still extremely hard for the disabled to negotiate, but Transport for London does publish a leaflet called Access to the Underground, which gives details on elevators and ramps at individual Underground stations; call ☏ 020/7222-5600 or visit www.tfl.gov.uk. And the 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 in general, easily wheelchair-accessible tourist attractions and cinemas, theaters with hearing aids, and sign language–interpreted tours and theater productions. Artsline will mail information to North America, but it's more helpful to contact them once you arrive in London; the line is staffed Monday to Friday 9:30am to 5:30pm.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

London has one of the most active gay and lesbian scenes in the world; we've recommended a number of the city's best gay clubs, lounges, and bars in chapter 10, “London After Dark.”

One of the best places for information on what's hot in London's gay and lesbian scene is Gay's the Word, 66 Marchmont St., WC1 N1AB (☏ 020/7278-7654; www.gaystheword.co.uk; Tube: Russell Sq.), London’s best gay-oriented bookstore and the largest such store in Britain. The staff is friendly and helpful and will offer advice about the ever-changing gay 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, as well as at other gay-friendly venues, you can find a number of gay publications, many free, including the popular Boyz and Pink Paper (this one has a good section aimed at lesbian readers). Also check out 9X, filled with data about all the new clubs and whatever else is hot on the scene.

The International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association (IGLTA; ☏ 800/448-8550 or 954/776-2626; 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 and tour operators.

Many agencies offer tours and travel itineraries specifically for gay and lesbian travelers. Above and Beyond Tours (☏ 800/397-2681;

SENIOR TRAVEL

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

If you’re over 60, you’re eligible for special 10% discounts on British Airways through its Privileged Traveler program. You also qualify for reduced restrictions on Advanced Purchases airline ticket cancellations. Discounts are also granted for British Airways’ tours and for intra-Britain air tickets booked in North America. British Rail 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 that you’re a senior when you make your hotel reservations. Many hotels offer seniors discounts.

Members of AARP (formerly known as the American Association of Retired Persons), 601 E St. NW, Washington, DC 20049 (© 888/687-2277; www.aarp.org), get global discounts on hotels, airfares, and car rentals. AARP offers members a wide range of benefits, including AARP: The Magazine and a monthly newsletter. Anyone over 50 can join.

7 Staying Connected

TELEPHONES

To call London: If you’re calling London from the United States:

1. Dial the international access code, 011.
2. Dial the country code, 44.
3. Dial the city code, 20, and then the number. (London’s official city code is 020, but you will dial 20 because you always have to omit the zero from the area code when calling London from outside England.) So the whole number you’d dial would be 011-44-20-0000-0000.
To make international calls: To make international calls from London, first dial 00 and then the country code (U.S. or Canada, 1; Ireland, 353; Australia, 61; New Zealand, 64). Next, dial the area code and number. For example, if you wanted to call the British Embassy in Washington, D.C., you would dial 00-1-202-588-7800.

Or call through one of the following long-distance access codes: AT&T USA Direct (0 800/890-011), Canada Direct (0 800/890-016), Australia (0 800/890-061), or New Zealand (0 800/890-064). Common country codes are U.S. and Canada, 1; Australia, 61; New Zealand, 64; and South Africa, 27.

For directory assistance: Dial 118212 for a full range of services; for the rest of Britain, dial 118118.

For operator assistance: If you need operator assistance in making a call, dial 100.

Toll-free numbers: Numbers beginning with 0800 within London are toll-free, but calling a 1-800 number in the U.S. from England is not toll-free. In fact, it costs the same as an overseas call.

To call within London: Dial the local seven- or eight-digit number.

To call within Britain (outside London): Phone numbers outside the major cities consist of an exchange code plus telephone number. To dial the number, you need to dial the exchange code first. Information sheets on call-box walls give the codes in most instances. If your code isn’t there, call the operator by dialing 100.

There are three types of 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 coins before dialing. The minimum charge is 40p (75¢).

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 Great Britain and the rest of Europe and dozens of other countries worldwide. In the U.S., T-Mobile, AT&T Wireless, and Cingular use this quasi-universal system; in Canada, Microcell and some Rogers customers are GSM, and all Europeans and most Australians use GSM. If your cellphone is on a GSM system, and you have a world-capable multiband phone such as many Sony Ericsson, Motorola, or Samsung models, you can make and receive calls across civilized areas around much of the globe. Just call your wireless operator and ask for “international roaming” to be activated on your
account. Unfortunately, per-minute charges are usually $1 to $1.50 in Britain.

That’s why it’s important to buy an “unlocked” world phone from the get-go. Many cellphone operators sell “locked” phones that restrict you from using any other removable computer memory phone chip (called a SIM card) cards than the ones they supply. Having an unlocked phone allows you to install a cheap, prepaid SIM card (found at a local retailer) in your destination country. (Show your phone to the salesperson; not all phones work on all networks.) You’ll get a local phone number and much, much lower calling rates. Unlocking an already locked phone can be complicated, but it can be done; just call your cellular operator and say you want to use the phone with a local provider.

**INTERNET/E-MAIL**

**WITHOUT YOUR OWN COMPUTER**

There are cybercafes throughout the heart of commercial London, with fees averaging about £2 ($3.80) per hour. For an Internet Exchange, there are some 22 locations at libraries all over London—call @ 020/8742-4000 for the location nearest you. You can also use [www.cybercaptive.com](http://www.cybercaptive.com) and [www.cybercafe.com](http://www.cybercafe.com) to find cybercafes in London.

**WITH YOUR OWN COMPUTER**

More and more hotels, resorts, airports, cafes, and retailers are going Wi-Fi (wireless fidelity), becoming “hotspots” that offer free high-speed Wi-Fi access or charge a small fee for usage. Most laptops sold today have built-in wireless capability. To find public Wi-Fi hotspots at your destination, go to [www.jiwire.com](http://www.jiwire.com); its Hotspot Finder holds the world’s largest directory of public wireless hotspots.

For dial-up access, most business-class hotels throughout the world offer dataports for laptop modems, and a few thousand hotels in Europe now offer free high-speed Internet access.

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 if your hotel supplies them to guests. British current is 240 volts, AC, so you’ll need a converter or transformer for U.S.-made electrical appliances, as well as an adapter that allows the plug to match British outlets. Some (but not all) hotels supply them for guests. If you’ve forgotten one, you can buy a transformer/adapter at most branches of Boots the Chemist.