

Discovering London: 5 Unmissable Experiences for Your 2025 Adventure (Episode 133)

The UK Travel Planning Podcast helps you plan your perfect UK vacation

Tracy: Planning a trip to London, but not sure where to start. Don't worry, I've got you covered. Welcome to episode 133 of the UK Travel Planning Podcast. Today, I'm sharing five of my favourite London experiences to help you plan your perfect visit. Whether it's your first time or you're looking to add something special to your next trip.

intro: Welcome to the UK Travel Planning Podcast. Your host is the founder of the UK travel planning website, Tracy Collins. In this podcast, Tracey shares destination guides, travel tips and itinerary ideas, as well as interviews with a variety of guests who share their knowledge and experience of UK travel to help you plan your perfect UK vacation. Join us as we explore the uk, from cosmopolitan cities to quaint villages, from historic castles to beautiful islands. And from the picturesque countryside to seaside town.

UK Travel Planning Podcast goes through five favourite experiences in London

Tracy: Hello and welcome back to the UK Travel Planning Podcast. London is a city that never stops surprising its visitors. Whether it's your first time or you're returning to uncover more of its charm, London has an incredible variety of experiences to offer. So

in today's episode, I'll, walk you through my five favourite experiences in London, share tips and insights which will help you hopefully make the most of your visit. So I'll be talking about some iconic landmarks, cultural highlights like afternoon tea and historic pub tours, and even how to catch some of London's unique traditions, such as the changing of the guard or the ceremony of the Keys at the Tower of London. You'll also hear a bonus 6 experience which I really couldn't miss out. When I was putting this together, I was like, no, I have to talk about this particular experience. So, you'll find that at the end. So grab a notebook, get yourself comfy and let's dive into planning your perfect London adventure.

First on my list is experiencing London's iconic landmarks

So, first on my list is experiencing London's iconic landmarks. And these are the places that immediately come to mind when you think of London. So, such as Westminster Abbey, Big Ben and yes, I know that is the bell and it's actually the Elizabeth Tower, but honestly, no British person calls it that. It's always going to be Big Ben to us, St. Paul's Cathedral and of course, the Tower of London. did I mention Buckingham Palace? Possibly not. But, you know, these are the places that, when you think about London, immediately come to mind. So not only are these sites fantastic to look at, but they're also steeped in history and culture that dates back centuries. So now I recommend that you actually go into these places as well. Don't just see them from outside and tick off A list. I had a friend who went to London last year and she didn't actually even go into the Tower of London, which I was a bit disappointed with. Like to experience London, don't just look at the Tower of London from outside. Go into the Tower of London and find out about history. You know, walk around and feel the history. It's. You just can't avoid, you can't miss it. The actual kind of whole, spirit and essence of the Tower of London and

what it's been over the centuries. Learn about that and find out about it. So, so please, please, please, if you can't, don't just see them from the outside because you're going to miss so much if you, that's all you do. Now if you can take a tour, really, you know, a small group tour with skip the lines access is, is what I like to go on for places like Westminster Abbey and the Tower of London. But I know if you're on a tighter budget, maybe consider things like a verger to Westminster abbey which costs 10 pounds. It's at 11 o'clock though, they only take 20 people. So make sure that you are there well in advance and that you pay your 10 pounds to get in. As one of those, 20 people. I found out in, I think it was October, November when I ended up being number 22, that there was absolutely no way that I was going on that Verger tour, unfortunately. So that was a bit of a disappointment for me. So I don't want that to happen to you as well. So, so make sure that you're there ahead of time. But for example, you know, you can do things like that if you go to St. Paul's Cathedral you have to pay to go in, but they have audio tours and I actually joined a free tour with a volunteer when I went around in, I think it was October time when I visited St. Paul's when I was doing the London Pass Challenge, which you can hear about in a, in a previous episode of the podcast. So if you want to tight a budget and you don't, you can't afford to pay for a small group tour or a private tour, do consider making sure that you do the actual tours that exist in some of these places. So St. Paul's is, say you've got an auditor, there's volunteers that take tours for the Tower of London, there's a free Yeoman Water tour that you can join and it's, it's so informative and it's really entertaining as well. the Yeoman orders are, ah, they really know this stuff. but also they've got great personalities. The only downside of it is that it's busy so you don't get, you know, you can't have that one to one or small group kind of exchange range that you, you can have on some of the small group or private tours. But, as I say, you'll learn so much.

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So do join a tour. Even if there's a lot of you there, you will learn about these different iconic landmarks and historic buildings and just wonderful places to visit in London. Like, seriously, you can't miss out seeing these places. You know, if you can book a tour with a guide, honestly, you won't regret it because you really will be able to take advantage of kind of finding out far more about the place place. And if you do so, as I say, it will give you a deeper understanding of London's history and make your visit all the more memorable. And believe me, there were, there were times in my 20s and probably 30s that I didn't necessarily take tours. I kind of would wander around and probably not learn anything about a place. Just kind of go, oh, excellent, I've been here and tick it off. But to have a deeper experience of London, honestly, do do a tour, do the free tours, do the audio guide if that's what they provide you with, because that's going to be a better way to understand London.

So next up, see London from a different angle because the city is breathtaking from above

So next up, see London from a different angle because the city is breathtaking from above or along the river. For panoramic views you have quite a few choices. And I do have an article, the Best viewpoints in London. So the obvious ones that spring to mind are the London Eye. Not everybody loves the London Eye. I personally always like to go on the London Eye because you get a different view. You get a great view of Big Ben, House of Parliament, Westminster, Abbey M. You can see for, for miles from up there and you get a wonderful view of the Thames itself. For a different view you can go to the Shard or the Sky Garden. Now the advantage of the Sky Garden is that it is free. So make sure that you do get your tickets for that because you will have to get a slot. But it is free, so it's great. If you're on a budget, it's a great option to go the Sky Garden. And

you do get great views of HMS Belfast, the Tower of London, Tower Bridge, the, the Thames. Again, again, if you want to be, if you want to go up the Shard and see, I mean the View from the Shard is also amazing. we did that last year. We had access to London, shot the Shard through the London Pass, so enjoyed the view from that. We did have to book that. So you've got lots of different options to give you lots of vantage points where you'll get really a fantastic bird's eye view of landmarks across London. So I recommend you do that. And as I say, if budget's an issue, just go to Sky Garden because it's free. For something more relaxed, maybe consider a Thames river cruise, because that's a fantastic option. So you'll glide past iconic landmarks like the House of Parliament, Shakespeare's Globe, and you enjoy a unique perspective of the city. If you're looking for an unforgettable moment, opt for a sunset cruise, because it's truly magical to see London skyline illuminated as day turns to night. And I was very lucky last October, ah, to be on the, Uberboat from Greenwich back down to Westminster Pier at sunset. And it really was gorgeous. I'll put some pictures in the show notes, actually, because it was stunning. But obviously a cruise isn't the only way to experience the Thames, as I've just said. I got the Uberboat. Now that's a Thames Clipper. It's not like Uber, as in you call Uber on your phone. It's not a boat like that. It's basically just a Clipper service that goes up and down the, Thames. That would be cheaper than a cruise. And, you know, many London people will use that to get around. And I love hopping on the Uber boat. You know, one of my favourite rides is, is basically on the Uber, but all the way down to Greenwich. But if you say you're visiting the Tower of London, you could actually join up, jump on at the Tower Millennium Pier and then just go to Westminster Pier. And that takes about 30 minutes. And if you do that, you pass by some of London sites and landmarks, like I said, HMS Belfast, Globe Theatre, St. Paul's Millennium Bridge, etc. Etc. So that's a great way to travel between those two points in London and get a different perspective. The third experience that I recommend is to experience the culture and tradition of London. Really. London is a city where

culture and tradition are woven into everyday life. Whether it's watching the changing of the Guard at Buckingham palace or attending the Ceremony of the Keys at the Tower of London, these rituals offer a, fascinating glimpse into London storied past, the history. It's just, it, honestly, it just seeps all through the city. And if you attend any of those particular ceremonies, you really will be kind of involved in the pomp and ceremony of the UK basically of Britain. So the change of the guard everyone wants to see. It's crazy busy, especially during the holidays and in peak season. So it really is best to prepare and we do have a guide on the website. so you know what to see, what to, when to be there, where, and how to move around to get the best of it. and I will link to that in the show notes.

One of my favourite things to do in London is afternoon tea

So now other ceremonies that I absolutely love to attend and I'm sure if you've listened to any of my previous podcasts about my favourite things to do in London, you'll know that I love the opening Ceremony and the Ceremony of the Keys at the Tower of London. so that's the, basically the open ceremony. So you're there before you actually see the Tower of London opening. And the Ceremony of the Keys is a very

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extremely historic event that is, it happens every evening. It's the actual closing of the Tower of London and it's been following the same way of doing it for, for centuries and centuries and centuries. You cannot video, you cannot take photographs. The only way to experience the Ceremony of the Keys is actually to attend it. Now tickets for the Ceremony of the Keys must be pre booked in advance online if you're going to book for

the five pound tickets. and it does become fully booked very quickly. They're, they're released on a rolling monthly basis. So if you for tickets for April, so if you head in for London in April, they were released at the beginning, beginning of March at 4pm on the 1st working day of the month, unless it's a Friday and then they're released on the following Monday. So add that to your diary. Now those five pound tickets are excellent if you can get them, but if you want a truly VIP experience, I do recommend the walks tour as a small group tour and you get exclusive time with a Yeoman Order. And it's one of my favourite experiences in London. I think I've done it three times now. and I'd like to do it honestly would like to do it so many times that I meet m every one of the Yeoman Waters because they're also different, they all have their own stories, but being able to ask them questions and for them to be able to share about their life living in the Tower of London as well is something, it's such a privilege to be able to speak, spend the time and, and learn about it. And also to just learn the history of the Tower of London from them. They know so much. So another experience that I recommend to try in London, and this comes up so often and m, we get asked so often about this is afternoon tea. So you know, whether you want to go for the classic elegance of the Ritz or a quirky option like Bridget's Bakery afternoon tea bus or a themed tea like Alice in Wonderland with Peter Pan, which Doug and I have done both of those. It's really honestly a delightful way to indulge in a British tradition. There are so many afternoon teas on offer that you really are spoilt for choice. there's traditional and themed afternoon teas and I know when I talk to, people do consults, about visiting London itinerary consults, often I'll talk about what ask and what sort of afternoon tea in particular they would like to experience because there are so many different choices. We do have a guide with information about lots of the options and I will share that in the show notes.

So while we talk of culture and food and drink, I highly recommend

visiting a London pub

So while we talk of culture and food and drink, I highly recommend also visiting a London pub. So if you have our London travel planning map, you can philtre by the pub tag to find the locations of our favourites. And I'll also mention, I can't not mention this, the Taste Tales and Traditional Ales tour I took with Devour a few years ago, which I absolutely loved. Visiting some of the most historic pubs in London and hearing the stories, histories and about the famous people who visited over the centuries was honestly was so fantastic. And it was topped off with some great food, including the best Scotch egg I've ever eaten. Okay, Fortnum and Mason, you do an amazing one too. But this is one of my favourite tours ever anywhere in the world. Honestly, I loved it so much and I went with a friend of mine and Terry, and she is still talking about this tour because it was so, so much fun. The guide was excellent. We went to visit some of these old, old pubs, down little, alleyways, hidden away. And it was brilliant. And I'm British and I loved it, absolutely loved it. So if you want to experience that kind of culture of the British pub and also the history, honestly, I can't recommend that tour enough. It was just brilliant. And I'll link to that in the show notes as well. Now, you can't forget the markets. Borough Market is a foodie paradise. Now I've still tried those strawberries dipped in chocolate that everybody goes on about, but honestly, humble Crumble is my go to. When I go to Borough Market, there's other options. Portobello Market, Greenwich Market, Camden Market, Covent Garden markets, and those are just some of the markets to consider visiting. And there's really no better way to immerse yourself in the culture than by engaging in these quintessentially British experiences. So again, we have a guide to London markets, which I'll link to in the show notes.

My fourth favourite experience is to visit a museum. Because there

are so many amazing museums in London

My fourth favourite experience is to visit a museum. Now, I know this isn't everybody's taste and I, I do get told in the Facebook group occasionally, you know, my husband isn't, isn't a museum person, we're not interested in museums. But I will say London's museums are really among the best in the world. And the even better news is that many of them are free. So the Victorian Albert Museum, also called the va, Natural History Museum, National Gallery, National Portrait Gallery, Science Museum and British Museum are some of the most popular options. And free though they do, I mean they do charge sometimes for special exhibitions. So do cheque that. But, but entrance to the museums is free. And each of these institutions offers honestly, a unique window to art history and science. And ah, as many of you will know, the VNA

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is my personal favourite. I always got the vna. It's, it's, honestly, it's a highlight of my itinerary whenever I visit London. And don't miss the cafe, that's all I'm saying, do not miss. If you go to the va, you cannot miss the cafe. Now, if you're looking for something, more offbeat, London's got lots of smaller museums too. The, ah, Florence Nightingale Museum, which I recently visited with the London Pass, provides a fascinating insight into the life and legacy of the founder of modern nursing. For history enthusiasts, the Imperial War Museum offers a gripping exploration of Wartown Britain. The Churchill War Rooms give a glimpse into the nerve centre of Britain's World War II efforts. HMS Belfast, which is moored on the Thames, provides a unique opportunity to step aboard historic Royal Navy warship. Other highlights include the Sir John Soanes Museum, treasure trove of art and antiquities. The Tower of Dickens Museum, which offers a glimpse into the life of one of England's greatest writers. These are just a few of the

countless options available. So there's truly something for everyone. Whether you're a history buff, an art lover or simply curious about London's rich heritage, there is a museum for you. And again, I have a guide to museums on the website. So do have a look and pick one out that meets your interest. Because there are so many amazing museums in London and I would strongly recommend that you add that into your London experiences.

My fifth experience is to explore some of London's unique areas

So my fifth experience is to explore some of London's unique areas. So each area has its own distinct character and charm. So it makes you feel like you're discovering a different side of the city every time you turn a corner. For example, Notting Hill with its pastel coloured houses and lively Portobello Road market is perfect for a, leisurely morning. I had a fabulous photo shoot with Domi of scale and studio and Notting Hill which I loved and we had so much fun finding the best spots. It's such a lovely part of London. And of course for fans of the movie Notting Hill, finding the Blue Door and the Notting Hill bookshop has to, to be done. But honestly I had some. Probably my favourite photos I've ever had taken of me was taken in Notting Hill by Domi and it's a beautiful, beautiful area to explore. Shoreditch on the other hand in the East End is a hub for creativity and street art, trendy cafes and boutiques to explore. And if you're a history lover, Greenwich, I'm sure you've heard me mention Greenwich a number of times, is a must visit and one of my absolute favourites. There's so much to do and see. The Royal Observatory where you can place a foot in east and west hemispheres. The Painted hall and the old Royal Naval College, the Clipper, the Cutie Sark. Greenwich really is a treasure trove of maritime history and beautiful views. So don't forget the beautiful views from the observatory. It really is worth walking up that steep hill for the

view that you get. And again I'll share in the show notes some of the photos that I've taken. I've taken a few videos from up there as well because it's so beautiful. You do get a stunning view. Now I would recommend that you take some time to wander around these areas, soak in the atmosphere and experience kind of the many facets of London life. Because it isn't all about the changing of the guard or Westminster Abbey or the ceremony of the Keys. You know, there is kind of normal life going on and, and these areas honestly are wonderful to, to explore and walk around. Take a picnic to Greenwich park if you're there and the weather's lovely. Honestly it's a very, it's a beautiful park to just sit and relax in and enjoy. In the spring there's, you get the cherry blossom. In the autumn the leaves change colour and it's, it's a really, really pretty place to visit. And it's, I say it's one of my favourite areas to go. And you can actually combine a few things because you can take that, that Uber boat down there and, enjoy the, the river on the way down and then explore Greenwich and then head back up into the city.

One of the best things you can do in London is take a day trip

Now, bonus tip number six, my bonus experience. I don't know if this is going to be controversial because I know we're talking about five best experiences in London, but one of the best things you can do if you have time, honestly, if you have time, is to actually get out of London on a day trip. And I know I keep saying this, I feel like I do a bit of a stock record with saying this, but there's so many incredible places to explore. Just a short journey away from London. Hampton Court palace offers a fascinating glimpse into Tudor history. You've got Windsor Castle where you can walk in the footsteps of royalty. And of course, St. George's Chapel is the final resting place for the late Queen. So those are wonderful, easy day trips from London. They're very close. But if you're up for a bit more of an adventure, Stonehenge, Bath, Oxford, Cambridge,

Canterbury and the Cotswolds are just some of the iconic destinations that showcase England's natural beauty and historic charm. And they're all within reach of London on a day. Day trip. We have got two podcast episodes where we dedicated. Now, off the top of my head, I think it's episode 97 and 98 or 96 and

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97. Hopefully that's correct where I talk about. Doug and I actually talk about our favourite day trips from London. We kind of go clockwise round because there's so many different places to choose. But if you're in London long enough, I, ah, really urge you to include a day trip out of London itself so you can experience a little bit different. Something a little bit different. Get out of the city, experience the countryside, just see a different side of England. And, my final tip, the one thing that I would recommend that you do to make the most of these experiences is honestly to book a tour with a knowledgeable guide to truly discover London. So whether it's a private tour, a small group tour or a guided experience included with your entry ticket, having experts show you around is honestly 100% worth it and it will help you make the most of these experiences.

UK Travel Planning Podcast features five favourite experiences in London plus a bonus tip

And there you have it, my five favourite experiences in London, plus a bonus tip. Which of these will you add to your itinerary. Let me know via the Speak Pipe link in the show notes because I'm really excited to know if you have a question or have enjoyed this episode. Let me know too because I love to hear from you. And you never know, you

may get a shout out in a upcoming episode. Now that's it for this week. Please do cheque the show notes at uh.uktravelplanner.com forward/episode133 for photos and links to the different tours that are mentioned. But that just leaves me to say until next week. Happy UK Travel Planning thank you for tuning in to this week's episode of the UK Travel Planning Podcast. As always, show notes can be found@uktravelplanning.com if you've enjoyed the show, why not leave us a feedback via text or a review on your favourite podcast app? We love to hear from you. And you never know. You may receive a shout out in a future episode, but as always, that just leaves me to say until next week, Happy UK Travel Planning.

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