

Where to Stay in London: 12 Best Areas Compared

Tracy Collins with Doug Collins

IN THIS EPISODE

Tracy and Doug take you around the 12 areas of London they recommend staying in: who each one suits, what is on the doorstep, the nearest train stations, and the pros and cons worth knowing before you book. Plus three things to check on any hotel listing and Tracy's three favourite areas.

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01

Welcome

TRACY Covent Garden or Kensington, South Bank or Shoreditch? If you've been staring at a hotel map wondering which part of London to pick, this one's for you. 12 areas, who each one suits and the pros and cons worth knowing before you book.

Hi everybody and welcome to this week's edition of the UK Travel Planning Podcast. I've got Doug with me this week.

DOUG Hello there.

TRACY And he's hoping to chip in occasionally with some pearls of wisdom about where to stay in London. I don't know about that. Now, we know one of the biggest questions we get asked, and it comes up in the Facebook group all the time, is where to stay in London.

DOUG London's a big place.

TRACY It is a huge place, and when we do consults and video reviews, quite often that's something we look at: where people are choosing to stay in London in relation to what they're planning to do, day trips and things like that, just to make it easier for them. The temptation with London is often to stay a little bit further out, but that can have all sorts of problems that go with it. We know it's cheaper, but there are lots of things you've got to consider.

DOUG Yeah.

TRACY And we know it is really the big decision of the trip. If you're planning to spend any amount of time in London, you're going to be thinking about that. Now, we have done an episode on this topic before, which was episode 68, so quite a while ago, and I talked through how to choose your area. So the four steps: why staying central usually pays for itself, budgets, how close you want to be to a Tube station. If you want that decision-making framework, go back and listen to episode 68, because it's all really good advice.

DOUG Yeah, it's very popular.

TRACY And I don't want to repeat that in this episode. So this episode is slightly different. I'm going to take you around the 12 areas themselves, the ones we consider the best areas to stay in London. We're going to go through them one at a time and talk about the area, who it suits, what is on your doorstep if you stay there, and the pros and cons worth knowing before you book, because each area has pros and cons.

DOUG It most definitely has.

TRACY And different areas suit different people. One thing I never do is wag my finger and say you shouldn't stay here, or you should stay there. I can't bear that approach. Our idea is to give you the information so that you can make that decision based on your own needs, because we're all grown-ups and we can all figure out what would work best for us. And if you're not sure, you can send us a message, ask in the Facebook group, or we can always do an itinerary consult or a video review and help you with this, if it's something you're struggling with.

DOUG I will point out there are more than 12 areas to London.

TRACY Yes, there are.

DOUG In case anybody asks.

TRACY I've just grouped them into 12 areas to make it easier, grouping together the areas that go together.

DOUG Yeah, it'll make sense when you start going through it.

TRACY Absolutely. Now, it's an overview, a quick tour of all 12 areas so you can work out which ones might suit you.

DOUG Yeah.

TRACY But we'll be coming back to each of them with more in-depth episodes on individual areas. I know I keep promising that I'm going to do that, and it is something we will definitely do in 2027. But if you don't want to wait for those, we do have a full guide to every area on our London website, londontravelplanning.com, which has hotels at every budget and a map. So if you're listening and you think, oh, that sounds really good, that's where to go and dig a bit deeper. Now, Doug and I have stayed in quite a few of these areas over the years, and I'm going to share my favourite three areas.

DOUG You've stayed in a lot more than I have.

TRACY I have. Quite often I travel solo into London and stay in different parts of London. I've also stayed there with friends when I've not been with you.

DOUG Yeah, well, I disappear off on the train somewhere.

TRACY Exactly. So yes, I have stayed in a lot more areas, but there are a couple of these areas that I've got pegged that I definitely want to stay in, to explore a little bit more. South Kensington is probably top of my list for next time. But anyway, let's get into it. As I say, we have a full guide to where to stay in London on the londontravelplanning.com website, so I will link to that. That's what I'm going to be referring to, and that's what you need to go and have a look at to get a little bit more detail. From there you can start looking at individual areas.

Our idea is to give you the information so that you can make that decision based on your own needs, because we're all grown-ups and we can all figure out what would work best for us.

TRACY

Covent Garden, Charing Cross and Trafalgar Square

TRACY Right, so the first area we're going to talk about is Covent Garden, Charing Cross and Trafalgar Square. Popular areas, and when we do consults a lot of people are trying to stay in that Charing Cross area.

DOUG Yeah.

TRACY Covent Garden is one of my favourite areas to stay in.

DOUG I think it's one of everybody's favourites.

TRACY I think so. Now, who is it good for? It's a really good area for first-time visitors who want as much as possible close by, and there's a reason for that, because there is so much to do around that area. You've got the Piazza at Covent Garden, you've got Theatreland, there are so many amazing restaurants, good shopping. From Covent Garden you've got Soho, the Embankment and Trafalgar Square all within 10 to 15 minutes on foot. You've got the Royal Opera House, the Market Halls, the London Transport Museum. I know that's one of your favourites.

DOUG It is, yeah.

TRACY And we highly recommend it. We're going to do an episode all about the lesser-known, smaller museums in London at the beginning of November, so we'll cover the London Transport Museum then. Charing Cross Station is close by too, and that's got trains to a few places.

DOUG Yeah, Charing Cross is close to London Waterloo, which is one of the stations that opens up the south of England.

TRACY They are close. Charing Cross is north of the river and Waterloo is south of the river, and we'll cover that area around Waterloo in a bit as well.

DOUG Which is close to Trafalgar Square as well, very close.

TRACY Now, when I'm in London, this is an area that I tend to stay in when I'm on my own. I like to stay in the Z Hotel in Holborn, which is just up the road. It's a reasonable price, it's a great option if you're travelling solo, and it's right next to the Tube station. Now, the downsides of this area: it's busy, it's quite lively in the evening, and it can be quite pricey.

DOUG Sure.

TRACY But it's a great area to stay in if you like the restaurants, if you want a little bit of nightlife, and if you're going to the theatre, especially any that are in that theatre district. It's a perfect area to stay in.

DOUG I think you hit on it initially there: for first-time visitors, you just won't get better.

TRACY I think it's a really, really good area.

03

Tower Bridge and the City of London

TRACY The next area we're going to talk about is Tower Bridge and the City of London. We have stayed in this area before. If you want to be beside the River Thames, with a bit of history and a quieter area, this is an area to stay in. The City is the oldest part of London, and staying down by Tower Bridge puts the Tower of London, the river and a couple of thousand years of history right outside your door. We stayed at the citizenM, and when you come out of the citizenM, there's the old Roman wall, the London Wall.

DOUG Literally outside the door.

TRACY It's crazy. And we stayed at the citizenM because it was great for early and late tours of the Tower of London.

DOUG Which is what we were doing.

TRACY With WalksDevour we did the opening ceremony, and I've done the Ceremony of the Keys a few times now. It's a perfect place to stay because it's literally a few minutes' walk from the Tower of London.

DOUG It would also have been very good for the Uber Boat illuminated bridges tour that I did. That sets off at half past nine at night, so that would have been perfect.

TRACY So another perfect reason to stay around Tower Bridge and the City of London. Now, one thing I will say about that area, which you might not expect, is that the City is absolutely packed with office workers during the week.

DOUG Yes.

TRACY But in the evening they all go home and it really empties out. It's much quieter and calmer after dark than the West End, which we've just talked about, but it's still really well connected. That quiet cuts both ways. Weekday evenings and weekends can feel very quiet, and some of the smaller cafes and pubs close at the weekend because their customers are mainly the office workers. On the plus side, it's a really lovely place

to be at the weekend. I went to Borough Market earlier this year, had a Sunday roast, and we walked across and through the City, and it was so lovely because it was so quiet after the craziness of Borough Market on a Sunday.

DOUG Yeah.

TRACY And it's also slightly cheaper to stay there at the weekend, for that exact reason: it is mainly an area so many people come into for work. Now, for trains, you've got Liverpool Street Station, which has the Stansted Express and trains to Cambridge and Norwich.

DOUG They head out to the east, and then you've got Fenchurch Street, which will give you the link out to Essex, coastal Essex.

04

South Bank, Bankside, Southwark and Waterloo

TRACY Area 3: South Bank, Bankside, Southwark and Waterloo.

DOUG Yeah.

TRACY This is a great area if you want to enjoy a stroll in the evening, because you've got that lovely riverside path running down past the London Eye, the Globe and Tate Modern. It's a fantastic walk if you like culture, and if you're there during the festive season it's a great area to stay in because you've got the Christmas market there.

DOUG Yep.

TRACY I stayed in that area a few years ago with my friend Lucy, and we really enjoyed it. That riverside path is wide, it's flat, and there are loads of benches, so you can have a stroll along there, sit down, have a break, have a drink or a snack. By late November that whole stretch is lit up and there's a Christmas market alongside it. It is lovely, though it does get pretty busy at Christmas time. And as I said, you've got Waterloo, which is a great base for getting to lots of places.

DOUG We could list so many of them. There's a direct train to Windsor, and you've got Winchester, Salisbury, the south coast, not to mention Gatwick Airport.

TRACY I like that area, I really do. It's also handy if you're going on a day trip with The English Bus, which I did this year. I did three trips out with The English Bus, and they pick you up beside the London Eye. So if you stay in the area it's just a quick stroll over, they pick you up, you go out for the day, you get dropped off at the same place and you're back at your hotel. That works really well.

DOUG Yeah.

- TRACY** Now, because we're talking about the pluses and minuses of each area: it does get very busy at weekends, especially around the London Eye, and some of the streets a little further back from the riverfront are probably not as pretty.
- DOUG** That's true.
- TRACY** But it is an area that I enjoyed staying in. You've got the Leake Street tunnels.
- DOUG** Yeah, I spent a bit of time looking around there this year. And just off Leake Street there are some lovely, quirky cafes and restaurants. I wouldn't say hidden, but not straight in your face. It's worth having a look around there, some good choices.
- TRACY** And there's quite a wide variety of accommodation prices in this area as well, so it's quite nice.
- DOUG** It's got a nice vibe down there. I enjoyed it.
-

05

South Kensington, Knightsbridge, Belgravia and Chelsea

- TRACY** Now the next area, and this is the one I've got earmarked to stay in next time, is South Kensington, Knightsbridge, Belgravia and Chelsea. Oh, it sounds so posh.
- DOUG** It does.
- TRACY** This is a great area if you love museums. I mean, I could stay in a hotel opposite the V&A and I'd be very happy.
- DOUG** You'd stay in the V&A itself.
- TRACY** I would. It's also great if you're travelling with your family, or you just want somewhere a bit more elegant and calmer near Hyde Park. South Kensington is famous for the big museums: the Natural History Museum, the Science Museum and the V&A are all in that area, and of course you've got Hyde Park. It's a very expensive area, with beautiful white terraces along there.
- DOUG** Yeah.
- TRACY** For families this is a real winner, because those three museums are free to enter, which is fantastic if you're on a budget. There's a pedestrian tunnel from South Kensington Tube station straight to the museums, which is really handy when it's raining.
- DOUG** Absolutely.

TRACY After this, we're recording an episode for next month all about what to do in London when it rains, and we'll be talking about the museums.

DOUG It'll be a short episode, because I'll just say travel around by train.

TRACY When it's raining.

DOUG Yeah.

TRACY Now, South Kensington is also on the Piccadilly line, so you can come straight in from Heathrow if you're staying there. The drawback is that it's one of the more upmarket parts of London, which means it comes with the price tag to go with it, both for hotels and for eating out. This is not a cheap area. Knightsbridge in particular is the home of Harrods and Harvey Nichols, so the shopping is lovely, but it's not cheap. But we've done some consults where some interesting hotels have been mentioned in that area that I'd like to stay in, which sounded like a really good option.

06

Greenwich

TRACY Next is number 5, which is Greenwich. Now, we stayed in Greenwich a few years ago.

DOUG We have, and that was a good experience. We thoroughly enjoyed that, didn't we?

TRACY Yeah, because it's a little bit further away. If you're a history lover, or a family, it's a good area. And if you're coming back to London for a second or third visit, Greenwich will give you a completely different side of London. You've got the Royal Observatory, the National Maritime Museum, the Cutty Sark, the Old Royal Naval College, there's a market, there's a huge open park, and it's all in one place.

DOUG There's a cable car.

TRACY Yes. You've done the cable car, haven't you?

DOUG I have, yeah.

TRACY And there's far more room to breathe than in the centre. So if you want something that feels a little bit friendlier, a bit more local...

DOUG A bit slower paced.

TRACY Slower paced, then I would say Greenwich is a great area to go to. We stayed in a lovely B&B there, probably 12, 13, 14 years ago.

DOUG Yeah, exactly. We got invited down to a party, didn't we?

- TRACY** It was lovely. It's got more of a village feel than feeling that you're in central London.
- DOUG** And it's not a big journey back into central London from there.
- TRACY** No. You can get back into central London using the DLR, which is the Docklands Light Railway.
- DOUG** Also the Jubilee line.
- TRACY** Or you can take the Uber Boat, and I would recommend doing that at least once because that's a lovely trip back.
- DOUG** I'll also mention there's a cruise terminal at Greenwich, so if you're arriving by cruise ship, some of them come up the river and stop there.
- TRACY** And Greenwich Station also has trains into London Bridge which take about 10 minutes, so it's not too far. Now, worth noting, because there are amazing things to do in Greenwich, and I absolutely love Greenwich: the Royal Observatory is at the top of a steep hill, so you just have to take your time if you're going up there, because it's a bit of a hike.
- DOUG** It's the last part. It's a gradual rise through the park, but the last 100 yards or so is pretty steep.
- TRACY** Otherwise everything's on the flat by the river. The market's really nice, and there are some really good pubs there for a Sunday roast.
- DOUG** Are you going to smile because I always mention I like having a picnic there?
- TRACY** You do. I'd rather go and have a Sunday roast at one of the pubs down there, to be honest. Some of the pubs we've been to there are really great. I can remember we were there once and there were people playing all these little games on the tables.
- DOUG** Oh, that's right. Near the Cutty Sark.

07

The East End, Spitalfields and Shoreditch

- TRACY** Okay, so Area 6 is the East End, Spitalfields and Shoreditch.
- DOUG** Now this is a different area again.
- TRACY** We're talking about the East End of London now. This is great if you love your food, love markets, or you want something a little bit different: creative, modern London. If you base yourself in Shoreditch or Spitalfields, it's really about bars, there's lots going on,

and some of the best food in London.

DOUG And history. I always feel like there's a history vibe there, in the buildings.

TRACY That area is absolutely steeped in history, some of it gruesome, because that's the area of Jack the Ripper. So if you're going to do a Jack the Ripper walking tour, it'll be in that area. Now, Liverpool Street Station is right next to Spitalfields, and the Elizabeth line will take you straight to Heathrow. And then there's also the Stansted Express.

DOUG Yeah, the Stansted Express out to the airport. But from Liverpool Street you're also opening up the east, Suffolk and Essex.

TRACY Now, worth knowing about this area: it's lively, it's a late-night part of town. So if you're a light sleeper and you don't want the nightlife, then the East End probably isn't the place to stay. It feels very different from the London of the West End, but some people love it for that. So if you're looking for something a little bit more edgy, a little bit different...

DOUG I've always enjoyed going out to that area.

TRACY Oh, I love that area. It is fantastic. A lot of street art, there's the flower market out there, a lot of markets. It's really good for that.

08

Camden and King's Cross

TRACY Area 7 is Camden and King's Cross. Now, we've stayed here quite a few times.

DOUG Quite a few times. It's north London, and obviously it's my train history. I've used King's Cross, St Pancras and Euston many, many times, early in the morning or back late at night. So it's been a place that's suited both of us really.

TRACY Absolutely, especially when we're getting those trains across to Paris early in the morning, or Amsterdam or wherever. You want to be close by. Now, King's Cross used to be an awful area. I can remember, 30 years ago, probably longer than that, 40 years ago, it was really not an area that you felt safe in.

DOUG Good for trainspotting, though.

TRACY Well, it's been completely rejuvenated, the whole area, and it's a good one. Again, markets. There's the music in that area, a lot of connections with music, and obviously the connections by train north as well.

DOUG That's right.

TRACY Eurostar.

DOUG My hometown, Burton-on-Trent, had a close association with St Pancras, next door to King's Cross, through the beer industry.

TRACY We should mention that you've got three train stations there in a row.

DOUG Two very close together and one further up Euston Road. You've got Euston, which serves the north and west. Then you've got St Pancras, which has the St Pancras International part for Eurostar, but also heads towards the East Midlands: Derby, Sheffield, Nottingham. And then you've got King's Cross, which heads north and forms the East Coast Main Line all the way up to Edinburgh.

TRACY And York.

DOUG And York.

TRACY In that area now you've also got Coal Drops Yard, and obviously you've got Camden's famous markets. And this is literally where we stay. We've stayed at the Pullman, we've stayed at the Megaro, and if you want something more budget-friendly, we stayed at a place called Keystone House.

DOUG That was very good, actually.

TRACY I think that was because we were getting the first Eurostar of the morning, at 6am or something.

DOUG And that's the balance you have to work out. We caught the early trains, we had a long day's travel, and the early trains are more reasonably priced, but then you've got to pay for accommodation. So it's a balancing act.

TRACY Absolutely. As I said, this area really has shed the reputation it used to have. It's become one of the best connected places in London to base yourself. You've got Camden Market, Regent's Canal, music venues a short walk away, and the British Library, which is always worth popping into to see the Treasures. That's right next to St Pancras. In fact, St Pancras station is beautiful.

DOUG Yeah, it is.

TRACY It's worth just going in and having a look around.

DOUG St Pancras is in essence two stations in one, because you've got the old and the new.

TRACY If you're taking the Eurostar or Thameslink it's a really good station, and there are really good shops in there as well.

- DOUG** It's a bit of a hidden secret: all around King's Cross and St Pancras there are some really tucked-away traditional pubs worth visiting, with some good food.
- TRACY** Excellent. I think we really like the area because I've seen how it has changed over the years, and we've found some affordable places to stay. There are more expensive ones, obviously. The Pullman and the Megaro are a little bit more expensive, but they're really nice. Now, you've also got Camden and the Camden Market area. I'm not a massive fan of Camden Market, to be honest. I think it's gone a bit touristy.
- DOUG** It gets very, very busy as well.
- TRACY** It does. And as you go up more towards that area, it can be a little bit more scruffy. If you want five-star luxury, that's not the area to stay in. Camden Market also gets very, very crowded at weekends, so that would put me off the Camden end.
- DOUG** Yes, it really does.
- TRACY** But King's Cross, if you're taking a train or going on the Eurostar, honestly, you can't do better than staying in that area.
- DOUG** Yeah.
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09

Bloomsbury and Fitzrovia

- TRACY** Next area is Bloomsbury and Fitzrovia, which I just love. It just sounds so posh.
- DOUG** It sounds posh, yes.
- TRACY** It does. Now, if you're a book lover, a museum lover, or anyone who wants central London with a calmer feel, then Bloomsbury and Fitzrovia are just perfect. They sit just north of the West End, so central London is on your doorstep, but once you're back at your hotel it feels quieter and more residential. The streets around there are full of leafy garden squares and gorgeous Georgian terraces, and there are the bookshops and cafes that the area has always been known for.
- DOUG** Beautiful flowers in the summer.
- TRACY** An absolutely beautiful area. And of course the British Museum is there, and that's free to enter. There are some good restaurants around there as well. Now, you've got Tottenham Court Road station on the edge of that area, and that's on the Elizabeth line, which will take you straight back to Heathrow.
- DOUG** Good links from Tottenham Court Road.

TRACY Absolutely. This area often gives you better value than Covent Garden or Westminster for a very similar location, so that's worth knowing if you want to be central without those central prices. Now, the thing to check is that a lot of the hotels here are in converted Georgian townhouses. They are beautiful, but it can mean small rooms, steep stairs and sometimes no lift. So it's always worth checking before you book.

DOUG Most definitely.

They are beautiful, but it can mean small rooms, steep stairs and sometimes no lift.

TRACY

10

Mayfair, Marylebone and Oxford Street

TRACY Now Area 9, if you're still keeping up: we're in Mayfair, Marylebone and Oxford Street. Another great area, for a special occasion or anybody who loves shopping. Everybody knows about Mayfair. It's the most exclusive part of London, and yes, it's the most expensive square on the Monopoly board.

DOUG I was just going to say, anybody who's played Monopoly will know Mayfair.

TRACY It sits on the eastern edge of Hyde Park, and it's full of smart hotels, fine restaurants and elegant townhouses. Now, if a Park Lane stay is not in the budget, and for most of us it isn't, look a little further north around Marylebone and Oxford Street, because you're still close to the shopping and to the park, but it's slightly less expensive.

I've got a soft spot for Marylebone. The high street has a lovely village feel with independent shops and cafes, and it's a very easy, lovely place to stay. And obviously you've got Marylebone Station as well.

DOUG Yeah, Marylebone Station has great rail links on the Chiltern line. You go up towards Oxford, Bicester Village, Warwick, and ultimately, with a change at Leamington, up to Stratford-upon-Avon.

TRACY Now, the only thing I would say about that area is Oxford Street. It's not particularly great. It has gone downhill, I would say, in the last few years, so I would probably say not to stay on Oxford Street itself, though the talk is that it's going to be pedestrianised, so that might make it a bit quieter.

DOUG That's a good idea.

TRACY But honestly, Mayfair and Marylebone would probably be my pick in that area, because it is really nice.

11

Westminster and St James's

TRACY Area 10 is Westminster and St James's. This is another great area for first-time visitors, especially if your priority is having the famous landmarks on your doorstep, because they are. You've got Big Ben, the Houses of Parliament and Westminster Abbey all within a short walk. You've got St James's Park, which is one of my favourite parks. You can go and see the pelicans.

DOUG Oh, yes.

TRACY And when you stand on the bridge you get a great view of the London Eye, and you can see Buckingham Palace. There are some lovely hotels, and top of my list, because I want to go there for afternoon tea as well, is The Rubens at the Palace, which is opposite Buckingham Palace. Not actually in the palace, it's opposite.

DOUG Well, you wouldn't mind an invite there?

TRACY No, I wouldn't. I don't think the King's going to invite me to the palace, but you never know. Maybe for services to podcasting. That would be really cool. Now, you've also got Victoria station close by, and that's another popular area with people because it's a little bit cheaper.

DOUG Victoria is very good. Again, it opens up the south of England. You can get down to Gatwick Airport, Brighton, Portsmouth, the south coast.

TRACY There are plenty of restaurants around Victoria train station itself, and you've got the bus station there as well. So if you're taking a coach or getting a bus, that's probably where you're going to be heading.

DOUG The bus station is a couple of minutes from the train station.

TRACY So it's a nice area. It's great for sightseeing, but it's a little bit quieter in the evenings, so again, it depends what you're after.

12

Soho

TRACY Area 11 is Soho. This is great for theatre, if you like food, or for anybody who wants to be right in the middle of it, because that's what you're going to get.

DOUG I'm just thinking of Hamleys toy shop.

TRACY Yes, shopping as well, because you've got Liberty, you've got Hamleys, and you can go for dinner in Chinatown.

DOUG Oh, cool.

TRACY Soho puts you in the centre of the action in the West End. You've got Covent Garden, Mayfair and Fitzrovia all pretty close by. And honestly, if you're a theatre lover and you're going to be doing a lot of theatre, stay in Soho, or again Covent Garden, because you can walk back to your hotel after the show rather than queuing for the Tube. And of course Piccadilly Circus is on the Piccadilly line, so it's straight in from Heathrow again. Worth knowing for this area: it's lively very late into the night, which is part of the appeal if you want that. But if you're a light sleeper it's probably not the area to stay in, or ask for a room at the back of the building. That would be your best bet if you want to stay in Soho. It's another great area for Christmas, though, for the Christmas lights.

DOUG Yeah, true.

13

Notting Hill and Little Venice

TRACY Right, last area, if you're sticking with us: it's Notting Hill and Little Venice. This is a great area for couples and photographers, because, oh my goodness, I love Notting Hill. If you want something that's pretty and villagey, then that's where you've got to go.

DOUG Yeah.

TRACY Notting Hill, of course, is the London that you'll have seen in the films Notting Hill, Love Actually and of course Paddington.

DOUG I only know the Paddington film, though.

TRACY Have you not seen Love Actually? I'm sure I've made you sit and watch both of the other two.

DOUG I probably fell asleep.

- TRACY** No, I don't think you did, honestly. Well, Notting Hill: think pastel houses, the market on Portobello Road, street food. It's a beautiful area, and there's wisteria there around April and May. It's the best place to go for photos. I had some beautiful photographs taken there a few years ago. You've seen them.
- DOUG** I took some nice photos around the Little Venice area.
- TRACY** You did. Last year?
- DOUG** In autumn.
- TRACY** In autumn. Now, Little Venice, if you're wondering where that is, is just to the east. That's got the canal, with Regent's Park beyond it, and it has a really gentle neighbourhood feel. It's another place worth staying if you're going to London on a second visit. And you've got Paddington Station right between the two.
- DOUG** Paddington Station is right by the canal, and you can walk all the way down to Little Venice very easily.
- TRACY** We often get asked about Paddington. It's another area that people like to stay in because it's a little bit cheaper. You've got the Heathrow Express and the Elizabeth line to Heathrow, and if you're going west, to Oxford, Bath or Bristol, then Paddington Station's the one.
- DOUG** Cornwall, Devon, Exeter.
- TRACY** Skipping back to Notting Hill: if you're going to go to Portobello Road, the market's best on a Saturday. But if you're planning to visit over the August bank holiday weekend, that's when the Notting Hill Carnival takes place, so either plan to go to it or just avoid that area. The drawback is that it's a little removed from the main sights, so you will be taking the Tube most days. And Portobello Market gets extremely crowded on a Saturday, so weekday mornings are calmer if you'd rather avoid the crush. But again, a lovely area to stay in.

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Three things to check before you book

- TRACY** Now I want to give you three things to check before you book. We've gone through all 12 areas.
- DOUG** Yes.

TRACY As I say, if you want more information, I have detailed guides on each of those areas on the website. Whichever area you choose, these are three things I check on the hotel listing before booking, and they're really important. The first one is whether there's a lift, because a lot of small London hotels are in older townhouses and some have no lift at all.

DOUG We have a story on that one.

TRACY We have experience of this, don't we? We stayed in Covent Garden, in a hotel I will not mention because we won't be staying there again, as the manager was particularly rude. I think that's my only experience ever of particularly rude staff. But we ended up at the top of this building with our luggage. We didn't have a lot of luggage, but we still had to take it up five sets of stairs.

DOUG We?

TRACY Okay, you had to take it up five sets of stairs.

DOUG Yeah.

TRACY And this brings me to the second point, because this was the middle of summer and the hotel also didn't have the second thing I check for. If you're going to be staying in London over the summer, check for air conditioning, because London can be stiflingly hot and a lot of hotels do not have air con, especially the older ones. If you're coming between June and September, I would absolutely check, if air conditioning is important to you. We ended up with a fan, but we still melted in there.

DOUG And the room was very, very small.

TRACY Very small, very stuffy, top of the stairs and no air con. And the manager was unpleasant.

DOUG Suffice to say, we didn't spend a lot of time there.

TRACY No, we didn't. I love the area, but not particularly the hotel. The third thing, which you alluded to, is room size. London hotel rooms are small, often much smaller than visitors from the US, Australia or New Zealand are used to. So look at the room size in square metres or square feet if it's listed, and look at the photos properly. We had that problem in Japan, because we had tiny rooms there.

DOUG That's right.

TRACY But London can be just as ridiculously small. I'll also mention bed size, because this has crossed my mind.

DOUG That's right.

TRACY The beds in the UK are tiny. We struggle every time we go back with double beds that are just ridiculously small and not very long. So if you're particularly tall, or your husband's particularly tall, do check that when you're looking at hotels.

DOUG It's not always the length, it's the width, isn't it?

TRACY The width, and sometimes the length as well. That's why it's sometimes worth paying a little bit extra for London accommodation, because it does pay off in the long run. I know people say, oh, I only sleep there, it's not that important, but you've just got to figure out what is important to you.

DOUG That's right.

TRACY Which is why, when I'm on my own, I like the Z Hotels. They're not expensive, and the rooms are perfect. They're really well set out.

DOUG Talking about things being important: where was the one where I couldn't make a cup of tea?

TRACY Oh, that was the citizenM at Tower Hill.

DOUG Lovely hotel room, lovely hotel, great location, but I could not make myself a cup of tea.

TRACY They didn't have a kettle in the room, and that might have changed, because it was a couple of years ago now. We did complain, and they said the idea is to bring everybody downstairs. Well, first thing in the morning when we wake up, people don't want to see me downstairs, they really don't. And the first thing we want is a cup of tea. So that was the only thing about that particular hotel, and I don't know if the chain has changed that.

DOUG It's funny how one detail sticks in my mind.

TRACY It was one of those things.

DOUG The staff were lovely. I do remember the staff were lovely.

TRACY You had to keep going downstairs to get hot water so you could make tea.

DOUG In my dressing gown.

TRACY I hope you didn't go down in your dressing gown.

DOUG I think I probably did once.

TRACY Oh no. I don't think that's allowed. Anyway, we'll forget about that.

DOUG It was a fashion.

TRACY Maybe it was a Japanese kimono rather than a dressing gown.

DOUG Oh, there you go, possibly.

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Tracy's top three areas

TRACY Anyway, let's talk about my top three places to stay. This might be different from Doug's, because I put this together. These are areas rather than specific hotels.

DOUG Yes.

TRACY My favourite, I guess, is Covent Garden. I love that area because stuff's always cracking off. The restaurants are great, the theatre's amazing. It's just got a really cool feel, that area.

DOUG I think it has. I agree with you.

TRACY And I'm not too far from Piccadilly.

DOUG I knew that would come into the equation somewhere.

TRACY The other area that I do like, I have to say, is around South Bank. You haven't stayed there. That was me with Lucy a few years ago. I liked it because you could walk over Westminster Bridge and you've got the Houses of Parliament, the London Eye, and you can walk down the Thames.

DOUG I can see the appeal, particularly on a light summer evening. I can imagine that's very nice.

TRACY And again in the festive season it's quite a nice area to stay. The third one I'm going to mention, because we've stayed there a lot, is that St Pancras area, especially when you're catching trains.

DOUG That's probably one of my go-to areas, because it usually involves trains that day or the following day, so it's the area I know quite well. I know Paddington Station very well too, from using it multiple times. But north London does have an appeal to me, because I think there's a lot of range for hotels, for all price ranges. There's a lot on offer there.

TRACY And now the area has improved and you've got Coal Drops Yard, so there's plenty for eating out at night.

DOUG I've seen lots of families around there, in front of King's Cross and St Pancras. On King's Cross Square they have markets, and there are things going on, particularly at weekends.

TRACY So those are my three areas, but honestly, you can't really go wrong with any of those 12. It's really about picking what suits you.

DOUG And there are lots of other factors, which we covered in the first one, but also consider the time it takes to get from your accommodation to where you're going for that day.

TRACY Yes, look at your itinerary. And back again, because it's not the going out in the morning, it's the coming back at night.

DOUG It's the coming back, yeah.

TRACY You just don't want to be walking home.

DOUG Had enough.

TRACY Yeah.

DOUG Can I just sit on this bench?

TRACY That's true.

So those are my three areas, but honestly, you can't really go wrong with any of those 12.

TRACY

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Until next week

TRACY Well, that brings us to the end of this week's episode. We've looked at 12 areas, and hopefully you have one or two in mind for your own trip now. If one of those areas has caught your eye, head over to londontravelplanning.com, where you'll find a full guide to each of the 12 with our hotel picks at three different budgets, and a map showing exactly where each area is in London so you can visualise it. And keep listening, because we'll be doing more in-depth episodes on each individual area throughout 2027.

Everything is linked in the show notes at uktravelplanning.com/episode220, along with episode 68 if you want the framework to help you choose. And if you'd like to see exactly what's around each area before you book a hotel, take a look at our Ultimate London Travel Planning Map. It has more than 900 handpicked places across London in 16 categories, so you can see at a glance which area puts you closest to the things you want to do. I will add a link to that in the show notes too. But I guess, Doug, that's it for this week.

DOUG I guess.

TRACY Happy UK travel planning.

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