

UK TRAVEL PLANNING PODCAST

Episode 225 · Full transcript

10 Smaller London Museums Worth Your Time

With Tracy and Doug Collins, plus what to pair each one with

THE TEN MUSEUMS

1. Postal Museum and Mail Rail
   Clerkenwell
2. Sherlock Holmes Museum
   Baker Street
3. Florence Nightingale Museum
   Lambeth
4. HMS Belfast
   London Bridge
5. London Mithraeum
   City of London
6. The Painted Hall, Old Royal Naval College
   Greenwich
7. Charles Dickens Museum
   Bloomsbury
8. Foundling Museum
   Bloomsbury
9. Apsley House
   Hyde Park Corner
10. Leighton House
    Kensington

- Bonus: the free British Library Treasures gallery at King's Cross

Transcript

Tracy 00:00
Already visited the British Museum and the V&A and wondering what other museums London has to offer? In this episode, Doug and I share 10 small London museums, from a Roman temple beneath an office block to a ride on London's secret underground mail train, and how to fit them into your trip. Hi everybody and welcome to this week's edition of the UK Travel Planning Podcast. Now, I'm back with Doug again.

Doug 00:28
Hello there.

Tracy 00:28
So back in March, Doug and I talked through London's big museums, the ones that end up on everybody's first trip. But this week we're gonna go a little bit smaller. So all of these ones on this list we have visited, but there are still plenty more, aren't there?

Doug 00:41
Oh yes.

Tracy 00:42
Absolutely plenty more.

Doug 00:42
How many is there in total?

Tracy 00:44
Well, somewhere between apparently 150 and 250 museums, depending on how you count. Roughly half of them are free.

Doug 00:51
That's good.

Tracy 00:52
That's really good. But actually, I will say that we're gonna talk about 10, but only 2 of these are actually on that kind of free list. Now, none of these museums will take you a whole day, and most of them you can actually pair up with something else nearby. So for each one, we're going to talk through where it is, who it would suit, how long to allow, and also what is in the vicinity to pair it with. So obviously, as I say, it's not a definitive list. We are still working our way through the 200-odd museums, so it could be up at some time. And I know I was asked to visit a couple of museums this last year, and I just didn't get time to—

Doug 01:28
No.

Tracy 01:28
visit. So we will try and do more next year. So if you have a museum that you're thinking about including in your trip and we haven't talked about it, let us know via SpeakPipe and we'll try and get it into itinerary next year, which would be really good. Right, so should we get into the first museum?

Doug 01:47
Okay.

Tracy 01:48
And the first one we're going to talk about is one that we've both been to.

Doug 01:51
We both wanted to go to this for a while, actually.

Tracy 01:53
We did, yeah. And this is the Postal Museum and Mail Rail. Okay, so that is in Phoenix Place in Clerkenwell on 2 sites either side of the road.

Doug 02:02
Yes.

Tracy 02:03
Opposite each other. So it's a bit of a walk from the tube.

Doug 02:06
Yeah, it's a good 10 minutes.

Tracy 02:08
Yeah, I can't remember which tube station we went into. Was it Russell Square we went to?

Doug 02:11
I think it was.

Tracy 02:12
Yeah, and then we walked to from there. And we actually also had to book it as well.

Doug 02:15
We did.

Tracy 02:16
'Cause it is very popular. It is, yeah. Right, so what is it? Should we talk about what it is?

Doug 02:21
Well, let's start with the Royal Mail, the post.

Tracy 02:24
Yeah.

Doug 02:25
It's the, it was a means to move parcels and mail around, or should I say, underneath London for many, many years. And most people, myself included, possibly you, we didn't know of its existence.

Tracy 02:42
No, honestly, had no idea about it. It makes sense, when we were at the museum, about why they created this underground—

Doug
It's a labyrinth.

02:48

Tracy 02:49
It's incredible way of getting post around, because it started getting to the point where there was so much gridlock in London, they couldn't get post across town, or they couldn't do it very fast. So they decided the best way to do it was to shuttle it around underneath the streets. So basically build— just, they built a mail train.

Doug 03:07
That's it. And it's a small little rail system, not extensive. We talk about the centre of London, but for efficiency it was fantastic. And little trains, for rail enthusiasts like me, it's fantastic because there was mail trains around the whole of the UK on the main line, so that was also Something I was familiar with, but not—

Tracy 03:29
Not underground.

Doug 03:30
Not this postal train underground.

Tracy 03:32
No. So basically, we're talking about there's 2 parts to this museum, really, this experience. So one is the actual mail train, which we'll talk about, and the other side is the museum where you kind of go on and you learn all about kind of 500 years of the post within London. So there's like lots of information, a little museum. It's actually really good.

Doug 03:52
It is. What makes this sort of museum really good is it's something for the whole family. They've engaged part of it for children. There's lots there about the trains themselves and the trains through the ages, really. And then also just for the whole family. There's no way of putting it.

Tracy 04:12
Yeah, there was lots of families there when we were there. There were a lot of families there visiting. So do you want to talk a little bit about the actual mail train, Doug?

Doug 04:19
Well, the mail trains are small and it's just for sorting purposes. They just actually scooted around parts of London very fast.

Tracy 04:28
Really?

Doug 04:28
They're a little train. The trains themselves are tiny.

Tracy 04:32
Yeah.

Doug 04:32
And little like bullet type units really, and just all built for speed, just speed underneath London.

Tracy 04:41

So you go on this train. Oh, you go on the train. So this is the thing. Now I will mention, 'cause I get a little bit claustrophobic, and there's not a lot of room, so they're quite small, so you have to get down into it. And they're enclosed. And they're enclosed. So they enclose like a— there's like a glass roof, and then they lock it.

Doug 04:57

Yeah.

Tracy 04:57

Now that gave me a few palpitations, and I had to really calm myself down because I do get claustrophobic and get a bit panicky. But I managed to do it. A few times I was like, whew, okay. Because you go through these dark tunnels. But it's really cool because you come out on these platforms, and there's— they show you what it was like, the people that were working there, and how quickly they had to take the mail off and then reload it. It was crazy. It must have been such a hard job to do.

Doug 05:25

But it's quite a community. There's a lot of people work together for many years, and it was a proper little underground community.

Tracy 05:32

Yeah, and crazily, it only stopped working in 2003.

Doug 05:36

Yes.

Tracy 05:37

Can you believe that? Oh, this was still going when I was working in London. They were shuttling this post around.

Doug 05:41

I was still working on the railway then.

Tracy 05:43

Yeah, but I just honestly had no idea. It's really, really good fun to go and and visit, you know, I really would recommend it. Other nearby things to do, which I said I would mention, is the Dickens Museum and the Foundling Museums, which we are going to talk about. They're a few minutes' walk, sort of 10-15 minutes' walk from the Postal Museum. So, if you're having a museum day, you could do all 3.

Doug 06:06

Yeah.

Tracy 06:07

So, like I say, who it would suit, it's perfect for families, anyone who's interested in kind of hidden London, and if you want something totally different. Like I say, the tunnels are small and dark, The actual carriages are small, so again, that confined spaces thing, I will mention that.

Doug 06:27

And one good thing about anybody who is not able to go on the train, because there is videos and there is commentary whilst you're on the train, anybody who's not able to

get on the train, you're not going to miss out because there is a central area where that's all presented just the same.

Tracy 06:44

Yeah, so you can go and sit in there and watch it and kind of get get taken. It's great because it kind of takes you underground so you can see it all. So if, you know, going into actually one of the little trains seems a little bit too much for you, then you can do that. Now, each part of the museum is step-free, but the train ride itself is not wheelchair accessible. As I say, there is a Mail Rail Explorer experience. Yes, there is. So you can go and, you know, experience it that way instead because you can't go onto the actual train itself. And there's stairs down, but I believe there's a lift as well that get you down there.

So if you want to go and see the train, even if you can't get onto it, and maybe with friends that want to go out, or family, you can.

Doug 07:27

Um, but you won't miss out if you're not able to get on the train. You won't miss out on the experience.

Tracy 07:31

No, it was, it was really, really good fun. There's a little cafe there because when I went off to the Charles Dickens Museum, you stayed behind and had a couple of cups of tea.

Doug 07:38

Worth noting, the Wi-Fi was very good there too.

Tracy 07:41

Yeah, yeah. And they said there was lots of families having afternoon tea and sitting having a natter with their friends.

Doug 07:46

And me, some talk to me as well, some go on my own.

Tracy 07:49

Yeah, well, only 'cause I've gone to the other museum.

Doug 07:51

That's true.

Tracy 07:52

So what it would pair with, now, if you have got an interest in transport and engineering, then the obvious other places to go are the London Transport Museum in Covent Garden.

Doug 08:01

Which is very good.

Tracy 08:02

Which Doug absolutely loves. The Brunel Museum in Rotherhithe, the Science Museum, and the Hidden London Disused Station Tours, which I have not done yet either.

Doug 08:12

That appeals to me as well.

Tracy 08:13
Yeah. So, yeah, that would be a great thing to do next time.

Doug 08:16
That'd be on our list.

Tracy 08:18
Yeah. So, Postal Museum, we really enjoyed it. I really would recommend it if you want to do something different. It's a smaller museum, but really popular. I think a lot of, say, families, London families go to see it, and it's just really cool. Also, the shop was really good. Like, obviously, the museum shops are always fantastic.

Doug 08:36
Yes.

Tracy 08:37
And yeah, so I would really just go and, you know, take your kids there and go and experience something else.

Doug 08:43
Or take your husband. Or take your husband.

Tracy 08:44
Yeah. Doug saw a video on, on, I think, Instagram, and you were like, I want to go and do that. Uh, so that was really cool. Number 2 museum on our list, and now this is one that Doug has only been to. So this is the Sherlock Holmes Museum. Now you're a bit of a Sherlock Holmes fan.

Doug 09:02
Yes, I— yeah, I've always, uh, the first books I ever read were Sherlock Holmes.

Tracy 09:07
Yeah, it works.

Doug 09:07
So it's, it's a small museum.

Tracy 09:10
Yeah.

Doug 09:10
And But it's well done. It's— I'm choosing my words carefully because it is small, and there's a little tour, guided tour, which you join. You can go in the shop for nothing. The shop is next door to 221B Baker Street, obviously, and the shop's very good to go in.

Tracy 09:30
Yeah.

Doug 09:30
Okay, worth noting that it's a small shop, so if you've got any big bags, they're not very happy for you to go in. But the museum itself Quite honestly, I thought it was a little bit expensive for what the experience was because it's a small group and you are led round by somebody in costume, Imperial costume. There's also a policeman on the door in Victorian costume as well, but it's good and it's engaging. Overall, about an hour

or not much more than that. So you have the tour in several rooms and Tell you a bit about Holmes, um, Holmes' skills as an investigator, and then you're left to do a little bit on your own to roam around, which is good, but our tour group was quite busy, so there wasn't a lot of room. You have to wait for an opportunity to actually go and have a look and read of things, so it was quite busy. It was in the summer, it was very hot in there as well, and you're waiting for the opportunity, and then by then the next group is starting to come up as well. So up the stairs and the entrance got a bit busy and a bit bit congested, but it's one of those museums I'm so glad I actually went to do it because, as you said, we wanted to do it for a long time.

Yeah. And it's a, it's a tick off, uh, off a list.

Tracy 10:47

Right, now pivot. I'll talk a little bit about the practicalities about the Sherlock Holmes Museum.

Doug 10:51

So where it is obviously is 221B Baker Street.

Tracy 10:54

Absolutely. Marylebone. Marylebone. Um, so near the Baker Street station. So, um, really a minute away. It's, it's literally around like on the same street, isn't it?

Doug 11:03

And across the road as well.

Tracy 11:04

Yeah, so it's a Georgian lodging house, so what's really cool is what you do get to see is what it was like in those times. So it is dressed as those, like, rooms, period rooms. So that's really cool to go and see that. And as I say, there's the gift shop, it's amazing. We've been in the gift shop quite a few times before. And one thing I know is that this does get— it's a very popular museum actually. It does get really, really busy, so I would make sure that you book ticket for a date and a time because I've seen massive queues outside this place because it's not very big.

Doug 11:37

Exactly right. And the— if it's a museum, you think, I'm going to do this because the weather forecast isn't great, just remember you will be queuing outside.

Tracy 11:43

Yes. Yeah. And you will absolutely book a ticket. Actually, I'm going to say that as well about the Postal Museum as well. Book your ticket as well for that, um, because— and you, you can book a separate ticket. You can do the mail train. I think the ticket was valid for 12 months, but you only got one mail train ride in that. Yes, from what I remember.

So the Postal Museum is in the London Pass. I actually should have mentioned that, um, whereas the, um, Sherlock Holmes Museum isn't in the London Pass. But again, the London Pass changes what it has on offer, so just check it. Um, yeah, who would you say that this is the best museum for the Sherlock Holmes want to go to?

Doug 12:22
I would say anybody who's a fan of Sherlock Holmes. I mean, it's all ages, people from around the world. you'll find there as well, because Sherlock Holmes is a global brand.

Tracy 12:34
Yeah, yeah, that's it. Everybody kind of— a lot of people think about Sherlock Holmes and they want to go and see it, and especially if they watch the recent TV series or any of the movies.

Doug 12:41
I won't give any secrets away, but one of the rooms has sort of face casts of all the people— all the people— all the men that have portrayed Holmes in films over many years.

Tracy 12:51
Oh, okay, perfect. Now what about accessibility?

Doug 12:54
I would say that'd be a bit tricky there because you've got the stairs up straight off the little hallway from the front door, so that would be tricky.

Tracy 13:02
Yeah, so I don't think there's a lift on that one either, so it's not wheelchair accessible. So difficult. We've got a, I guess, narrow staircase as well.

Doug 13:09
Oh, narrow staircase.

Tracy 13:10
Yeah, yeah. Now, where it would pair with, again, if you want a literary theme in London, Charles Dickens Museum, Dr. Johnson's House off Fleet Street, and the British Library Treasures. Right, museum number 3, and I'm going to try to do this in correct order, so to tell you a little bit about if it's included in the London Pass and how long to spend there. So, um, Florence Nightingale Museum. Now I've done this one.

Doug 13:35
You've been there, and, uh, embarrassingly, I was going to go, but somebody didn't check whether the museum was actually open that day, and that would be me.

Tracy 13:44
Okay.

Doug 13:45
So I have no excuse.

Tracy 13:46
Okay, so maybe next time you can go to the Florence Nightingale Museum. I knew this is one that you wanted to go to.

Doug 13:51
I did, yes.

Tracy 13:52
So where it is, it's inside St Thomas's Hospital on Lambeth Palace Road, directly across the river from the Houses of Parliament. Westminster and Waterloo stations are a 10 to 15 minute walk to get to. So what is it? Well, as it says, it's Florence Nightingale's life and

legacy. There's lots of things to see there, including her stuffed pet owl Athena and her later work on nursing and public health. It's quite small.

Doug 14:16
Yeah.

Tracy 14:17
I did enjoy it actually. It was really interesting to go, and the bit I really liked the most is there's this bit where you can pick up a phone and you can listen to Florence Nightingale.

Doug 14:27
Oh, that's right.

Tracy 14:29
And I love that sort of thing because, you know, when we, we hear about these people who are so famous and did amazing things in the past, and they are kind of like figures that we just feel that we can have no connection with, they're just— we see a picture and we hear the stories. But to actually hear her voice, it was— that was incredible because it just brought a bit more to life, I think.

Doug 14:51
That's good. Was that a guided tour like the Sherlock Holmes Museum was? And I could Or was it just a free walk around?

Tracy 14:57
No, just walk around and you look at the exhibits and there's a lot of things to read, there's a lot of things to see. So, you know, I would— I didn't book it, I just kind of walked up to it. That was included in the London Pass and it was actually one of the days that I did when I did my London Pass itinerary challenge a few years ago. So obviously it's a— if you're a nurse or anybody in healthcare, medical history, interested in Victorian social reform, It's a very specific interest museum rather than a general one.

Doug 15:29
Or just an interest in nursing or healthcare.

Tracy 15:30
Yeah, exactly. That's what I'm saying. Anyone with an interest in nursing or healthcare, it's definitely worth going to. So I would say give yourself about an hour. It's all on one level, so fully wheelchair accessible. Now, this is a bit Doug didn't check out. It's open Tuesday to Sunday. It's closed on a Monday.

Doug 15:51
Yeah, guess which day I went?

Tracy 15:53
I'm guessing that might have been a Monday. Yeah, so obviously nearby, you've got Westminster Bridge and Parliament, so London Eye, South Bank, it's so a lot of things to do in that area anyway. So if you've got an interest in medicine, and some of these other ones I want to do next time I go because I've not done some of these, there's the Old Operating Theatre at London Bridge, the Hunterian Museum at Lincoln's Inn Fields, and of course the science museum's medical, medicine galleries, which would be really interesting to go to. I actually did visit the Florence Nightingale Museum with a friend of

mine who's a retired midwife, and she loved it. Yeah, she thought it was really, really good. Okay, museum number 4, HMS Belfast. This is another one for Doug.

Doug 16:34
Yeah, this is one I thoroughly enjoy doing. This is the, the actual cruiser that's moored on the River Thames opposite the Tower of London. So the HMS Belfast is part of the Imperial War Museum group, Whereas the Imperial War Museum is for— has free entry. And the HMS Belfast and the Churchill War Rooms are part of this Imperial War Museum group, that they are paid entry, as is the HMS Belfast. Now, this is— The HMS Belfast is one that you will enjoy walking around But there's such a lot to read, there's a lot to take on board. But I thoroughly enjoyed it. You need a little bit of an interest in, I think, in naval history, not necessarily just, uh, British Navy.

Tracy 17:24
Yeah.

Doug 17:24
But actually within, you know, sort of global terms for ships of this age, because this served in the Second World War and then, uh, during the Korean, uh, conflict as well. So there's lots to take on board, and it's a good museum to go around. And if you have a membership for the Imperial War Museum, So yes, you've got the free ones, but things like the Churchill War Rooms and HMS Belfast, you can get a good collective ticket.

Tracy 17:49
I was going to say the Imperial War Museum itself is actually free, but the HMS Belfast isn't.

Doug 17:53
Yes.

Tracy 17:54
Unless you say you're a member of that Imperial War Museum.

Doug 17:57
Yes, but a ticket is a good idea, well, particularly if you're going on a Saturday in the summer.

Tracy 18:01
Okay.

Doug 18:01
It can get quite busy.

Tracy 18:02
It is at the moment included in the London Pass as well.

Doug 18:05
And the shop is very good as well, because the shop is just as you're going up the ramp to And I bought the ship.

Tracy 18:12
Okay, cool. It is popular and it's busy, and it's also in an area where there's lots of other things going on. So you've got Tower Bridge, Tower of London, Borough Market, Southwark Cathedral, they've got the Shard. So there's a lot in that area that you can

actually kind of go to. So you can include in, uh, if you want to, the HMS Belfast if you're in that area as well. So it's great if you've got an interest in naval and Second World War history, um, you know, that's a great place to go and, uh, and visit. And we've got— in fact, we've got a whole article about, um, different World War I and World War II places to visit in London. So I'd check that out.

I can link to that in the show notes as well.

Doug 18:47

It is a very good thing to go around, actually. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

Tracy 18:50

And of course, so they're saying that there's a lift as well, so you can get access to the main deck, quarter deck, boat deck, and cafe. But the upper and lower decks are by steep ladders, so they're not accessible.

Doug 19:00

That's right, down to the engine room, there was quite a bit there.

Tracy 19:02

Yeah, so there, I think that's open daily, apparently closed 24th to 26th of December, but most things in London are shut on those days anyway. So again, again, it pairs really well with the Imperial War Museum, which is free, Churchill War Rooms, the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich. Again, that's another one that would, would match really well. So you've got a lot of different choices that you can, if you want to have that kind of themed, um, you know, naval or wartime London theme.

Doug 19:28

And you could take your time walking around because obviously when you're on the open deck, you know, the weather's nice, you can take your time, take the views. It's a good place actually for photos of the Tower Bridge and the Tower of London.

Tracy 19:38

Yeah, that's true. Yeah, I've seen some really good pictures from there. Okay, so museum number 5 is the London Mithraeum, which I went to a few years ago and really enjoyed it. I've got an interest in Roman history anyway, so it was— it's quite cool, this is. So what it is— well, where it is, let's talk about where it is actually. It's in the City, and it's actually beneath a building. It's beneath Bloomberg's European headquarters. Bank Station is a couple of minutes' walk away from it.

So what is it? And I find it incredible. I was actually reading something the other day When it was discovered, it was discovered in a bomb site. So basically, yeah, 1954 it was discovered, and I've seen all these pictures of people in London queuing up to see it. Yeah, because they were all like, it was amazing. And I guess if you're living in somewhere, you don't think about what is actually under your feet. And in London, it's incredible what's under your feet.

Doug 20:31

Yeah, a lot of history.

Tracy 20:32

Yeah, so basically what it is is the Roman Temple of Mithras. Now, it's been removed to its original spot, 7 meters below today's street level. So that is where Roman London

was, basically 7 meters below where we would walk today. You see all these Roman finds that they found from the dig, and it also includes the earliest written reference to London, which is amazing.

Doug 20:56
Wow.

Tracy 20:57
Then you go into the temple for a kind of short, light, like a short show which runs like it's every 20 minutes. And it's just, it's short, but it kind of gives you, it shows you what it would have been like when it was used as a temple. So it is absolutely worth going to see. I just couldn't believe it when I discovered that there it was, kind of under 6, 7 meters underneath the actual, the road that you're walking on.

Doug 21:26
I think I'll be adding that to my list next time.

Tracy 21:28
Yeah, you know, it is really worth going to. So nearby to that, you've got the Bank of England Museum. Um, you've got the Roman Amphitheatre under the Guildhall, you've got St. Paul's, Leadenhall Market, Sky Garden. Um, now the London Mithraeum is free. Um, I didn't book a ticket, but you can book a free timed ticket to guarantee entry. Um, so if you've got an interest in Roman London or history generally—

Doug 21:54
Just like you.

Tracy 21:55
Well, yeah, then, and just want to see something like which will probably blow your mind, and also again something that not a lot of people potentially know about. I would go. There is a lift, so you can go down the lift. Again, open Tuesday to Saturday and on a Sunday. Um, so again, check the days, but again, closed Monday, so don't go on a Monday, doll. Don't go on a Monday. Um, so if you want to pair that with other Roman-themed things in London, I say there's the Guildhall Amphitheatre. Um, there's a stretch of London Wall at Tower Hill.

I love that. You come out the tube station, there's a bit of Roman Wall.

Doug 22:26
Oh, yeah, that's right.

Tracy 22:27
It's incredible. Um, yeah, and then you've got the Roman Britain Gallery at the British Museum. And then very excitingly, from later on this month, there's the new London Museum at Smithfield. I'm really excited to go and see that. I think we should both go to the new London Museum next year. That's gonna be really good. So there's lots to see if you're interested in Roman history. London is pretty— Londinium, it's pretty cool.

Doug 22:49
Yeah.

Tracy 22:50
Now number 6 is the Old Royal Naval College and the Painted Hall. Um, now I love the Painted Hall. Yeah, it's brilliant. I think I go to the Painted Hall every time. I love Greenwich. Everybody always knows I love Greenwich, and I think I go to the Painted Hall every single time.

Doug 23:04
This is one we've done together.

Tracy 23:05
We have done it together a few times, getting the Uber boat down to Greenwich Pier and then doing a little bit of a walk. I mean, there's lots to see in this area anyway, so plan a whole day in Greenwich.

Doug 23:15
This is a day down here.

Tracy 23:15
Really. Um, so what is it? It's Wren's Baroque riverside complex built as Greenwich Hospital for retired seamen. The Painted Hall is the reason to pay. Honestly, it incredible. So it's Sir James Thornhill's painted ceiling and walls done between 1707 and 1726, restored in 2019, um, and is often called Britain's Sistine Chapel. I mean, I just like to— they've got like these benches, like, and you can lie back and just look up, and I just love doing that.

Doug 23:49
You'll see loads of people with these benches.

Tracy 23:51
Yeah, yeah, just lying back and looking at this amazing the ceiling.

Doug 23:54
And there's a tour around there as well.

Tracy 23:56
Yes, so you can— I think on the hour or whatever. But yeah, we did that and that was really, really good. So nearby, as I said, there's loads of stuff nearby. You've got the Cutty Sark, got the National Maritime Museum, there's the Queen's House, the Royal Observatory, Greenwich Market, Greenwich Park, the foot tunnel under the river. Just fabulous. So, you know, you do have to pay to get into the Painted Hall. I would pay it, honestly, it's just amazing. So definitely just just do it.

Doug 24:20
A nice cafe there as well.

Tracy 24:22
Yeah, yeah, really good cafe. It is included in the London Pass at the moment. Um, we've never booked it, we've just kind of turned up and it's never been a problem. But other places in Greenwich I would check, like the Queen's House. You had to— I don't know if that's still the case, but you did have to have a booking to go there because everybody wants to take a picture of the tulip staircase. Um, so who would it suit? Everyone. Honestly, everyone should go. Anybody who's got an interest in art, architecture, in history, it's all in one room.

And to be honest, Um, you've got the whole of Greenwich to explore, so give yourself a full day. Give yourself a day, go down to Greenwich, get the Uber Boat down, and enjoy yourself.

Doug 25:00
There's plenty of places to eat and drink as well.

Tracy 25:03
Yeah, absolutely. Now, it does pair with— if you've got interest in maritime, then obviously Greenwich is the perfect place to go. Maritime Greenwich. So Cutty Sark, National Maritime Museum, Queen's House, the Royal Observatory, Like all of those, I've covered all those in episode 192. So do check those out in that previous episode. But we just love it. Absolutely love it. You know, 100%, go down there and go and see the Painted Hall because I think you'll be astounded.

Doug 25:34
Well, I'm not a great one for art myself, but I enjoy it.

Tracy 25:38
Yeah, it is just so lovely. It really is. Now, number 7 is the Charles Dickens Museum. Now, I did this when Doug and I went to the Postal Museum because it's very close by, and you stayed because you're not so interested in Charles Dickens. So I decided that that's what I wanted to do. It's been on my list for quite a while. So literally, it's about— it was about 10, 5 minutes walk, I think, from the Postal Museum.

Doug 25:59
I was drinking tea and eating cake.

Tracy 26:02
You were, of course you were. And I was doing the kind of cultural intellectual stuff.

Doug 26:06
That's right.

Tracy 26:07
So what is it? It's the only surviving London home of Charles Dickens. And he lived there from 1837 to 1839, wrote Oliver Twist and Nicholas Nickleby there, and finished The Pickwick Papers. Now the rooms are furnished as they would have been with his desk. I mean, his desk is amazing. Manuscripts and personal things. It's just incredible. It really is. It is.

And also there's some really nice paintings of Charles Dickens and his wife on, on the actual wall as well. Um, so I mean, I would give yourself probably about an hour to have a walk around. Was that— I was away about an hour, do you reckon?

Doug 26:40
Oh, round about, yeah. Is it small? museum.

Tracy 26:42
Yeah, it's fairly small, and, um, I didn't pre-book. I don't think it's worth pre-booking, but do be aware that they will keep people back because if— obviously it's small, um, so they can't let lots of people in. And actually, you enter through the house next door and

then go into— because then they can kind of, I guess, manage how many people come. But they own the house next door, and then you go into Charles Dickens' house through that way. Um, so you buy your ticket and then go in. Um, they say that's managed because I guess it's one of those, if there's a lot of people, it would not be very good.

Doug
27:13

That's true.

Tracy
27:14

You just wouldn't appreciate it as much. Now, what's nearby? Um, the Foundling Museum, which I'm going to talk about because I have been in that. Um, there's Gray's Inn Gardens. The British Museum and the British Library are both in about 15 minutes away from Charles Dickens Museum. And as we've mentioned, the Foundling Museum and the Postal Museum are also pretty close by. Um, not too expensive, it was about £14 I think I paid for that. Not in the London Pass at the moment. Has been in the past, I think, but not at the moment.

Yeah, so it's kind of the, the due time, the entry, just so that they don't have too many people in. Now, one thing I would love to have done is go at Christmas because apparently it's all dressed up for Christmas, which would be really nice. Oh, wow. Yeah. So who is it going to suit? If you've read or watched A Christmas Carol, or you're lovers of Victorian London, or obviously a Charles Dickens fan, it's absolutely perfect to go to. Now, apparently there is step-free entry and a lift to 4 levels. Only the Attic Nursery is stairs only, so you wouldn't be able to get up to that. And again, now this one, it's open Wednesday to Sunday and it's closed Monday and Tuesday.

That's something I had to check, but apparently in December it's different and that they have different— it's open Wednesday to Sunday and then it's also open on some Tuesdays, um, in December. But do check if you're thinking, oh, you know, I always say this is what I've got doing the research, but it can change, so do check.

Doug
28:33

Don't do it, Doug.

Tracy
28:35

Yes, don't do what Doug's done before and turn up. Actually, I've done that before at the Silver Vaults, went to the Silver Vaults and didn't check, and I was like, oh, they're not open.

Doug
28:42

Well, it's because I found myself passing, you think, I'll just change my arm.

Tracy
28:46

That's the thing, it's like if you're thinking I want to do a few of these things in one area, then do check that they're all open, that's for sure. Now what it does pair with, again, if, if you've got an interest in Victorian London, the Foundling Museum, the old operating theatre at London Bridge, Or do a Charles Dickens walking tour as well. That's something we haven't done.

Doug

No, that would be interesting.

29:05

Tracy 29:06
I'm sure we've done consult with people before who were going to do a Charles Dickens walking tour. I'm fairly sure.

Doug 29:10
Perfect opportunity to dress up, that would be.

Tracy 29:12
Yeah, that would be really, really good fun actually. And I honestly think probably doing it at Christmas would be really cool. The whole Scrooge thing.

Doug 29:19
Oh, that'd be good.

Tracy 29:21
Yeah, it'd be really good. Um, yeah, so I think that would be a cool one to go to actually, the run-up to Christmas.

Doug 29:26
business.

Tracy 29:27
So number 8, and I have kind of mentioned it a couple of times before, is the Foundling Museum, uh, which is in Brunswick Square in Bloomsbury. And like, Russell Square is a 4-minute walk away, so it's really close to also to King's Cross, St. Pancras, and Euston there, about a 10-minute walk away. It's quite a sad museum, this one, I have to say. It's a story of the Foundling Hospital, which was Britain's first children's charity, set up by Thomas Coram in 1739, for babies whose mothers could not keep them. It's— it is really sad. Um, it— I just— I think what really got to me as well is that all these— a lot of these mothers left the babies with little tokens, um, so that I think they were hoping that they could maybe recognize their child if they went back. Um, you know, that they would know it was their child.

Um, so yeah, so really, really sad. Some of the stories are lovely, and I guess they got, you know, they were reunited. But, um, it just tells you like what it must have been like in the Victorian era.

Doug 30:28
Yeah, it would have been tough.

Tracy 30:29
They couldn't afford to keep the children. Um, so I said nearby to that you've got the Dickens Museum, um, and the British Library. So there's a few things. It's Bloomsbury, so there's quite a lot to do in that area. Um, I think that cost me about around about £14.50. Uh, and then again, it was one of those tickets that it's valid for a year if you want to go back again. Now it's not in the London Pass at the moment. It did used to be, but it's not at the moment.

Um, again, just woke up. I went actually with my friend to go and see this, and we were both like, oh, it was, it was, yeah, it was hard. Um, now, who it suits: social history lovers, anyone who is interested in the kind of human stories. And I think sometimes we forget

that in history we, we learn about— we all know about the kings and queens and the rich people and, and, you know, the people that made an impact.

Doug 31:15
True.

Tracy 31:16
but we don't think about the actual human stories behind what it was like to live in Victorian London. So yeah, there's a lift to gallery floors that you can get up to. Give yourself about an hour, an hour and a half to have a check, you know, look around. Now if you're interested in children's history and social history, again, the Dickens Museum, the Young V&A in Bethnal Green, and the Museum of the Home in Hoxton would be really good ones that would match up with that. But yeah, just be prepared if you go to that one. There's a lot of sad stories with that one. Now, number 9 is Apsley House, which I did again, actually was part of the London Pass Challenge. So it's not one that you've done either, Doug, is it?

Doug 31:55
No, I've not done this one, no.

Tracy 31:56
No, so what it is, it's the Duke of Wellington's London home. And apparently the family still live upstairs. It was really interesting to go and visit this because it's not somewhere that I'd thought about going before. It was only when I was given it as part of the challenge to go and to go and visit it. And of course you've got Wellington Arch, which is across the road. So I actually did go across to Wellington Arch afterwards and went up the lift and got fantastic views. What I remember about going to Apsley House is the incredible collection of tableware, dining room, like the plates, and I'm sure it was silver plates, Just incredible, incredible collection of all this. I guess there was, maybe there was a lot of entertaining going on.

Doug 32:44
Possibly.

Tracy 32:46
Um, but it was actually really interesting to go and see. Um, and I'm glad I did. If you've got an interest in anything to do with history around Waterloo, Napoleon, or Regency London, if you're interested in art, or if you're interested in wanting to go and see what a grand townhouse interior, um, It is like, it's a place to go and visit. What a contrast to what I was just talking about with the Foundling Museum, I have to say. Give yourself about an hour to go and have a look around. As I say, if you're interested in that kind of Wellington and Waterloo history, the Guards Museum at Wellington Barracks goes with that really well. The Household Cavalry Museum, Horse Guards, Wellington Arch itself.

Doug 33:25
Yep.

Tracy 33:25

The National Army Museum in Chelsea, worth kind of matching up. Um, but yeah, it was, it was very interesting. It was, uh, it was a bit of an eye-opener, just like to say how much, um, entertaining must have been going on.

Doug 33:41

True.

Tracy 33:42

Now number 10 is another one that I've done that you didn't do, and this is Leighton House, which is in Kensington. Um, so this is about a 10-minute walk from High Street Kensington tube station. Uh, so I decided to go and have a look. I actually walked past, I'm sure it was the Brands Museum, and I, I want to do that next time. Yeah, I'm so Yeah, that's on our list for next time. So what is it? It's the studio house of the Victorian painter Frederick Lord Leighton, who was president of the Royal Academy. Now, the reason I went, and the reason a lot of people go, is to go and see the Arab Hall, which is just beautiful. It's a golden-domed room lined with centuries-old Islamic tiles he collected on his travel.

Doug 34:20

Oh.

Tracy 34:21

There's a fountain on the floor, and then he's got a massive studio upstairs. So I did go and have a check that out. It was all fully restored and extended in 2022. And actually this year it's the museum's centenary year. If you're going to be in that area, other things to see nearby: Holland Park, the Kyoto Garden.

Doug 34:40

Very nice.

Tracy 34:41

Yeah, as I say, the Design Museum, Kensington High Street. Again, go to the— if you're in Kensington High Street, go to the charity shops. Always used to be really, really good. Yeah, and the Sambourne House, which is a sister museum. Apparently you can get a joint ticket. I didn't. I just actually went to Leighton House to have a look around. And you've got Kensington Palace, which is about 20 minutes away from there as well.

It was about £14 from what I remember. Again, just check on the actual official website. Wasn't part of the London Pass. Now, if you've got an interest in art and interiors, anybody— if you enjoyed the V&A's Islamic Gallery, anyone wants somewhere quiet, peaceful, morning away from the crowds, then head over here because it is lovely. Give yourself about an hour to have a walk around. And there's lifts. I remember them in lifts. You could get the lift up, so step-free access is absolutely possible.

It was lovely. I took some beautiful photos. I will share those in the show notes. And a very different experience to a lot of the other places I've visited in London. Yeah. So, I will— if you're interested in this, do check out the photos because you'll get an idea of what I mean about how absolutely beautiful the Arab Hall is.

Doug 35:50
Very nice.

Tracy 35:50
Yeah, really nice. Now we're going to talk about a bonus because we've talked about 10, um, but I did want to mention this because we haven't talked about it before, um, and it's not strictly a museum. It's actually part of the library. It's part of the British Library, um, and it's the British Library Treasures. What's interesting is what is there, and there's a, like, a wide variety of stuff that's there that you can go and see. It's free, so this one is Um, so what can you see? Magna Carta, the Lindisfarne Gospels— fabulous, I mean, they're beautiful— Shakespeare's First Folio, and you can see Beatles lyrics on the back of envelopes. Jane Austen's writing desk and Leonardo's notebook have all been on show there. Obviously, if you want to go and see Jane Austen's writing desk now, you need to go to Chawton to see it.

Doug 36:37
Oh, yes.

Tracy 36:38
Oh, I was amazed, actually, because— and I'm hoping to actually get the people who run Jane Austen's house in Chawton come on the podcast and talk all about it, because I loved it. It was one of my favourite things I did this year. Um, just seeing how tiny her writing desk was. It was tiny. I don't know, she must have just had one notebook, not like me who'd spread it across 25.

Doug 36:56
And her shoes, you said.

Tracy 36:57
Yeah, shoes were tiny. Yeah, clothes were tiny. I think all the women were tiny then. But, um, this tiny little desk, and I was thinking, you know what I'm like, I spread all my notebooks and stuff everywhere. Well, I could— I don't think I was— I'm definitely not a Jane Austen writer type. Um, but yeah, just absolutely incredible. And of course, where is it?

Doug 37:13
Oh, it's on Euston Road. So you've got, um, in one direction you've got Euston Station, and then the other direction you've got St Pancras International and King's Cross right next door.

Tracy 37:23
So if you're going to do that, you could do the British Museum, British Library, Foundling Museum, Postal Museum, Charles Dickens Museum, all in that kind of same kind of vicinity and area. Um, so absolutely worth going to. In fact, all of these I've enjoyed all of them actually that I've been to, and some of the ones you've been to, I'm like, oh, I wouldn't mind going to check that out.

Doug 37:41
Oh, sure. Yeah.

Tracy 37:42
So anyway, that kind of brings us to the end of this episode. So in the previous one, we talked about top 10 kind of larger museums. This episode, we've talked about the 10

smaller museums, and then we've kind of thrown in the treasures of the British Library as a bonus.

Doug 37:57
And we know we've only scratched the surface here.

Tracy 38:00
Well, how many did we say? 200 and something museums?

Doug 38:02
Yeah, exactly.

Tracy 38:03
So like I said at the beginning, if you're interested in us visiting a museum. We'll do our best. I can't promise, 'cause you just never know. When we get to London, there's always so much to do and see. But we try, and I'm gonna try and do some of the medical museums next time, because there are quite some of those that I've been interested to go and check out. And of course, the brand new London Museum that's opening.

Doug 38:24
Well, that'll be good.

Tracy 38:25
That'll be really worth going to see. So I say you can find all the information in the show notes at uktravelplanning.com/episode-225. But that just leaves me and Doug to say, until next week, happy UK travel planning!

Links from this episode

Show notes

The at-a-glance table for all ten museums (cost, London Pass, closed days, time to allow and what is nearby), plus Tracy's photos of Leighton House: uktravelplanning.com/episode-225

London's big museums

The British Museum, the V&A and the rest of the big names are in episode 192: Visiting London's top museums.

Free UK Trip Planning Roadmap

Our free roadmap takes you through planning your UK trip step by step. The link is in the show notes.

Every episode, sorted by place and topic

Find more London episodes in our Podcast Episode Guide.

Want us to visit a museum for you next time? Leave Tracy a voice message through SpeakPipe on uktravelplanning.com.

Prices, opening days and London Pass details were correct when we recorded on 5 October 2026. Please check each museum's official website before you go. This transcript was made from the episode audio and lightly tidied for reading.