

TIME OUT



London is a cultural powerhouse. Its music, arts, and theater options are legendary. In addition to world-famous museums and galleries, it is home to many less well-known specialist museums such as the Design Museum, the London Transport Museum, the Imperial War Museum, and the National Maritime Museum—all of which are free to enter. Visitors should book ahead to secure tickets for the opening week of the latest paid-for exhibition or to ensure the best theater seats.

Beyond the capital, there is a wealth of heritage, arts, and history to discover in the main metropolitan centers and regions, including the Eden Project in Cornwall; Portsmouth Historic Dockyard, which displays Nelson's flagship "Victory" from the 1805 Battle of Trafalgar; Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow; the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; Titanic Belfast; and Shakespeare's Birthplace, Stratford-upon-Avon. Information is available from the regional tourist boards.

DINING OUT

It would be an understatement to say that postwar Britain was not a foodie destination. While the oldest restaurants, such as Wilton's, Simpson's Tavern, and Rules, opened in London in the 1700s, ordinary people didn't begin dining out for pleasure until the 1960s or '70s, after they'd discovered new flavors and ingredients on their overseas travels. Their experiences abroad of different cultures and cuisines made them want to eat out more, and they demanded quality. Gradually, more restaurants opened in the cities, and with added competition the restaurant scene was transformed. Today you can find every kind of cuisine in London.

Dress Code

High-end restaurants, events such as polo matches or trade shows, and some luxury hotels expect diners to wear smart, elegant but casual clothing—a dress or trousers and a shirt, shoes rather than sneakers, no sportswear, and nothing ripped, dirty, or creased. However, some more formal establishments such as The Palm Court or The Ritz Restaurant and Terrace in the Ritz Hotel, London, insist on a jacket and tie. Equally, if you are attending the Royal Regatta at Henley on the first weekend of July, particularly if you are a member of the exclusive Leander Rowing Club, dress protocol demands that you wear an appropriate shirt and tie.

Usually, invitations to a formal occasion make the dress code clear. Lounge suit, or “black tie,” means dinner jacket (a tuxedo) or a smart dress.

SERVICE AND TIPPING

The British don't like serving others: it is seen as demeaning, and traditionally hospitality was poorly paid. Before Brexit, most waitstaff in the cities were from the EU and as so many left the country after 2016, many restaurants and bars are short-staffed—so service can be a mixed bag. However, since Brexit hospitality staff have received a 10 percent pay rise.

It is common practice to leave a tip of at least 10 percent for taxi drivers, waitstaff, hairdressers, and barbers. Sometimes an optional “service” charge is added to the bill, which solves the problem if you are not sure whether to leave a tip, or how much.

CULTURE AND THE PERFORMING ARTS

A Cultural Cornucopia

When it comes to cultural events, Britain shines, and many of its best-loved events date back centuries.

The Summer Exhibition, held at the Royal Academy in London, was founded in 1769, making it one of Britain's longest-established cultural events. Every June, it gives the public the chance to discover work by up-and-coming artists and household names.

Compared to the Royal Academy's Summer Exhibition, the classical music festival known as The



The Royal Albert Hall, home to the BBC Proms, an eight-week season of classical music concerts.

Proms—established in 1895—is a relative newcomer. Concerts take place between July and September in the Royal Albert Hall. During the grand finale known as “the last night of the Proms,” the audience dress up, wave Union Jack flags, and sing “Land of Hope and Glory.”

As its name suggests, the Royal Horticultural Society Chelsea Flower Show has attracted members of the royal family since it was founded in 1913. Show gardens and floral displays, talks, and gardening demonstrations take place every May in the grounds of the Royal Hospital in Chelsea, a historic retirement home for army veterans.

Glyndebourne Festival in Sussex meanwhile has been impressing opera fans every summer since 1934.

The Edinburgh Festival in August is a world-renowned platform for all aspects of the performing arts; the open-

access Fringe, comprising hundreds of separate (often small) productions, is an entertainment kaleidoscope covering the sublime to the ridiculous.

The Scots are also proud to celebrate the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo, which sees military bands, dances, and piping performances take place on the esplanade at Edinburgh Castle in August.

Founded in 1822, the iconic Royal Highland Show is held in June. It showcases Scottish farming, livestock, produce, rural crafts, and different musical bands.

The National Eisteddfod of Wales, established in 1861, is Wales’ premiere cultural event. Poetry readings, live music, Welsh cooking demonstrations, and Welsh language lessons take place across Wales every August. The Royal Welsh Show dates back to 1904. Every July, it celebrates agricultural life with sheepdog trials, motorbike stunt displays, and horticultural demonstrations in Llanellwedd, Powys.

Hay Festival, established in 1987, has been described as “the Woodstock of the mind.” Held every June in the market town of Hay-on-Wye, this prominent literary festival draws international authors for talks, book signings, and live music.

Museums

London’s not-for-profit, permanent public museums are world leaders in researching, collecting, and conserving exhibits for the purposes of education and enjoyment. The British Museum, founded in 1753, was the first national museum to embrace all fields of human knowledge. In terms of visitor numbers, it ranked fourth in the world in

2022, even though museums were still recovering from the Covid-19 lockdown. The Natural History Museum, housed in a late-nineteenth-century neo-Gothic building, ranked third. Meanwhile the fine and applied arts Victoria and Albert Museum (the V&A) had 2.4 million visitors in 2022, and the Science Museum 2.3 million. International visitors also flock to The Royal Observatory in the capital. Founded in 1675 by Charles II, it is home to the Greenwich Meridian line (zero degrees longitude), which determines Greenwich Mean Time.

Beyond London, there is a wealth of knowledge to discover at the Roman Baths and Pump Room in Somerset, Beamish Museum in County Durham, and the Ashmolean Museum in Oxfordshire.



Giant blue whale skeleton in the main hall of the Natural History Museum.

The National Museum of Scotland drew the most visitors in Scotland, with 2 million in 2022. Glasgow's Riverside Museum, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, and The Burrell Collection—Art Fund Museum of the Year in 2023—are also worth a mention.

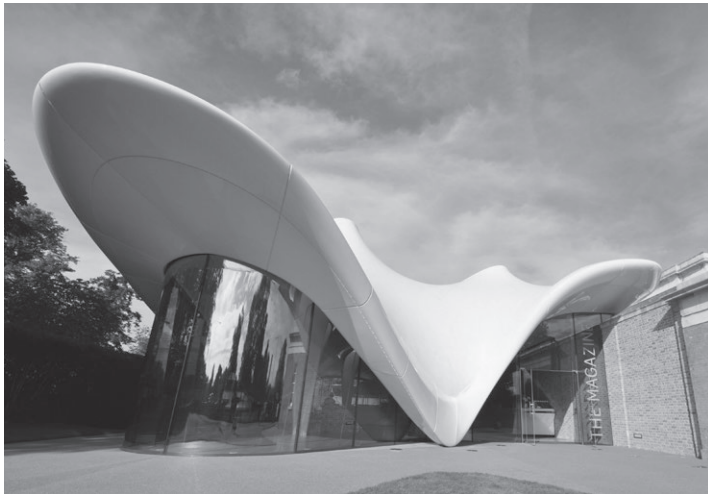
For Welsh heritage and culture, Cardiff Castle and the National Museum Cardiff offer a broad overview.

There is a long-standing debate about whether British museums should return certain permanent exhibits to their countries of origin, as many were taken by colonialists in the days of Empire.

Galleries

Like its museums, many of Britain's major art galleries are free to enter. The Tate Modern saw the most visitors in 2022, with 3.9 million. Housed in a huge former power station, this gallery of contemporary and modern art expanded its collection with an extension in 2016. Its neighbor, the Southbank Centre—a vast cultural complex consisting of the Hayward Gallery and performance spaces such as the Royal Festival Hall and Queen Elizabeth Hall—attracted 2.9 million visitors, followed by the National Gallery (2.7 million) in Trafalgar Square, whose permanent art collection dates back to 1824.

In Scotland, 1.3 million visitors browsed the Scottish National Gallery's collection, which opened to the public in 1859. Art connoisseurs in Wales meanwhile may wish to visit the National Museum of Art in Cardiff and Swansea's Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, a partner of London's Tate. Wales is also planning to create a National Contemporary Art Gallery.



The extension to the Serpentine North Gallery in Hyde Park, designed by Zaha Hadid.

Individual exhibitions and works may draw crowds, but newer galleries have the power to regenerate entire towns. Towner Eastbourne, Margate's Turner Contemporary, and Hastings Contemporary have helped revitalize the south coast in recent years, while The Mining Art Gallery, which opened in 2017, has had a positive impact on County Durham.

Theater

Theater in Britain has deep roots, a vibrant tradition, and today is a trailblazer in modern and experimental productions. "Theatreland" in London's West End is renowned for the range and quality of its plays and musicals and is home to forty theaters. Its longest-running show, Agatha Christie's *The Mousetrap*, took to the stage in 1952—audiences are traditionally asked not to reveal the ending. *Les Misérables*, *The Phantom of*



The Garrick Theatre in London's Charing Cross Road.

the Opera, and *The Woman in Black* have all been running since the 1980s. Book well in advance to ensure you don't miss out, particularly if a celebrity is playing a leading role. The Southbank Centre on the Thames is home to the National Theatre, and The Royal Shakespeare Company is based in Stratford-upon-Avon in Warwickshire. There are regional theaters across the country, such as the Chichester Festival Theater in West Sussex.

The British love of spectacle and language continues to find expression in local amateur dramatic society productions, pantomimes held over Christmas, and variety shows with comedians, singers, and magicians, which are held in summer in seaside towns such as Blackpool. Stand-up comedy is also popular, thanks to Britain's freedom of speech laws, although recently there have been calls by some to "cancel" comedians whose jokes are considered offensive.

The Music Scene

London is the epicenter of classical music making, with four symphony orchestras and many chamber orchestras and choirs. Venues include the Royal Albert Hall, the Royal Festival Hall, Wigmore Hall, the Barbican Centre, Cadogan Hall, and King's Place. There are also lunchtime concerts at affordable prices in churches such as St. Martin in the Fields. Other distinguished national venues include The Bridgewater Hall in Manchester, The Usher Hall in Edinburgh, and Belfast's Waterfront Hall.

The Royal Opera House in London's Covent Garden area was built in 1858 on the site of a much older theater. Elsewhere, opera fans can watch pop-up

performances across Scotland by the Scottish Opera or listen to the Northern Ireland Opera at the Grand Opera House in Belfast. The Welsh National Opera, which was founded in 1943, is based at the contemporary Wales Millennium Center in Cardiff.

Britain's Royal Ballet is one of the most famous classical ballet companies in the world. Based at the Royal Opera House, it is the largest of the five major ballet companies in the country. The contemporary dance company Rambert is based at Sadler's Wells theater in Islington. This venue began life as a music house in 1683, and today it commissions blockbuster performances, groundbreaking new works, hosts dance workshops, and supports emerging dancers and choreographers. Other notable companies are the English National Ballet, founded in 1950, and the Scottish Ballet formed in 1969, which is based in Glasgow. Its Welsh counterpart, Ballet Cymru, was established in 1986.

Chart Music

London, Manchester, Liverpool, and Glasgow are all known for their live music scenes, with venues ranging from the 90,000-seat Wembley Stadium in London to the more intimate Cavern Club in Liverpool where the Beatles played, and Glasgow's legendary live music venue and bar, King Tut's Wah Wah Hut.

British creativity has led to the development of new musical genres. Britpop, a form of alternative rock characterized by regional British accents and cultural references, emerged in the mid-1990s, with bands such as Oasis, Blur, Suede, and Pulp leading the way. Around the



The Royal Opera House with Enzo Plazzotta's statue of a young dancer in the foreground.

same time, garage—a form of electronic dance music—developed in England. Inspired by jungle, house, and R&B, the Artful Dodger and Craig David were at the forefront of the scene. Grime was also inspired by jungle and hip hop. Recognizable for its fast beats and lyrics about gritty urban life, the genre emerged in London in the early 2000s. The artists Stormzy and Dizzee Rascal are most closely associated with the style.

A-list stars, top-of-the-range sound systems, and a chance to bond, run wild, and see multiple artists ensure that music festivals continue to be popular. The biggest, Glastonbury, started in 1970 and now attracts 210,000 people, transforming a farm in Somerset into a pop-up city. Southern England also hosts the Isle of Wight Festival and British Summer Time in London, with headliners such as Elton John. Other popular festivals include the Reading and Leeds Festivals, Parklife in Manchester, and Creamfields, a dance, house, and techno festival in Cheshire.

Established in 1978, the Edinburgh Jazz & Blues Festival is still going strong while the Shetland Folk Festival has been going since 1981. In Wales the Green Man Festival in Powys attracts up to 25,000 visitors.

Combining spectacle and music, London's famous Notting Hill Carnival in August is the largest celebration of Caribbean music and culture in Europe.

Cinema

The British film scene centers on London, with film studios in the capital, in Greater London, and the home counties around it. Once it completes its



Samba drummers at the Notting Hill Carnival in London.

expansion, Shepperton Studios in Surrey—which is behind *Gladiator*, *Billy Elliot*, and *Love Actually*—will become the world's second-largest studio after India's Ramoji Film City. For now though, Pinewood Studios in Buckinghamshire, which dates back to the 1930s, is the largest. The most well known, however, is Studios Leavesden in Hertfordshire, thanks to its Warner Bros. Studio Tour – The Making of Harry Potter. FirstStage Studios in Edinburgh is among the newest, having opened in 2020. London's Soho is the epicenter of Britain's post-production industry.

While on-demand services have seen a decline in the number of British cinemas, there has been an increase in the number of cinemas built in new apartment buildings and in cinemas offering sofas, double beds, sophisticated meals, and cocktails delivered to your seat.

Film fans can watch blockbusters at multiplexes such as the Odeon, Vue, and Cineworld, or at independent boutique cinemas such as The Curzon, Picturehouse, or the Everyman. The British Film Institute's BFI

Southbank in London is a repertory cinema showing world cinema, documentaries, and exhibitions while hosting premieres and talks.

SPORTS

Several of the world's great games were invented in this country—including cricket, tennis, and football—and whether you are a player or a spectator, Britain is a sporting heaven.

Football

Football (US, soccer) is Britain's national sport and has even been described as a “new religion.” The industry is driven by the multimillion-pound clubs of the Premier League, dominated by Arsenal, Chelsea, Everton, Liverpool, Manchester United, and Tottenham Hotspur, which opened a new stadium in north London in 2019.

Historically, football was associated with the working classes and blighted by hooliganism; today it attracts a broad audience. More women and families watch and play the game these days, and a generation of female footballers has been inspired by the 2002 film *Bend It Like Beckham* and by the inclusivity of the 2012 Summer Olympics and Paralympics in London. This cultural shift has led to successes such as the British Lionesses winning the 2022 European Championships and reaching the final of the FIFA Women's World Cup in 2023.

Rugby

The modern form of rugby, originally referred to as rugby football, is believed to have started at Rugby School in Warwickshire in 1823, although this is disputed. Whether true or not, it is still considered a sport for the middle classes and is typically played at boys' private schools.

There are two types of rugby: Rugby Union and Rugby League, which have different rules, for example, for scoring and possession. Rugby Union was formed in 1871 and its rules are used in major tournaments such as the World Cup and Six Nations—an annual championship between England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, France, and Italy—so it's often considered to be the “true” form of the game. There are fifteen players in a team and eight substitutes are allowed during a game. It uses a larger pitch than Rugby League, which has thirteen players a side and allows up to ten substitutes.

As with football, more women are playing rugby, and women's teams are attracting bigger crowds thanks largely to increased TV coverage.

Cricket

Cricket is thought to have been invented in southern England in Saxon or Norman times, and since the 1600s British traders and settlers have spread it around the world. Today it's generally associated with the middle classes and rural life, although city dwellers can also watch matches at Lord's (home of the MCC, Marylebone Cricket Club) and The Oval cricket grounds in London.

A match can take up to a whole day to complete, or, in the case of Test Cricket, up to five days. Self-evidently, it is a serious game that requires endurance, commitment, and application. Everybody in the team takes part batting or fielding—and for some, bowling—and usually everybody gets the chance to hit the ball and score runs.

Golf and Other Sports

Another great British sport, golf, originated in Scotland in the mid-1400s, and King James IV of Scotland was a fan. The first 18-hole course was created in 1764 in the town of St. Andrews, establishing the game as we know it today. In 2017, there were 1,872 courses in England, 560 in Scotland, and 145 in Wales. Colin Montgomerie, Justin Rose, and Nick Faldo are considered to be some of Britain's greatest golfers.



A cricket match on a summer's day.

MAIN SPORTING EVENTS

February and March: Six Nations Rugby, Wales

March: The Boat Race, Southwest London

May: The Horse Trials at Badminton, Badminton House, Gloucestershire

May: Highland Games, Scotland

June: Derby Day, Epsom, Surrey

July: Royal Ascot, Ascot, Berkshire

June–July: Wimbledon, London

July: Henley Regatta, Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire

August: Cowes Week, Isle of Wight

Horseback riding is also a popular pastime. The Pony Club, the international youth organization, has some 50,000 members in the UK, while the British Riding Club has 34,000. Professional riders compete in racing events that are held throughout the year. The biggest, the Grand National, takes place in April at Aintree, Liverpool. It is a punishing test of endurance for young horses and their riders, who are often unknown, and vast numbers of the population who otherwise would never be seen in a betting shop enjoy placing “one-off” bets on the winner. The race takes place over a 2.25-mile (3,600 m) circuit, run twice, comprising thirty fences. Royal Ascot in June attracts royalty and media interest, so it is also a famous society fashion occasion, at which women show off their clothes, especially their hats.

SHOPPING FOR PLEASURE

Visitors will find iconic global brands, independent family-run boutiques, and historical shops with original décor across the country.

Tourists flock to London's famous department stores such as Harrods in Knightsbridge, Liberty's, or Hamleys toy shop on Regent Street, and Fortnum & Mason on Piccadilly, which is patronized by the Royal Family. The rich and famous also shop in historic arcades in Mayfair and St. James and at tailors in Saville Row. Elsewhere, visitors are drawn to classic shops in Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter, Queen's Arcade



The elegant, upmarket Burlington Arcade off London's Piccadilly.

in Belfast, and Glasgow's "Style Mile" along Argyle, Buchanan, and Sauchiehall Streets.

If you'd like to buy a classic British souvenir, consider Scotch whisky or finely woven woolen goods such as kilts; Welsh tapestry, slate coasters, or Welsh cakes; or Liberty fabric, English gin, or Wedgwood fine china.

By Royal Appointment

Since medieval times, official suppliers of goods and services to the royal family have received recognition from the monarch. Today, around 800 businesses have applied for a royal warrant, which permits them to display a sign that they are "By Royal Appointment . . ." for five years. Holders include the Welsh cheesemonger Caws Cenarth Cheese, the Scottish jewelers Hamilton & Inches, and the London wine merchant Berry Bros & Rudd, established in 1698.

Antiques and Flea Markets

All British cities and many towns have regular antiques fairs, flea markets, and car boot sales that sell antique silver, furniture, paintings, and second-hand books among the bric-a-brac. Television programs such as the BBC's "Antiques Roadshow" are hugely popular.