



London's Luster

FROM DAZZLING LIGHT INSTALLATIONS TO TOWERING TREE DISPLAYS, FESTIVE SEASON IN THE BRITISH CAPITAL IS TRULY A WINTER WONDERLAND

BY AMBER GIBSON

London always lights up for the festive season, from quieter residential streets to its busiest landmarks, all bedecked with twinkling lights. It may be chilly, but walking London's streets this time of year feels magical, and when it's snowing, you'll feel as if you're in a life-size snow globe. Regent Street's iconic presentation illuminates the street's legendary storefronts. Close by, Carnaby's famous installation gets more dazzling each year. One of the most iconic winter lighting displays is Christmas at Kew, in which the UNESCO World Heritage Site Kew Gardens adorns its grounds with innovative installations. This year, new installations include Lili by TILT, a collection of towering flowers, Spark Ballet, 24 lanterns each filled with dancing lights, and Candles, a series of one hundred floating candles. Hanukkah is also celebrated with candle lighting ceremonies throughout the city, including the famous menorah on Trafalgar Square.

If you're looking for holiday gifts, luxury shoppers can head to the glittering Harrods building, whose hallowed halls are a destination in their own right. Other legendary department stores include Selfridges, Fortnum and Masons, and Liberty's. The capital will also be rife with bustling Christmas markets, with lines of chalet stalls popping up in Leicester Square, the Southbank, Kings Cross, Greenwich, and Covent Garden.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

The top hotels in London are spread throughout the city, from Marylebone and Hyde Park to Shoreditch and Covent Garden. There are well over 100 museums in the city, but most of the top tourist attractions are free to the public, including the Victoria & Albert, British Museum, Science Museum, National Gallery, National Portrait Gallery, Tate Modern, Tate Britain, and the Natural History Museum. There are so many charming neighborhoods in the city, including unexpected delights like canal-centric Little Venice filled with house boats and floating eateries, and Canary Wharf, a business district just a few minutes on the Jubilee line from central London that has earned the nickname "London's Dubai" for its impressive skyscrapers.

Heathrow Airport can be daunting, and in recent years the airport has garnered a reputation for losing luggage. Buy an AirTag for any checked baggage, so that if it doesn't show up at the carousel, you'll at least know where it is. Once you're in the city, Uber Boat is a fast and scenic way to move around town,



connecting more than 20 piers along the River Thames, with departures every 10-20 minutes. If you travel by bus or Tube, there's no need to buy an Oyster card. All buses and subways accept contactless credit or debit card payment as well.



ATTRACTIONS

GABRIELLE CHANEL: FASHION MANIFESTO AT V&A

The first UK exhibition dedicated to the work of French couturière Gabrielle “Coco” Chanel, this exhibition has been an immediate hit, with tickets selling out nearly instantly as soon as they are released. The trick to getting in is to become a V&A member to see the exhibition without booking in advance. Vintage dresses, photographs, and artifacts trace the evolution of Chanel’s design style, the establishment of her haute couture house, and the ways she continues to influence female dressing today. **Cromwell Road, vam.ac.uk**

GLIDE AT BATTERSEA POWER STATION

The city’s only riverside ice rink boasts unrivaled views of the Thames as you glide across three interconnecting rinks surrounded by twinkling lights and a spectacular 30-foot Christmas tree. After your skate session, visit the adjacent Glass House for hot chocolate, champagne, or mulled wine while watching skaters zoom past. Then shop for Christmas presents at Battersea Power Station, home to more than 120 shops, bars, cafes, and restaurants, including a Marks & Spencer food hall, and British labels like Mulberry, Jo Malone, ME+EM womenswear, Reiss, and more. **Nine Elms, glidebatterseapowerstation.co.uk**



WHERE TO STAY

ONE ALDWYCH

This independent luxury hotel in the heart of Covent Garden may have an elegant Edwardian facade and copper roof, but the 105 rooms and suites are spacious and modern, with a feminine touch. Every guest room has fresh cut flowers and all rooms, suites, the Indigo restaurant, and the lobby bar were renovated in 2020. Circular bridge view studio suites have stunning vistas across the River Thames and Waterloo Bridge. The hotel’s innovative curator program



features walking tours with esteemed locals like the UK's premier silhouette portraitist Charles Burns and Director of London Design Biennale Victoria Broackes. Relax in the basement spa with Natura Bissé treatments and an 18-meter lap pool with underwater music. 1 Aldwych, onealdwych.com

SHANGRI-LA THE SHARD, LONDON

This modern skyscraper boasts panoramic views of the city and one of the most attentive concierge teams in London. The 52nd floor infinity sky pool is the highest hotel pool in Western Europe, with a sky sauna and gym as well. On the same floor, you'll find GONG Bar for creative Asian-inspired cocktails and exceptional views. All 202 rooms and suites have binoculars to enjoy the views, and bespoke Jo By Jo Loves bath amenities scented with

grapefruit, lime, and cedarwood. The convenient location at London Bridge Station offers great connectivity, too. 31 St Thomas Street, shangri-la.com/london

THE LANESBOROUGH

A stately 18th century mansion at prestigious Hyde Park Corner, The Lanesborough has 93 ornately outfitted rooms and suites, with sumptuous upholstery, vintage figurines, marble bathrooms, and a personal library. Plus, every guest feels like aristocracy with 24-hour butler service. Begin the day with a full English breakfast under greenhouse skylights and glittering chandeliers at The Lanesborough Grill. The expansive health club and spa offers a wide array of treatments, including the most posh manicure in town, using L'Atelier Green polish and massaging 24K gold into your hands for a soft

and radiant finish. Hyde Park Corner, oetker-collection.com/hotels/the-lanesborough

DAY TRIPS AND TOURS

HIDDEN LONDON TOURS

The London Transport Museum offers mind-blowing tours behind the scenes of some of the city's busiest transit stations to showcase the infrastructure and engineering feats hidden below your feet. You can even venture into "forgotten" historical underground stations and step into a time capsule of vintage advertising posters below Euston Station, or journey 11 stories underground to explore the deep-level shelter beneath Clapham South, where more than a mile of subterranean passageways reveal the stories of those who sheltered here during WWII. Itmuseum.co.uk/hidden-london





GOLDEN TOURS

The classic hop-on, hop-off bus tour is genuinely the best way to see the city, particularly for first-time visitors and especially at Christmas time. An evening tour among London's iconic festive lighting is guaranteed to be enchanting. They offer Harry Potter-specific tours as well, for those who have fallen under the spell of the wizarding world, and are the preferred partner of Warner Bros. Studio Tour London. You'll get the chance to experience sets like the Hogwarts Great Hall and Gringotts Bank, along with a behind-the-scenes look at original props and special effects. goldentours.com

DINE AND DRINK

CHARLIE & THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY AFTERNOON TEA

There's nothing more festive than a cozy holiday tea in London, and with the new *Wonka* movie starring Timothée Chalamet coming to theaters this month, the Charlie & The Chocolate Factory afternoon tea at One Aldwych is apropos. Roald Dahl's famous, "Tremendous things are in store for you" quote greets you in neon as you descend the stairs into a fantastical world of milkshakes mixed by waterfall, scones with snozzberry jam, spinach roly-poly

sandwiches, and fabulous fluffy floss. The prix-fixe menu includes unlimited bites, so you can ask for seconds of any favorite sweets and savories. Upgrade your experience with a glass of champagne or fanciful cocktail. **1 Aldwych, onealdwych.com**

TING RESTAURANT

For excellent Asian delicacies served in the clouds, TING's unparalleled views put all of London at your fingertips on the 35th floor of the Shard. The restaurant serves three meals a day, and diners can opt for a set menu or a la carte

dinner. Celeriac truffle tarts, steamed wild Scottish halibut, and marinated wild sea bream dressed with almond leche de tigre are just a few examples of seasonal favorites, along with signature dishes like wok-fried tamarind prawns, Vietnamese-style "ca nuong lo" oven-baked sea bass and a vegan rendition of Szechuan mapo tofu, all menu staples. The wine list is excellent too, with an especially impressive selection of champagne by the glass. **Level 35, 31 St Thomas Street, ting-shangri-la.com**

IKOYI

With two Michelin stars and clinching the 35th spot on the World's 50 Best Restaurants list, Ikoyi features the unique culinary voices of co-founders chef Jeremy Chan and Iré Hassan-Odukale through a modern West African-inspired menu. From venison curry tarts and delicately plated caramelized moin-moin bean pudding to smoked jollof rice and black-eyed pea ice cream topped with caviar, this memorable meal will defy expectations. The tasting menu is a commitment at £300, but a shorter and less expensive lunch menu (£180) is available on Wednesdays and Thursdays. **180 Strand, Temple, ikoyi-london.com** ■

