

Keep Calm and Carry On

ROYALTY, HISTORY
INFUSE LONDON

By Mary Gilbert



Ballantyne residents Terri and Mike Williamson frequently visit his daughter, Jenny, in London. As soon as they land, they “walk and walk and ride the Tube to take in the quintessential London-ness of it all,” Terri says.

They know there’s a lot to see and do in this remarkable city—especially in summer.



Landmarks in London's night sky include the Coca-Cola London Eye, Big Ben and Westminster Abbey.

Photo by Julian Elliott, courtesy of @VisitBritain



Photo by Eric Nathan, courtesy of VisitBritain

Avid theatregoers, the Williamsons prebook performances at the glass-domed, Italianate-style Royal Albert Hall in South Kensington and at assorted venues in the city's West End theater district. Still on their wish list? Attending the tennis championships at Wimbledon, held this year July 1-14.



The arrival of warm weather signals festivals, outdoor concerts, sports competitions, parades and more.



Photo by Mary Gilbert

Top: Hyde Park is a 350-acre royal park in the heart of London. **Above:** The Palace of Westminster (foreground) contains the two houses of Parliament. The iconic bell and clock face known as Big Ben (background), is silenced until 2021, while conservation work takes place at Elizabeth Tower, which houses it. **Below:** Tate Modern gallery showcases international modern and contemporary art in the former Bankside Power Station. **Below Left:** Mike Williamson often visits his daughter, Jenny, in London.



Photo by Terri Williamson



Photo by Mickey Lee Photography, courtesy of England's Historic Cities



Photo by Antoine Buchet, courtesy of England's Historic Cities and visitlondon.com

Above: Tower Bridge crosses the River Thames and is more than 120 years old. It has a new glass floor and giant, moveable roadways that lift for passing ships. **Below:** Union Jack, officially called Union Flag, is the flag of the U.K. It contains crosses of three patron saints — George (England), Andrew (Scotland) and Patrick (Ireland). **Bottom:** Buckingham Palace is the working headquarters of the monarchy.



Visit Britain/Visit England, the national tourism agency, notes that Americans are most likely to visit the capital city during summer. The arrival of warm weather signals festivals, outdoor concerts, sports competitions, parades and more.

This summer's "more" includes the recent birth of Archie, the son of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex — the duchess being U.S.-born Meghan Markle.

Lauded as the world's best-rated destination in TripAdvisor's 2019 Travelers' Choice Awards, London exudes a modern and multicultural vibrancy that belies its age. Its beginnings harken back to Roman times. Straddling the winding



London's vast cityscape brims with ancient and contemporary buildings and monuments. Serene green spaces intersperse the architecture.



Photo by Jon Reid, courtesy of England's Historic Cities and visitlondon.com

River Thames, London's vast cityscape brims with ancient and contemporary buildings and monuments. Serene green spaces intersperse the architecture.

Bold, recognizable images abound: the tri-colored Union Jack flag, the population's heartfelt "God Save the Queen!" plea and the "Keep Calm and Carry On" slogan introduced pre-World War II to inspire morale.

Three things make a trip to London simpler for Charlotteans than visiting many other places: a common language, two direct flights daily on American to Heathrow and a variety of lodging options. Accommodations run the gamut from quaint bed-and-breakfasts to stylish luxury retreats and large international chains. The editors at Condé Nast Traveler have named The Kensington, an elegant boutique hotel made up of four Victorian townhouses, as one of their favorite hotels of all time.



Photo by Mary Gilbert

Upscale department store Harrods is a must-see destination for fashion and trend seekers.

Royal palaces and playgrounds

A stirring start to sightseeing is the Changing of the Guard outside Buckingham Palace, the working headquarters of the monarchy and one of the world's most recognizable buildings. With scarlet tunics, tall bearskin caps and precision drill and bands, the Foot Guards epitomize the pomp, pageantry and military ceremony for which London is known.

The lavishly furnished Buckingham Palace State Rooms are open for tours from July 22 to Sept. 29. Official functions in these spaces — which include the enormous ballroom and throne room — range from large-scale banquets to private gatherings with foreign ambassadors.

About two miles west, Kensington Palace lies in Kensington Gardens, located at the western edge of Hyde Park. This year the palace hosts a major exhibition marking the 200th anniversary of Queen Victoria's birth.

Hyde Park is a 350-acre royal park in the heart of London. It offers boating and swimming in a lake called Serpentine, horseback riding and running in such events as the Serpentine Last Friday of the Month 5K. Superstar Celine Dion is one of several headliners scheduled for the 10-day British Summer Time Hyde Park, presented by Barclaycard. Fans of the late Princess Diana can stroll the Diana Princess of Wales Memorial



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Walk. Speakers' Corner at the northeast perimeter is a famed, open-air area for public speaking.

On the River Thames

About five miles east near the river, the Tower of London boasts a 900-year-old history, often grim — as a royal palace, prison, place of execution and an armory. The fortress also safeguards the priceless crown jewels. At night, visitors can experience the centuries-old Ceremony of the Keys, the formal locking and unlocking of the tower gates.

Also along the waterway stands the Palace of Westminster, a Gothic building where the two houses of Parliament, the House of Commons and House of Lords, meet. The public can attend debates and committee hearings and take tours to learn about U.K. government. “Bongs” from nearby Big Ben are silenced until 2021, while conservation work takes place at Elizabeth Tower, which houses the iconic bell and clock face.

Close by is Westminster Abbey,



Photo by Mary Gilbert

Above: The Westminster Arms pub is a favorite among politicians thanks to its proximity to Parliament. **Below:** The Coca-Cola London Eye's 32 capsules each hold up to 25 people and rotate for a 30-minute trip. **Below Left:** Serpentine Bridge stretches between Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens.



Frequenting public houses for pints of ale or plates of fish and chips is ingrained in the British lifestyle.



Photo by Jon Reid, courtesy of England's Historic Cities and visitlondon.com

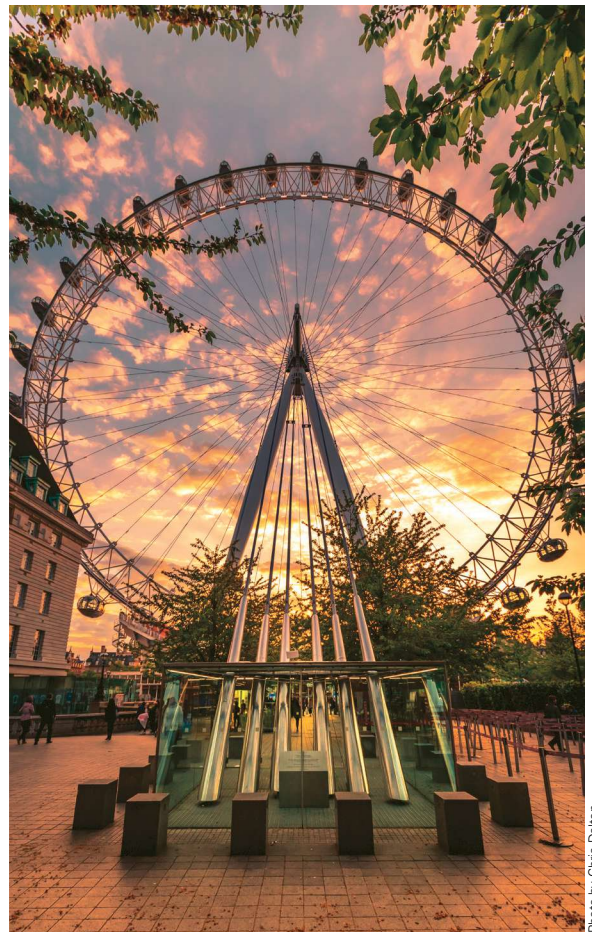


Photo by Chris Dalton

the coronation church since 1066, the final resting place of 17 British monarchs and scene of royal weddings and daily services. Many national and historic figures are buried or commemorated here.

The Churchill War Rooms museum is also in the vicinity. This underground labyrinth of rooms and corridors was the nerve center where Prime Minister Winston Churchill and his inner circle directed Britain's efforts during World War II. The Map Room, with pins still in the wall to denote troop movements, remains exactly as it was the day the room's lights were turned off in 1945.

Along the river to the east is the monolithic Tate Modern, the most visited attraction in the U.K. in 2018. The gallery showcases international modern and contemporary art in the former Bankside Power Station.

Nearby, providing panoramic views of dozens of landmarks is the Coca-Cola London Eye, a cantilevered observation wheel. The Eye's 32 capsules, each holding up to 25 people, gracefully rotate for a 30-minute trip.

Not far from the river banks stands the domed St. Paul's Cathedral, another stately feature that graces London's skyline.

London eats, drinks and shops

London continues to evolve its culinary scene. The River Café opened along Thames Wharf 30 years ago and is still a go-to for inventive Italian cuisine. Bluebird Chelsea, serving contemporary European fare, is at once a restaurant, bar, lounge, café, courtyard and emporium in a former art deco garage.

Frequenting public houses for pints of ale or plates of fish and chips is ingrained in the British lifestyle. Certainly, the walls of London's 3,000-plus pubs could tell surprising stories.

The Westminster Arms is a favorite of politicians thanks to its proximity to the Houses of Parliament. Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese, dating from 1667, nourished literary notable Charles Dickens. The aptly named "Gloucester: The Only Pub on Sloane Street" leaves no doubt of its location.

A more refined activity is high tea, a light meal of finger sandwiches, scones with clotted cream, cakes, pastries and, of course, hot tea. Locales for partaking in this late afternoon ritual are many and varied —such as The Connaught in Mayfair, The Goring Hotel in Belgravia and The Wolseley in Piccadilly, along with upscale department stores like Fortnum & Mason and Harrods (both have food halls that are gastronomic havens).

Next to London Bridge is Borough Market. London's preeminent wholesale and retail food market is an enticing and aromatic warren of passageways and open spaces. A market on this site dates back to the early 12th century.

In Notting Hill, the mile-long Portobello Road provides the backdrop for the world's largest antiques market. Specialty shops and stalls are in full swing on Saturdays. Shoppers hustle and haggle for food, clothing, bric-a-brac and collectibles.

To uncover London's depths and delights, "take time to immerse yourself and not feel rushed," Ballantyne's Terri Williamson advises.

Or, to update the city's pre-WWII slogan, "Keep calm and go to London." ©



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