



- TV
- Property
- Travel
- Pets
- Experts
- Videos
- Forum
- Win
- More

LifeStyle Channel » Travel » Things To Do » Eat, Play, Stay: The Best of London



Eat, Play, Stay: The Best of London

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17 captures

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London is the third most visited city in the world, pipped only by Hong Kong and Singapore. So what's the big attraction? Travel writer Fiona Harper road tested some of the city's best.

Eat

Londoners love tea. Admittedly not quite as much as they love beer, but nonetheless tea has evolved from frumpy to funky. High tea has become the equivalent of Sunday brunch, an occasion to frock up and catch up with a handful of your besties.

Billed as a West End Mad Hatters Tea Party, the only thing missing on this trip down the rabbit hole at Suka Restaurant are mind altering drugs (not that I'm condoning drug use). Expect tea with attitude (teapots topped with crowns), exquisite sweet and savoury morsels almost too pretty to eat and sugar cubes dished up in a tinkling jewellery box complete with prouetting ballerina. Scarlet martinis are optional.

Afternoon Tea in elegant The Promenade restaurant is a far more traditional, though equally fun, affair. Yes there are delicate cucumber sandwiches served on artisan bread infused with basil. But there's also French pastries (and French champagne), warm scones and deliciously rich Cornish clotted cream. Dress in your finest and rub shoulders with Mayfair high society.

Trendsetters are flocking to Granary Square in the heart of revitalised Kings Cross. Warehouse style Caravan is a cavernous restaurant with exposed industrial funk housed in a former grain store on the banks of Regents Canal. Jean-clad staff briskly whisk away butchers paper tablecloths while army issue wool blankets are distributed to alfresco patrons adjacent to dancing fountains. Expect soulful food prepared with passion to an eclectic crowd ranging from impoverished students to business movers and shakers.

Play

Still bathed in the golden glow of the 2012 Olympics, [Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park](http://www.queenelizabetholympicpark.co.uk) is now open to the public. Enjoy parklands, waterways and cafes shaded by the striking art installation ArcelorMittal Orbit (the UK's tallest sculpture). Take your swimmers and dive into the same pool that saw Michael Phelps claim his place in history as the most decorated Olympian ever. Or you could pedal around parklands with London Bicycle Tour Company enjoying the fine-looking architectural lines of the London VeloPark, considered the fastest cycling track in the world.

If foot power is more your thing join a bespoke walking tour with [Fox and Squirrel](http://www.foxandsquirrel.com) for intimate explorations into the soul of the city. Walks are themed to particular interests, whether fashion, photography, art, food or history and led by passionate graduate guides who will surely challenge you to see London from a new perspective.

But if you can't find an excuse to play in London you're really not trying. The city is bursting at the seams year round with extraordinary events. Shakespeare's birth 450 years ago is being celebrated city-wide, delve into one million years of the Human Story at the Natural History Museum, the Tate Modern gallery is showcasing artist Henri Matisse (possibly the most significant colourist ever) while the Quest for Longitude at the National Maritime Museum should enthrall sailors. There's a gazillion other playtime options. Check out www.visitlondon.com

Stay

With over 1,200 hotels offering almost 120,000 beds it's not easy to narrow down the choices when bedding down in London. Here's three of our favorites:

OK admittedly, with rooms starting from around AUD \$800, glamorous [The Dorchester Hotel](http://www.dorchesterhotels.com) is not for everyone. But if you're looking for an iconic London hotel favored by world leaders, royalty and high society with a Park Lane, Mayfair address (sounds a bit like a Monopoly board doesn't it?) The Dorchester ticks all the boxes. Michelin-starred cuisine, plushly furnished rooms and vast suites overlooking Hyde Park (want your own butler? sure, why not) along with exemplary service are de-rigueur. Good for milestone celebrations.

Across Hyde Park five star [Royal Garden Hotel](http://www.royalgardenhotel.com) is equally well-connected to royalty, sharing the park boundary with Kensington Palace. Ask for a garden view room to watch the comings and goings from the Palace from the voyeuristic comfort of your bed. Leafy High Street Kensington is on the doorstep (with a tube station) plus historic West End, Knightsbridge and Mayfair are all within easy walking distance. Good for royal watchers.

The plain heritage-listed exterior of [Sanderson Hotel](http://www.sandersonhotel.com) conceals a quirky gem of a design hotel favored by hip young things with an Alice in Wonderland twist. Housed in the 1950's Sanderson Textiles former headquarters, nothing is left to chance. Right down to the placement of Phillippe Starck and other weird chairs in the Opera Curtain-lined lobby. Think African Fertility chairs, a hanging clear bubble chair popular with photographers and perhaps the weirdest of all, a Deprivation Chamber chair for complete self-reflection. Immaculately groomed staff ensure each chair is eye-pleasingly aligned thanks to a minuscule nail head pinned discreetly in Canadian Maple timber floorboards. Chandeliers poke from behind shimmering sheer curtains, humorous dog portraits leer unexpectedly (many of them high priced antiques) while an oversized scarlet lip sofa (think Marilyn Monroe) dominates the entrance. Good for design devotees.

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Getting there & Getting Around

[British Airways](http://www.britishairways.com) fly direct from Sydney to London www.britishairways.com

Purchase a pre-paid [London TravelCard](http://www.londontravelcard.com) for travel city wide on buses, underground and overground rail. A London Pass card offers priority entry to over 60 top city attractions and tours.

Follow Fiona Harper travel writer at www.travelboatinglifestyle.com

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Posted by Clive • 6w ago • Report

Hi Fiona, Loved your story on London. We were there this time two years ago, and just love the sheer vibrancy of the city. The city was gearing up for the Olympics and it was all go. Great article.
Clive



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