

London

Brief history of London

It was the **Romans** who were responsible for the city we know today as London. They invaded Britain in AD43, and soon afterwards founded the city of Londinium. In AD60, Queen Boudica of the Iceni tribe rose up against the Romans, who fled. The city was burnt to the ground. However, the Romans eventually regained control and rebuilt London, this time adding a Forum (market) and Basilica (a business centre), and slowly building a wall around the city to protect it from further invasion.

The Romans left at the beginning of the 5th Century as the Roman Empire crumbled, leaving London largely deserted. Britain was invaded by the **Angles**, the **Saxons** and the **Jutes** (who came from Holland, Germany and Denmark). These Anglo-Saxons were farmers and tended to live outside big towns. By the beginning of the 7th Century the city had become important enough to justify the building of a cathedral, St Paul's. There is still a cathedral (but not the same one!) on the same spot. During the 9th and 10th centuries there were many attacks by the Vikings.

Medieval London (1066-1485). Soon afterwards, the Normans invaded from France and William I (William the Conqueror) took control. He quickly began to build a stronghold to guard London – the Tower of London. The Tower was used as a castle and a palace, a zoo and a weapons store, a mint and a prison. The city grew up within the original Roman walls, which were repaired and built up. Houses were made of wood and plaster and crowded together very tightly, with the upper floors leaning out over the streets, which were either cobbled or dirt tracks, and rubbish was thrown out of the windows onto the streets below!

Tudor London (1485 -1603). London was the centre of trade and government under the Tudor monarchs. We know that there were about 200,000 people living in London by 1600. The Tudors established a number of palaces in London and the area around it, and also made deer parks so that they could indulge in their favourite occupation of hunting. You can still see deer in Richmond Park, in south London. The river Thames was very important in Tudor times as Britain's navy expanded. Dockyards were built and ships were sent to explore the world – to the Americas and India, for example.

Shakespeare and The Globe. The first theatres were built in London during this time. The most famous is of course The Globe, in which Shakespeare owned a share. His plays were performed there. The original theatre was burnt down in 1613 and immediately rebuilt, but later closed by the Puritans in 1642. In the 1990s a new Globe Theatre was built, as close to the original as possible, and thrives with constant productions of Shakespeare's plays.

Civil War. In the 1640s, civil war raged in England, with Charles I and his army battling against Parliament, led by Oliver Cromwell and based in London. The King lost and was beheaded in London in 1649. The reign of Parliament did not last long, however, and Charles II was crowned in Westminster Abbey in 1660.

The Great Plague. In 1665, rats on board trading ships brought bubonic plague into the city of London. Because people lived in very close quarters and hygiene standards were very low, it spread very quickly. If you caught it, the chances of surviving were very slim. Over the year that the plague rampaged, 100,000 people died.



The Great Fire of London. A small fire, accidentally started in Pudding Lane in the City of London in September of 1666, was the cause of an enormous fire which lasted four days and wiped out 80% of London. Amazingly, very few people lost their lives, but buildings which had been crammed very close together and were made of wood were easily destroyed. After the fire, all new buildings were made of stone and brick.

18th century. Britain was a very powerful nation in the 18th century and London, with its trading capacity, was the centre of its power. Goods were brought into London from all over the world. During this century, London also became an important financial centre. Much of the business of the day was done in coffee houses in the Square Mile, especially in Exchange Alley, the site of London's stock exchange.

19th century. Queen Victoria was crowned in 1837 and died in 1901. During her reign, London expanded enormously as industry came to Britain and railways were built, linking much of Britain to the capital. London was the centre of world trade and had a large, powerful Empire. Many of the buildings in London today were built in Victorian times. The most famous is probably the Houses of Parliament, built in 1834 after a fire destroyed the original buildings.

The Tube. London had the first ever underground railway which opened in 1862.

20th century. London continued to grow both in population and area. Between 1919 and 1939, built-up London doubled in size as the suburbs were extended. Shopping had always been good in London, but big department stores were built in the early part of the century (Harrods and Selfridges): these were the first of their kind.

The Blitz. There was a lot of damage to London during the Second World War, especially in the City and around (and including) St Paul's Cathedral.

The New Century. Londoners marked the end of the century by building The Millennium Wheel, or "London Eye", a huge Ferris wheel overhanging the river Thames which gives far-reaching views of London. It is now one of the most popular tourist attractions in the city. A huge exhibition centre, the "Millennium Dome" (now the O2) was also built.

Tourist attractions in London

Noisy, vibrant and multicultural, London is one of the largest cities in the world, with a population of 8 million people. It is now a leading global city of culture, fashion, finance, politics and trade and remains one of the most visited cities by international tourists in the world. The city contains many famous landmarks and getting around is easy, on its famous underground.



1. Big Ben

The 150 year old Big Ben Clock Tower is one of the top tourist attractions in London. The name Big Ben actually refers not to the clock tower itself, but to the 13 ton bell housed within the tower and takes its name from the man who first ordered the bell, Sir Benjamin Hall. The present-day Big Ben bell was constructed in 1858 after the first bell, weighing 16 tons, had cracked irreparably two years before.



2. Tower Bridge

Tower Bridge is a combined bascule and suspension bridge in London, over the River Thames. It is close to the Tower of London, which gives it its name, and has become an iconic symbol of London. Construction started in 1886 and took eight years to build. The bridge consists of two towers which are tied together at the upper level by means of two horizontal walkways which are designed to withstand the forces of the suspended sections of the bridge.

3. British Museum

Established in 1753, the British Museum in London is a museum of human history and culture. Its collections, which number more than seven million objects, are amongst the largest and most comprehensive in the world and originate from all continents, illustrating and documenting the story of human culture from its beginnings to the present. Objects include the Rosetta Stone, the key to the deciphering of hieroglyphs, and the largest collection of mummies outside of Egypt.

4. Buckingham Palace

Buckingham Palace is the main residence of Queen Elizabeth II although it is owned by the British state and is not the monarch's personal property. The Forecourt of Buckingham Palace is used for the Changing of the Guard, a major ceremony and tourist attraction. Between May and July the guard changes each morning, and on alternate days the rest of the year. Since 1993, the palace's state rooms have been open to the public during August and September.

5. London Eye

Situated on the banks of the River Thames, the London Eye is an enormous, 135 meter high observation wheel carrying 32 exterior glass-walled capsules. It offers fantastic views over central London. The wheel does not usually stop to take on passengers as the rotation rate is slow enough to allow passengers to walk on and off the moving capsules at ground level. It is the most popular paid tourist attraction in the United Kingdom, visited by over 3.5 million people annually.

6. Tower of London

Now home to the British Crown Jewels, the Tower of London was built by William the Conqueror in 1078. It served as a prison from 1100 to the mid twentieth century. Famous prisoners include Sir Thomas More, King Henry VI, Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard (wives of King Henry VIII) and Rudolph Hess. Today, the Tower of London is one of the most popular London tourist attractions.



7. Trafalgar Square

Trafalgar Square is a large city square commemorating Lord Horatio Nelson's victory against Napoleon's navy at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. The central monument within the square is a single, tall column on which the figure of Nelson stands gazing over London. His monument is surrounded by four colossal lions and a series of large fountains. Much more than just an open plaza, Trafalgar Square is one of the most famous city squares in the world and has become a social and political location for tourists and Londoners alike.

8. St Paul's Cathedral

Built in the 17th century, St Paul's Cathedral is one of London's most famous and most recognizable sights. The Cathedral was heroically saved by firefighters when it was bombed during the Second World War. Its impressive dome was inspired by St Peter's Basilica in Rome and rises 118 metres to the cross at its summit. It was the tallest building in London from 1710 to 1962, and its dome is also among the highest in the world.

**9. Palace of Westminster**

The Palace of Westminster (more widely known as the Houses of Parliament) is the seat of Parliament in the United Kingdom. The present building largely dates from the 19th century when it was rebuilt in a splendid example of Victorian neo-Gothic architecture, following a fire. The House of Commons (elected Members of Parliament) is located to the north of the building and is decorated with green leather upholstery, and the House of Lords is located to the south and decorated with red leather upholstery.

10. Westminster Abbey

Westminster Abbey is a large, mainly Gothic, church located just to the west of the Palace of Westminster. It is one of the most notable religious buildings in the United Kingdom and is the traditional place of coronation and burial site for English and, later, British monarchs. Most of the present building dates from 1245 to 1272, when Henry III decided to rebuild an old abbey in the Gothic style. The building was later significantly expanded: the Chapel of Henry VII was added between 1503 and 1512, while the two West Front Towers date from 1745.



Dublin

Brief history of Dublin

Dublin is the largest city in Ireland and capital of the Republic of Ireland. The earliest reference to Dublin appears in the writings of the Greek astronomer and cartographer Ptolemy around the year A.D. 140. The Vikings arrived in the 10th century and established an important trading post. Christchurch Cathedral was built after the arrival of Christianity in the 13th century. Many of Dublin's principal buildings and its main street layout date from the end of 18th century and the streets of Georgian four-storey townhouses are a distinctive feature of the city's architecture.

The laid-back Irish capital is a somehow harmonious blend of Victorian pubs, rows of elegant Georgian town houses in silvery stone, and glittering modern buildings. With a permanent population of nearly 1.7 million, more than a third of the Irish people either live in or near this city, which explains the great number of restaurants, bars, and shopping opportunities.

Tourist attractions in Dublin

1. Farmleigh House

Built in the late 18th century, Farmleigh was purchased by Edward Cecil Guinness, a great-grandson of Arthur Guinness, in 1873. The house contains many beautiful features including the Main House area (a fine example of Georgian-Victorian architecture), the Sunken Garden, the Walled Garden, the famous Clock Tower and the Lake and The Benjamin Iveagh Library. The library holds some of the finest examples of Irish bookbinding from the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries.

2. Science Gallery at Trinity College

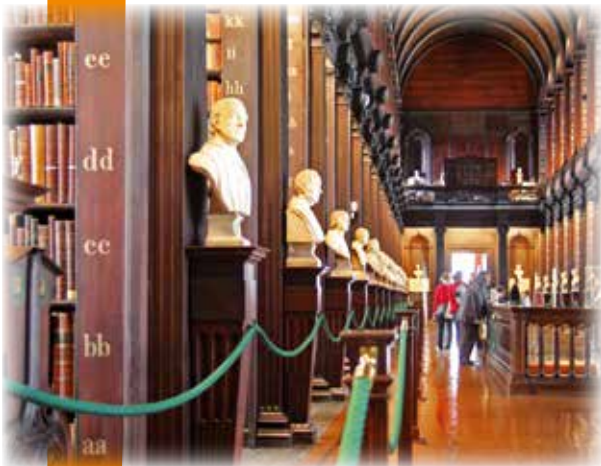
Dublin's Science Gallery is a world first. The collision of science and art is the key DNA strand of this international success story now being cloned worldwide.

3. National Museum of Ireland

The Museum displays examples of Celtic and Medieval art, such as the famous Ardagh Chalice, the Tara Brooch and the Derrynaflan Hoard, and the finest collection of prehistoric gold artefacts in Europe.

4. St Patrick's Cathedral

Built between 1220 and 1260, the Cathedral is one of the few buildings left from the medieval city of Dublin. Today, St Patrick's is the National Cathedral of the Church of Ireland and still the largest cathedral in Ireland.



5. National Botanic Gardens

The Gardens, 19.5 hectares on the south bank of the Tolka River, contain many attractive features such as an arboretum, sensory garden, rock garden and burren area, large pond, extensive herbaceous borders, and an annual display of decorative plants including a rare example of Victorian carpet bedding.

6. The National Gallery of Ireland

Today the collection includes over 2,500 paintings and some 10,000 other works, including watercolours, drawings, prints and sculpture. It also houses a renowned collection of Irish paintings. The gallery's highlights include works by Vermeer, Caravaggio, Picasso, Van Gogh and Monet.

7. The Book of Kells

The Book of Kells was written around the year 800 AD and is one of the most beautifully illuminated manuscripts in the world. Its 680 pages of vellum contain the Latin texts of the Four Gospels. It was written around 800 AD by Irish monks and later buried in the ground for fear of the Vikings. After being eventually rediscovered, it was deposited for safe keeping in Trinity College Dublin in 1653.



8. National Aquatic Centre

AquaZone, at the National Aquatic Centre, is one of the most innovative water parks in Europe. It has Europe's biggest and best water rides and attractions.

9. Dublin Zoo

See many rare and exotic animals living and roaming in a wide variety of natural habitats.

10. Guinness Storehouse

Located in the heart of the St James's Gate Brewery, which has been home to the black stuff since 1759, this massive seven-storey building, a former Guinness® fermentation plant, has been remodelled into the shape of a giant pint of Guinness®. The highlight for many visitors is the Gravity Bar® where they receive a complimentary pint of Guinness® and a chance to relax and enjoy the breathtaking 360-degree views across Dublin City.



Edinburgh

Brief history of Edinburgh

It was during the Dark Ages that the name of Edinburgh – at least in its early forms of Dunedin or Din Eidyn ('fort of Eidyn') – first appeared. Castle Rock, a strategic fort on the top of one of the area's extinct volcanoes, served as the nation's southernmost border post until 1018, when King Malcolm II established the River Tweed as the permanent frontier. In the reign of Malcolm Canmore (1058-93), the castle became one of the main seats of the court, and the surrounding town, which was given privileged status as a royal burgh, began to grow around it.

Medieval Prosperity. Robert the Bruce granted Edinburgh a new charter in 1329, giving it jurisdiction over the nearby port of Leith, and, during the following century, the prosperity brought by foreign trade enabled the newly fortified city to establish itself as the permanent capital of Scotland. Under James IV (1488-1513), the city enjoyed a short but brilliant Renaissance era.

Renaissance to Reformation and modern times. This period came to an abrupt end in 1513 with the calamitous defeat by the English at the Battle of Flodden, which led to several decades of political instability. In the 1540s, Henry VIII's attempt to force a royal union between England and Scotland led to the sack of Edinburgh, prompting the Scots to turn to France for help: French troops arrived to defend the city, while the young queen Mary was dispatched to Paris as the promised bride of the heir to the royal throne, the Dauphin. While the French occupiers succeeded in removing the English threat, as Catholics, they themselves antagonized the locals, who had become increasingly sympathetic to the ideals of the Protestant Reformation. When the radical preacher John Knox returned from exile in 1555, he quickly won over the city to his Calvinist message. James VI's rule (1567-1615) saw the foundation of the University of Edinburgh in 1582. It is in the second half of the 18th century that Edinburgh achieved the height of its intellectual influence, led by an outstanding group that included David Hume and Adam Smith. On July 1st 1999, the Queen formally opened the parliament – its first since 1707 – temporarily housed in the twin-towered Church of Scotland Assembly Halls on the Mound.

On 18 September 2014 Scotland was asked to vote in the Scottish independence referendum. However, the "No" side won, with about 55% voting against independence.

Tourist attractions in Edinburgh

Of all the cities in the world, Edinburgh – the capital and cultural centre of Scotland for over 500 years – is situated in one of the most beautiful locations. Sometimes described as the "Athens of the North", this famous festival city boasts Greek-style columns on Calton Hill, a wide choice of museums and art galleries, as well as a host of historical gems.

Edinburgh actually consists of two cities: the Old Town, dominated by a medieval fortress, the castle, set on high basalt rock, which overlooks the densely populated labyrinth of narrow alleys and rows of houses; and the New Town, with grand squares, wide avenues and elegant façades.

Some of the finest public and commercial monuments of the New-classical revival in Europe survive in the city, reflecting its continuous status as the capital of Scotland since 1437, and a major centre of thought and learning in the 18th century Age of Enlightenment, with its close cultural and political links with mainland Europe.

1. The Royal Mile

The Royal Mile refers to the road linking Edinburgh Castle and the Palace of Holyroodhouse. It is lined with charming townhouses and historic landmarks. Some of the most popular attractions are to be found at the upper end of the Royal Mile – commonly called Castle Hill – and include Outlook Tower and the Camera Obscura with its outstanding views, the Tolbooth (St John’s Highland Church) with the city’s tallest church tower, Gladstone’s Land, a six-story merchant’s house with pretty ceiling paintings and original furniture, and Lady Stair’s Close, home to the Writer’s Museum displaying manuscripts, portraits, etchings and memorabilia of the poet Robert Burns and writers Sir Walter Scott and Robert Louis Stevenson.



2. Edinburgh Castle

Scotland’s most famous landmark, Edinburgh Castle is one of Britain’s most visited tourist attractions. Highlights include the One o’clock Salute from Half Moon Battery (cannon fire commemorates the tradition of helping ships synchronize their clocks), the impressive Scottish National War Memorial and the stunning collection of Crown Jewels housed in the Royal Palace. Another notable feature is the Stone of Destiny (aka, the Stone of Scone), famously stolen by Edward I and placed under the English throne in London – only returned to Scotland 700 years later, in 1996.



3. Palace of Holyroodhouse and Holyrood Abbey

The Palace of Holyroodhouse is the Queen’s official Edinburgh residence and has frequently been at the centre of Scottish history: it was where James II and James IV were both married, where James V and Charles I were crowned, and where “Bonnie Prince Charlie” held court in 1745. When the Queen’s away, public access is permitted to the stunning Historic Apartments (former home of Mary Queen of Scots) and the State Apartments, famous for their fine furnishings, tapestries and plasterwork.

4. Holyrood Park: Arthur’s Seat and the Salisbury Crags

At 820 ft, Arthur’s Seat is the highest point in the 640-acre Holyrood Park. The spectacular sightseeing views from the top encompass the whole city all the way to the mouth of the Forth. Another easy climb are the dramatic Salisbury Crags, a series of 151 ft cliffs adjacent to Arthur’s Seat.



5. St Giles Cathedral

Consecrated in 1243, St Giles Cathedral is Edinburgh's principal church. The almost 50 m high central tower with its eight arched buttresses forms a huge crown (the Crown Steeple).

6. The Royal Botanic Garden

Edinburgh's Royal Botanic Garden is the second oldest such garden in Britain. Within its magnificent 70-acres are a herbarium and Britain's biggest palm house, a tropical house with exotic orchids, an alpine house, a terraced moorland garden, a heather garden, and an extensive arboretum with rare giant trees from the Himalayas, North America and China.

7. National Museum of Scotland

Since opening in 2011, the National Museum has become one of Scotland's most popular attractions with close to two million visitors each year. It incorporates collections from a number of Edinburgh's older museums. Highlights include national archaeological collections, medieval artefacts, plus displays focusing on natural history, geology, art, science and technology. Among the 16 galleries, the most interesting of more than 8,000 artefacts on display include Dolly the sheep, the world's first cloned mammal, as well as some of Elton John's more elaborate stage costumes. Traditional museum displays include material from Ancient Egypt, and the infamous Maiden, an early form of guillotine.

8. Princes Street

Busy Princes Street is Edinburgh New Town's main thoroughfare. It extends for almost a mile and is lined with colourful gardens and elegant shops, including the tradition-conscious Jenners of Edinburgh, the world's oldest independent department store. House of Fraser's at the western end is also quite grand, while Princes Mall, with its small shops set among fountains and cafés, offers goods of varying quality. Princes Street's historic landmarks include the 200 ft tall Sir Walter Scott Monument, and the David Livingstone Memorial, a memorial to the missionary and African explorer.

9. Art City: The National Galleries of Scotland

Paintings of Scotland's leading historic figures from the 16th century to the present day can be seen in the National Portrait Gallery, one of Edinburgh's three major art galleries.

10. The Royal Yacht Britannia

One of Edinburgh's newest attractions is the Royal Yacht Britannia.

Over the years, this luxurious vessel has hosted numerous famous people from around the world, although none perhaps as famous as the Queen. After more than 40 years serving the Royal Family, the 60-year-old vessel was sent to Leith, Edinburgh's port area, as the centrepiece of the Britannia Visitor Centre. Once aboard, you'll learn about the history of this and other Royal Yachts as you explore the ship's five main decks. Highlights include the Royal Apartments and bedrooms, the lovely sun lounge, and the onboard Royal Deck Tea Room.



Malta

Brief history of Malta

Malta has a long and rich history, with evidence of habitation going back to the Neolithic era (4th millennium BC). The country boasts some of the world's most ancient standing buildings (the Neolithic temples), and its strategic location and good harbours in the middle of the Mediterranean have attracted Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Normans, Crusaders, the French and finally the British, whose colonial period lasted until 1964. The Knights of the Order of St John of Jerusalem, also known as the Knights Hospitallers and Knights of Malta, took over sovereign control of Malta in 1530, and by 1533 the Order had built a hospital at Birgu to care for the sick. In 1565, Suleiman the Magnificent, Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, mounted a great siege of Malta with a fleet of 180 ships and a landing force of 30,000 men. In response, the Order, with only 8,000 defenders, drove the Ottoman Turks away after a hard siege of several months. After this, the Order founded the city of Valletta on a peninsula, and fortified it with massive stone walls, which even withstood heavy bombing during the Second World War. By 1575, the Order had built a new large hospital known as the Grand Hospital or Sacred Infirmary, in order to continue with its primary mission of caring for the sick. In 1798, the French, under Napoleon, took the island on 12 June, without resistance, when the Grand Master of the Order capitulated after deciding that the island could not be defended against the opposing French naval force. French rule lasted a little over 2 years, until they surrendered to the British Royal Navy, under Admiral Nelson's command, in September 1800.

Great Britain formally acquired possession of Malta in 1814. The island staunchly supported the UK through both World Wars. The island was awarded the George Cross for its heroic resistance during the Second World War. An image of the cross is displayed on the flag.

Tourist attractions in Malta

Malta is the most southerly European country, being 58 miles south of the tip of Sicily and just 180 miles from North Africa. Malta is not a single island, but an archipelago of five islands, Malta, Gozo, Comino, Cominetto and Filfla. Only the first three are inhabited, with Cominetto and Filfla being quite small.

Malta is characterised by the rugged coastline and low hills. There are no rivers on the island. The coastline is peppered with small coves and caves, many only reachable by boat or climbers, but there are several good beaches catering for the summer tourists.

Malta's capital is the grand fortress city of Valletta.

1. Valletta

Described by UNESCO's World Heritage website as "one of the most concentrated historic areas in the world", Valletta is Malta's capital city



squeezed into less than one square kilometre of space. From the rich St John's Co-Cathedral, to the pristine 300 year old Manoel Theatre, restaurants, arts, monuments, traditional balconies, shops and malls, museums, forts and bastions, flea markets... Valletta has got it all.

2. Mdina

It is Malta's medieval jewel. Its distinctive narrow winding streets sheltered by imposing walls of nobles houses are simply beautiful and suggestive to stroll in. Hardly any signs of modern development are noticeable and the lamp-lit evenings are surreal.

3. Sun, sand and sea

Even though Malta has a multitude of historic and cultural gems, the sunny weather, some of the cleanest sea anywhere and idyllic beaches remain a main draw for tourists. There are the obvious popular sandy beaches as well as the rugged, but no less beautiful, rocky coasts.



4. Gozo

It is a smaller rural island to the north of Malta, just a half-hour ferry ride away. It is a vivid glimpse into what Malta was up to a few decades ago.

A slower pace of life, welcoming locals, open countryside, raw, rugged coastlines, sleepy unconverted villages and traditional crafts. Gozo's must-see attractions include the Citadella, Ggantija Temples, ta' Pinu Sanctuary and the Dwejra area.

5. Country walks

Spring, autumn and most of winter offer the perfect climate to walk through the rich and varied Maltese countryside.

6. Diving

Thanks to the ideal weather, diving in Malta is an all-year-round sport.

7. Mediterranean dining and nightlife

Malta boasts more than its fair share of inspiring restaurants. Eating the 'catch of the day' under a brilliant night sky is what Mediterranean living is all about.

8. Megalithic temples

These prehistoric monuments are megalithic complexes dating as far back as 3,600 BC. In all, five of these temples are listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites including the oldest known freestanding temples in the world at Ggantija and the underground wonder of the Hal Saflieni Hypogeum.

9. Comino and the Blue Lagoon

Comino is a minuscule island half way between Malta and Gozo. The Blue Lagoon's turquoise waters must be the best spot for swimming and snorkelling anywhere in the Mediterranean.

10. Village religious feasts

The sheer amount of energy, fanaticism and belief that goes into these 'festas' draws in the crowds, both local and foreign.

