



London is the **capital** of the United Kingdom and one of the world's oldest and largest cities. It is Great Britain's economic , cultural and political centre. Its **sights attract** millions of tourists every year.

Geography

The city lies on the River Thames , about 50 km from the North Sea. The river has **influenced** London for many **centuries** . Rising **tides** have flooded the city more than once. In the 1970s and 80s, a large **barrier** was built in the eastern part of the city to stop incoming water from **flooding** the nation's capital.



The Thames Barrier

Image: [Andy Roberts from East London, England,](#)
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London is divided into three main **sections**.

- **The City** is London's financial district and the oldest part of the capital . It is very small, with a **size** of only one square mile. Although only a few thousand people live here, hundreds of thousands **pour** into the City every day to work in the big office buildings of large banks and other institutions.
- **The West End** **includes** London's government **district**, Westminster as well as the famous shopping streets around Piccadilly Circus and Trafalgar Square. The city's famous cinemas, theatres, and bars are **located** in the West End. Most of London's tourist attractions are **concentrated** here.
- **The South Bank** is the area south of the Thames River. It is a cultural district with many concert halls, museums, theatres, and galleries.



History of London

London has a 2000-year-old history. In the first **century A.D.** the Romans came to Great Britain and **founded a settlement** near the **mouth** of the River Thames . They called it Londinium.

After they left London about four hundred years later, the Saxons, a Germanic **tribe** , **settled** in the area. In the centuries that followed, Vikings **repeatedly** attacked the city .

When William the Conqueror **invaded** Britain in 1066 London was already the biggest town on the island. William made the city its **capital** and **crowned** himself king in Westminster Abbey on Christmas Day. He also built the Tower of London to **protect** the city from invaders .

During the Middle Ages, London grew **steadily**. It became one of Europe's **trading centres**, and its population grew to about 200,000 by the beginning of the 17th **century** . Then **disaster struck** the city twice. The Great **Plague** of 1665 killed about a fourth of the city's population. A year later, the Great Fire burned down most of the older part of the city. After this tragedy, the city was rebuilt with houses made of stone and **brick** instead of wood.

At the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, almost a million people lived in London. It was the largest city in the world and the centre of the British **Empire**, which, at that time, was growing at a **rapid pace** .

As more and more people moved to the city from the countryside, London needed more and better transportation systems. In 1863, it became the first city in the world to start an underground railway system .

During the Second World War, Nazi Germany bombed London **heavily** . 30,000 people were killed. The rebuilding of the city after World War II **caused** many problems. City planners did not want London to grow **endlessly** in all directions. A **green belt** was created around the city to stop its **expansion** . Outside this green area, new towns **emerged**. They became small cities which many people moved to later on.

In the second half of the 20th **century**, London faced many problems that other megacities also have: **air pollution, traffic jams** and **unemployment**.

In the 1970s and 80s the Docklands in the eastern part of London were rebuilt. They were once part of the world's largest **harbour** . The Docklands lost their importance as the British Empire lost its colonies. In the past **decades**, new office buildings , shopping centres and a new airport have been created in an **attempt** to **revitalize** this region.



Population

London became one of the first **megacities** in the world. Since the end of World War II, however, the population of the city has begun to **decrease** because many people have been moving to the **suburbs** and new towns outside of London.

London is a **multicultural** city. In the 19th **century**, thousands of people began **pouring** into London as a result of the Industrial Revolution. At the beginning of the 20th century, **immigrants** from other European countries came.

In the 1950s and 60s, people from Britain's colonies came to London. Indians, Pakistanis and West Indians are a **common sight** in the city today. About 25 % of London's population are immigrants or the children of immigrants.

Economy and Tourism

London is the UK's main **economic** and financial centre. It is the centre of trade and banking.

Factories around the city produce all kinds of **consumer goods** — from clothes and electronic products to food and chemicals.

Trading companies were **founded** along the Thames River at a time when Great Britain was still the biggest **colonial power** in the world. Docks and **wharfs** in eastern London became the centre of **world trade**. New container terminals were built in the 60s, in order to **handle** the larger **cargo** ships that came to London.

London is Europe's most important banking and financial centre. Almost all the world's large banks have regional **headquarters** in London. The Bank of England, **located** in the City of London, controls the country's **money supply** and is **responsible** for the **value** of the British pound sterling.

Tourism is an important economic factor for the city. Every year, millions of people from all over the world come to London to see the city's well-known sights. Pupils and students from all over the world come here to learn English or to take language courses. Over 200 000 Londoners work in **tourist-related** industries.



London Docklands in 1860

Image: [Public domain](#), via Wikimedia Commons



Transportation

As Europe's **gateway overseas**, London has two big international airports. Heathrow, in the western part of the city, is the main airport for international flights. Gatwick, halfway between London and the southern **coast**, was opened in 1958 in an **attempt** to get some of Heathrow's **traffic** away from the city. Stansted, in the north of London, **handles** regional flights and flights of **budget airlines**. London's new City Airport is only 15 minutes from the city centre and is used **especially** by business travelers.

There is probably no other city in the world that has such a dense public transport system as London. The Tube, London's underground railway, is the oldest in the world. The red double-decker buses are well-known around the **globe** and a symbol of inner-city transportation. Altogether, about 5 million people use London's public transport every day.



London's famous double-decker buses

Image: [Badudoy \(original\), cropped by User:Ultra7, CC BY-SA 3.0](#),
via Wikimedia Commons

London has 6 railway stations that handle over 1.5 million **commuters** who travel in and out of the city every day. Fast trains from Paris and Brussels arrive in London daily through the Channel Tunnel.

Culture

London is well known for its museums, art galleries and concert halls.

The British Museum is one of the oldest and largest museums in the world. It **contains** over seven million **artifacts** from all continents, cultures, and civilizations.

The National Gallery, situated near Trafalgar Square, is home to a great selection of European paintings. Tate Gallery has **works** of British and modern art.

London's theatres **perform** works by Shakespeare and other great dramatists. The Royal Opera House at Covent Garden is **host** to performances of London's big orchestras.



Sights and Places to See

Buckingham Palace

Buckingham Palace is the most famous of London's many **royal** palaces. **Constructed** in the 18th **century**, it is located at the end of the Mall, one of London's **broadest** roads. The King and his family live in a part of the palace. Other parts can be visited by tourists. The Changing of the Guard is a **ceremony** that takes place every day.

The Tower of London

The Tower of London is one of the oldest buildings in the city. The **fortress** **consists of** several buildings around a central tower. It is situated on the northern **bank** of the River Thames.

For many centuries, the Tower of London **served** as a **prison**. Among the most famous prisoners were the **explorer** Sir Walter Raleigh and Anne Boleyn, one of Henry VIII's wives, who was **beheaded** there.

Today visitors are able to see the Crown Jewels of England, which were originally **protected** by Beefeaters, and the Tower's **ravens**.

Tower Bridge

Tower Bridge, near the Tower of London, may be London's most **impressive landmark**. The bridge is over a hundred years old and can be **raised** to let ships pass through. The two towers and the **walkway** that connects them give visitors a great view of London.



Buckingham Palace

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Tower Bridge

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St. Paul's Cathedral

St. Paul's Cathedral was **rebuilt** in the 17th **century** by the great English architect Sir Christopher Wren after the original building had been **destroyed** by the Great Fire of London in 1666. It has the largest **dome** in the world after St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.



St. Paul's Cathedral

Image: [Mark Fosh, CC BY 2.0](#),
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Westminster Abbey

Westminster Abbey is located near the Houses of Parliament. Since its construction by William the **Conqueror** in 1066 almost all the country's kings and queens have been **crowned** there. **Monarchs** and famous people are **buried** in the abbey. Among them are Charles Darwin and Sir Isaac Newton.

Trafalgar Square

The largest square in London has been a central meeting place since the Middle Ages. In the centre is Nelson's Column, built **in honour of** Admiral Nelson, who **defeated** the French **fleet** at Trafalgar in 1805.

Picadilly Circus

A busy **plaza** in the heart of London lies at the **junction** of five **major** streets. The place is famous for its colourful **billboards**, a **fountain** and a statue of Eros.

Houses of Parliament

The Houses of Parliament are located in the City of Westminster, **alongside** the River Thames. Both the House of Commons and the House of Lords hold their meetings in the palace. Big Ben, the clock tower's famous bell, has been **chiming** since the middle of the 19th **century**.

London Parks

The City of London is well known for its large and beautiful parks.

Hyde Park is the largest of London's **royal** parks. It is about 2 km long and over 1 km wide. Hyde Park is a popular area for free time activities, including jogging, running, and horse riding. Speaker's Corner, near the north-eastern **entrance**



of Hyde Park, is a place where Londoners **gather** and listen to people who talk about all kinds of things. The Serpentine is a large **artificial** lake where people can go swimming or **rowing**.

London has many other parks, including St. James's Park, with a great view of Buckingham Palace, and Green Park.

Greenwich

Greenwich is a famous **district** in the eastern part of London. Tourists either take a Thames boat ride there or go by the Dockland's Light Railway. Greenwich is famous for British **naval** history.

The National Maritime Museum shows **exhibits** from a time when Britain was the world's biggest sea power.

The Royal Observatory has a **planetarium** and a museum with a **display** of **astronomical** and navigational instruments. The **prime meridian** of the world goes through the observatory. It **divides** the world into an eastern and western **hemisphere**.

London Eye

A giant Ferris wheel rises 135 m high on the south **bank** of the River Thames. It was built as a part of London's **millennium** celebrations. Each egg-shaped **cabin** can take up to 25 passengers. A complete turn of the wheel takes 30 minutes.



Greenwich and the National Maritime Museum

Image: [Gryffindor, CC BY-SA 3.0](#),
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London Eye

Image: [Khamtran, CC BY-SA 3.0](#),
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Other places to see:

Windsor Castle	One of the royal family's official residences is the largest inhabited castle in the world. It lies about 30 km west of London. In the course of history it has changed several times.
Covent Garden	The former fruit and vegetable market is always a crowded place , especially during weekends and in the summer. Today it is known for its open-air cafés, restaurants, pubs and street performers .
Madame Tussauds	The most famous museum of wax figures was opened in 1835. Thousands of famous people, artists, writers, politicians and other celebrities have been created in wax. During the tourist season, waiting lines can be very long. The museum now has other wax museums in cities all over the world.
The Globe Theatre	The Globe was originally built in 1599 by William Shakespeare's company of actors. It was destroyed and rebuilt in the early 17th century . Shakespeare's Globe, a reconstruction of the old Globe, was finished in 1997.



Windsor Castle

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The new Globe Theatre

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