

9-Day London Experience: The World of 19th Century Naturalists and Writers



DAY 1

Depart the USA on our transatlantic flight to London.

DEPART USA

(meals aloft)

DAY 2

Today we arrive in London. Down through the years, from a small Roman settlement housed within stout fortifications, London has steadily grown to become one of the world's greatest capital cities. Upon arrival this morning we are met at the airport by our guide and coach and drive into the city. We will see many famous places on our panoramic tour -- Marble Arch, Mayfair, Piccadilly, the Houses of Parliament and Big Ben, Buckingham Palace and Hyde Park. We visit famed Westminster Abbey, burial place of Darwin, Dickens, and other nineteenth-century luminaries, and home to many coronations and royal weddings. After our visit we transfer to our hotel for check-in. The balance of the day is at leisure for exploring on your own and visiting the National Portrait Gallery. From its humble beginnings in 1856, at which time it was the first portrait gallery in the world, it is now located at St Martin's Place off Trafalgar Square and adjoins the National Gallery.

ARRIVE LONDON

(meals aloft,D)

DAY 3

Our sightseeing today includes a visit the Charles Dickens Home and Museum with its impressive collection of material relating to the great Victorian novelist and social commentator. Here in the only surviving London home of Dickens, where he lived from 1837-1839, the impressive collection includes paintings, rare editions, manuscripts, original furniture and many items relating to the life of one of the most popular and beloved personalities of the Victorian age. Following our visit we continue to the British Museum, home to more than

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seven million objects comprising one of the most comprehensive collections worldwide and spanning the entire breadth of human history and culture. The British Museum has treasures from around the world including the Rosetta Stone (which helped archaeologists to interpret Egyptian hieroglyphics), the magnificent Elgin Marbles (sculptures that formerly decorated the Parthenon in Athens) and a copy of the Magna Carta (the charter signed by King John in 1215 to which is ascribed the origins of English liberty). We also visit the British Library, which houses more than 150 million items in a myriad of languages and formats. Second in size only to the American Library of Congress, the British Library must automatically receive a copy of everything that is published in the United Kingdom. This evening we enjoy a traditional English meal of fish and chips before returning to our hotel for overnight.

(B,D)

DAY 4

Today we visit Kew Gardens, the Royal Botanic Gardens, which is home to the world's largest collection of living plants. The organization employs more than 650 scientists and other staff. The living collections include more than 30,000 different kinds of plants, while the herbarium, which is the largest in the world, has over 7 million preserved plant specimens. This afternoon we proceed to the Royal Observatory in Greenwich, overlooking the River Thames. While there have been significant buildings on this land since the reign of Edward I, the observatory was commissioned in 1675 by King Charles II. The Royal Observatory, Greenwich is the home of Greenwich Mean Time and the Prime Meridian of the World, making it the official starting point for each new day, year and millennium. From here we return to our hotel, dinner included this evening at a local restaurant.

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(B,D)

DAY 5**LONDON**

Today we visit the Natural History Museum, home to life and earth science specimens comprising some 70 million items within five main collections: Botany, Entomology, Mineralogy, Palaeontology and Zoology. The museum is particularly famous for its exhibition of dinosaur skeletons, and ornate architecture - sometimes dubbed a "cathedral of nature." From there we proceed to the Victoria and Albert Museum, the world's largest museum of decorative arts and design, housing a permanent collection of over 4.5 million objects including ceramics, glass, textiles, costumes, silver, ironwork, jewelry, furniture, medieval objects, sculpture, prints and printmaking, drawings and photographs. Named after Prince Albert and Queen Victoria, it was founded in 1852 and its collection spans 5000 years of art from ancient times to the present day, in virtually every medium, from the cultures of Europe, North America, Asia and North Africa. This evening we enjoy dinner in a local restaurant and then attend a show in London's famed West End. (B,D)

DAY 6**COTSWOLDS/LONDON**

Today we are joined by a guide specializing in naturalism, and we travel by coach from London to the Cotswolds. There we enjoy a walking tour and take in the quintessentially English surroundings, well known for gentle hillsides ('wolds'), outstanding countryside with river valleys, water meadows and beech woods, sleepy ancient limestone villages, and historic market towns. We return to London later this afternoon and have dinner at a local restaurant this evening. (B,D)

DAY 7**DOWNE/LONDON**

We travel by coach today to Kent where we tour Down House, the former home of the English naturalist Charles Darwin and his family. It was in this house and garden that Darwin worked on his theories of evolution by natural selection which he had conceived in London before moving to Downe to accommodate his growing family. The estate is now a museum, and Darwin's study is restored with original furniture including his wheeled armchair and writing board. We return to London this afternoon and visit Tate Britain, the national gallery of British art from 1500 to the present day and the most comprehensive collection of its kind in the world. Dinner is included at our hotel this evening. (B,D)

DAY 8**LONDON**

Today we visit Keats House, where the poet John Keats lived from 1818 to 1820, and the setting that inspired some of Keats's most memorable poetry. Here Keats wrote 'Ode to a Nightingale', and fell in love with Fanny Brawne, the girl next door. And it was from this house that he traveled to Rome, where he died of tuberculosis at just 25 years old. Today the house is a museum which displays artifacts such as the engagement ring Keats offered to Fanny Brawne and a copy of Keats' death mask. Following our tour, we have the afternoon at leisure for exploring and sightseeing on our own. Dinner is on your own this evening. (B)

DAY 9**LONDON/USA**

We transfer to the airport this morning for our flight back to the USA. (B, meals aloft)