

London's Parks and Museums

Parks

London is one the greenest big cities in the world. Everywhere you go there is always a park or garden. There are 387 parks in Greater London! Most of these green open spaces were once the parks of royal homes and palaces. Now these lovely parks belong to the people, and in many parks you can rent a deck chair ¹ and sit on the grass and enjoy the sun or read a book.

Hyde Park is the best-known of the great royal parks with more than 4,000 trees. It was first owned by the monks ² of Westminster Abbey and then by King Henry VIII, who went hunting there. In the 1600s it was opened to the public and in 1665, during the Great Plague, many people left the City and went to stay in Hyde Park. The Serpentine Lake is a big attraction because you can swim in it all year long or you can rent a boat. You can also go biking or riding in the park. On Sundays you can listen to people at Speakers' Corner, where anyone can talk about any subject. In the summer many fun events take place in the park. Famous singers and bands often perform here.

To the west of Hyde Park are Kensington Gardens. They are the grounds ³ of Kensington Palace, which was the also the home of

1. deck chair :



2. monks :



3. grounds : the land around a building.



Diana, Princess of Wales. These gardens have beautiful fountains and statues and lots of colourful flowers and plants. The famous statue of Peter Pan is here and it is a big attraction for everyone who loves the wonderful story. At the far end of the park is the Round Pond, where children (and adults!) can play with model boats.

Going east we find one of London's oldest royal parks, St James's Park. In 1532 King Henry VIII bought the land where the park is today. In 1603 King James I created a park where he kept wild animals like camels, elephants and birds. In the 1660s King Charles II asked a French artist to redesign⁴ the park, which was later opened to the public. There is a large lake with Duck Island, where different kinds of ducks and birds live. Every afternoon at 2.30 the pelicans⁵ are given fresh fish to eat and it is fun to watch them. On summer weekends you can listen to concerts in the park. All around the park you can see some

4. **redesign** : to design again.

5. **pelicans** :





of the country's most famous places: Buckingham Palace, The Mall and Whitehall. Regent's Park is north of Oxford Street and it has an Inner and Outer Ring. Within the Inner Ring are the lovely Queen Mary's Gardens and the Open Air Theatre where Shakespeare's plays are performed in the summer. The London Zoo, with over 750 kinds of animals, is in the Outer Ring.

Museums

There are more than 240 museums in London and most of them are free. Some are small and others are very large, and they are all fun to visit. Let's take a look at the most important ones. The British Museum is one of the largest and most important museums in the world. It has more than seven million objects from all over the world: Ancient Egypt, Ancient Greece and Rome, the Americas, Europe, Asia and the Middle East. These objects tell the story of human culture from its beginning to the present. For example, in the Egyptian Sculpture section you can see the famous Rosetta Stone, which was the key to reading ancient Egyptian writing. And in the Greek section you can see the beautiful Parthenon Sculptures from the Acropolis in Athens. The museum was opened to the public in 1759. During the years many important objects were added to the collections. The centre of the museum was redesigned by the famous British architect Sir Norman Foster, and in 2000 it became the beautiful Great Court with a glass and steel roof, which surrounds the original Reading Room. It is the largest covered open space in Europe – it is bigger than a football field!



The Great Court in British Museum.

The Natural History Museum is the largest and most important natural history museum in the world. It has more than 70 million specimens: ⁶ animals, insects, birds, plants, rocks and minerals. The museum is famous for its skeletons of dinosaurs and other big mammals, and its section on biodiversity. The museum opened in 1881 but its history goes back to the late 1700s, when Captain Cook brought back many unusual specimens from his trips to the South Pacific. The museum is on Exhibition Road in South Kensington near two other famous museums, the Science Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum. This area is often called 'Museum Mile'.

The National Gallery is the biggest building on Trafalgar Square. It was founded in 1924 and has a world famous collection of over 2,300 paintings from the mid-13th century to 1900. Almost every important artist in the world is represented in



6. **specimen** : a plant or animal which is the example of a particular species.



Natural History Museum: diplodocus skeleton.

the wonderful collection – from medieval painters, to the great Renaissance artists, to the 19th- century impressionists.

If you want to find out more about London's history from the prehistoric days up to now, go to the Museum of London in the City. See what prehistoric London was like in the London Before London exhibit, which goes back to the year 450,000 BCE!

There is an excellent simulation ⁷ of the Great Fire of 1666, where you can see what happened during the fire and how people tried to put it out. You can also hear about different people's adventures during the disaster. Near the museum you can see the old Roman city wall.

7. **simulation** : something that shows you how the real thing was.