

## 72 Hours in London

[JUNE 12, 2019](#) / [JESSICA ANSELM](#) / [0 COMMENTS](#) / [EDIT](#)

### Holiday on a holiday weekend

Memorial Day weekend – the anticipated kick-off to beach and BBQ season yet in cities like Boston, it's often coin toss when it comes to sun & blue skies. This year, I decided to hedge my bets and squeeze in one last international trip before summer. Boston summers are what we live for and come June, I like to stay local. So, I headed to London – even more of a gamble when it comes to weather and very un-American given the occasion. But, let me tell you, I didn't want to brexit.

Here's the itinerary – structured to reflect what I would've done if I had just 3 days, from Friday – Sunday, and the rest as a bonus. It's organized (or shall I say 'organised') by the most efficient geography which, in hindsight, I failed to do for myself.

*[For the record, the weather in London and in Boston was perfect this past MDW so it was a win-win.]*

#### Passport Snapshot

**Who:** Me (solo!)

**What:** Long weekend trip

**When:** Thursday – Monday in May

**Where:** London proper

**Why:** Expiring flight credit – long story, let's skip

**How:** British Airways

**Spend:** Approx. \$900 (excluding flight)

**Tip:** No better way to see a city than to walk it but London is huge – load an Oyster card for easy Tube access

**Budget:** Wi-fi is everywhere; don't pay for international data

**Fun Fact:** Known for its "Beefeater" guards, London is actually one of the world's most vegetarian-friendly cities - while there, I decided to follow a plant-based diet

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### Hotel Highlight

London's an expensive city, even more so with the current exchange rate. Loved my stay at [Vancouver Studios](#) in Bayswater (4 nights \$494). The common area was quaint, the staff friendly and it was conveniently located near a Tube station and a stone's throw from Notting Hill.

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### Day 1, Friday – Tower of London, South Bank, The City

- Dive right in with an early visit to **Tower of London** – allocate three hours to enjoy a free, guided Beefeater tour where London's complicated past comes to life with tales of royals and traitors to the crown
    - *Tip – see the Crown Jewels first thing to avoid crowds*
  - Exiting the tower, admire views of Tower Bridge and the Tate Modern across the Thames before crossing over **Tower Bridge** yourself
  - Stroll along the South Bank, stopping for lunch as you make your way to **Shakespeare's Globe Theater** – take in a brief guided tour or, for theater buffs, consider returning for an evening show (book in advance for both)
  - Cross back over the Thames via Blackfriars Bridge to **The City** [the neighborhood's name]\* to get acquainted with the area's history – WWII buffs should consider a tour
  - Visit **St. Paul's Cathedral** which stands proud after numerous WWII bombings
  - Close out the day & kick off the evening with a pint at historic **Blackfriar's Pub**right near the London Stock Exchange (lady friends, you can thank me later)
  - Consider an evening spin on the **London Eye**
  - *\*Visit The City on a weekday, it's a business hub and is abandoned on weekends*
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## Day 2, Saturday – Borough, Westminster, St James, West End

- Wake early and walk through **Hyde & St. James parks**, past Buckingham Palace to **Westminster Abbey** to be shocked & awed by both its opulence and reverence
    - *Tip: Book tickets in advance for a morning visit to avoid the line – allocate 3 hours to fully explore*
  - Cross Westminster Bridge to Borough, where you'll find **Borough Market's** endless stalls of artisan fare to refuel – the area teems with “football” fans on weekends
  - Heading up to Soho and the West End, stroll around **Piccadilly Circus** where you'll learn about Beatlemania's beginnings and the Great Plague that killed nearly 1/3 of Europe's population centuries prior
  - Enjoy cocktails & appetizers at vegetarian-friendly spot, **The Palomar** (book in advance for bar seats)
  - Close out the day and rest your tired feet at some of the best pubs in London by heading to **Covent Garden**
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## Day 3, Sunday – Shoreditch/Spitalfields, Camden, Notting Hill

- Sunday's market day and an authentic way to experience the city
- Start in hip, graffiti-laden **Shoreditch** where you'll taste your way through the area's melting pot of coffee shops, off-the-beaten-path Bangladeshi food, fish & chips, native beignets piled high with corned beef and bean-to-bar West African Chocolate
- Wander Brick Lane's Sunday market for vintage finds before arriving at **Colombia Road Flower Market**
- On Sundays, a narrow street becomes more narrow, packed with beautiful, fragrant flowers & vendors hawking their wares in Cockney accents – think “peonies for a fiv-ah!”

- *Tip: Be sure follow the folk music to a small side street for a pint with locals*
  - For a grittier market feel, head northwest to **Camden** – home to a gentrifying area & eclectic market. Sample Halloumi fries topped with mint cucumber dressing and pomegranate seeds while browsing classic trenches with an edge, thanks to a growing South Korean clothing scene
  - End the day in **Notting Hill**, walking through the winding, colorful streets before sundown (and wishing you were Julia Roberts or Hugh Grant)
  - Grab dinner to-go at Mediterranean-inspired **Ottolenghi** and enjoy perched on a bench in **Kensington Gardens**
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#### Bonus Day 1

- Head north for a half day in **Hampstead** – hilly views over London and home to many an artist from Keats to Sylvia Plath
  - You'll wander Hampstead High Street – stop for coffee at **Ginger & White** and a crepe at Creperie – where the winding side streets offer a feel more reminiscent of the British countryside
  - Visit **Kenwood House**, once home to the King's Royal Hunting Grounds and home to a scene from the movie Notting Hill, for exquisite paintings, including Vermeer's
  - Head back toward London with a half hour stroll to **Primrose Hill**, reminiscent of Notting Hill with its colored buildings and air of times gone by, eventually arriving at **Regent's Park**
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#### Bonus Day 2

- Monarchy buffs can tour **Buckingham Palace** – be sure to plan around the 11:30am daily changing of the guards, which you'll want to see
  - Consider the **Victoria & Albert Museum** in Knightsbridge/South Kensington – in addition to delighting design buffs, it hosts rotating world-class exhibits
  - I caught the excellent **exhibit "FOOD: Bigger than the Plate"** which invites visitors learn about global food system experiments via interactive exhibits
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London is a truly global city – Brits are friendly, cultured and the best kind of brash. While you can see a lot in 72 hours with careful planning, it likely takes at least a week to truly experience each unique neighborhood and allow time to make it outside the city walls to Windsor Castle. So don't try to do it all in one visit and leave some time to get lost on foot.

Keith Bellows, Editor-in-Chief of National Geographic Traveler magazine, said it best:

*"Navigate a city on foot and you feel, intimately, its energy. You connect with the place. You engage face to face with its inhabitants. Neighborhoods become neighborly, and storefronts draw you close. You begin to sense its cadence – where energy ebbs and flows. You smell the flowers, read the fine print on monuments, stumble across local celebrations, lounge on park lawns, eavesdrop on workday conversations, succumb to a nightclub beat, sample an early morning espresso, or simply sit and watch as life passes by in natural high-def ... happenstance is the currency of the traveler who chooses to go step by step."*