

London doesn't hibernate in winter – the fun just moves indoors to theatres, clubs and restaurants – but the arrival of spring definitely witnesses a change of pace in the city. April's sweet showers herald the start of warmer weather and a host of outdoor events that see Londoners and visitors alike shedding their sweaters and enjoying the longer days.

1. Parks, gardens & architectural gems

London's green spaces look their best in spring. Everybody's favorite floral indicator of the change in season is the daffodil, and the best places to see them are St James's Park and Green Park, where hundreds of these yellow flowers cover the lawns. By the time the daffodils have faded, roses have taken their place, with the rose gardens in Regent's Park and Greenwich Park the perfect spots to treat your eyes and nose. The world's greatest botanical gardens, at Kew, are worth a visit at any time of year, but spring is when the bluebells bloom, and over the Easter period the Gardens host an Easter egg hunt and chocolate-themed events.

2. Sports & activities

Getting around London by bike might not seem the obvious way to travel in such a busy city, but if the spring weather is behaving itself and you fancy actually seeing the sights rather than travelling beneath them on the tube, renting a city bike is an enjoyable way of getting around. Pick-up/drop-off stations are found all over London, you can hire using just your bank card, and if you plot your route to follow the parks and River Thames you can cross from one side of the city to the other avoiding most of the traffic.

The London Marathon is held in the capital every April (28 April in 2019). The world's biggest fundraising event starts in Greenwich Park, before wending its way past London's most famous sights until it reaches the finish line on

the Mall near Buckingham Palace. Thousands of runners take part, and you can join the many loud and enthusiastic spectators lining the streets.

3. Festivals & events

The highlight of the year for Britain's keen gardeners (and there are many) is the spectacular Chelsea Flower Show, held in the grounds of the Royal Hospital towards the end of May (21-25 May in 2019 to be precise).

If culture rather than chrysanthemums is your thing, check out the Museums at Night festival (15-18 May in 2019, as well as 31 October-2 November), which sees evening events at many of London's top museums and galleries, including the London Transport Museum, the National Portrait Gallery and the Victoria & Albert Museum.

4. The insider's guide to London's Notting Hill

It has taken many guises over the decades, from brickmaking in the 1800s through prosperity in the Victorian era, slum housing in the mid-twentieth century and migration from the Caribbean, but it's now a largely gentrified area of townhouses and private gardens which manages to retain some of the dynamism of its working-class roots. Every year, the Notting Hill Carnival attracts over a million revellers in a celebration of West Indian culture. Local streets are jam-packed with costumed party-goers, steel pan bands, sound systems blasting reggae, soca and calypso, and food stalls serving jerk chicken, rice and peas and curries. From its humble beginnings in the 1950s, the carnival has grown into one of the world's top outdoor street festivals and is by far the largest event of its kind in Europe.

5. Browse Portobello Road Market

On weekends throughout the year, crowds stroll the two-mile stretch of Portobello Road Market. Colourful terraces are interspersed with antiques shops, buskers, historic pubs and clothing stalls. Straddling the antiques and fashion markets (which are busiest on Saturdays) are the old-fashioned and charming produce markets, the calls of fruit and veg sellers helping give the place a Dickensian air.

There's street food of all kinds, from paella and bratwurst to crepes and churros. The markets have a grungier feel past the Westway sports centre, but it is worth persevering for the people-watching and to admire the 100m-long Portobello Wall, which features public artworks commissioned by the local council.

For an indoor activity, Ginstitute, on the corner of Portobello Rd and Talbot Rd, provides a gin-themed experience, where you'll learn about the spirit's history and make some of your own.

6. Shop for music, books and fashion

Even more interesting shops can be found just off Portobello Rd. A visit to alternative music pioneer Rough Trade on Talbot Rd, its walls covered with original posters and album sleeves, is a treat for any music buff. Books for Cooks on Blenheim Crescent is a treasure trove of food-related books with a cafe out the back for cooking demonstrations, light lunches and tea. Across the road, the tiny Spice Shop stocks more than 2500 herbs, spices and condiments in bright, collectible yellow tins.

Fashionistas should head to Westbourne Grove and Ledbury Rd, which are sprinkled with higher-end boutiques and children's shops, as well as a smorgasbord of French chains including Sandro and Maje. Also worth a look is Paul Smith's three-storey flagship store, crammed with artwork and curios from the much-lauded British designer's personal collection.

7. Finding food in Notting Hill

With the exception of the two-Michelin-starred Ledbury (a major food destination for its inventive modern European food), neighbourhood restaurants and independent cafes dominate in Notting Hill.

Italian favourites serving wood-fired pizza and pasta can be found at the bottom of Kensington Park Rd, while a number of pubs serve gourmet classics (try the Walmer Castle) or Sunday roasts (try the Sun in Splendour). A coveted reservation or queueing stamina is a prerequisite for favourite local hangouts such as Granger & Co and 202 London, or E&O for pan-Asian fusion and delicious cocktails.

8. Best boutique hotels in London

Finding the right accommodation is integral to your London experience, and there's no shortage of choice. The city has some stunning hotels and many are experiences in their own right, with numerous distinctive, luxurious boutique hotels on offer. Our favourites are dotted around town centre, from the historic heart of the City to leafy Richmond, and feature mood-lit pools, free-standing baths, Victorian fittings and irresistible cocktails bars. Rooms in popular hotels often need to be booked well in advance – so start researching now, and spoil yourself later.

9.SHOPPING IN LONDON

London's been honing its retailing skills since being founded as a trading post by the Romans nearly two thousand years ago. The West End is the heart of the city's shopping world, particularly Covent Garden, with its mix of cool chains and unique boutiques, Oxford Street, with its procession of world-famous department stores, and Bond Street, with its designer collections. But other neighbourhoods have plenty of cash-splashing options too: Knightsbridge and Kensington have upmarket shops aimed at wealthy locals; while Shoreditch and Spitalfields play on their hipster credentials with specialist outlets offering cutting-edge fashion. And don't forget the city's wonderful markets where everything from gourmet sausages to antique furniture is on offer.

10.NIGHTCLUBS IN LONDON

When it comes to clubbing, London's where it's at. You'll probably know what you want to experience – it might be big clubs such as Fabric or Ministry of Sound, or sweaty shoebox clubs with the latest DJ talent – but there's plenty to tempt you to branch out from your usual tastes and try something new: from thumping techno, rock, Latin, ska, pop, grime, minimal electro, hip hop or 1950s lindy hopping, there's something going on every night. Thursdays are loved by those who want to have their fun before the office workers mob the streets on Friday. Saturdays are the busiest and best if you're a serious clubber, and Sundays often see surprisingly good events throughout London. There are venues across town, though East London is the top area for cutting-edge clubs, and Camden is rock central.

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