

Self-Guided Royal London Tour

Note: Starting this tour around 10:00 will result in being near St. James's Palace during the [Changing of the Guard](#).

Start: Green Park Underground Station

Finish: Parliament Square for Westminster Underground Station

Duration: 2 – 3 hours depending on watching the Ceremony

We also offer a more detailed [GPS-enabled audio version](#) of this tour.

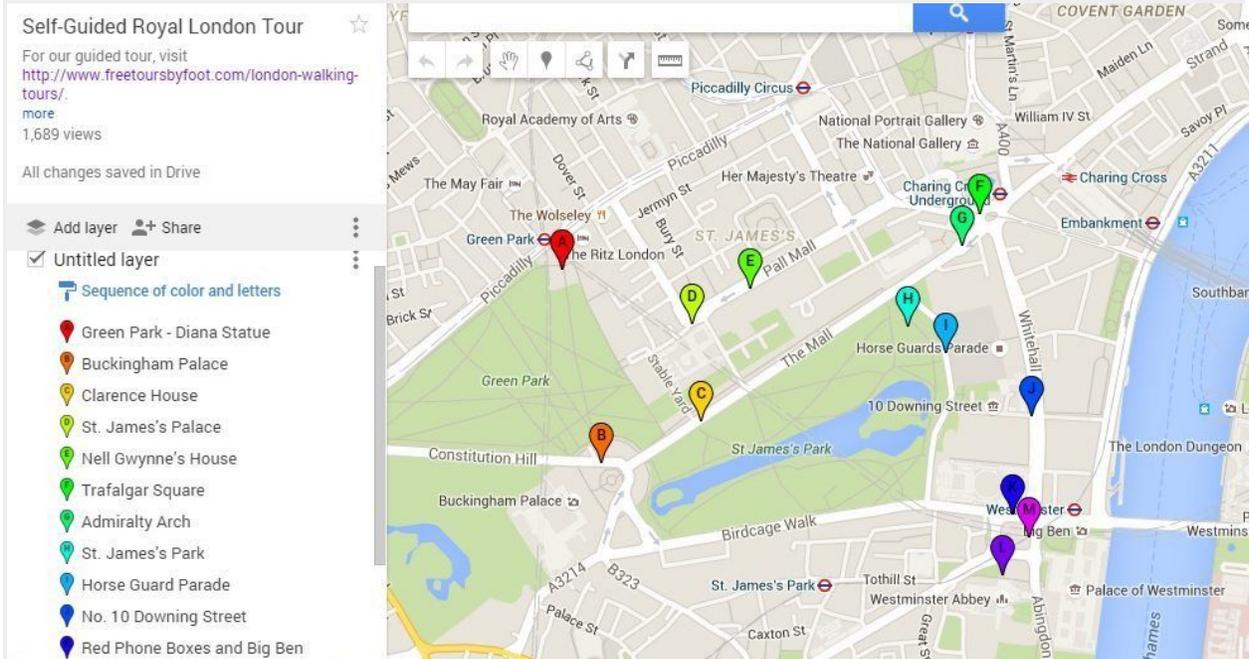
Be sure to also check out our [full list of self-guided London tours](#) as well as all of our [guided tours of London](#).

Click here for the top [30 hotels in this area](#) as listed on TripAdvisor.

Below is a map of the things to see near Buckingham Palace. Yellow markers indicate a stop on our self-guided tour, red stars indicate a stop on the Big Bus Tour Company route, and blue stars indicate a stop on the Original Bus Company Tour route.

TIP: If you are considering using one of the hop-on, hop-off bus companies to get around London, please keep in mind that all the major companies have stops in Westminster. Read our [comparison post on London bus tours](#).

[Click here for larger interactive map.](#)



(Stop A) – Green Park

[Take the exit for BUCKINGHAM PALACE. Walk towards the black marble DIANA FOUNTAIN. This is your Start Point.]



Welcome to Green Park where you will start your Royal London Tour! You are now standing in one of the most affluent areas of London. To the north of you are London's luxury hotels: The Dorchester, The Ritz and Claridges. This is also the neighbourhood where Queen Elizabeth II was born

– and where she lives today. Her house is just on the other side of Green Park (so named because it was said that this part stayed green all year long...supposedly because this is the medieval burial ground for a leper hospital that used to stand on this site!).

Take the path that directs you towards BUCKINGHAM PALACE and follow it to the end of the park.

(Stop B) – Buckingham Palace

You are now standing just outside [Buckingham Palace](#) – the London residence of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II. Buckingham Palace originally was known as Buckingham House and was a much smaller home of the Duke of Buckingham in the 18th century. However, once the house fell into royal hands, it was expanded and partially redesigned into the palace you see today. Queen Victoria and her husband, Prince Albert, are mostly responsible for the palace you see today and were the first royal family to spend the majority of their time here.



Even though Buckingham Palace is the most famous Palace in the U.K., the Queen actually has houses all throughout the country and

spends the majority of her time at Windsor Castle. There is a flag flying above Buckingham Palace at all times and the type of flag that is displayed tells the public whether or not the Queen is at home:

Union Flag – The red, white, and blue flag of the United Kingdom signifies that the Queen is NOT HOME.

Royal Standard – The red, blue and gold flag known as the Royal Standard depicts symbols representing the United Kingdom (harp for N. Ireland, red lion for Scotland, three golden lions for England) and when this flag is flying it means the Queen IS AT HOME.

Read our blog post on [visiting Buckingham Palace](#) for more information.

Also read our post on the [Changing of the Guard](#).

You now want to walk AWAY from Buckingham Palace. Look at the VICTORIA MEMORIAL and notice that her back is to the Palace and she is facing down a long red road known as THE MALL. Walk down the MALL and stop when you see large black gates on the left side of the road.

(Stop C) – Clarence House

Behind these gates you will see two members of the Queens Guard (the world-famous soldiers wearing large black hats) who are guarding the entrance of a building known as [Clarence House](#).



Clarence House was commissioned by the Duke of Clarence in the early 19th century and was designed by master architect John Nash (also responsible for Regent's Street). The house has traditionally been home to

secondary members of the royal family and for just over 50 years it was the home of Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon, the Queen Mother. Today it is the official home of Charles, the Prince of Wales and his wife Camilla, the Duchess of Cornwall.

Clarence House is only open to the public one month during the year – traditionally this is at the end of the summer when the Prince of Wales and his wife are away from London, taking their holidays!

Continue down the Mall and take the first LEFT onto MARLBOROUGH ROAD. Walk to the end of the road and make a LEFT onto the main road, PALL MALL.

(Stop D) – [St. James's Palace](#)



You are now looking at the gatehouse of St. James's Palace. This Palace was begun in 1531 and finally considered complete in 1536. The King who ordered the Palace built was King Henry VIII, who moved into the Palace in 1533 with his second

wife, Anne Boleyn. Numerous historical monarchs have considered St. James's Palace home: Queen Mary I, Queen Elizabeth II, King Charles II and James II – just to name a few!

It was in the Chapel Royal, inside the Palace, that Queen Victoria married her husband, Prince Albert in 1840, and here also in October 2012 was where Catherine Middleton and Prince William had their first son, George, christened.

Today, however, the Palace has a different function. The offices of the Royal Collection Department are kept here and this is where the Accession Council meet to officially proclaim a new monarch on the death of the previous one. The rooms here are used to entertain guests on state visits, and it is also where the Household Office of Prince William and Prince Harry are located – although neither of them lives here. You can think of St.

James's Palace almost like the office of the Royal Family. [Read our full post.](#)

Now go back on yourself, staying on PALL MALL, cross over MARLBOROUGH ROAD and continue going straight. Stop at 80 PALL MALL.

(Stop E) – Nell Gwynne's House

This building – although not original – sits on the site of an early home of Nell Gwynne. Nell was a popular mistress of King Charles II in the 17th century. King Charles II had numerous mistresses and was the father of well over 20 illegitimate children, of which 2 were born to Nell Gwynne. The King's two primary mistresses at the beginning of his reign were Barbara Villiers and Louise de Keroualle. Both of them were of high birth and were fond of spending the King's money and demanding titles and allowances for their children. They also both meddled in political affairs, showed no respect to members of the royal family, and were generally detested by the public! Louise, in particular, suffered much dislike because of her French lineage and her Catholic faith – mostly because in 17th century England, both Catholics and the French were viewed with much derision and dislike.

Nell, on the other hand, was a common Londoner. She had no links to the Royal Family, owned no land, and nobody in her family had any titles. And as a practicing member of the Church of England – and a native Londoner – Nell looked on Louise de Keroualle with disgust...and the feeling was

mutual. Nell and Louise fought constantly and Nell is noted to have dumped ink into Louise's tea, to turn her teeth black, without telling her! As much as the public hated Louise, they loved Nell...she was one of them! A commoner, a Londoner, and a protestant...and she felt the same way about the other King's mistresses as the public did. Her role as the King's Mistress is well recorded and an incident that took place here, at Pall Mall, is often recalled to display the public's love of Nell:

As Nell was leaving the King's Palace at Whitehall, she was traveling in his royal carriage toward her home. Members of the public who had been walking through St. James Park (just behind Pall Mall) spotted the carriage and assumed Louise was inside. They formed a mob around the carriage, shouting and screaming abuse directed at Louise's French birth and Catholic religion. The crowd got violent – rocks and mud being thrown. Nell realised what was happening and ordered the driver to stop the carriage. She then threw open the door, stepped out and called out, "PRAY! Good people, be civil! I am the *PROTESTANT* whore!" And the crowd...cheered! The men took their hats off and bowed, and the ladies clapped as Nell got back into her carriage and went home without further disturbance.

Now continue down PALL MALL until you walk to TRAFALGAR SQUARE.

(Stop F) – Trafalgar Square



Named after the Battle of Trafalgar, [Trafalgar Square](#) is a bit like London's common room. It has been a site of celebration (the end of WWII) a site of protest (suffragettes campaigning for the right to vote) as well as hosting numerous events throughout the year such as showing American football games, ballet and opera performances. The column in the centre of the square is known as Nelson's Column and it is Nelson himself who

stands on top.

Nelson led the English navy in the Battle of Trafalgar and other Napoleonic generals are depicted in the square, as is King George IV – who was on the throne during the Battle of Trafalgar. However, the statue in the northwest corner of Trafalgar Square is constantly changing. Part of the Fourth Plinth Project, different artists are selected to have their work displayed here in the Square.

The Square is flanked by The National Gallery to the north, the Canadian Embassy to the west, and the South African embassy to the east.

Leave Trafalgar Square by crossing PALL MALL toward The Admiralty pub. Take the small road to the right of The Admiralty, SPRING GARDENS. This road will bring you back to the red road of THE MALL.

(Stop G) – Admiralty Arch

The arches here on your left are part of a ceremonial entrance to Buckingham Palace. Commissioned by Queen Victoria's son, King Edward VII, in the early 20th century. The two arches on the left and right of the structure are used for passing traffic but the centre arch is only open for ceremonial events – or athletic competitions where racers come this way, like the London Marathon. The arches here are also the reason why the Mall is a red road – and not black. Because the road symbolises a red carpet that has been unrolled all the way down to Buckingham Palace. Rumour has it that the [Admiralty Arch is to be turned into a 5 star hotel](#).



Walk to the first set of traffic lights between you and the Palace. Here, carefully cross the road and, where it is safe to stop in the middle, you can see the entire length of the road toward Buckingham Palace.

Cross to the other side of THE MALL.

Continue walking straight ahead from the traffic lights down a small path

with the concrete bunker (covered in ivy) on your right. At the bottom of this path is HORSE GUARDS PARADE.

(Stop H) – St. James’s Park

Originally the site of a medieval leper hospital (which gives this park its name today), [St. James’s Park](#) was first claimed as hunting space for King Henry VIII in the 1500’s and remained in the hands of the royal family until the late 17th century. King Charles II opened the park to the public in the 1660’s and chose this location as a place to keep his collection of rare birds. In fact, the park is still home to a family of pelicans that descend from these original birds! A great place to relax in the grass, enjoy a pic-nic or feed the birds (the swans here are legally owned by Her Majesty, the Queen!), St. James’s Park is perhaps the most beautiful and picturesque of all London’s royal parks.

Read our post on the [best London parks to visit](#).

(Stop I) – Horse Guards Parade

The huge concrete building you just passed is known as the citadel and was built during World War II to be a war bunker in case of an emergency. Today it houses the control centre for all of the CCTV cameras in London.

The open space here is known as Horse Guards Parade and is, for the majority of the year, a large empty courtyard. So called because the [Household Cavalry](#) – made up of the two most senior regiments of the

British Army – are based here. The huge white building dominating the eastern side of the Square forms part of their base here in London.



Occasionally, athletic events are held here and this is also where The Trooping of the Colour takes place every year, which is the official celebration of the Queen's birthday. Originally, this large piece of land was a courtyard in the midst of a huge palace that stood on this site: The Palace of Whitehall. Whitehall

Palace was the primary home of kings and queens from its' creation in the 1500's until its' destruction in a fire of 1698. The area here is still known as Whitehall to this day.

In the 1990s this area was a car park for government employees working in the nearby buildings such as the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Scotland Office, both of which are based here. Parking here was outlawed in 1997 and more recently, in 2012, this was the grounds where the beach volleyball tournament was played in the London Olympics!

Now walk toward the huge white building and walk through the CENTRE ARCH. As you go through the courtyard here you may see some of the Household Cavalry who are stationed here. Between 11:00 am and 10:00

pm there are usually two, mounted on horses, at the front of the courtyard here. Walk straight ahead onto the main road of WHITEHALL. Turn RIGHT and walk down until you get to the large black gates on your right side.

(Stop J) – No. 10 Downing Street

Here you are looking onto Downing Street, a 17th-century residential street that is now famous for holding Number 10 – the traditional home of the Prime Minister. Until the 1990s, it was possible to walk along Downing Street, but because of security, it is fenced off on either side and guarded by officers with automatic weapons. Today, Downing Street holds only two houses: Number 10 and Number 11, traditionally home to the Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer respectively. However, the residential rooms in Number 11 are actually somewhat bigger than the ones in number 10 which means occasionally Prime Ministers actually move their families into Number 11, instead! Click here to [read more about Downing Street](#).

Continue down WHITEHALL until you get to the huge traffic junction with BIG BEN on the opposite corner. Turn RIGHT onto PARLIAMENT STREET, where you will see Parliament Square opposite and red phone boxes on your side of the road.

(Stop K) – Red Phone Boxes and Big Ben

The red phone boxes here are some of the most iconic items in all of London. The famous design was submitted by architect Giles Gilbert Scott in a competition that was hosted by British Telecom. in the 1920s. Around 10 years ago, many of the red phone boxes were being removed as the majority of people now use mobile phones. However, the public were outraged at the removal of these iconic boxes and many of them were reinstated!

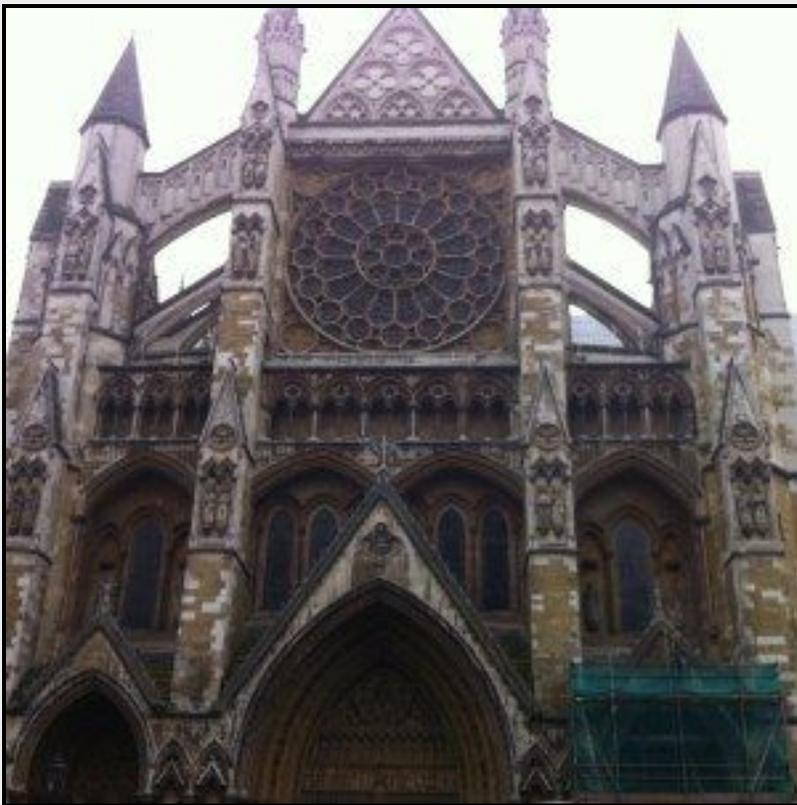


Here you also have a brilliant view of [Big Ben](#). Strictly speaking, it is impossible to stand here and see Big Ben...because Big Ben is actually the name of the bell inside this tower! Nowadays, the entire tower is commonly referred to as Big Ben but it is actually officially called the Queen Elizabeth II Tower. If you look

above the clock face you will see large arches and it is through those arches that Big Ben – the bell – is hanging, along with four smaller bells. These small bells ring what we call ‘The Westminster Chimes’ every 15 minutes, and Ben rings at the top of the hour only. [Read more about Big Ben](#).

Continue down PARLIAMENT STREET with Parliament Square on your left. When you get to the traffic lights, cross over and walk down PARLIAMENT SQUARE – with the square still on your left, and the statues of George Canning and Abraham Lincoln on your right. When you get to the corner, cross AGAIN into the courtyard of Westminster Abbey.

(Stop L) – Westminster Abbey



One of the most famous churches in the world, [Westminster Abbey](#) is sitting on a site that has had a house of worship on it for around 1,400 years! However, the Abbey is built of stones dating from the past 10

centuries – pieces from the 11th century, the 15th, and even the Victorian era comprise the Abbey as we know it.

Today, the Abbey is the church most associated with the royal family. This is for a number of reasons: the man who founded the Abbey as we know it today, Edward the Confessor, was a King of England in the 11th century – the Abbey is where we host royal weddings like that of Queen Elizabeth II and her husband Phillip or the wedding of William and Kate in 2011 – it is where all but two of our monarchs have had their coronations – and it's also where the majority of our Kings and Queens are buried.

The Abbey is also the burial site of famous names who are not royalty: Charles Darwin, Isaac Newton and Sir Laurence Olivier who is, at the time of writing, the last person to be buried in the Abbey. Read our tip on getting into [Westminster Abbey for free](#).

Now cross BACK over the road into PARLIAMENT SQUARE.

(Stop M) – Parliament Square

Here at Parliament Square, you are surrounded by all the branches of the State: Religious with Westminster Abbey, Judicial with the Supreme Court (the white stone building with the Lincoln statue outside), Executive with the Treasury and Home Office (the white buildings where the red phone boxes are), and legislative with the Houses of Parliament – to which Big Ben is connected.



The Houses of Parliament that you can see here, run from Big Ben on your left to the tall Victoria Tower on the right.

Although we know this building as Parliament, it is also a royal palace! This is the Palace of

Westminster, which has stood here in one form or another for 1,000 years. Originally a home for kings and queens, the last monarch to live here was Henry VIII who moved out in 1512. In 1547 his son, King Edward VI, gave the building to Parliament and they have been sitting here ever since – although the original Palace was lost in a fire in 1834 which means the one you see today is a Victorian building.

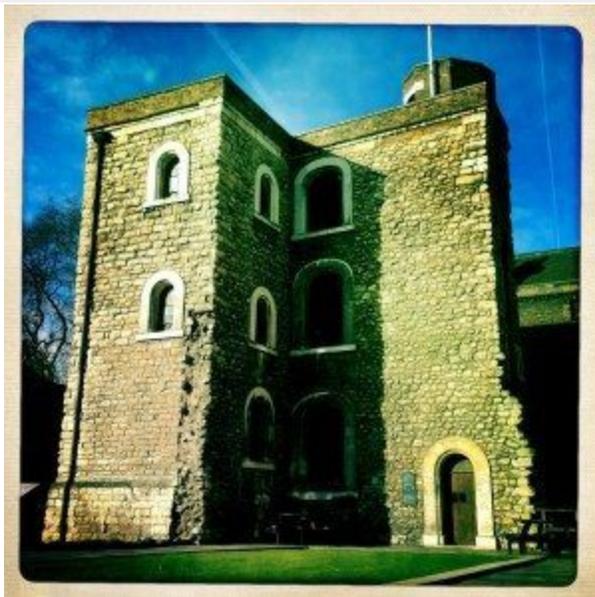
Our Parliament is comprised of three parts:

- **The Sovereign**
- **The House of Lords** (currently around 800 members, invited to sit here by the Queen based on their individual areas of expertise)
- **The House of Commons** (currently 650 members, elected by the public of the United Kingdom to represent them inside)

And for any law to pass here in the U.K., all three parts of parliament have to agree!

It is possible to [visit the Parliament](#) on weekends by purchasing a ticket for a guided tour. However, whenever the Houses are in session, it is FREE for the public to request to go inside and sit in the public galleries – something we at FTBF recommend!

OPTIONAL STOP N – The Jewel Tower



The Medieval Palace of Westminster was lost in a fire in 1834, but there is one small piece of the original building that still stands. Just opposite the Victoria Tower (the southern tower at the Houses of Parliament) sits the [Jewel Tower](#) – a 14th century building that used to hold the personal treasures of the

King! It is known that King Henry VIII kept a large supply of goods, fabrics, and toys for his children here. Later, the parliamentary archives were kept in this building and in the 20th century it became the office for Ways and Means. During the summer months, the Tower is open to the public every day, but in the winter it is weekends only! The downstairs ceiling is an original medieval piece with beautiful stone carvings and the rest of the

tower operates as a museum and describes, in detail, the extraordinary life of this little stone tower!

<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/jewel-tower/>

It is here that your walk ends. The nearest Underground Station is Westminster, just opposite the tower of Big Ben.

+++You might also be interested in reading our blog posts on [Queen Elizabeth](#), [Prince Charles](#), [Prince Harry](#) or about [Royal Palaces in London](#).+++