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# A Little London Luxury

Since London was selected as the 2012 Summer Olympics venue, the city has been riding high on a new wave of international acclaim. This summer, on top of this Olympic honour, London was voted by Forbes as the world's most cosmopolitan and stylish city. So perhaps it comes as no surprise that this city is a major contender in the style stakes, able to draw upon a wealth of influences from all over the world. By European standards, London is huge; even conservative estimates suggest the population is greater than the whole of Switzerland. Most visitors, however, only stay for a few days. So, with this in mind, we've compiled the FINEST guide for our discerning readers, which will point you towards the best that high-class London, (mainly concentrated around Knightsbridge, Mayfair, Chelsea, the City and some parts of Soho) has to offer.

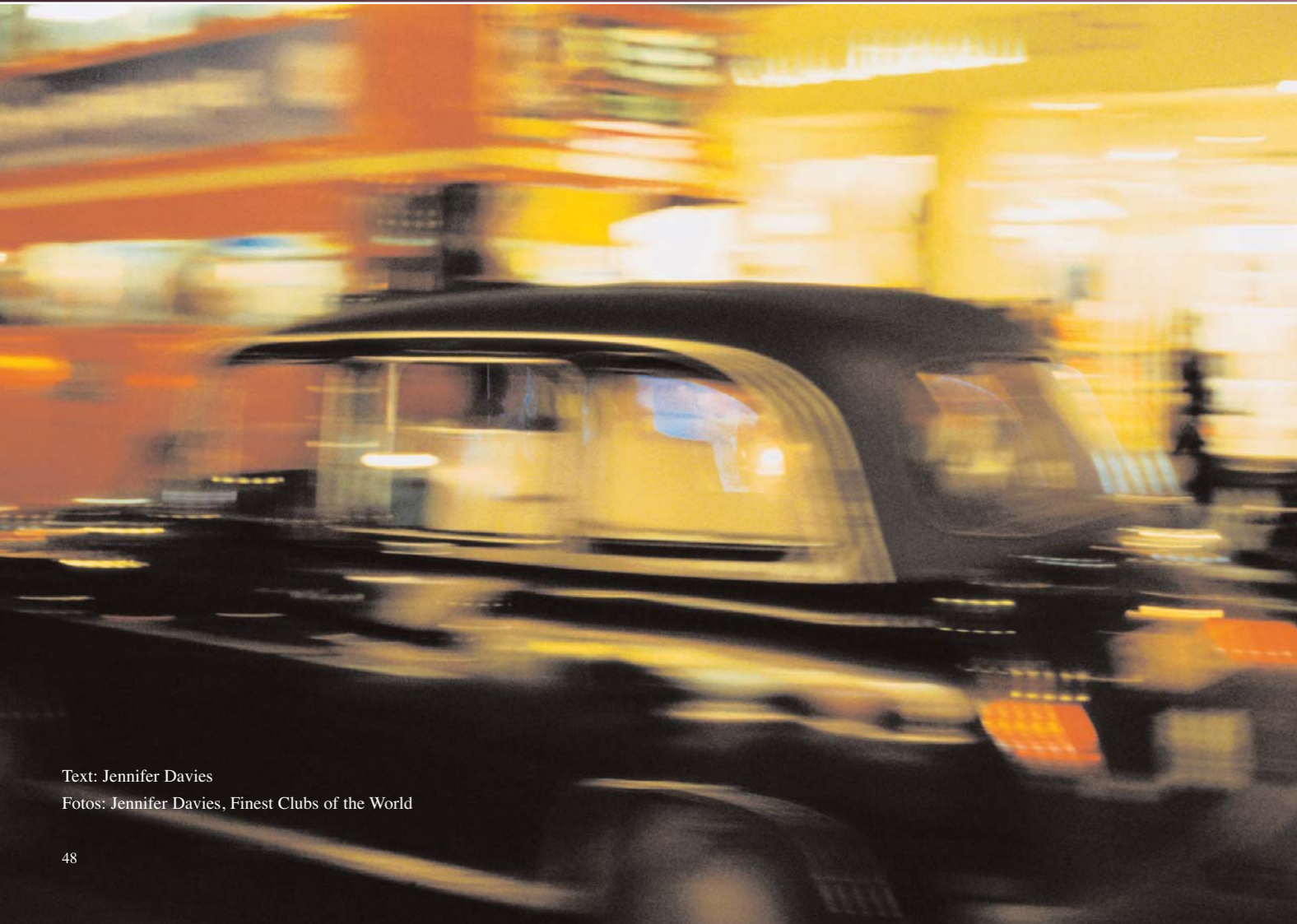
## Attractions and architecture

Until recently, London's skyline remained defiantly low-rise, but the last few years have seen the city's planners adopt contemporary and consequently taller architecture. Examples like 'the gherkin' and the Millennium Bridge now sitting alongside some of the older historic buildings provide an exciting contrast. Until ten years ago, one of the most popular tourist sights, Buckingham Palace – the London residence of Her Majesty The Queen – was closed to the public. The Royal Family has its offices here and it is one of the few working palaces in the world. Since opening to the public, visitors can walk around 19 State Rooms, which contain priceless works of art by Vermeer, Rubens, Rembrandt, Canova and Canaletto. This year a new exhibition opens in the palace Ballroom from 29 July to 29 September highlighting the painstaking work that goes into the preparation of a State Banquet – replete with displays of the Queen's silver tableware. Continuing with the royal theme, take a visit to the Tower of London. The fortress-stronghold is home to the Crown Jewels, worn by the Queen at her coronation in 1953. The tower has an impressive history, which dates back to the 11th[hochgestellt] century and is still guarded by Beefeaters, soldiers dressed in traditional garb. For a bird's eye view of the city head to one of its newest landmarks. Built in 1999, the London Eye is the world's tallest observation wheel, rising to 135 metres above the River Thames. A 30-minute rotation gives panoramic views of the city, which is most impressive during sunset or after dark when it is floodlit. Another newcomer to the London architectural lands-

cape is the Swiss Re building in the City. Designed by Norman Foster and known as 'the gherkin', the offices, spread over 41 floors at 30 St Mary Axe, are set around a central garden where plants re-circulate stale air, eliminating the need for air conditioning. The building is open to the public during Open House Weekend, which happens in September each year.

## Art and culture

The British Museum is considered one of the greatest museums in the world and contains more than seven million objects – some dating as far back as two million years ago. It's the oldest national public museum in the world, built in 1753, and despite the age of some of the artefacts, the museum is modern and interactive in its outlook. This ethos is also reflected in the architecture of the museum's Great Court, another Norman Foster creation and London's largest covered public square. If it's art you're after then take a boat trip along the Thames River from Tate Britain to Tate Modern. The Tate Boat is a state-of-the-art catamaran with a specially commissioned polka dot exterior designed by famous Brit artist, Damien Hirst. The two Tates span the breadth of the art scene in London; Tate Britain is the centre for British art from 1500 to the present day and holds collections by Constable and Turner among others. Tate Modern on the other hand is a massive gallery with a dynamic feel to it, created by Swiss architects Herzog and de Meuron from the shell of the Bankside Power Station and opened in 2000, housing international modern art from



### The World's Finest Clubs – Because the world is your playground

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1900 onwards. Tate Modern also has a panoramic bar with a great view along the Thames, which opens late Friday and Saturday nights. If you fancy an evening of music and entertainment, head to the West End and take in a musical. Like New York's Broadway, a run on the West End makes or breaks an acting or writing career. You'll find a huge range of shows on offer, from Andrew Lloyd Webber's classics like (Italics) Les Misérables to Disney's (Italics) High School Musical.

### Shopping

London is considered by many to be the best shopping destination in Europe. Characteristically, British brands are being constantly updated to appeal to younger and trendier global customers, so it's very likely you will pick up a high-fashion item with a hint of English elegance about it. A good shopping trip would commence at one of the city's main department stores like Selfridges on Oxford Street near Hyde Park. Harvey Nichols on the corner of Knightsbridge and Sloane Street is another up-market department store known for its high fashion offerings. Harrods in Knightsbridge, one of the most famous department stores in the world, now houses the Princess Diana memorial sculpture, as well as their renowned food hall. Fortnum and Mason, in Piccadilly, is equally well-known for its fine food hampers, which can be ordered and sent overseas. One of the most distinctive traditional design brands in London is Liberty, just off Oxford Circus in Great Marlborough Street. A new flagship store is due to open this summer in Sloane Street. Burberry, on New Bond Street, is another great name whose distinctive checked design has been replicated the world over. Their new high fashion range is remarkably check-free. Since the days of punk, Vivian Westwood has been known as the grand dame of high fashion – drop by her flagship store in Conduit Street. New contenders on the British fashion scene, Alexander McQueen and Stella McCartney, now have stores on Old Bond Street and Mayfair's Bruton Street respectively. Lingerie lovers have two choices – traditional or contemporary. Rigby & Peller is Her Majesty's corsetiere and is known for its expert fitting and a bespoke underwear service; find them at a new store on the King's Road, Chelsea and at other stores in Knightsbridge and Mayfair. Agent Provocateur, a favourite of Kate Moss, in Soho, Knightsbridge and the City, is where you'll find the most stylish ready-to-wear undies. Bags and leather goods abound at Mulberry, which has many stores dotted around the city, while gentlemen will find the new Thomas Pink White Shirt Bar in Jermyn Street the ultimate emporium for every conceivable style of shirt. And finally, if you're looking for original gifts to take home, a traditional umbrella might just do the trick – you'll find them at James Smith and Sons at New Oxford Street, dating back to 1857. Ladies might prefer the wares from scent emporium Penhaligons, with seven shops around London, or Floris, in Jermyn Street, both of whom are perfumers by Royal Appointment to the Queen.

### Dining out

For those with a taste for fine food, London offers a wealth of choices, with new trends and the latest hotspots changing as regularly as the

menus. So we've chosen venues that exude glamour and serve up an excellent dining experience – and you might well find a celebrity or two at the table next to you. Traditional British food has a bad reputation around the world, but new restaurants created by Brit-food pioneers like Jamie Oliver have changed the way the world thinks about what the nation has to offer food-wise. Try Oliver's restaurant Fifteen in Westland Place – which also helps underprivileged young people to train in the restaurant business. J Sheekey's restaurant in St Martin's Court has been a venue for the well-known and well-heeled to enjoy fine dining since the 1800s. The menu focuses on fish (the salt-baked wild sea bass and organic Irish salmon are highly rated) as well as specialising in local organic produce. The Ivy is known as the star-hangout in Hollywood, and their venue in West Street London is where the celebrities tend to gather when in the city. With stained glass windows and a warm, cosy feel, it's an inviting place to dine and serves traditional British dishes like shepherd's pie and fish cakes. When the weather's good, The Ivy in St James's Park merits a visit. Londoners seem to have taken oriental cuisine to their hearts. Nobu Berkeley in Berkeley Street is a Japanese fusion restaurant beloved of stars watching their waistline. The sushi dishes are staple low calorie favourites but there are some calorific treats on the menu too, like the wicked house speciality, the chocolate bento box. Yauatcha in Broadwick Street, Soho, is a fine teahouse and dim sum restaurant where the city's fashionistas can sample 84 dishes in opulent oriental luxury. If you're looking for European food with a signature twist, then try Sketch, which is a gallery and a bar with three restaurants. Its showpiece, the Lecture Room, is an ornately decorated dining area with extravagant details, which serves a fine menu from French chef Pierre Gagnaire. There are many places to enjoy the evening after your meal. For a night of dancing try Maya or the Donovan Bar which is popular with the fashion crowd at Browns Hotel. Or visit the stylish late-night bar Eclipse in Walton Street, a must for every discerning cocktail lover.

### Club Maya London – Glamorous guests <sup>1</sup>

The new lounge and club Maya, located in the heart of London's West End, takes its inspiration from New York. Its sleek and sexy décor mixes exotic fretwork and eastern elements with a western edge. Think luxurious furnishings, exposed industrial ceilings, dark wooden floors and discrete lounging areas – all seductively illuminated by backlit walls in inviting tones. The owners, Markus Thessleff and Marc Boyan, wanted to bring a little glamour back to London's West End, so the club replaced the 'members only' rule with a velvet rope policy. This means that if you're stylish enough, you're in; if not, you're on the pavement outside. Fashionable urbanites come to the club to hear performers such as Razorlight's Johnny Borrell or Duran Duran's Roger Taylor perform as Maya boasts one of the UK's best sound and lighting systems. The club has yet to celebrate its first birthday but is already considered an unmissable venue on the capital's top end nightlife circuit and just took home the prestigious accolade for Best New Club in London.

For more: [www.mayalondon.com](http://www.mayalondon.com) – [www.visitlondon.com](http://www.visitlondon.com)  
[www.lfa2008.org](http://www.lfa2008.org) – [www.openhouse.org.uk](http://www.openhouse.org.uk)

# Reader's package

**InterContinental London Park Lane partners with aston martin on Park Lane offering a luxury insider london experience with a difference: «Travel in style»**

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