

# 7 Day London Itinerary: Plan a Perfect Week in London

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November 23, 2022

We recently spent one week in London and, as you can imagine from a travel planner, I spent a lot of time thinking about our London itinerary before we left. One thing that always surprises me about planning a trip to London is just how much there is to do in the city. While 7 days in London seems like a long time, you will be surprised by how quickly your time fills up.

With 5 days in London, you will have enough time to hit all of the highlights if you are smart about how you organize your time. However, I'd recommend planning a week in London to leave some time for day trips to places like [Stonehenge](#), [Oxford](#), or [Bath](#), or specialty tours. Based on our own trip, and my experience planning multiple London trips for other families, I've put together this 7 day London itinerary as your very own cheat sheet to planning an awesome trip.

Wondering how much a 7-day trip to London costs? Check out my [London trip budget guide](#).



## 7 Day London Itinerary with Family

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I've created this 7-day itinerary with [London for families](#) in mind, taking care not to overstuff the days racing from attraction to attraction. Trust me, it is easy to fill every second of the day and still not see everything in London. But since that will make most kids miserable, I've tried to balance out sightseeing with some downtime and included the must-see attractions that are appealing to families with children of all ages.

We visited London with our teen (see more [things to do in London with teens](#)), but this is a trip that will appeal to school-age children and tweens as well. If you do plan on visiting many of the attractions and historical sights listed in this London itinerary, you may want to look at investing in the London Pass.

### Day One – Arrival

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If you are coming from the United States, you will likely arrive pretty early and have a lot of time to kill on not much sleep before you are able to check into your hotel. Ideally, you can book a room for the night before so that you can check in as soon as you arrive, but at a minimum try to request early check-in.

We stayed in two different locations in central London, which I will explain more about later. The first, the [Royal Garden Hotel](#), was near Kensington Palace and Hyde Park, with easy access to the Tube. The second, the [Athenaeum Hotel & Residences](#), was within easy walking distance to most of central London in Mayfair. For more options, also check out the [top family-friendly hotels in London](#) on TripAdvisor.

If you decide on an [apartment rental](#), be sure to work out luggage storage with the property managers so you don't have to lug your bags around until check-in time.

If you do need to kill some time, a [hop-on hop-off bus tour](#) is a good way to get a sense of the city without expending too much energy.

You can also spend some time relaxing in Hyde Park. In nice weather, you can rent a pedal boat on the Serpentine. Young children will love the Princess Diana Memorial Playground, or you can take a tour of Kensington Palace and Kensington Gardens.

We loved staying at the Royal Garden Hotel, just steps away from Kensington Palace. We spent our time until our room was ready taking in the Princess Diana exhibit at [Kensington Palace](#). That night we took advantage of the hotel's food and flicks package to watch a movie and order up a room service buffet of fun treats.

Whatever you do, don't overdo it on your first day because you want to save your energy for the rest of the trip. This is your day to get acclimated and seek out those classic British experiences (like a family photo in a red telephone booth!)

## **Day Two – Royal London**

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If you start your day early, you can fit in many of London's most recognizable attractions for a big "wow" factor on your first full day. Start off at Westminster Abbey, the coronation church since 1066 and the burial spot for many of England's most famous authors, poets, and royalty, including 17 monarchs. With over 1,000 years of history, this has been an important historical landmark for centuries.

It is highly recommended to book online tickets and ticket sales open up two months in advance. If you aren't taking a formal tour, at least rent an audio guide so you can understand what you are looking at.



Depending on how much time you spend in Westminster Abbey (allot at least one hour) and when you started, you may be able to catch the Royal Horse Guard Parade. This can be a nice alternative or complement to the more well-known Changing of the Guard (and it is much easier to get a better viewing spot.)

The Queen's Life Guard changes daily during the Horse Guards Parade at 11:00 on weekdays and 10:00 on Sundays. The Horse Guards leave Hyde Park Barracks at 10:30 on weekdays and 9:30 on Sundays to ride to Horse Guards Parade via Hyde Park Corner, Constitution Hill, and The Mall on their way to the guard change ceremony.

The New Guard arrives at Horse Guards Parade at 11:00 am and the ceremony lasts about half an hour. The Old Guard leaves Horse Guards Parade at 11:30 and passes Buckingham Palace at 11:45 am. Just be sure to check the schedules in advance as they can vary by season and depend on any royal appearances.

From there, walk down to the River Thames for a boat trip down to the Tower of London. The London Pass will get you into Westminster Abbey, the Tower of London, and includes a Thames River Cruise, or you can just buy a hop-on, hop-off boat tour ticket.

Or, you can take a faster water taxi using your Oyster Card. An Oyster Card is a transportation pass for the Underground Metro. You can get a Visitor Pass and load it up depending on how much you think you will use the Tube during your stay. Either way, arriving at the Tower of London via the Thames is reminiscent of how prisoners or visitors were brought to the Tower back in the day and it is a cool way to cruise through the city.



I would highly recommend a tour of the [Tower of London](#). I know the first time I visited, we mainly went to see the Crown Jewels and nothing else really stuck with me, but there is so much history there to soak up. The Tower of London was built in the 1070s by William the Conqueror and has been a prison, royal armory, royal mint, and even a zoo.

For 500 years, the Tower was used by monarchs as a luxurious palace, but today it is more well-known for some of its most infamous prisoners and the mysteries surrounding some of them. With all the history, you can see why I recommend visiting with a guide. Walking around on your own is fine if you just want to see the Crown Jewels or the Ravens, but the rooms are rather bare without the stories that fill them.

You can always take one of the public Yeoman Warder tours, but you may end up with a group of 40 people. We saw those around the grounds and I imagine it would be very hard to hear and see in a group that large, let alone ask questions.

What we did was take a [half-day tour that included Westminster Abbey and the Tower of London](#), which worked out great. If you are visiting [London around Christmas](#), like we did, you can expect really long lines to get in. Luckily your guide can navigate lines and get you fast-tracked.

If you need lunch beforehand, take a walk over to Leadenhall Market. This covered market is filled with boutiques, shops, restaurants, and bars, and was even used in filming [Harry Potter](#) as the entrance to the Leaky Cauldron and Diagon Alley.



If you don't want to go out of your way, there is also a small cafe on-site at the Tower of London that serves meat pies and small snacks.



After spending a couple of hours exploring the Tower of London, I would recommend walking across the Tower Bridge and visiting the [Tower Bridge Exhibition](#). Tower Bridge is the iconic bridge that many of us think of as “London Bridge.” Today you can walk across the Bridge on high-level glass walkways for stunning panoramic views.

You can also go into the magnificent Victorian Engine Rooms and see the engineering magic behind this landmark.

## **Day Three – City of London**

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If you didn't catch the Horse Guard Parade yesterday, make sure you get to Buckingham Palace early for the Changing of the Guard ceremony. Be sure to plan ahead and check the schedule, especially if you are visiting in the winter as the ceremony doesn't happen every day in the winter.

If the ceremony is taking place at 11 am, I would recommend arriving at the Palace NO LATER than 10:30 am (10:15 or even 10 am would be better to get primo spots by the fence.) Expect big crowds so keep an eye on your children and your purses/bags.

You may want to bring a selfie stick to take pictures above the crowds. You can also gather by the monument across from the palace and still get a good view of the guards as they march in.

After the parade, walk through the Mall over to Trafalgar Square. It is always fun to pose with the lions in front of Nelson's Column. You can also stop at the National Gallery in the Square (admission is free!)



From here, walk through Leicester Square (you may want to check out the giant Lego Store) and over to Covent Garden for lunch and some shopping. Try Chez Antionette for fresh soup, tartine, and charcuterie, or make a reservation at [Dishoom](#) for some excellent Indian food (you MUST try the Black Daal!)

If you aren't too tired, continue on to [St. Paul's Cathedral](#). You can visit and see where Prince Charles and Princess Diana were married. St. Paul's is open to visitors Monday through Saturday. It opens for visitors at 8:30 am on most days and 10:00 am on Wednesdays and the last visitors can enter at 4:00 pm.

You can [buy tickets](#) right up until the time of entry, but it is recommended that you purchase them in advance. You can even climb to the top of the Dome for views over London.

## **Day Four – South Bank**

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Start your day at either Westminster or Waterloo station and get some good views from the South Bank side of the Westminster Bridge of Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament.

After catching your photo opportunity, head over to the [London Eye](#). I'd highly recommend booking in advance so you can skip the line when you arrive.

If you don't want to worry about arriving at a certain time, you can always buy a Flex ticket that lets you skip the line at any point during the day that you reserved.

This could be a good idea to give you more flexibility to work around the weather. When we visited we booked a timed-entry ticket and it was great to skip the line, but there wasn't a very big line anyway because it was rainy. The rain definitely impeded our views from the top, but it was still a fun experience.

Stop for lunch at [Black & Blue](#) near Waterloo or Swan at [Shakespeare's Globe](#). If you can continue to walk along the waterfront, you will pass the Millennium Bridge and arrive at Shakespeare's Globe.



You can stop in for a guided tour of this reconstructed theater or visit the [Tate Modern](#) museum.

End your exploration of the South Bank at the fantastic [Borough Market](#). Just make sure you save some room after lunch to sample some of the tasty food stalls and shops. Borough Market is the oldest and largest food market in London, with a focus on quality food, sustainable production, and social interaction. Nearby, you can see filming sites for both Harry Potter and Bridget Jones' Diary.

There are also plenty of other things to do on the South Bank, but some are really touristy (e.g. SEA Life Aquarium) and these will give you a more authentic experience. If you have some extra time, you may want to try to catch the sunset from the viewing gallery at The Shard, a skyscraper comprised of office space, residences, and restaurants and bars. The viewing platform is on floors 68, 69, and 72, almost twice the height of any other viewing platform in London, offering 360-degree views for up to 40 miles.

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## Day Five – Museums and more

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There are many museums in London (and so many are free!) but one that you can't miss is the immense British Museum. There are eight million artifacts to see, so it is best to explore the museum with a guide. I should recognize that many of these artifacts were taken from their native homes and that is something to explore as you talk to the kids about colonialism (and rewatch the museum scene in the Black Panther.)

If you are visiting London with kids, make sure to find a family-friendly guide that can orient the tours to capture the imaginations and spark the curiosity of kids of all ages.

Set aside at least half a day to explore the museum. Afterward, stop into Hamley's, the world's largest toy store, to delight the kids. Or, enjoy some ice cream sundaes at the Fortnum & Mason department store.





Today may also be a good day to schedule an afternoon tea. After all, that is a must-do when in London and there are so many options that are kid-friendly. There is the science-themed afternoon tea at the Ampersand Hotel, the Arcane Wizard's afternoon tea at the Wands and

Wizards Exploratorium, and the [Charlie and the Chocolate Factory Tea](#) at One Aldwych, along with many others.

## Day Six – Shopping and Special Interests

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You won't run out of things to do with 1 week in London, but make sure you leave time for the things you really enjoy. As major Harry Potter fans, we enjoyed a day out at the [Warner Bros. Studio Making of Harry Potter tour](#). Between transportation and time on site, this really ends up taking nearly a whole day from your London itinerary.

***Just make sure if you plan on doing this that you book your tickets months in advance because they sell out really early!***

We also spent part of one of our days taking a [Harry Potter Black Cab driving tour](#) to see all the Harry Potter attractions in London. See [my post about Harry Potter sites in London](#) for my full review of both the Studio Tour (spoiler alert: totally a must-do for Harry Potter fans) and the Black Cab Tour (spoiler: only for true die-hards.)

If you are a [Sherlock Holmes](#) fan, I have to say I found that museum pretty disappointing. There are so many options depending on your interests from a Beatles walking tour, [Dr. Who walking tour](#), ghost tours, a [street art tour](#), and even a [Paddington bear tour](#).



You may also want to visit some of the classic London department stores like Harrod's or Claridges. And take time to go to the theater. This could also be a good day to visit some other London attractions like Churchill's War Rooms, the Victoria & Albert Museum, Kew Gardens, or Nottinghill.

If you enjoy food and drink (who doesn't?), you may want to look at a [gin tasting tour](#) or an [evening SoHo food tour](#).

## Day Seven – Day Trip

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If you have one week in London, you should have enough time to plan at least one day trip. Popular day trips include Windsor Castle, Stonehenge, Oxford, or Bath. You can visit Oxford or Bath as a day trip by train on your own, or book a guided [Stonehenge and Bath day trip](#).

We wanted to do something on our own but didn't want to drive. So we took a custom day trip with [British Tours to Stonehenge and Oxford](#). Our driver-guide Michael did an excellent job explaining Stonehenge's fascinating history and showed us all the Harry Potter tie-ins at Oxford.

### Stonehenge

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Located about 1.5 hours from London, a [Stonehenge](#) day trip is one of the most popular for families. There is just something about those mysterious prehistoric stones that fascinates kids and adults alike — especially families like ours that have a special interest in sci-fi and fantasy. After all, isn't it fun to imagine that those stones were placed there by aliens? (But



don't worry, they weren't.) If you are visiting Stonehenge on your own, you will want to spend some time in the visitor center to understand its history. You will park at the visitor center up the road and then take a shuttle over to the stone circle. You can no longer walk right up and touch the stones, as barriers have been erected to preserve this historical site.

Our driver-guide Michael from [British Tours](#) filled us in on the history of Stonehenge on the ride up from London. We don't really know the purpose of the stones, since they are 5100 years old (built around the same time as the pyramids) and pre-date written history.

We don't know what is special about the area, but we have to assume that the whole area was considered sacred as there is also another mini Stonehenge nearby. The smaller stones are 5,000 lbs. and they came from Wales 125 miles away. It is mind-boggling to consider how the ancient Druids crafted and moved these stones when the wheel hadn't even been invented yet and there was no metal yet to use to shape the stones. The larger stones came from only 25 miles away but they are tens of thousands of pounds!

## **Oxford**

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Oxford is another great day trip pick for families. There is enough to see that you could spend a [weekend in Oxford](#). This university town is both quaint and rich in history. In warmer weather, families can enjoy taking a punting boat out on the river. But one of the main draws for us (and other families) is that it was the filming site for many scenes in the Harry Potter movies. If you visit on your own, you can join a Harry Potter walking tour. But since I told British Tours that this was important to us, our driver guide Michael was able to focus much of our visit on seeing these sites.

Oxford used to be called Oxenford (where oxen crossed or forded the Thames to be brought to market), but it became a place for study after students were thrown out of the Sorbonne in France because of a war in the 1200s. They came to Oxford to study and it grew until it was granted status as a University. Today, the [University of Oxford](#) has 38 individual colleges.

There is so much to see in Oxford you can really spend at least a full day but our Oxford tour started off at New College, where Michael pointed out the Cloisters, which were used for many hallway scenes in the Harry Potter movies. You can also see the tree where Draco Malfoy was turned into a ferret.

After lunch we visited the Great Hall at Christchurch College, which was where they filmed scenes for the dining hall at Hogwarts. And the staircase was where McGonagall greeted all the first year students in the first movie. Something about it just makes you want to put on a robe, head into the library and start studying (magic or something else!)



Oxford Christchurch Great Hall

Oxford is such a wonderful place to visit for those with a literary bent. Famous authors like C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkein, Lewis Carroll and others have spent time in Oxford and it is fun to follow in their footsteps.

Visiting both places was a full day, departing at 8am and returning to our central London hotel by 6pm. In the summer, it would be light longer and attractions would stay open later. If that was the case, we would have included a stop in the village of Lacock in the Cotswolds, another Harry Potter filming site.

So there you have it, a London itinerary with 7 days jam-packed full (but not too full) of fun!

## **Getting to and around London**

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Most airlines from the USA will fly into London Heathrow (LHR) airport, although you may find some that go into London Gatwick (LGW.) If you are looking for cheap flights to London, you may want to look at discount airlines like Play Airlines through Iceland, or use miles and points on JetBlue or American Airlines (or other OneWorld Alliance Members.)

We actually found cheap flights (under \$500 per person just before Christmas) on Aer Lingus through Dublin. While it took a little longer, it was worth the cost savings and if you have more time, you can always combine a trip to London with 3 days in Dublin.

If you fly into Heathrow, the fastest way to get to Central London is on the Heathrow Express train. This high-frequency train service provides a 15-minute journey from London Paddington Station to Heathrow Terminals 2 & 3, with an extra six minutes to Terminal 5. A free transfer is available to Terminal 4.

Alternatively, the average price of a cab from Heathrow to central London is £90. If you want to arrange a private transfer instead of waiting in line for a cab, it will only cost a little bit more.



Once you arrive in London, you will want to learn how to use the Underground metro to get around. The “Tube” as it is called in London is easy to navigate. The Underground is divided into nine zones and all of central London is covered by zone 1. There are 11 Tube lines in all, so you just need to identify the line you want to take, the endpoint of the direction in which you are traveling, and the station you want to get off at.

The Tube fare depends on how far you travel, the time of day, and how you pay. The Oyster card or contactless payments are the cheapest way to pay for single fares. An adult cash fare on the London metro for a single journey in zone 1 is £5.50. The same Tube fare with a Visitor Oyster card, Oyster card or contactless payment card is £2.40.

A Visitor Oyster Card is a smartcard that lets you pay for journeys on the bus, Tube, tram, DLR, London Overground, TfL Rail, River Bus, and most National Rail services in London. You put money on your Visitor Oyster card and use it to pay as you go. You can purchase the [Visitor Oyster Card](#) before you travel and it will be delivered to your home and ready to use when you arrive.

## **Where to Stay in London with Kids**

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*Note: We received a media package at the Royal Garden Hotel and hosted stay at the Athenaeum, all opinions are my own.*



Kensington Palace

## Royal Garden Hotel

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The Royal Garden Hotel is located just outside of Kensington Gardens, nestled between Hyde Park and Millionaires Row on a sought-after piece of real estate on Kensington Road. With some rooms overlooking the park, the location really offers the best of both worlds.

It is convenient to all major attractions (Tower of London, London Eye, etc.) with the Kensington High Street tube station just a five-minute walk from the hotel. Yet you also have the peaceful views of the park with easy access to fun and play. It is a five-minute walk to Kensington Palace and just 10 minutes to the Princess Diana Memorial playground. The Royal Garden hotel even offers loaner scooters to families that want to spend time enjoying the park!

The Royal Garden Hotel décor has the feel of an upscale business hotel – clean and classy without a ton of personality. We stayed in an Executive Room and it was surprisingly spacious for the three of us. I didn't have a chance to tour other rooms but the Executive Room with a king-sized bed and full pullout sofa bed is plenty of room for a family of four with two small children or a family of three with a teenager.











Royal Garden Hotel

The bathroom was also quite large with both a tub and stand-up shower. Of course, it always makes me happy when a hotel offers a heated towel rack, robes, and slippers – especially when I want to warm up after a chilly, wet day exploring London. Some of the other luxe perks that I appreciated were the turndown service with complimentary bottled water, complimentary shoe shine, and no additional charge for breakfast room service – this really helped us get out the door on time in the mornings!

Since we stayed for four nights, we had time to enjoy all three of the Royal Garden Hotel's restaurants. The kid-friendly Park Terrace restaurant offers pretty views and a generous breakfast buffet (so it pays to book a package that includes free breakfast), as well as options for lunch and tea. Bertie's Bar offers light bites, perfect for when you need just a little snack after indulging at high tea. For a splurge, the Min Jiang restaurant on the tenth floor offers authentic Chinese cuisine with beautiful views over Hyde Park.

## **Athenaeum Hotel & Residences**

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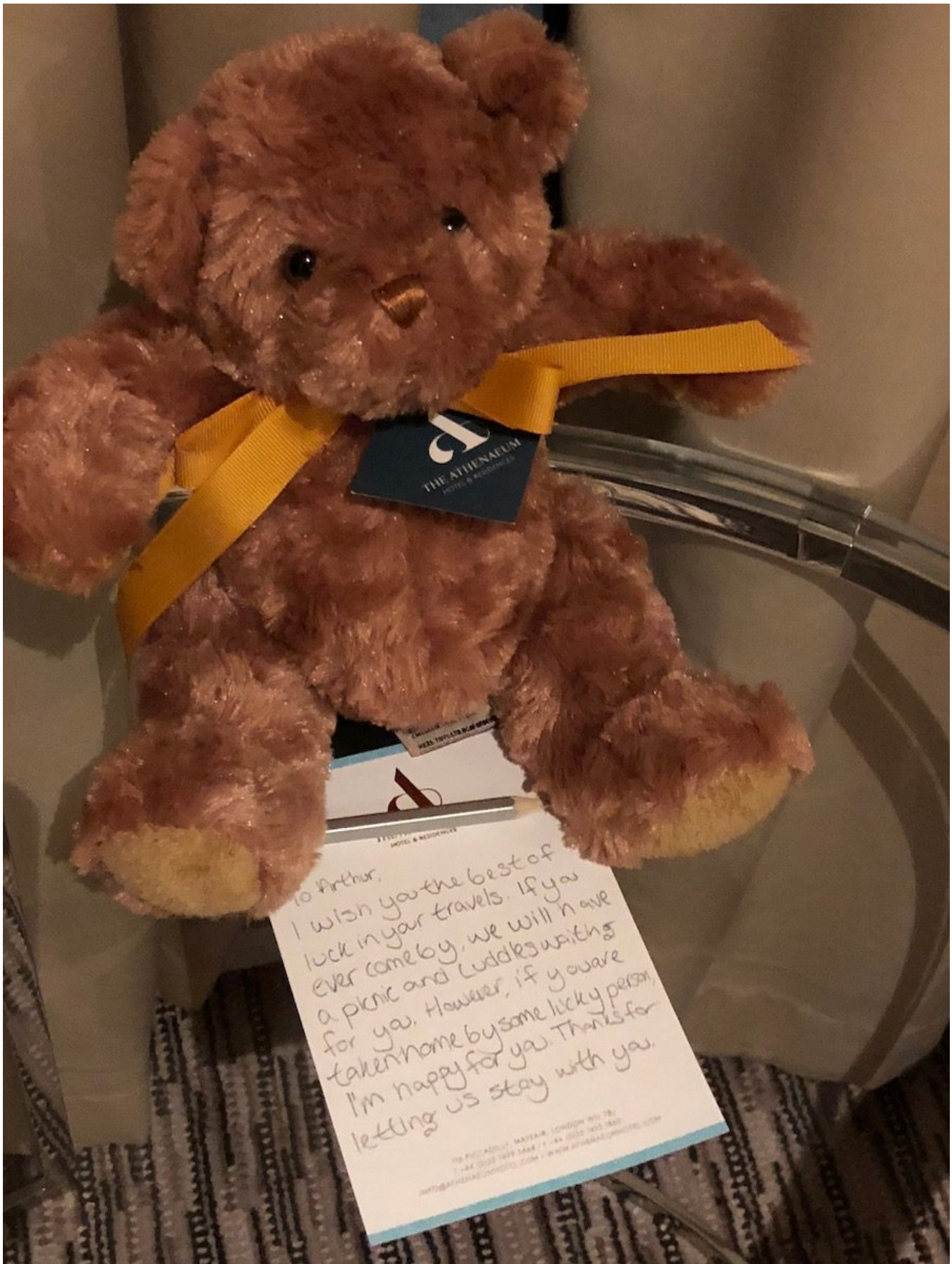
For the latter part of our stay, we switched over to the Athenaeum Hotel & Residences, on Piccadilly in the Mayfair neighborhood. This is a great location in the heart of London, just a couple of minutes' walk to the Green Park tube station. Buckingham Palace, Fortnum & Mason department store, Hamley's toy store, and Trafalgar Square are all within a five-to-ten-minute walk.

The Athenaeum really prides itself on making you feel at home. Every time we walked in, it was "Welcome home Mrs. Gruber" and when we left "Have a good day Mrs. Gruber." The deluxe rooms are a bit tight for a family of three once you bring in the rollaway bed, but the Athenaeum also offers family rooms and luxury serviced apartments with fully-equipped kitchenettes.

The design and decor are luxurious and fashionable, while still feeling comfortable and child-friendly. The lobby is small but a cozy spot to enjoy a cup of tea and watch the foot traffic along Piccadilly. It was especially beautiful all decked out in its Christmas finery.

Just off the lobby is 116 at the Athenaeum, featuring local produce from independent farmers across the United Kingdom for a modern take on classic British dishes. We had dinner at the restaurant on our second night and enjoyed the braised venison shoulder, Dingley Dell

bacon chop with bubble and squeak, and the parsnip and cider soup. For pickier eaters, there is also a children's menu.





Upstairs, it was all about comfort. Our deluxe room was cozy and the bathroom was also much smaller than the family-sized bathroom at the Royal Garden, but the decor and touches were all about stylish luxury. You couldn't beat our views over Green Park and, for overlooking Piccadilly, the room was surprisingly quiet.

The Athenaeum also provides the amenities you would expect from a luxury hotel — robes, slippers, turn-down service, a coffee maker, and a mini-fridge with free coffee, tea, milk, juice, and water. With such luxurious comforts, stand-out service, and a convenient location, I would have loved to stay even longer at the Athenaeum.

## Looking for more information?

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If you are planning a trip to London, be sure to also check out these posts:

- [Trip to London cost](#)
- Festive [things to do in London at Christmas](#)
- Ultimate fan guide for [Harry Potter attractions in London](#)