

Accessible LONDON



London Wetland Centre

London prides itself on being inclusive and continually strives to improve its accessibility for older and disabled people, as well as those with young children in tow. Read on for information that will hopefully make your visit as hassle-free as possible. By Jo Caird

In keeping with the Olympic and Paralympic spirit, the organisers of London 2012 are committed to ensuring that everyone, regardless of their age, disability or access requirements, will be able to get the most out of their Games experience. Services include accessible shuttle buses from key train and bus stations, audio description and commentary at all venues and a mobility service to help spectators get around at events. For details, visit london2012.com/paralympics/spectators/accessibility/

But it's not just at the Games where access is important, so here's our guide to London's accessible highlights. Please bear in mind that while we've tried to include as much information as possible, you should contact the venues and services directly for the most up-to-date information about their facilities and accessibility.

GETTING AROUND

Use Transport for London's (TfL's) Journey Planner to help you plan

your way around the capital. It can give you journey options that avoid stairs or escalators and can be set to limit walking distances. TfL also publishes a range of free guides in alternative formats to help users with impaired mobility plan and make journeys.

All London's buses and trams, as well as the entire Docklands Light Railway, are wheelchair accessible and wheelchair users travel free of charge on buses and trams. Trained assistance dogs are allowed throughout the transport network. Sixty-three stations on

the London Underground have step-free access from street to platform (usually by lift), with some stations providing access from street to train. However, wheelchair users are advised to travel off-peak as the Tube can become very congested in busier periods. Excellent signage, announcements and tactile warning surfaces make the Tube a safe service for deaf or blind visitors to London. Meanwhile licensed London taxis (black cabs) are wheelchair accessible and feature accessibility aids.



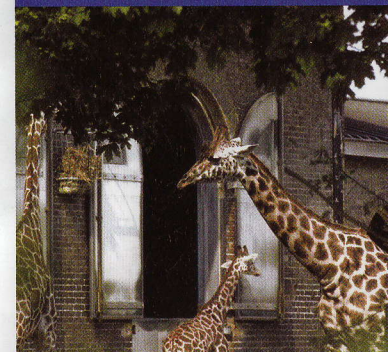
ACCESSIBLE OUTDOOR PLACES

Whether you're looking for entertainment, intellectual stimulation or just a breath of fresh air, London's outdoor attractions have a lot to offer.

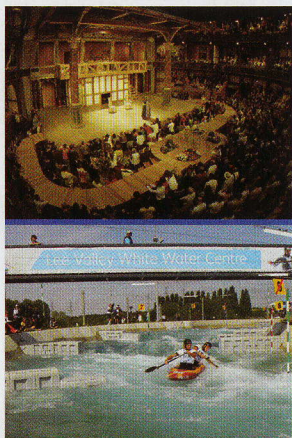


Enjoy a sensory experience in the midst of magnificent greenery and impressive landscaping at **Kew Gardens** (above, p. 59), **Eltham Palace** (p. 56) or the **Horniman Museum And Gardens** (p. 76). There is good wheelchair access at all three and the Horniman Museum, with its collection of objects sourced by a Victorian tea merchant during his travels, is a delight. Look out for the 'hands-on' events taking place at the weekends and during school holidays.

The **London Wetland Centre** is a 105-acre reserve dedicated to birdlife. Spot dozens of species from the network of accessible paths and hides as well as a family of otters who have recently moved in (p. 58). You'll also find plenty of our feathered friends, along with fish, reptiles, insects and mammals galore at the impressively accessible **ZSL London Zoo** (below, p. 64).
Continues overleaf.



10 ACCESSIBLE ATTRACTIONS



The zoo is located within **Regent's Park** (p. 55), another great outdoor option. It's home to a wonderfully-fragrant rose garden and boasts one of London's most atmospheric entertainment venues, the **Regent's Park Open Air Theatre** (p. 94). Further south, the wide, smooth paths criss-crossing **Hyde Park** and **Kensington Gardens** make a visit to the beautiful Serpentine lake and peaceful **Diana Memorial Fountain** very easy indeed (p. 55).

If culture's your bag, then a trip to **Shakespeare's Globe** is essential (pictured top, p. 60). Wheelchair users can watch an outdoor performance at this replica of a 16th-century playhouse from an accessible box, or can opt for a raised platform in the open-air 'yard' among the 'groundlings'.

For more of an active outdoor experience head over to London 2012 venue the **Lee Valley White Water Centre** (above, Station Road, Waltham Cross, EN9. ☎ 08456 770 606. visitleevalley.org.uk 🚗 Waltham Cross, then bus. Off map). People with a wide range of mobility requirements can try their hand at white water rafting, canoeing and kayaking. The centre reopens after the Games on **8 Sep**. If you can't wait that long, there's always the **London Fields Lido**, a fully accessible, heated, outdoor 25-metre swimming pool in trendy east London (London Fields Westside, E8. ☎ 020 7254 9038. hackney.gov.uk/c-londonfields-lido.htm 🚗 London Fields. Off map).

A great way to get a feel for the city is taking in the sights on a **river cruise**, from Westminster to Greenwich with City Cruises and Thames Clippers (pictured below left, p. 65). Boats offer wheel-on access and disabled toilets. While in Greenwich, make sure to pop into the **National Maritime Museum** for a taste of maritime history (p. 78) and the **Royal Observatory** (p. 59), with its fully accessible planetarium. Visually-impaired visitors can download the excellent audio and large-print guides from the website.

London's most important religious buildings are now both accessible to disabled visitors. The Whispering Gallery and Golden Galleries at **St. Paul's Cathedral** involve a lot of stairs, but there's lift access down to the atmospheric crypt, where you can do a virtual tour of the galleries, as well as see the tombs of various famous figures (p. 60). Touch tours can be arranged at **Westminster Abbey** and transcripts of the audio guide are available for deaf visitors (p. 63).

Disabled access to theatres, galleries and concert halls is improving every year in the capital. The **Royal Opera House** (below right) offers a free access membership scheme with benefits including priority booking and discounted tickets (p. 105); you can do audio-described, BSL and touch tours at the **Royal Academy of Arts** (p. 74); and **The Roundhouse** has an infrared-assisted hearing system (Chalk Farm Road, NW1. ☎ 08444 828 008. roundhouse.org.uk 🚗 Chalk Farm. Off map).

Sports fans will enjoy the tour at **Lord's Cricket Ground**, which includes the memorabilia-filled MCC Museum, the Media Centre — with its fantastic views of the famous ground — and the players' dressing rooms (p. 58).

And for shopping addicts, there's **Old Spitalfields Market**, which has been around since the 13th century but underwent an excellent refurbishment in 2003 (p. 89). Level flooring throughout the covered market area makes access to the dozens of quirky fashion, antiques, crafts and food stalls easy.



USEFUL INFORMATION

- Visit London's website is your best starting point when it comes to finding out about London and accessibility. You'll find maps, information on venues, dining, tours, getting around, public toilets and much more. visitlondon.com/access
- Transport for London (TfL) provides a range of helpful information, including disabled access on London's Tubes, trains, buses, trams, taxis, minicabs, river services and more. tfl.gov.uk/gettingaround/transportaccessibility/1169.aspx
- Inclusive London is an online nationwide access register of buildings, venues and services.

You will find it extremely useful for things such as planning a day out. inclusivelondon.com

- Tourism For All is a UK charity dedicated to making tourism welcoming and inclusive for everyone. With essential information on everything from places to go to public toilets. tourismforall.org.uk

