

GOING OUT

MAKE MERRY IN LONDON THIS WINTER WITH AN EXTRAORDINARY LIST OF THINGS TO SEE AND DO

From festive shopping in unlikely locations to unusual exhibitions celebrating the joys of Christmas past, we've got the season of goodwill all wrapped up.



Chelsea Physic Garden

CHELSEA PHYSIC GARDEN

London's oldest botanic garden may technically be closed until springtime but those in the know can explore this beautiful place on a handful of frosty days this winter. On 29 - 30 November a Christmas Fair takes place in heated marquees on the lawn at the heart of the garden (admission £5). Plants, jewellery, silverware, chocolates, clothing and garden objects will be on sale at over 80 stalls, and the lovely Tangerine Dream Café will be serving a seasonal menu. The garden is also open (with no charge for entry) on 2 - 5 and 8 - 12 December, when the Book & Gift Shop will be selling Christmas cards and gifts. 'Hidden gem' is much overused

but the phrase is spot on as far as this place is concerned: what opened as the Apothecaries' Garden in 1673 with the aim of training apprentices in identifying plants is still a fascinating spot to learn about the medical and other uses of thousands of everyday and unusual plants.

SIR JOHN SOANE'S MUSEUM

This building, really three 18th-century houses gradually demolished and rebuilt over a period of 30 years, was the home of celebrated architect and parliamentarian Sir John Soane. He arranged for it to be turned

into a museum for his extraordinary collection of art and antiquities after his death and the place has been open to the public since the early 19th century. It's at its eclectic best on the monthly evening opening (first Tuesday of each month), when Soane's treasures are lit by candlelight. Be sure to arrive early as entry is limited to the first 200 people.

FORTNUM & MASON BEAUTY ROOMS

Shopping is a tiring business at the best of times, but it's positively exhausting when the festive season comes round. So take a break with the Flagging Shopper pampering package at the Beauty Rooms at Fortnum & Mason (£50). The 50-minute treatment includes a reviving foot refresher and a back massage, working on the areas of your body most affected by pavement pounding and lugging heavy shopping bags. And when you're done, have a stroll around the historic store to stock up on luxury festive tidbits like teas and confectionery.

GEFFRYE MUSEUM

Located within a set of beautiful 18th-century almshouses in East London, this museum explores English domestic life from the 1600s to the present day through a series of carefully dressed period



A VISIT TO ATG'S LONDON THEATRES MAKES THE PERFECT FESTIVE TREAT. CHRISTMAS HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE TRADITIONAL PANTO MAGIC WITH CINDERELLA AT THE NEW WIMBLEDON THEATRE, THE SPARKLING SONG AND DANCE MUSICAL DIRTY ROTTEN SCOUNDRELS AT THE SAVOY OR FOR GHOSTLY THRILLS TRY WOMAN IN BLACK AT THE FORTUNE THEATRE. ATGTICKETS.COM



The Blue Anchor Charles Dickens Museum
Chelsea Physic Garden The Holly Bush

interiors and gardens. It's a delight to visit at any time of year, but there's an added incentive in wintertime when the museum is transformed by *Christmas Past: 400 Years of Seasonal Traditions in English Homes* (from 25 November to 4 January). This exhibition sees each of the Geffrye's 11 period living rooms decorated in the traditional style of the era, and is accompanied by a programme of events exploring Georgian Christmas traditions.

WARMING DRINKS

When it comes to getting into the Christmas spirit, there's nowhere better than a traditional London boozer and nothing better than a glass of mulled wine or cup of hot, spiced cider. We love The Holly Bush in Hampstead, a place full of nooks and crannies that feels like it hasn't changed at all since the 19th century. It's the perfect spot to warm up after a wintry walk on Hampstead Heath. Other favourites are The Blue Anchor in Hammersmith, with its river views and boating paraphernalia, and the cosy Cross Keys in Covent Garden.

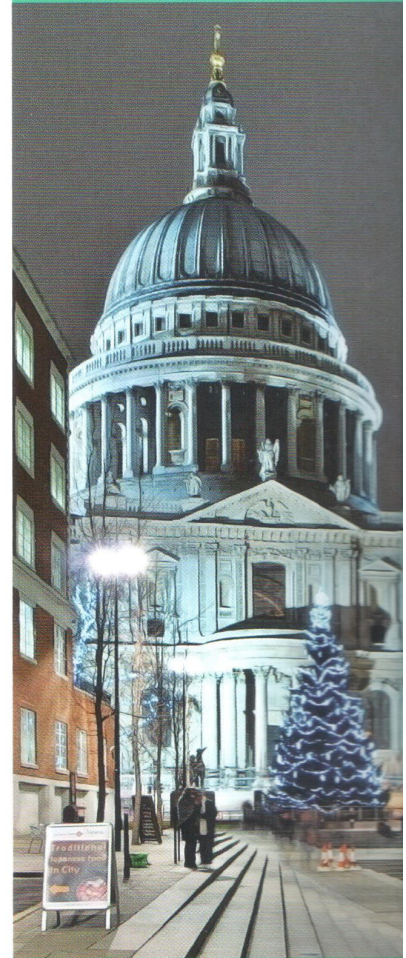
CHARLES DICKENS MUSEUM

We have 19th-century novelist Charles Dickens to thank for Christmas as we know it - his 1843 story

A Christmas Carol was enormously influential in terms of creating our modern idea of Christmas, from snowy street scenes to decorated trees. You can learn about his life at one of London's most charming house museums, the terraced property in Bloomsbury where Dickens lived with his growing family between 1837 and 1839. Full of letters, portraits and antique furniture (some of it owned by the author himself), the house is decorated in the early Victorian style, as it might have been in Dickens' day. From the end of November until Twelfth Night (6 January) the museum will be dressed for Christmas, with costumed tours and candlelit evening openings taking place throughout the festive period.

CAROL SERVICES

Whatever your faith, there's something very special about Christmas carol services, particularly those that take place in London's great churches. St Martin-in-the-Fields on Trafalgar Square hosts a Christmas Concert with Audience Carols, including works by Handel, Vivaldi and Bach, on 6 December, plus a number of other festive concerts. Meanwhile, Benjamin Britten's *Ceremony of Carols* is just one of a large number of Christmas and Advent concerts and services at St Paul's Cathedral (19 December). ■



St Paul's Cathedral

chelseaphysicgarden.co.uk/special-events/christmas-fair/

soane.org

fortnumandmason.com

geffrye-museum.org.uk

hollybushhampstead.co.uk

blueanchorlondon.com

crosskeyscoventgarden.com

dickensmuseum.com

stmartin-in-the-fields.org

stpauls.co.uk

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