



Left: Paralympic torchbearers pose in Trafalgar Square. This page, clockwise: Potters Fields Park; BT London Live; Chariots Of Fire; the Paralympic Torch; Coldplay.

# Let the Games Begin

Whether you're fortunate enough to have bought tickets to the 2012 Paralympic Games, or just happen to be in town, there's plenty of sporting fun to be had by all. Events take place right across the capital this summer and here's how you can get involved.  
By David G. Taylor and Jo Caird

Welcome to the **London 2012 Paralympic Games**, the biggest the world has ever seen. More than 4,000 athletes from 165 countries will compete in London this summer, according to the International Paralympic Committee, that's 19 more nations taking part than at the last Games in Beijing four years ago.

Sixteen countries will be making their Paralympic debut at London 2012 this summer, including Brunei, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gambia, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, North Korea and the US Virgin Islands. And with sports including archery, athletics, swimming, cycling, sailing, wheelchair fencing, sitting volleyball and powerlifting,

it promises to be exciting viewing.

Don't worry if you haven't got tickets to any sports. You can catch the action free on a big screen such as **BT London Live** in Trafalgar Square, on TVs in many of London's bars and cafés, or live at free-to-watch sporting events. Meanwhile, Games-themed exhibitions (p. 40), plus the stage show **Chariots Of Fire** (p. 100), help to set a sporting mood.

## PARALYMPIC HISTORY

The Paralympics began life in 1948 as a sports competition for British veterans of World War Two with spinal injuries. Pioneering doctor Sir Ludwig Guttmann of

Stoke Mandeville Hospital in Buckinghamshire, England, used sport as a method of therapy to build physical strength and self-esteem.

Taking place for the first time on the opening day of the 1948 Summer Olympics in London, the Stoke Mandeville Games continued each year until 1960 when they were moved to Rome and became the first official Paralympic Games. This competition, unlike its predecessors, was open not just to war veterans, but other disabled athletes too. Since then the Games have grown and grown – the Paralympics are now one of the largest international sports events on the planet.

## TORCH RELAY

The **Paralympic Torch Relay** begins in London with the lighting of England's flame on **24 Aug**. The flame (along with Northern Irish, Welsh and Scottish flames lit in Belfast, Cardiff and Edinburgh) will then be taken to Stoke Mandeville, home of the Paralympic Movement, for a **Lighting Ceremony** on **28 Aug**. The Paralympic flame then travels back to London in a 24-hour relay by 580 torchbearers to light the cauldron at the Opening Ceremony.

For details of where to see the torch, go to [london2012.com/paralympics/torch-relay/](http://london2012.com/paralympics/torch-relay/)

## OPENING AND CLOSING CEREMONIES

Involving more than 3,000 adult volunteers, 100 child volunteers and 100 professional performers, the **Paralympics Opening Ceremony** will showcase the talents of deaf and disabled artists. The show is called *Enlightenment* and will start with a fly past by Aerobility, a charity that trains disabled people to pilot light aircraft. It takes place on **19 Aug**.

The **Closing Ceremony**, which sees London handover to Rio, the host city for the 2016 Paralympic Games, is on **9 Sep**. British band Coldplay will perform live at this so-called *Festival Of Flame* to an estimated worldwide audience of 750 million people.

## FREE BIG SCREEN ACTION

For the duration of the Games, central London's Trafalgar Square will be home to the gigantic 60-metre screen of **BT London Live** (**29 Aug-9 Sep**, [btlondonlive.com](http://btlondonlive.com)). There you can watch free coverage of the events throughout the day from 11.00 to 23.30. Expect to find Paralympic sports to try too, while each evening a free concert is planned to entertain the crowds.

Elsewhere, watch the best action from the Paralympic Games for free live on a big screen at south London's **Potters Fields** (**12 Aug-9 Sep**, [molpresents.com/picture](http://molpresents.com/picture)). Potters Fields Park is situated next to Tower Bridge on the south bank of the River Thames. You'll also find food and entertainment there, while nearby more fun is to be had at the **Free Music (until 31 Aug)** and **Free Film**

(**12-28 Sep**) festivals taking place a short stroll away at The Scoop amphitheatre (p. 94).

## FREE SPORTS

If you didn't get tickets for the Games, you can still enjoy the magic of the Paralympics for free. Spectators will be able to access large sections of the **Paralympic marathon** route, which will loop past London sights including Buckingham Palace, Admiralty Arch, Birdcage Walk, St. Paul's Cathedral and the Tower of London (**9 Sep**). Meanwhile, just outside the capital, catch **Paralympic road cycling**, taking place in the streets around Brands Hatch in Kent (**5-8 Sep**).

## KEY DATES

**29 Aug:** Paralympic Opening Ceremony 2012.

**9 Sep:** Paralympic Closing Ceremony 2012.

For all Games information, visit [london2012.com](http://london2012.com)