

London: The Literature-Lover's Dream

For centuries, London has inspired authors, poets and playwrights. Arguably, the capital has had the greatest global influence on the English language of all the English-speaking places in the world. But how can you pack even a small part of all this into just a couple of days in London? Here are some suggestions to help you try.



Hotels

E. M. Forster apparently lodged in the Kingsley Hotel (now known as the Thistle Bloomsbury) from 1902 to 1904 - probably for its proximity to his Bloomsbury comrades. Today, it makes a great central lodging for the discerning literary disciple.

Romantic poets **Keats, Shelley, Byron and Coleridge**, along with writers **Robert Louis Stevenson, D. H. Lawrence and J. B. Priestley** all lived in Hampstead. A favourite hotel in this area is the well-priced Hampstead Britannia Hotel.

If you want to push the boat out, try Hazlitt's in Soho Square, named after the 19th-century writer **William Hazlitt**. This is a hip hotel with rooms named after its former guests. You could stay in the **Jonathan Swift** room or the **Lady Francis Hewitt** suite. We've heard on the grapevine that **J.K. Rowling** is rather fond of this swish hotel - hang out in the lobby with a copy of a Harry Potter, and she might even sign it for you!

Brown's Hotel is the perfect place for little bookworms to stay as it's where **Rudyard Kipling** wrote *The Jungle Book*. You'll find plenty of family-friendly facilities including cots, a children's menu, and interconnecting rooms. Brown's also have a special family package which includes toys, sweets, and

themed children's bed linen.



Day Time Activities

If you can, get an early start with a guided Dickens Walk. London is **Dickens'** domain and some of the city's most evocative areas are Southwark and Borough. Saturday is market day at Borough – which is a real bonus. There are lots of amazing places to stop for lunch, but if the weather's good, why not grab a picnic, linger a while and enjoy the surroundings.

Dickens lived and breathed London, apparently walking the city from morning to night – so after lunch why not cross the river and walk up Chancery Lane to Staples Corner and Lincoln's Inn Hall. Then onto 48 Doughty Street, Dickens' only surviving home and now a museum devoted to him.

Doughty Street is in Bloomsbury, once the literary heart of London. The shops, the transport, the fashion and locals may have changed, but the architecture and atmosphere of the place that **George Bernard Shaw** and **Virginia Woolf** once called home still hold good.

Two real treats for bookworms in the area are the British Library and the Reading Room at the British Museum. Take a little quiet time out in either (or both) at the end of the afternoon.

Martin Amis' ambiguously titled novel isn't actually set in the London Fields Park in Hackney – but this trendy, gritty part of east London is home to many of the city's intellectuals.

Hampstead hangs onto its literary and artistic traditions and is packed with bookshops and art galleries – a lovely spot to spend a lazy half a day. A little like Bloomsbury and Dickens-land, Hampstead is best enjoyed on foot.



Hampstead also holds fascination for those interested in the poet, **John Keats**. A moment's walk from Hampstead Heath is the house where Keats lived from 1818 to 1820; the setting which inspired some of Keats's most memorable poetry. Here, Keats wrote "Ode to a Nightingale", and fell in love with Fanny Brawne, the girl next door. It was from this house that he travelled to Rome, where he died of tuberculosis aged just 25.

Evening Activities

When **Hemingway** stayed in London, he stayed at The Dorchester. And we presume when he stayed there, he drank at the Dorchester Bar, so begin your evening here.

For dinner, head over to The French House in Soho. The fabulous French House has counted scores of writers and actors as patrons. Charles De Gaulle even wrote his declaration of defiance against the Nazis here, and it's the place where **Dylan Thomas** famously got drunk and accidentally left his manuscript for Under Milkwood.

Or head for Hoxton Square. The area is filled with some seriously hip bars and pubs, we suggest The Bricklayer's Arms in Charlotte Road and the Barley Mow on Curtain Road. For dinner, try either Hoxton Apprentice or The Real Greek.

Books voted most essential travel item

In a poll hosted on the Skyscanner's site, "a good book" received 24% of the vote as the most essential travel item, followed by an MP3 player with 22%, perfume or deodorant with 14% and a laptop or PDA with 10%. Other items voted in were magazines, earplugs, a mobile phone, camera, insect repellent and even hair straighteners. In the era of the iPod, the result may come as a surprise, but despite the rise in popularity of new electronic gadgetry, it seems that one of the oldest forms of entertainment remains the best.

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