

London - Capital City of England

It's home to more than 8,000,000 people and millions more visit the city each year. But what is it that makes London such an iconic city around the globe?

History

London is the capital city of England and also its largest. It was established as a Roman settlement, known as Londinium, around 2000 years ago. The River Thames, the second longest river in the United Kingdom, runs through London. This provided a key trade route in and out of the city, which caused it to grow.

Over the centuries, it has developed significantly in size and now consists of 32 boroughs (districts). Among these boroughs is the City of Westminster, which is home to many famous landmarks such as Buckingham Palace, Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament.

Getting Around

As London is such a busy place, public transport is essential in helping people get around. Buses, taxis and even boats carry people around various parts of the city. Perhaps the most impressive transport system, however, is the London Underground (or the Tube as it is often known). Nearly half of the network of trains is found underneath the city and 1,370,000,000 journeys are made on it each year. The Tube opened in 1863, consists of 270 stations and is 402km in length.

Attractions

One reason for London's popularity among tourists is its wealth of famous landmarks, buildings and attractions. Historical landmarks such as the Tower of London are a huge draw for visitors wanting to learn more about England and Britain's history. A huge variety of museums, such as the Natural History Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum, are also popular spots for those wanting to learn. The world's oldest scientific zoo (London Zoo) can also be found in London. It opened in 1826 and is home almost 700 species of animals. The zoo is located inside Regent's Park, one of many large open parklands which can be found in the city. Theatres are also a huge draw for visitors to London. Thousands flock to see plays and musicals each night of the week, often starring famous faces and celebrities.

Famous Residents

London is home to many, many celebrities and well-known faces. These include film stars, musicians and sports stars. The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom also calls London home and famously lives on Downing Street, close to the Houses of Parliament. Undoubtedly, however, the capital's most famous residents are the Royal Family. Buckingham Palace is the Queen's official and main royal London home. It has been the official London residence of Britain's monarchy since 1837. Queen Victoria was the first monarch to live there. Buckingham Palace is used also for the administrative work for the monarchy. It is here in the state apartments that the Queen receives and entertains guests invited to the Palace. The Queen has other homes too, including Windsor Castle and Balmoral in Scotland. Buckingham Palace has 775 rooms including 19 state rooms, 52 royal and guest bedrooms, 188 staff bedrooms, 92 offices and 78 bathrooms.

Another famous landmark, Kensington Palace, is home to a number of other royals. The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, Prince William and Kate Middleton live at the palace with their children. Following the wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, the couple, who are now known as the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, moved into the palace also.

Events

A number of large events attract tourists, sports fans and party-goers to London each year. In June each year, Trooping the Colour marks the Queen's official birthday celebrations. The display features hundreds of Household Division officers, horses and musicians in ceremonial uniform. Spectators gather in St James's Park or along The Mall, while a spectacular Royal Air Force flypast takes place over Buckingham Palace.

In August, the streets of London come alive to the sound of music during the Notting Hill Carnival. A month earlier, meanwhile, the eyes of tennis fans around the world are fixed on the championships at Wimbledon. One of the most recent additions to London's calendar has been Winter Wonderland, which takes place in Hyde Park at the end of the year. Fairground rides and games, food, drink and even an ice bar attract millions of visitors of all generations.