



London
May '08

Three**Perfect**Days

3PD London

By Leslie Woit / Photography by Mirjam Bleeker / LONDON IS A TRULY COSMOPOLITAN capital, arguably the world's greatest. Art, literature, fashion, architecture, and business are booming in this city of some 8 million souls, and if you haven't visited lately, relax: The days of bangers and beans are long dead. London is now an epicure's paradise, though laced with a frisson of sticker shock as this is one of the world's costliest cities. Diners aren't the only ones agape at the bottom line. London watches in horror as the price tag soars for hosting the 2012 Summer Olympic Games. ►►►







DAY 1

London
England

Big Ben is watching: London shows off its iconic skyline in this panorama. The city is one of the most cosmopolitan and diversely populated on earth and also has one of the richest histories.

Despite the city's relentless popularity, there persists a degree of good old English deference. Closed-circuit TV cameras are said to snap you an average of 300 times a day, but celebs relocate here to go about their business relatively unhindered. I once watched Madonna at Sunday lunch unable to attract the attention of anyone—including the waiter. She's just one of two millennia worth of conquerors, exiles, and hippies who have made London their town. One in three Londoners was born abroad—making the city, to its detriment some believe, decidedly un-English. But as the good Dr. Samuel Johnson once said, "Patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel." London has its share of those, too. But you'll likely encounter only the good sort during your three days.

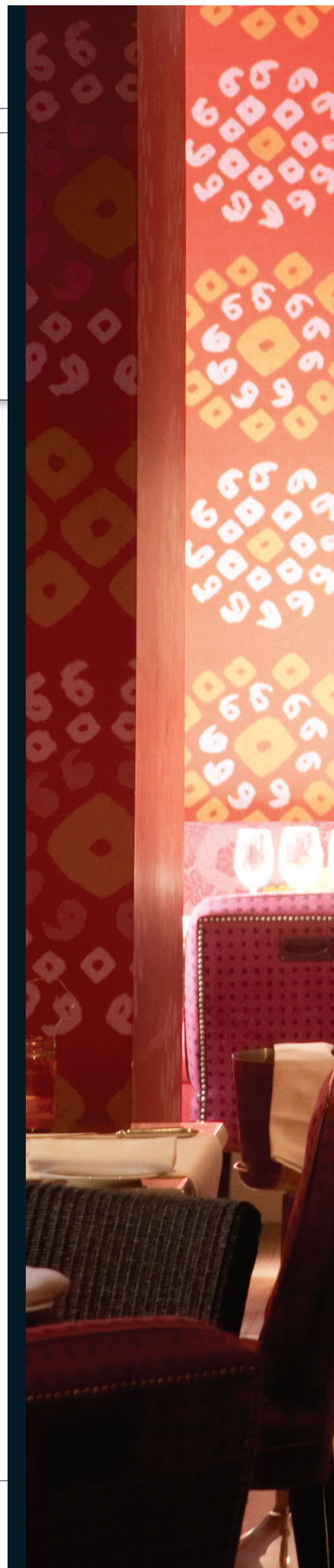


DAY ONE / The city's penchant for reinvention comes alive at your chic new address, the ❶ **Haymarket Hotel**, complete with Frette linens, quirky chandeliers, and an 18-metre indoor pool with glittering lights and a pewter bar. This colourful boutique hotel—a series of grand 19th-century townhouses designed by John Nash, the Regency-era überarchitect—opened in 2007. Nash is responsible for many of London's finest streetscapes and refurbishes: He turned Buckingham House into a palace.

It's morning, time for brekkie at nearby ❷ **Fortnum & Mason**, the grande dame of London foodstuff. She's had more than a nip and tuck in honour of her tercentenary last year, but the old dear still serves up nursery food just like nanny. Try the boiled free-range duck eggs and soldiers with a glass of fresh pomegranate juice.

Stroll down Piccadilly and browse Waterstone's (the largest bookstore in Europe) and Hatchett's (the finest). Cross the street to ❸ **Burlington Arcade**, Britain's first shopping arcade and an architectural masterpiece that opened in 1819. Luxury shops include Hancocks—the jeweller responsible for the Victoria Cross medal. Then indulge in a macaroon moment at the French patisserie Ladurée.

(previous page) London's black cabs; (this page, top) cityscape; (above) a spot of Earl Grey tea at Fortnum & Mason; (right) Haymarket Hotel dining room







Make a left at the Ritz into Green Park. Here, in 1660, England's new king, Charles II, wanted to be able to walk all the way from Hyde Park to St James's without leaving royal soil, so he acquired the land between them. The park's name is attributed to the fury felt by the king's wife when she discovered Charles had picked flowers in the park for another woman, so the queen ordered that all the flowers in the park be removed. Whether or not that was indeed the case, there are still no formal flowerbeds in Green Park.

Now head to **4 Buckingham Palace**, the 775-room London residence of Queen Elizabeth II, who has reigned for 56 years. The palace is open for tours during August and September. Masterpieces from the Royal Collection are on exhibit all year long in The Queen's Gallery, built atop ruins of the former private chapel, damaged during World War II. Watch the changing-of-the-guard ceremony at 11:30. By then, chances are Her Majesty is already hard at work, perhaps updating the royal YouTube content.

Cut back through Green Park, enter Hyde Park from the southeast corner, and amble beneath fragrant trellises in the Rose Garden alongside Rotten Row, a well-used horse path whose name derives from a corruption of "Route de Roi," or King's Road, built during the 17th-century reign of William III.

Exit the park at Albert's Gate onto Sloane Street for 21st-century blingdom. Harvey Nichols is the Ab Fab address of high fashionistas. Just follow the sparkles toward Sloane Square, where the major global luxe brands juggle for space alongside English clothing classics Pringle and Hackett, stationer Smythson, perfumer Jo Malone, and fashion house Burberry.

Drop your bags for luncheon just past Duke of York Square at **5 Daylesford Organic**. Its country-chic produce comes straight from the kitchen garden of Lady Bamford's grand Cotswolds estate. It's a classy spot to brush the spelt muffin crumbs off your new cashmere jumper.

Revived by a cuppa, you're just steps from **6 The Saatchi Gallery**. You'll be among the first to see one of the largest contemporary art museums in the world when the remodeled gallery reopens this summer in the classical Duke of York's HQ in Chelsea.

Back at the hotel, change for dinner and head off to partake of England's most popular pastime, patronizing the pub. **7 The French House**, an atmospheric spot in the heart of edgy Soho, was the meeting place of the French resistance in London during World War II.

Then, it's on to dinner at **8 L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon**, London's sexiest, most user-friendly Michelin star. This may be haute cuisine, but it's a long way from haughty. Perch on louche red-leather stools at the relaxed



Enjoy nature with views of Buckingham Palace in Green Park, one of London's eight royal parks (left); stop in for sustenance at Daylesford Organic (above).

dining counter and enjoy a perfect view of the French super-chef's open kitchen. Out comes a succession of small tasting dishes including caramelised quail breast and black truffle mashed potato, pig's trotters, and delectable mini beef and foie gras burgers. Even the desserts come in petite try-me-I'm-small portions: like creamy Araguani chocolate, a bitter chocolate sorbet.

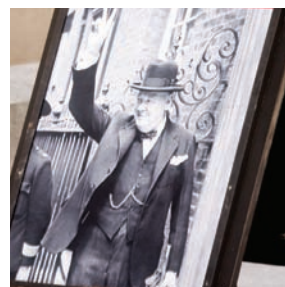
Be on time for the 10:30 p.m. second house at **9 Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club**, London's classic live-jazz venue. The greatest of the greats grace this recently smartened-up room. Afterward, the crowd spills across the street to Bar Italia for espresso and panini. If you still have energy, Soho does, too.

DAY TWO / After breakfast in bed with the papers (the only real cure for a large London night), elevate the soul with a visit to one of the greatest collections of European painting in the world, **1 The National Gallery**. Since the public owns the paintings, admission is free.

Time for a walking tour. Set out across the recently pedestrianised Trafalgar Square (Mayor Ken Livingstone banned cars and feeding pigeons). Lord Nelson, who led Britain to victory over the French in the Battle of Trafalgar, still watches from atop his column. Head down Whitehall. On the right is 10 Downing Street, the prime minister's home, and on the left is Banqueting House, where Charles I lost his head in 1649. At the neo-Gothic **2 Houses of Parliament**, guided tours are offered for everyone but the queen when the House is in recess; by law the monarch is not permitted entry into the House of Commons.

Next stop is the **3 Churchill Museum and Cabinet War Rooms**, an underground command centre where Prime Minister Winston Churchill and his government met as bombs rained down on London during the Blitz in 1940–1941. Perfectly preserved, the warren of situation rooms and sparse sleeping quarters offers an awe-inspiring look into wartime London.

(below) The Churchill Museum and Cabinet War Rooms, an underground World War II command centre; (bottom) Trafalgar Square with Big Ben in the background



Explore historic Trafalgar Square by foot. The open space hosts festivals as well as cultural and sporting events, and Heritage Wardens keep the square safe and visitors well-informed.



For a slideshow
of bonus photos and
a PDF of this story,
visit **hemispheres**
magazine.com.

London Weather

Damp, foggy, drizzly: London's weather could sure use some PR. On the positive side, extreme heat and cold are rare. Winter highs are in the mid-40s. Snows are light and infrequent. In May highs peak in the 60s and near 70 in July and August. On the negative side, the marine climate means plenty of days with clouds, fog, and drizzle. Rainfall is generally on the light side. From May to September, dry, sunny days occur more often.

The Weather Channel

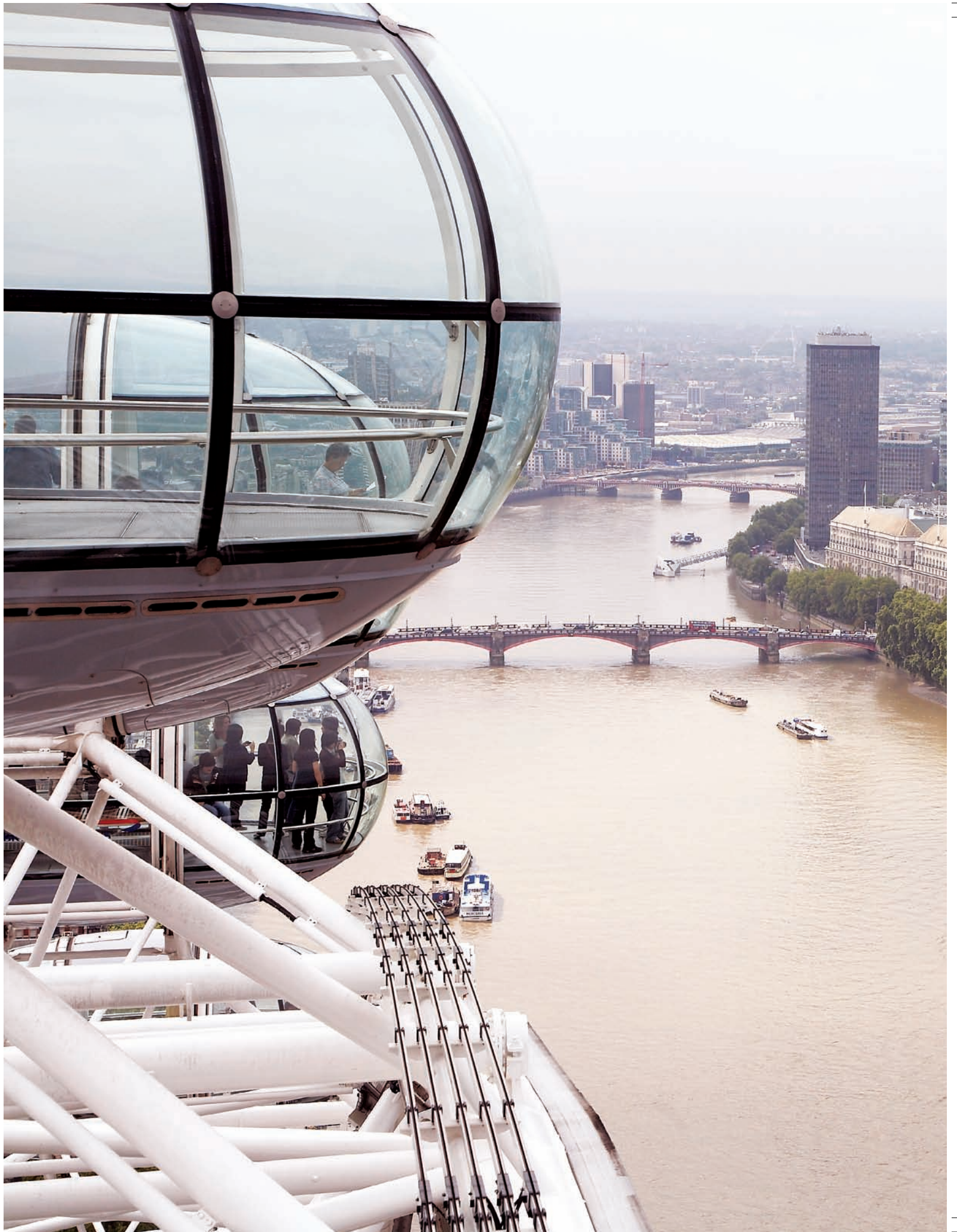
Weather information is provided by The Weather Channel. For more London climatological details, visit weather.com.

Getting Around

In June, United is moving to LHR's newly remodeled Terminal 1, which will streamline the departures and arrivals process. Getting to central London from the airport takes about 50 minutes on the Underground and costs £4. The Heathrow Express train reaches Paddington Station in 15 minutes and costs £14.50 in standard class. A cab costs around £45 to £55.

London for Kids

- A The Dungeons** (the dungeons.com) This theme park covers 2,000 years of London's gruesome history.
- B Harry Potter Tour** (walks.co.uk) This taxi tour goes direct to more than 20 London film locations.
- C Topshop** (topshop.com) For any teen fashion maven, the flagship store is a must.
- D London Aquarium** (londonaquarium.co.uk) See sharks, feedings, and more.
- E Hamley's** (hamleys.com) This toy store was established in 1760 and now has seven floors of toys, games, and other delights.



Above ground, it's time for a romantic picnic (weather permitting) in one of London's most idyllic parks, St James's. At **4 Inn the Park** restaurant, pick up your picnic and blanket or choose from the locally sourced organic menu indoors or on the terrace.

After your trip below ground, go to 135 metres (443 feet) above it. Hop aboard **5 The British Airways London Eye**. Glass of bubbly in hand, your smooth glass pod floats Mary Poppins-style above London's skyline.

Next, it's onto the River Thames. You're headed to **6 Tate Modern** aboard the Tate Boat—door-to-door service in a sleek catamaran. Featuring a sea of expressionists and a room of Rothko, the gallery is the second-most-popular tourist attraction in the country. Walk over the Millennium footbridge afterward for a great view of St Paul's Cathedral.

Back at the hotel, there's time for a nap or a relaxing dip in the pool. This evening is dedicated to what London does best: "The play's the thing." If you didn't get to the Half Price Ticket Booth in Leicester Square today, the concierge will arrange tickets at one of London's **7 West End theatres** for the finest productions of Shakespeare, Wilde, Ibsen, Pinter, Lloyd Webber, and more. Take your seat and prepare to be transported.

The final curtain is your cue for a late dinner at trendy **8 Tom's Kitchen** in Chelsea. Simple gastropub-style cooking features tender aged beef and fresh seafood. Chef Tom Aikens opened this spot just down the street from his eponymous restaurant, which earned a Michelin star within 10 months of opening.

DAY THREE / Early this morning, promenade down Pall Mall, lined by London's famous members-only gentlemen's clubs built in the late 19th century and early 20th century. (At 104, The Reform Club provided the background for Phileas Fogg's fictitious departure in *Around the World in 80 Days*.) A right turn at St James's Street leads to a certified celebrity haunt, **1 The Wolseley**. Everyone from Catherine Zeta-Jones to Camilla has been paparazzied in front of this grand Mitteleuropa café.

After your Einspänner coffee and Viennoiserie pastries, it's off to visit

2 Museumland in South Kensington. The miracle mile of museums built in the 1850s by Prince Albert has something for everyone: the Science Museum, the Natural History Museum, and the Victoria and Albert Museum—all free. And their gift shops are treasures in themselves.

It's well past 1 p.m., so have lunch at buzzy **3 Wagamama** on Kensington's High Street. You'll commune at convivial group tables over ramen noodles and miso soup.

After lunch, put on your spyglasses and head north

Get a Peter Pan's-eye view of the city on the London Eye (left); breakfast with the stars at The Wolseley, a celebrity-favorite café with Viennoiserie pastries (above).





The fashionable Notting Hill is famous for its Portobello Road Market, high-class shopping and restaurants, attractive Victorian townhouses, and a certain Hugh Grant/Julia Roberts film.

along **4 Kensington Palace Gardens**—a private road that's open to pedestrians. It's known as Billionaire's Row and is dotted with grand embassies and imposing gates.

There's time for a quick nose around **5 Portobello Road**. The famous market runs every Saturday, and its permanent jewellery and antiques shops are open six days a week. We can't all be rich, but we can indulge in a little me-time now and then. An hour in a warm candlelit room at **6 Spa.NK** (part of the Space.NK apothecary) on Westbourne Grove is time well spent.

Youthful and relaxed, you're ready for a night at the opera—in the gardens of lush Holland Park, one of the most romantic parks in London. Elegant and intimate, **7 Opera Holland Park's** open-air events attract London society at its most genteel. The season runs from June through August. A glass of Pimm's on the terrace is part of the fun. Whether or not the opera is on, the park, one of the city's most romantic, is beloved for its charming Kyoto Japanese Garden, rose gardens, and splendid peacocks.

Then visit **8 Galvin Bistro de Luxe**, the gorgeous award-winning bistro of brothers Chris and Jeff Galvin. It's refined, low-key, and still a deal for tantalizing dishes like Berkshire pheasant, Puy lentils, and *saucisson lyonnais*. Save room for yummy apple tarte Tatin with *crème Normande*.

With tunes from Tosca in your head, ask your cab driver to take you home down The Mall and under Admiralty Arch. The lights of London at night are as romantic as you'll find. If this route is inspiring enough for Her Majesty, surely it's a good way back to the hotel after three perfect days. **Leslie Woit** enjoys cycling around London but still uses the "Look Left" and "Look Right" signs on the pavement just to be sure. Her 2007 HEMISPHERES feature "Ticket to Tibet" won an award from the North American Travel Journalists Association.



(top) affluent Notting Hill; (above) discreet dining at celebrity haunt The Wolseley; (right) preparations for a sumptuous dinner at Galvin Bistro de Luxe

