



DECOR TOURS
London

LONDON DISPATCH

No. 2: Money Matters

Among the most frequently asked questions we get are those related to how much money to bring, how to get Pounds once in the UK, and other money-related issues. If you still have questions after you review the following, please let us know.

Money, Money, Money

We honestly cannot advise you on how much cash to bring and what you might spend—but we do advise you have some Pounds on you when you land!



- Check with the bank that holds your corporate account and ask your banker to keep an eye on the exchange rate so you can purchase pounds at the best available price prior to your departure.
- Confirm you have a **debit** card that works internationally, that you know your PIN number, and that you understand any transaction fees involved.

This is because UK ATM's typically offer a better exchange rate than the than the dollar-to-pound kiosks found in tourist areas, and *definitely* better than any to be found in the airports! But *check with your banker first*, because each bank and account terms differ.

Transaction Fees

- If you don't already have one, start checking out credit cards designed for international travel, especially those that offer no transaction fees. Then pay off the balance when you return.
- At stores, restaurants, etc. when you use your debit or credit card, you may be asked if you want to be charged in pounds or dollars. Always choose pounds to avoid potential additional transaction fees.



If you don't have tap to pay—get it!

London is largely a cashless city, relying heavily on contactless card payments (including phones/watches) for everything from transport to coffee. You will rarely need cash, but it is useful to have a small amount on hand for markets, tips, or small purchases.

We'll be providing you with a "transportation rebate", a payment to you in advance of our trip that we recommend you load to your preferred no-foreign transaction fee card, that can also be linked to your digital wallet/Apple Pay/Google Pay, etc. Not only will you find it easier and faster to get beverage or snack while out and about, this is how we'll be paying for getting around London on the Tube and/or buses and trams.

In addition, if you're traveling on your own, London Transport has a daily fee limit, so once you've spent £XX.XX on the same card (the rate differs by day and zone) all the rest of your trips that day are free! And, if you want to Uber/Bolt, most of those drivers are cashless.

City Pricing

- London is a major metro area, be prepared to pay accordingly for a water, coffee, etc.

Be Prepared

- Know your debit PIN number. Have your international customer service numbers and all card numbers in a secure but easy-to-retrieve location and consider having a just-in-case card.
- Leave copies of all this information (as well as a copy of your passport) with someone back in the US that you trust and can get in touch with quickly, just in case an emergency comes up.
- Alert all card-issuers of your travel plans so your cards aren't frozen when attempting your first purchase, and/or be aware of how they will contact you with fraud-prevention alerts.



Don't Equate Dollars & Pounds

There's something a little psychologically tricky about purchasing items in the UK. You're speaking English; the language on the money, the tags, the menu is English; pound notes come in 5, 10, 20, etc denominations; and you start to equate \$1.00 with £1.00...but it's not!

Historically the pound has always traded above the dollar, but on average, an item that lists at £1.00 is going to

cost you \$1.35 or more. So don't fall into the \$ per £ trap, unless you want to be 35% or more overbudget when you return home!

VAT and VAT Refunds

VAT stands for Value-Added Tax, a cost already included on the price tag of any retail item you are shopping for. The majority of British goods are priced with a 20% VAT already included, while some items and services—food, alcohol, transportation, etc. are taxed at different rates.

Post Brexit, the UK abolished the “tourist refund” aspect of VAT, meaning there is no VAT refund unless you purchase from shop in Great Britain (England, Wales and Scotland) that deliver goods straight to an address outside the UK.

Of course, then the issue is that you'll pay for the shipping plus whatever US tariff fees may be in effect at the time. For most items, it's probably not going to be worth it.





Stress-Free Restaurant Tipping

Dining in London is a culinary adventure—the far-flung British Empire has left its mark on the city's restaurants and you'll find wonderful meals inspired by cuisines from around the world. So don't settle for mushy peas, bangers & mash, or other pub go-tos. Unless that's what you want...No judgement!

To be clear...

You do not need to tip in restaurants, cafés, etc. Unlike in the U.S., restaurant staff are paid a living wage salary, have paid vacations and health care and are not dependent on tips for their livelihood. Tipping in London is an act of appreciation, rather than a requirement, and dependent on the quality of service you receive. This applies everywhere, from restaurants to cabs to hotels.

That said, it is *always* polite to tip when you receive good service. In London restaurants, the going rate is 10%-15%, but in many restaurants it's becoming customary to add a service charge to your final bill, so double-check the bill at the end of your meals in London to make sure you don't tip twice. Keep in mind that typically for parties under four people, these charges are optional or discretionary, so you have the right to ask

from them to be removed, if you feel you had poor service.

Also, you do not have to tip at cafés and bars in London, but you are free to do so. Often the credit card reader will now ask if you want to add a tip, so it's easy to add a pound or two depending on what you purchased, how long you stayed, etc.

Understanding the Menu

As in any major tourist city, there are areas of the city that are more "touristic" than others, and often times restaurants in these areas add fees for something you might not realize you'll be charged for—often it's bread and butter, or not being clear that you just want tap water, etc.

- If you have any questions regarding menu charges—what is included in your meal, what might cost extra, etc. don't be afraid to ask!

Understanding the bill

- VAT means Value Added Tax. This is the general consumption tax. Each restaurant handles how they show the VAT differently, but it is NOT a cost you need to add to your total. It is already included in the listed price of every menu item.

- A "service charge" may be listed as optional or discretionary, but if it is not, have management confirm if you feel you want to pay less than the amount shown. Note: in some cases this may also be shown as an administration fee.

- Read your receipts thoroughly, as restaurants around the world have gotten into the habit of adding miscellaneous charges to bills—for carbon-neutral dining, for recycling, for low-car zones, etc. See the next-to-last page for a more complete break down of London dining receipts.

Other Tipping Situations

Hotels, guides, drivers, etc., we got you covered!



Coffee shops, pubs, etc.

Ordering at the bar versus a table in London can now sometimes cost differently. Some London pubs now add an optional service charge to orders made at the bar. With some venues now using apps or other QR menus with discounted pricing vs. the prices for in-person bar service.

However, in most traditional pubs, the price is the same, as you order at the bar and there is no table service. The same thing goes for when you order pub food too, unless there is a separate restaurant section, then you'll have table service. When in doubt, just ask.

Tip: If you're standing in the queue to order at the bar; once it's your turn to order, make eye-contact with the bartender otherwise he or she will probably look right past you if you're on your phone or not paying attention!

But, whether drinking at the bar or at a table, rounding up the cost of drink is an acceptable tip. If your espresso cost £2.70, feel free to leave £3.

Hotels

A pound or two per bag is considered standard for a bellman, the same for a doorman who calls you a cab. For housekeeping, a couple of pounds per night per person is considerate. As for the concierge, standard services such as calling a car service, recommendations or booking a restaurant are within the purview of their job. However, if the concierge goes above and beyond, such as securing reservations at a hot spot, arranging a private tour, or other extra-ordinary assistance, it is customary to tip for their help.

Drivers

Tipping taxi drivers can be handled the same way as a bar bill...round up

to a comfortable amount! For private drivers consider a tip based on the number of bags they loaded, the time or distance traveled, etc., but for the most part £5 or so is perfectly fine.

Guides

If you take a "free" walking tour or hire a guide for a private tour, it is considerate to tip. For the most part, "free" tour guides are paid via tips, so those tips should be more generous if you were genuinely pleased with the tour. For paid tours, £2-10 is acceptable, depending on the duration and insight provided. And don't forget to tip the tour driver if you have one!



Reading a London Dining Receipt

Barrafina Adelaide			
10 Adelaide Street London WC2N 4DW Tel 020 7440 1456			
Restaurant			
1. Restaurant / 12 TMC-2685	Sevenrooms 22/07/2024 18:16		
1 Special Croquetas x2	£8.50		
1 Stuffed Courgette Flower	£14.00		
1 Txakoli Bidaia 125ml	£8.20		
3 Item(s)	£30.70		
Service Charge @ 12.5%	£3.84		
Amount Due	£34.54		
Rate 20%	Net £25.58	Tax £5.12	Gross £30.70
	£25.58	£5.12	£30.70
VAT No.884636283			

Barrafina example notes:

VAT tax itemized below the total, service charge not identified as mandatory or discretionary, so worth an ask.

Saltine	
Saltine	10 April 2025
11 Highbury Park	21:04
London	Katie
N51QJ	
Ticket: 4	VAT # 448343382
EAT IN	
Tap Water	£0.00 A
Bergamot	£12.00 A
Bread & Butter	£4.50 A
Scallop	£11.00 A
Braised Cuttlefish	£16.00 A
Sole	£27.00 A
Sticky Toffee Apple Cake	£11.00 A
Subtotal	£81.50
Service charge (12.5%)	£8.49
12.5% service charge is added for parties of 1 or more.	
Total	£89.99

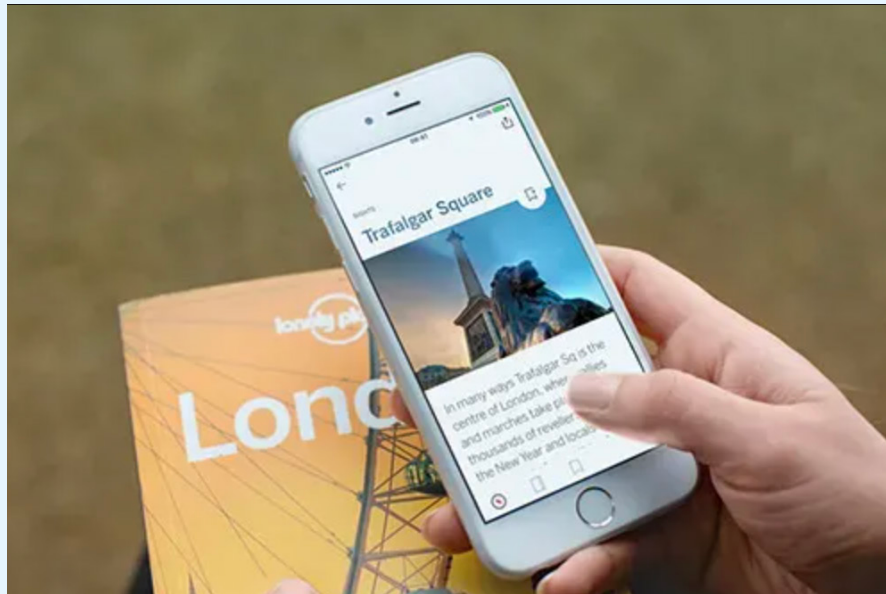
Saltine example notes:

VAT tax not itemized, bread charged, service charged listed as added for any size party, meaning mandatory.

eat@henriettahotel.com www.henriettahotel.com	
Server:, Alice	
28/03/19 07:32pm	
Table No:10 B	Covers: 2
1 Special 1	£13.00
1 Bread & Butter	£3.50
1 TUNA	£14.00
1 Beef tartare	£10.00
1 Beef txistorra	£10.00
1 Chips	£4.00
1 Grillo 125ml	£6.00
Opt Svc Ch:	£7.56
Amt.Due	£68.06
VAT Included	£10.08
An optional 12.50% service charge is added to your bill	

Henrietta example notes:

Bread charged, VAT listed as single line item, service charge listed as optional.



In the next issue of the
**LONDON
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No. 3: Useful Apps

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