

A local transport guide for first time visitors to London

For first time visitors to London, making your way around this busy, congested city can be a challenge. However, with a little guidance, you can learn to easily navigate your way around the big city.

Arriving by Air

Most domestic and international flights land at either London Heathrow Airport or London Gatwick Airport. Often flights into Gatwick Airport are cheaper, but this places you further outside the city upon arrival. London Heathrow sits in the middle of the London suburbs and so is a better starting off point, however either airport is fine.

It is possible to book online for your onward travel needs into the city and this is almost always cheaper.

Travelling from London Heathrow Airport

London Heathrow is Europe's busiest airport, so there are many ways out of the airport. Heathrow itself is on the south-west edge of center of the city.

If you are planning to stay in the heart of the city center, then the fastest ways into town are by using either the Heathrow Express or the Heathrow Connect special rail lines. These both take you into Paddington Station, near the center of the city. Heathrow Express is direct; Heathrow Connect makes a number of stops along the way. From Paddington Station, you can switch to the London Underground ("*the tube*"), to go the rest of the way to your destination. The Heathrow Express costs £18 one-way and the Heathrow Connect costs under £10 one-way.

<https://www.heathrowexpress.com>

<http://www.heathrowconnect.com>

The next best option is to use the London Underground network starting from one of several London Heathrow Underground stations. These are accessible from inside London Heathrow Airport. There are three underground stations: London Heathrow Terminal 1,2 & 3, Terminal 4 and Terminal 5. The main tube line is the Piccadilly Line (blue color) that runs north east from London Heathrow and terminates at Cockfosters in the far North-east of the city.

To more cheaply use the Underground, you should purchase a blue Oyster card from the London Heathrow Underground station. It costs £5, which is refundable when leaving the UK. More detail on the Oyster card is provided later in the "Getting Around Town" section of this article.

There is also the option of taking a pre-booked mini-cab or a taxi. Depending on traffic congestion this can be much slower than you might think and the cost can easily be between 35 to 60 pounds, or more.

Travelling from London Gatwick Airport

Gatwick Airport is split into the North and South terminal. There is a free shuttle that runs between them about every five minutes.

The train line options are Gatwick Express and Southern Railway, that run from London Gatwick to London Victoria station, on the southern part of the London Underground network. Both take about 35 minutes and cost £19 or less.

www.gatwickexpress.com

There are also two bus or coach options, using either easyBus or National Express. Prices range from £2 to £7. The trip will take 90-120 minutes depending on the time of day.

Getting Around Town

One of the best things to purchase if you wish to use either the London Underground or buses around town is an Oyster card. The Oyster card is shaped like a store card - you purchase it for five pounds (refundable later) - then you load money onto the card. To travel on a bus or the Underground, you place the card over a reader, your journey is tracked and the balance on your card is reduced accordingly. It is still possible to buy paper tickets, but these are priced often 100% more expensively than the equivalent journey using Oyster.

London Underground: "*The tube*"

The *tube*, operated by Transport for London, is the fastest way to move around the city when you are within the right part of town. The *tube* roughly covers the north of the city, the center and a small part south of the center of town, with several lines extending like tentacles into the southern part of town. In order to go further south than the *tube* permits, you would need to use the British Rail train network.

The *tube* network has many different lines, each with their own color on a tube map. Many lines intersect – shown as two or more black round circles on the *tube* map – and at those stations you can change *tube* lines. Therefore, if you choose to travel by *tube* from London Heathrow, then you may take a *tube* for part of your journey and then change lines once or even twice, to get to where you are staying while in the city. You will need to refer to the map to plan your journey before embarking.

The *tube* map is split into zones, with the inner most part of the city being zone 1, and expanding out from there. As well as paying for individual journeys

with your Oyster card, it is also possible to purchase a *travelcard*. These cover single or multiple days, for journeys made during off-peak hours (not during rush hour) and cover travel within specific zones only (i.e. a one-day *travelcard* for zones 1-3).

It is useful to note that a *travelcard* is almost always much cheaper than paying for individual journeys unless you move infrequently around town during your stay.

Useful maps are located here:

<http://www.tfl.gov.uk/gettingaround/14091.aspx>

A journey planner that includes several modes of transport including bus, train, and tube is available here:

http://journeyplanner.tfl.gov.uk/user/XSLT_TRIP_REQUEST2?language=en

British Rail Train Network

British Rail operates several major train lines running to the southern parts of the city and the suburbs, and also to major cities around the UK. These are separately run to *the tube*, but the Oyster card often does cover journeys close to London on the rail network. That said, it is important to check with the ticket office at the time of your journey to see if you need an additional ticket.

Train tickets can be purchased online here:

<http://www.thetrainline.com/>

London Buses

The famous red London buses are a convenient way to get around small parts of the city that are not covered well by the *tube* network. The two level buses are called "double decker buses" and there are also smaller single level buses with smaller carrying capacity that go on short journeys; these are called "hopper buses".

Each bus journey carries a charge depending on the journey length. Taking several buses can get expensive, however there is a maximum spend per day with your Oyster card to avoid using up too much credit in one day. When you board the bus, you will need to touch the electronic reader with your Oyster card to pay for the journey. When you wish to get off the bus, you need to press the bell to alert the driver, otherwise if there is no one waiting at the next bus stop, the bus will not stop!

A bus journey planning guide is provided here:

<http://www.tfl.gov.uk/tfl/gettingaround/maps/buses/>

Black Cabs and Mini-cabs

Black Cabs operate almost exclusively in the center part of town, whereas mini-cabs tend to operate in the suburbs. Black cabs are licensed taxis where the driver has passed "the knowledge", a complex series of tests checking on their knowledge of the city streets. Black cabs *always* run on a meter (unlike mini-cabs where the fee is agreed at the start of the journey).

Black cabs can be useful if you wish to get somewhere specific and you do not know where it is, or if you need to get somewhere not close to a station. Black Cabs can save you time, but it does depend on the time of day and the level of traffic. They are pretty expensive, so it is better to stick to buses and the *tube* unless you are really in a hurry to get somewhere. Mini-cabs are often half the price of a Black Cab.

Car Hire

The usual car hire companies are well represented in London. However, as well as paying for a congestion charge (road tax) for entering the city each day with your vehicle, gasoline is also quite expensive and parking is difficult to find too. Most tourists will find that car hire is unnecessary.

Other Transport Options

There are several other smaller transport options including trams and a rail network in the Docklands in the East End, however these are mostly outside of town and not often used by tourists.