

Children's London

On first sight London seems a hostile place for children, with its crowds, incessant noise and intimidating traffic. English attitudes can be discouraging as well, particularly if you've experienced the more indulgent approach of the French or Italians - London's restaurateurs, for example, tend to regard children and eating out as mutually exclusive concepts. Yet if you pick your place carefully, even central London can be a delight for the pint - sized, and it needn't overly strain the parental pocket.

Covent Garden

Covent Garden's buskers and jugglers provide no - cost entertainment in a car - free setting, and there's always the chance of being plucked from the crowd to help out with a trick. Don't underestimate the value of London's public transport as a source of fun, either. The no.11 double - decker from Victoria, for instance, will trundle you past the Houses of Parliament, Trafalgar Square and the Strand on its way to St Paul's Cathedral for 40p per child. The driverless Docklands Light Railway is another guaranteed source of amusement - grab a seat at the front of the train and pretend to be driver, then take a boat back to the centre of town from Greenwich.

Children's Attractions

[Legoland](#)

Winkfield Road, Windsor, Berkshire SL4 4AY Tel: 0870 504 0404

Very expensive but enjoyable and relatively tasteful theme park with gentle rides - perfect for five - to eight - year - olds.

[London Aquarium](#)

County Hall, SE1 7PB Tel: 020 7967 8000.

London's largest aquarium is situated on the South Bank, and is very popular with kids, especially the bit where they get to stroke the (non - sting) rays.

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[London Zoo](#)

Regent's Park, NW1 4RY Tel: 020 7722 3333

Architecturally interesting inner - city zoo which has recently opened its new Web of Life building, as part of a drive to redefine itself as eco - conscious.

[Mudchute City Farm](#)

Pier St, E14 Tel: 020 7515 5901.

Covering some 35 acres, this is London's largest city farm, with barnyard animals, llamas, a pets' corner and a café.

Children's Museums

Lots of London's museums will appeal to children. Below are those that are primarily geared towards entertaining and/or educating children - some are covered in the main part of our guide, and are cross - referenced accordingly. Most offer child - oriented programmes of workshops, educational story trails, special shows and suchlike during the school holidays. Time Out has listings of kids' events, and also produces Kids Out, a monthly listings magazine for those with children.

[Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood](#)

Cambridge Heath Rd, E2 9PA Tel: 020 8983 5200

Best known for its collection of historic dolls' houses, the museum also has a few buttons to press, and lots of weekend/holiday events and activities.

[Horniman Museum](#)

London Rd, SE23 3PQ Tel: 020 8699 1872

An ethnographic museum, but with lots to interest kids, including an aquarium, a natural history section and lovely grounds.

[Kew Bridge Steam Museum](#)

Green Dragon Lane, Brentford, TW8 0EN. Tel: 020 8568 4757

Best visited at weekends, when the beam engines are in steam and the miniature steam railway is in operation.

[Natural History Museum](#)

Cromwell Rd, SW7 5BD Tel: 020 7942 5000.

Dinosaurs, stuffed animals, live ants, a "rainforest", an earthquake simulator and lots of rocks, fossils, crystals and gems.

[Ragged School Museum](#)

Copperfield Rd, E3 4RR Tel: 020 8980 6405.

The reconstructed Victorian schoolroom here makes kids realize what an easy life they have these days.

[Science Museum](#)

Exhibition Rd, SW7 2DD Tel: 020 7942 4455.

More and more hands - on galleries aimed at kids are being introduced, and there are excellent daily demonstrations, plus a totally revamped transport wing.

Parks and City Farms

Central London has plenty of green spaces, such as Hyde Park, which has playgrounds and ample room for general mayhem, as well as a diverting array of city wildlife. If you want something more unusual than ducks and squirrels, though, head for one of London's city farms .

[Battersea Park](#)

Albert Bridge Rd, SW11 4NJ Tel: 020 8871 7540 (zoo) or 020 8871 6374 (playground).

A children's zoo with monkeys, reptiles, birds, otters and mongooses; challenging adventure playground and lots of open space. Every August, the free "Teddy Bears' Picnic" draws thousands of children and their plush pals.

[Coram's Fields](#)

93 Guilford St, WC1N 1DN Tel: 020 7837 6138.

Ducks, sheep, pigs, rabbits, goats and chickens, plus a large free playground with slides and swings. Adults admitted only if accompanied by a child.

[Hampstead Heath](#)

Info centre by Lido, NW3. Tel: 020 7485 4491.

Nine hundred acres of grassland and woodland, with superb views of the city. Excellent kite - flying, birdwatching and swimming potential too.

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[Hyde Park/Kensington Gardens](#)

W8 Tel: 020 7298 2100.

Hyde Park is central London's main open space; in Kensington Gardens, adjoining its western side, you can find the famous Peter Pan statue (near the Long Water), a playground and a pond that's perfect for toy boat sailing.

[Kew Gardens](#)

Richmond, Surrey Tel: 020 8332 5000.

You have to pay a hefty entry fee to get into the Royal Botanical Gardens, but they are fun for kids and adults. There's lots of green space, wildfowl, and some great glasshouses, one of which has an aquarium.

[Richmond Park](#)

Richmond, Surrey Tel: 020 8948 3209.

A fabulous stretch of countryside, with opportunities for duck - feeding, deer - spotting, mushroom hunting and cycling.

Children's Theatre

Numerous London theatres put on kids' shows at the weekend but there are one or two venues that are almost entirely child - centred. Ticket prices hover around the £5 mark for children and adults alike, unless the show is at a West End theatre, in which case you're looking at more like £15 and upwards.

[Little Angel Theatre](#)

14 Dagmar Passage, off Cross St, N1 2DN Tel: 020 7226 1787.

London's only permanent puppet theatre, with shows on Saturdays and Sundays at 11am and 3pm; the mornings are for three - to six - year - olds, the afternoons for older kids. Additional shows during the holidays and occasionally in the evenings.

[Polka Theatre](#)

240 The Broadway, SW19 1SB Tel: 020 8543 4888.

A specially designed junior arts centre aimed at kids aged up to around twelve, with two theatres, a playground, a café and a toy shop. Storytellers, puppeteers and mimes make regular appearances.

[Puppet Theatre Barge](#)

opposite 35 Blomfield Road London W9 2PF Tel: 020 7249 6878

The Puppet Barge is a theatre in a barge seating 55 with all modern facilities. It is

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rich in atmosphere and provides the ideal setting for the enchanting and imaginative shows produced by this famous company. This unique theatre has been presenting shows since 1982 giving performances during the winter and spring in Little Venice, central London and on the River Thames during the summer

[Unicorn Theatre](#)

147 Tooley Street Southwark SE1 2HZ Tel: 020 7645 0500

The Unicorn is the oldest professional children's theatre in London, and is currently performing in several venues across the capital, including the Pleasance Theatre, off the Caledonian Road, N1. Shows run the gamut from mime and puppetry to traditional plays.

Shops

[Benjamin Pollock's Toy Shop](#)

44 Covent Garden Apple Market, WC2E 8RF Tel: 020 7379 7866.

An old - fashioned outlet selling puppets, traditional teddies and dolls, as well as charming model theatres complete with cut - out sets, props and tiny actors.

[Davenport's Magic Shop](#)

Charing Cross Shopping Arcade, WC2 4HZ Tel: 020 7836 0408.

London's oldest magic shop sells tricks for the professional and the infant amateur.

[The Disney Store](#)

368 Oxford Street, W1 Tel: 08707 591701

All the toys you can possibly imagine relating to Disney characters.

[Eric Snook's Toyshop](#)

32 Covent Garden Market, WC2E 8RE Tel: 020 7379 7681.

Eschewing movie merchandise and cheap tat, this shop sells only the most tasteful, meticulously crafted playthings.

[Hamleys](#)

188 Regent St, W1B 5BT Tel: 0870 333 2455

The most celebrated toy shop on the planet, multistorey Hamleys is bursting with childish delights - from the humble Slinky to scaled - down petrol - driven Porsches. A smaller branch in Covent Garden Piazza gives a taste of what's on

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offer at the real thing.

[Skate Attack](#)

95 Highgate Rd, N14 5PH Tel: 020 8886 7979

Europe's largest retailer of roller skates, rollerblades and equipment. Roller rental, with protective equipment, is £10 a day, £15 a weekend or £20 a week, plus £100