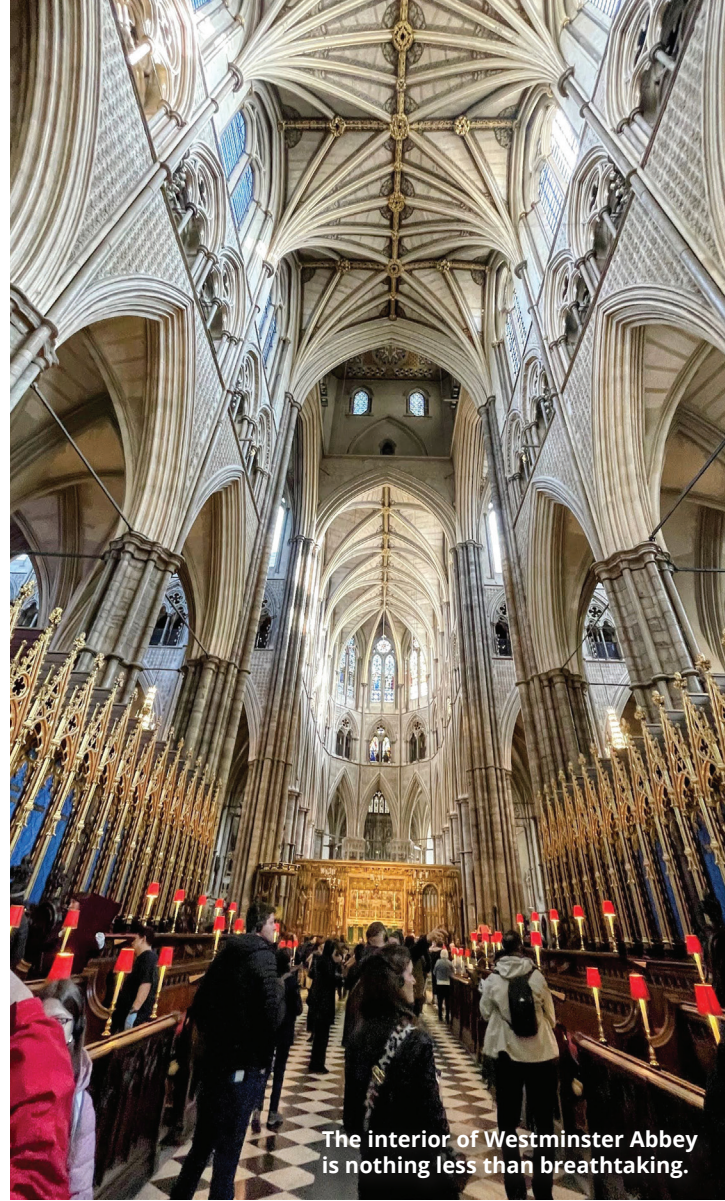




The exterior of Westminster Abbey is only surpassed by its amazing interior.



The interior of Westminster Abbey is nothing less than breathtaking.

## Traveling On: A London Getaway

By Nicole Pensiero

I'm always dazzled by London's fascinating mix of old and new — the ancient monuments, like Westminster Abbey and the Tower of London, sit close to modern-day attractions like the London Eye and The Shard. It's a city of contrasts that meld together beautifully.

Some 30 million tourists descend on England's capital city each year, and it's easy to understand why. It's a fun and fast-paced place with everything from history to culinary adventures.

London is perhaps the easiest city in the world to explore — thanks to its amazingly efficient Underground subway system, affectionately known as the "Tube."

For a recent solo getaway, I found an affordable, easy-to-book package through Expedia that included non-stop flights and a four-night stay at a modest, clean hotel, the Villa Kensington. Blessed with mild and sunny weather, there were many highlights in England's capital city.

Here are some suggestions for any first-time visitor:



**Get a View from Above:** If it's a sunny day, take in a view of London from above via either the London Eye or England's tallest building, The Shard. This time, I enjoyed the London Eye: a gigantic Ferris wheel with 32 capsules that can each hold up to 25 people. At 443 feet at its highest point, you get a great view of the city along the River Thames. The most popular paid tourist attraction in the UK — with more than 3 million visitors annually — the London Eye is a unique and fun experience.

**Visit London's Most Historical Sites:** Westminster Abbey and the Tower of London always get my vote. If you can't do both, do at least one. They are both magnificent and date back to 1066 AD. The price of admission at the Tower features an included tour with a Beefeater. Westminster Abbey, meanwhile, offers an included audio tour — and guests can select a shorter or more in-depth experience. From Poets Corner to the tombs of Queen Elizabeth I; and Mary, Queen of Scots, the history here is amazing.



**Each capsule of the London Eye holds 25 passengers; the ride takes about 30 minutes.**

St. George's Chapel at Windsor Castle, where Queen Elizabeth II is laid to rest.



**Take a Side Trip:** I decided to visit Windsor Castle, the world's largest and oldest occupied castle. Founded in the 11th century, it has been the home of 40 British monarchs, including the late Queen Elizabeth II, who is buried there. Traveling from London's Paddington train station was easy — only 20 minutes each way — and cost less than \$20 roundtrip. Admission to Windsor Castle includes a self-

guided audio tour. No photos are allowed inside, so one has to keep memories with them as they go along. I especially loved St. George's Chapel (where the Queen, Prince Philip, and her parents are laid to rest). St. George's Chapel is also where Prince Harry and Meghan Markle were wed in May 2018. The town of Windsor is small and charming, with many shopping and food options.



**Afternoon tea at the Royal Albert Hall was the perfect end-of-vacation activity.**

*Enjoy Afternoon Tea:* A highlight of my recent London trip was afternoon tea at the Royal Albert Hall, which has observed this tradition for more than 100 years. A world-famous entertainment venue, tea here was elegant and relaxing. Along with delicious sandwiches, scones, and cakes, there are 11 blends of tea to choose from!

*Grab a Good Meal:* From pub food to gourmet dining, London offers an array of dining choices. You can enjoy both entertainment and food at Covent Garden. Opened in the 1660s as a farmer's market, today you'll find upscale shops, an indoor/outdoor flea market, and street performers. At nearby St. Martin-in-the-Fields, one of the city's most beloved churches, you can enjoy a delicious meal in its Café in the Crypt.

Traveling around London is a breeze thanks to the popular Oyster card. This easy-to-use electronic ticket — which you just “top off” when funds get low — gets you around the city via the Underground, buses, and even the river buses (yes, that's what they're called).

London is my favorite city for more reasons than I can count, and it just might become yours, too. For more information, go to [www.visitlondon.com](http://www.visitlondon.com).

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