



Circular walking guide from London Waterloo

This walk is packed with the best of London: great views, famous churches, ancient pubs and even a fantastic patisserie

There's a sense of theatre on this walk, which takes in the Actors' Church, Covent Garden, the Royal Opera House, Freemasons' Hall and also The Inns of Court.

On the way, pass Bow Street, the site of London's first police force, and the Sir John Soane's Museum, and visit a Templar Church. Have a delicious lunch at Paul and quench your thirst at the 17th-century pub, Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese.

Leave London Waterloo by Exit 5, following the signs to "Hungerford Footbridge" to cross the Thames, and enter Embankment tube station. Take the exit to Villiers Street, at the end of which you cross the Strand and follow the sign, right, to Covent Garden.

On your left pass Coutts, then the Adelphi Theatre, with its 1930s art deco foyer, before turning left on Southampton Street to Covent Garden, where there are hundreds of shops and a piazza buzzing with entertainers. To visit St Paul's—the Actors' Church—go to the left of the piazza and into the churchyard. Plaques here commemorate theatrical and film greats such as Noël Coward and Charlie Chaplin. With your back to the church door, walk to Bedford Street, turning right to Paul, a patisserie serving tasty baked goodies.

Returning to the piazza, follow the signs to the Royal Opera House and visit the Floral Hall, a magnificent glass conservatory. If it is closed, take the lift to the Amphitheatre Bar and Café, open Monday to Saturday, noon to 3pm, and enjoy the views from the balcony.

You can usually cut through the box office, which is open Monday to Saturday, 10am to 3pm, to emerge on Bow Street. If it is closed, follow the signs to Covent Garden tube station, turning right on Long Acre to meet Bow Street. Emerge on Bow Street opposite the former Bow Street Magistrates Court and Police Station. London's first police force of sorts, the Bow Street Runners, was established here by writer Henry Fielding in 1750.

Turn left then right on Long Acre to Great Queen Street. The huge building ahead is Freemasons' Hall. Surprisingly for its reputed secretiveness, guided tours are offered weekdays, on the hour, from 11am to 4pm. Book Saturday tours at least six months in advance (020 7831 9811). Continue to reach Kingsway, cross to Remnant Street and Sir John Soane's Museum at No 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields. This gem of a house—free entry and open Tuesday to Saturday, 10am to 5pm—is packed with fascinating paintings and artefacts.

Leave No 13 turning left and follow the street around, right, to Lincoln's Inn, only weekdays, where bewigged barristers train and work. Continue down Serle Street, left on Carey Street to Chancery Lane. Charles Dickens fans can visit the Old Curiosity Shop by turning right off Serle Street to Portugal Street and right on Portsmouth Street.

Turning right on Chancery Lane, you meet Fleet Street. Turn left for the Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese, an atmospheric pub. Otherwise cross Fleet Street into Temple by Middle Temple Lane opposite (for details of opening times, go to www.templechurch.com) to visit Temple Church, for its effigies of the Knights Templar.

Returning to Fleet Street, turn left and pass the massive Royal Courts of Justice, right. On your left is Twinings, tea sellers since the 1700s. Continuing west you pass St Clement Danes, in the traffic island, right, immortalised in the nursery rhyme Oranges and Lemons. Further on, left, is Somerset House, home to art collections, good Thames views and cafés—and even an ice rink opens seasonally in the winter months. Turn left at Lancaster Place to return to London Waterloo station crossing Waterloo Bridge.