# Top tips for navigating and enjoying London like a local



Navigating London, with its over 5,000 hotels, 11,400 restaurants, myriad attractions, and a vast public transport network including 272 subway stations and 19,000 bus stops, can be a thrilling yet daunting experience for tourists. The city’s massive scale and complexity often pose challenges for visitors, leading to common pitfalls that can detract from their trip. Travel blogger Kalyn Franke, who has lived in Britain for over a decade and shares insights on her Girl Gone London YouTube channel, has pinpointed some of the most frequent mistakes tourists make and offers practical advice to enhance any visit.

One of the top blunders Franke highlights is the choice of transport ticketing. Many tourists still opt to buy paper tickets for the London Underground, known colloquially as the Tube, which can be substantially more expensive than modern alternatives. Franke recommends using an Oyster card, a smartcard that is pre-loaded with credit and offers fares at roughly half the cost of paper tickets. Alternatively, contactless-enabled bank cards can be used to tap in and out at stations, functioning similarly to an Oyster card. This method has gained traction among Londoners due to its convenience and equivalent fare rates. However, tourists should be mindful that some foreign card issuers may levy transaction fees per journey, potentially increasing travel costs. Official advice from Transport for London (TfL) underscores the necessity of tapping both in and out with the same card to ensure correct fare charges and avoid penalties. While Oyster cards are widely valued for their daily and weekly fare capping and potential savings, contactless payments offer ease of use without the need to top up, though visitors are encouraged to check with their card providers about overseas charges.

Franke also cautions against over-reliance on London’s iconic black cabs. These taxis are operated by drivers who have passed the rigorous Knowledge test, granting them unmatched familiarity with the city’s streets and shortcuts. While this expertise is invaluable, black cabs come with a higher price tag—potentially up to £10 per mile—making them an impractical choice for frequent use. Public buses offer a more cost-effective travel option, even though many tourists find the bus network intimidating due to the complexity of routes and maps. Franke encourages travellers to embrace buses, using specific routes like the 453 that pass major landmarks, as an economical and scenic alternative to costly sightseeing buses.

Another common misconception is that the Tube is invariably the fastest way to get around. Franke advises considering walking, particularly for short stretches in central London, where journeys such as the Covent Garden to Leicester Square leg on the Piccadilly line can be completed in four minutes on foot. This approach not only saves time but also allows visitors to soak in the city’s atmosphere.

Food choices also present pitfalls for tourists unwittingly stepping into overly touristy areas like Leicester Square, where eateries often deliver mediocre experiences at inflated prices. Franke, favouring spots like Ciao Bella in Bloomsbury or Da Mario in Kensington, suggests visiting food markets such as Leather Lane, frequented by locals and known for quality stalls during weekday lunch hours. She clarifies that while fish and chips are a British staple, the best versions are to be found in traditional takeout shops known as "chippies," rather than pubs where the dish is sometimes less authentic.

Regarding London's famous sights, Franke advises skipping duplicative or overly commercial attractions like Madame Tussauds or the London Aquarium, encouraging visitors to focus on unique London experiences. She also tips that while the view from The Shard skyscraper is spectacular, it is expensive without a London Pass membership. A comparable view is available for free from Sky Garden on the 43rd floor of 20 Fenchurch Street, provided visitors book in advance.

Tourists often misinterpret local customs, including a mistaken belief that the famously stoic royal guards can be joked with, a stereotype perpetuated by films. Franke warns against such antics, stressing respect for the guards’ discipline. Another frequent error is confusing London Bridge with Tower Bridge—the iconic bridge with twin towers seen in countless images and films is actually Tower Bridge, while London Bridge is less distinctive though offers good vantage points of Tower Bridge.

Accommodation choices can also confuse visitors not used to London’s spread-out geography. Unlike cities with a defined ‘downtown’ core, London is arranged in rings with major attractions scattered far apart. Franke points out the mistake of booking hotels in what appears to be the central area without considering transport links to various sites, which can affect convenience.

Finally, Franke advises against the misconception that Londoners are rude. She explains that the locals are often busy but not unfriendly, encouraging tourists to ask for help without hesitation.

For a well-rounded experience, Franke shares her ideal itinerary: beginning with a river ride, followed by lunch at a riverside pub such as the historic Mayflower in Rotherhithe, an afternoon at a standout museum like the Science Museum, and ending the day with dinner and drinks in the lively Covent Garden area. Her insider tips offer a path to enjoy London beyond the obvious and avoid common tourist traps, helping visitors make the most of the city’s vibrant culture and rich history.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/london-tourist-worst-mistakes-b2818709.html)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/london-tourist-worst-mistakes-b2818709.html), [[2]](https://tfl.gov.uk/fares/how-to-pay-and-where-to-buy-tickets-and-oyster/pay-as-you-go/touching-in-and-out), [[3]](https://visitorshop.tfl.gov.uk/en/visitor-oyster-card-vs-contactless-bank-card-which-saves-you-more-money-london), [[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London_Underground_ticketing), [[5]](https://www.toptiplondon.com/transport/tickets/contactless-cards), [[7]](https://support.visitorshop.tfl.gov.uk/hc/en-gb/articles/28090529777554-Visitor-Oyster-card-vs-Contactless-which-is-best-for-your-London-trip)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/london-tourist-worst-mistakes-b2818709.html), [[5]](https://www.toptiplondon.com/transport/tickets/contactless-cards), [[6]](https://plantriplondon.com/contactless-payment-london-transport/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/london-tourist-worst-mistakes-b2818709.html), [[5]](https://www.toptiplondon.com/transport/tickets/contactless-cards)
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* Paragraph 10 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/london-tourist-worst-mistakes-b2818709.html)

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1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/london-tourist-worst-mistakes-b2818709.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://tfl.gov.uk/fares/how-to-pay-and-where-to-buy-tickets-and-oyster/pay-as-you-go/touching-in-and-out> - This official Transport for London (TfL) page explains the importance of always touching in and out on a yellow card reader at the start and end of your journey to ensure the correct fare is charged. It also highlights the necessity of using the same card or device for both touch-ins and touch-outs to avoid potential issues. The page provides detailed instructions on how to use contactless payment methods effectively on London's public transport system.
3. <https://visitorshop.tfl.gov.uk/en/visitor-oyster-card-vs-contactless-bank-card-which-saves-you-more-money-london> - This article compares the costs and benefits of using a Visitor Oyster card versus a contactless bank card for travel in London. It discusses potential foreign transaction fees and currency conversion charges when using international bank cards and highlights the advantages of the Visitor Oyster card, such as preloaded credit, daily and weekly fare capping, and exclusive discounts at various London attractions and restaurants.
4. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London_Underground_ticketing> - This Wikipedia page provides an overview of ticketing options for the London Underground, including the use of contactless payment methods. It details how contactless Visa, Maestro, MasterCard, and American Express debit and credit cards, as well as contactless-enabled smartphones and smartwatches, can be used for travel on the Underground and other TfL services. The page also explains the operational differences between contactless payments and Oyster cards, particularly in terms of fare calculation and daily capping.
5. <https://www.toptiplondon.com/transport/tickets/contactless-cards> - This guide explains how to use contactless debit or credit cards on London's public transport system. It outlines the process of tapping in and out at stations and buses, the daily and weekly fare capping, and the benefits of using contactless payments, such as avoiding the need to top up an Oyster card. The article also advises visitors to check with their card provider regarding potential overseas transaction charges when using non-UK issued contactless cards.
6. <https://plantriplondon.com/contactless-payment-london-transport/> - This article provides a comprehensive guide on using contactless payments for public transport in London. It details the fares applicable when using contactless payment methods, including peak and off-peak rates across different zones. The guide also explains the daily and weekly capping system, ensuring that passengers do not pay more than the maximum fare for their travel patterns. Additionally, it offers tips on using contactless cards effectively and highlights the benefits of this payment method over traditional tickets.
7. <https://support.visitorshop.tfl.gov.uk/hc/en-gb/articles/28090529777554-Visitor-Oyster-card-vs-Contactless-which-is-best-for-your-London-trip> - This official TfL support page compares the Visitor Oyster card and contactless payment methods to help visitors choose the best option for their London trip. It discusses the advantages of the Visitor Oyster card, such as preloaded credit, daily and weekly fare capping, and exclusive discounts at various London attractions and restaurants. The page also highlights considerations for using contactless payments, including potential overseas transaction fees and the need for each person aged 11 and over to have their own contactless card.