

10. royal london

Ever since King Edward the Confessor rebuilt Westminster Abbey as his burial place in the early 11th century, London has been synonymous with royalty. William the Conqueror, fresh from the Battle of Hastings, established his base here in 1066 – building the first parts of the Tower of London – and his descendants, which include such legendary monarchs as Henry VIII, Elizabeth I, Charles II, George IV, Victoria and current Queen Elizabeth II – have all made the city their home. Palaces and parklands built for royal pleasure can be seen throughout central London, and almost every street in Zone One boasts some regal connection. Royalty may not have the political power it once did, but – as the Queen's recent diamond jubilee celebrations showed – it is still capable of captivating and influencing British society as much as it ever did.



Start point: Paddington tube

End point: Green Park tube

Duration: 5 hours

- Come out of **Paddington tube** (the District Line branch) and turn right. Walk straight ahead along Praed Street to **St Mary's Hospital**, which was the birthplace – in 1982 and 1984 respectively – of Princes William and Harry; the sons of Prince Charles and Princess Diana, who are currently second and third in line to the British throne. Princess Anne, daughter of Queen Elizabeth II, also chose to have her children here – Peter and Zara Phillips were born in the maternity wing in 1977 and 1981.

- Turn around and walk back up Praed Street, then catch the westbound **27** from the **Paddington Station** stop, on the opposite side of the road to the Hilton London Paddington Hotel. The bus passes through the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea – which, as it was the birthplace of Queen Victoria, was granted its title upon her death in 1901 – and heads down Kensington Church Street. Get off at the **York House Place/Kensington High Street** stop, continue down the road and then turn right into York House Place. This road turns into the alley-like York Passage, which leads you to the edge of Kensington Gardens. Upon entering the park, you'll see **Kensington Palace** to your left. As well as being the current home of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge – William and Kate to casual royal-watchers – it was the official home of Diana, Princess of Wales, from 1981 until her death in 1997. Other previous incumbents have included William of Orange, Queen Anne, and Georges I and II. Queen Victoria – whose gleaming marble statue sits in front of the palace's eastern façade – was born here in 1819.

- Walk along the front of the palace and turn right down the Broad Walk path. Follow this all the way down to the southern edge of Kensington Gardens and, upon emerging from the park, turn right and catch the eastbound **9** from the **Palace Gate** stop. Look to the left for Sir George Gilbert Scott's **Albert Memorial** – erected in 1872 to commemorate Queen Victoria's late husband Prince Albert, who died of typhoid in 1861.

- After passing Hyde Park Corner, the bus heads up Piccadilly and past **Green Park** on the right. Unlike all of London's other royal parks, there are no formal flowerbeds in this green space. The reason for this, apparently, is that Catherine of Braganza, wife of King Charles II (who built the park in the 1660s, as he wanted to be able to walk from Buckingham Palace to the northwest corner of Kensington Gardens without having to leave royal parkland), discovered the famously unfaithful monarch had been picking flowers from here and presenting them to his mistresses. She then ordered that all existing flowers be uprooted and forbade the planting of any more. Unfortunately for the queen, a lack of easily reachable foliage did little to stop Charles' infidelities.

- When the bus turns off Piccadilly into St James's Street, look straight ahead for **St James's Palace**, the administrative centre of the British monarchy. Built in the 1530s by King Henry VIII, the palace was – until recently – the official residence of Prince Charles. It is now home to Princess Anne and Princess Beatrice of York. Charles now lives at **Clarence House**, the former home of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, between the walls of St James's Palace and the Mall behind. The bus continues along **Pall Mall**, the southern side of which nearly all belongs to the royal family's Crown

Estate. As late as 1960, the one exception was number 79 – which was granted by King Charles II to royal mistress Nell Gwyn.

● After leaving Pall Mall, the 9 heads down **Cockspur Street**, where a statue of King George III (subject of the film *The Madness of King George*) on horseback has stood since 1836. After going through Trafalgar Square, it passes another equestrian statue on the right at the top of **Whitehall** – this time of King Charles I, who was executed near here in 1649. Charles is situated on the spot where King Edward I erected the last of the 12 crosses to mark the funeral route of his wife Eleanor of Castile in 1294. The original cross was destroyed in the Civil War, but a replica stands in the forecourt of **Charing Cross Station**, which you pass almost immediately on the right.

● Get off the bus at the **Aldwych/Drury Lane** stop and walk back down Aldwych. Turn right into Catherine Street. The **Theatre Royal Drury Lane**, which has its main entrance at the top of this road, has as many royal connections as its title would suggest. It was here, in 1668, that Charles II met his most famous lover Nell Gwyn, an actress who had worked her way up from mere orange-seller; and, not to be outdone by his ancestor, the Prince Regent (later George IV) first set eyes on actress Mary Robinson here in 1779. She went on to become his mistress for the next two years, before being unceremoniously – and very publicly – dumped.

● Catch the eastbound **RV1** from the **Covent Garden/Catherine Street** stop, which takes you past **Somerset House** – once the residence of Queen Elizabeth I, James I, Charles I and Charles II before it was extensively renovated by Sir Christopher Wren in the late 17th century – and over the Thames into Southwark. After the bus recrosses the river at Tower Bridge, get off at the **Tower of London** stop. This famous castle, which you can see to the left, has seen more than 1,000 years of royal history. William the Conqueror built the **White Tower** here in 1078 and the fortifications were expanded and developed by later medieval monarchs. It was here that 12-year-old King Edward V and his 10-year-old brother – the ‘princes in the tower’ – disappeared in 1483, conveniently leaving the throne to their uncle Richard III; and where Anne Boleyn, second wife of Henry VIII, was beheaded by sword in 1536. In 1554, Anne’s daughter, Queen Elizabeth I, was imprisoned here by her half-sister Mary before she ascended to the throne.

● Walk around the castle onto Tower Hill, passing all the open-top tourist bus stops, and catch the westbound **15** from **The Tower of London** stop. The bus takes you past **St Paul’s Cathedral**, where Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer were married in 1981, and along Fleet Street. Look to the right immediately after the Dundee Courier building at number 186, and you will see a statue of Queen Elizabeth I set high into the wall of **St Dunstan in the West** church. This 1586 effigy – the only existing one made of the queen in her lifetime – was originally part of the Ludgate, but was moved here in 1760 when the gate was demolished.

● Shortly after the bus passes **St Martin in the Fields** – parish church of the royal family and final resting place of Nell Gwyn – on the right, get off at the **Trafalgar Square** stop. Walk back in the direction the bus came from and turn right under Admiralty Arch. Walk straight down The Mall, the long, straight road that leads directly to **Buckingham Palace** – official London residence of the monarch since 1837. The balcony at the front of the palace is, of course, where the royal family gather to celebrate on public occasions – most recently for the wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton, and the Queen’s diamond jubilee.

● Turn left at the palace then left again up Birdcage Walk, and stroll all the way to Parliament Square. **Westminster Abbey**, on the right-hand side of the square, was first earmarked as a royal burial church in 1042 by Edward the Confessor – who was interred here in 1066 – and notable tombs include those of Anne of Cleves, Elizabeth I, James I and Charles II. The abbey has since served as a place of coronation for every British monarch since the crownings of Harold and William the Conqueror in 1066. It has also been the scene of several royal weddings, beginning with that of Henry I and Matilda of Scotland in 1100 and ending with the 2011 nuptials of Prince William and Kate Middleton. To the left of the abbey, the **Palace of Westminster** – more commonly known as the Houses of Parliament – was the main royal residence in London until 1512. Nowadays, the monarch is forbidden from entering its principal chamber, the House of Commons; a tradition that dates back to 1642 and a raging King Charles I’s attempt to force his way in to arrest anti-royalist MPs. It wasn’t the last time he lost his head.

● Walk up Whitehall (the road to the left of the one on which you entered Parliament Square) and catch the northbound **3, 12, 88, 159** or **453** from the **Parliament Square** stop all the way to the **Oxford Circus Station** or **Margaret Street/Oxford Circus** stops. Just after the bus turns from Piccadilly Circus onto Regent Street, look left for a glimpse of **Chinawhite**, the upmarket nightclub that was once frequented by Prince Harry.

● Cross the road and catch the southbound **G2** from the identically named stop on the other side. This bus heads back down Regent Street before turning right down Conduit Street into Mayfair. When the road becomes **Bruton Street**, look to the left for number 17 – now a branch of Regus office solutions – which is where Queen Elizabeth II was born on 21 April, 1926. Get off the bus at the **Green Park Station** stop, continue walking along Piccadilly, then turn right up White Horse Street. End your royal journey with a well-deserved drink at the suitably named **King’s Arms** in Shepherd Market.