

PART ONE

PLANNING *your* VISIT *to* ENGLAND

HOW FAR *in* ADVANCE SHOULD YOU PLAN?

THERE ARE ADVANTAGES TO PLANNING YOUR TRIP several weeks or even months in advance. Airline fares are generally lower if you book at least a month ahead. You may also lock into lower prices for air/hotel packages or find a super price for a hotel. Advance hotel planning is usually a must if you are traveling to London or any of England's top resort areas (Cornwall, the Cotswolds, and the Lake District among them) in the high-season months from Easter through August. We discuss Internet resources in "Web Sites for Further Research" (page 31), but keep in mind just how valuable the Web can be in planning your trip to England. Throughout this book, we provide Web sites for tourist-information offices, hotels, and tour companies, and we strongly suggest that you check them out when planning your trip.

On the other hand, you may come across a last-minute airline deal that saves you bundles of money but requires that you leave on short notice (see "Web Sites for Further Research"; many sites lower prices close to the date of departure, so if you're ready to hop on a plane, you can save a good amount). Before you act on any spur-of-the-moment airline deals, make certain that all the basic details of your trip are taken care of, especially the hotel part—we often hear of travelers who get a terrific last-minute airfare to London but end up paying a fortune for a hotel. Keep in mind, too, that airfares don't always come down. You might wait only to find out that the fares actually increased.

WHEN *to* GO

IF THIS IS GOING TO BE YOUR FIRST TRIP to England and you want to visit historic castles, manor houses, and glorious gardens, the

best time to travel is from April through October. All the major attractions throughout the country are open daily, or almost daily, during these months. Summer days are delightfully long in England, with daylight remaining until 9 or 10 p.m. The downside is that this is also the time when crowds tend to be densest, so you may be kept waiting in line at popular attractions, or have trouble finding a hotel if you haven't booked one in advance. London, on the other hand, is a year-round destination, with so much to see and do that you can have a great time during any season. Culturally, the city is busiest from September through June—the months when opera, ballet, and symphony performances are most plentiful—but during the summer, there are outdoor festivals, and the parks are green oases that are most welcome after a day of trudging through the streets. If you're going to London for theater, any time of year will do.

Autumn is a lovely time to visit England: the crowds thin out and the cultural calendar picks up steam, but attractions close earlier. In fact, most historic properties owned by the National Trust close in early November and remain closed until sometime in March. Though the gardens and grounds of the great manor houses often remain open year-round, you have to be a dedicated gardener to appreciate the beauty of an empty flowerbed, bare trees, and sodden paths.

Winter can be a special time to visit England, too, but be prepared for early twilights (3:30 p.m.), lots of gray skies, and very unpredictable weather—that is, weather that is even more unpredictable than usual. London decks itself out in high style for Christmas, which is one of its prime tourist seasons. Throughout the country, old towns and villages spruce themselves up for the holiday season, too, with results that are sometimes positively Dickensian. Be aware, however, that the entire country basically shuts down from December 24 to December 26.

SEASONAL PRICING

THERE'S NO GETTING AROUND THE FACT that England is an expensive country to visit. London hotel and restaurant prices are on a par with New York's. Hotels are somewhat less expensive outside of London, especially if you stay at a bed-and-breakfast, but eating out in a good restaurant anywhere in the country is always pricey. Admission prices for top attractions are also higher than in other European countries. There is some good news, though—thanks to an infusion of cash from the national lottery, museums administered by the national government are now free, meaning you can pop into such top attractions as the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and the National Railway Museum in York without paying a cent.

There are two high seasons in England: from Easter through August, and for about two weeks before Christmas. You're more likely to find better deals on hotels during the shoulder seasons of January to March and mid-September to mid-December. During these periods hotel prices may drop by 20% or more and airfares are

generally cheaper. In fact, airfares to England are amazingly low in January and February, when you can often travel from New York to London for as little as \$250—round-trip! Winter hotel prices are especially reasonable in resort areas like the Cotswolds.

To give you a very rough idea of what things cost in England, here's a list of some approximate prices, given in U.S. dollars:

Transfers to and from airport in London	\$6–\$60 one way
Medium-range hotel (top of the range is for London)	\$200–\$400 per night
Meal for two in an upscale restaurant (without wine)	\$50 and up
Pub meal for two (without wine)	\$20–\$30
Theater ticket for a show in London's West End or in a well-respected theater outside London	\$35–\$70
Admission to top attractions throughout the country	\$10–\$20

WEATHER

IN ENGLAND, YOU CAN'T COUNT ON HAVING GOOD WEATHER at any season, but the climate is *generally* mild year-round. Spring comes earliest to Cornwall in the west, where shrubs, trees, and bulbs flower as early as March. Daffodils, England's quintessential spring-time flower, appear throughout the country in April. The great English gardens generally hit their peak in May and June, as do the ancient hedgerows in the countryside.

Summer can be hot and humid, or cold and drizzly, or pleasantly warm with blue skies. It's the only time when you can reasonably expect to sit outside for a meal or a drink at a London cafe or a country pub. Bear in mind that many English hotels, even many in London, do not have air-conditioning. Air pollution can be a problem in London during the summer, too.

Autumn, one of the prettiest times to visit, is sometimes blessed with what Americans call Indian summer, but you cannot count on this. Winter generally brings rain and sleet; if it snows, the snow does

LONDON'S AVERAGE TEMPERATURES AND RAINFALL

MONTH	TEMPERATURE FAHRENHEIT/CELSIUS	RAINFALL (INCHES)	MONTH	TEMPERATURE FAHRENHEIT/CELSIUS	RAINFALL (INCHES)
January	40°F/4°C	2.1"	July	64°F/18°C	2.2"
February	40°F/4°C	1.6"	August	64°F/18°C	2.3"
March	44°F/7°C	1.5"	September	59°F/15°C	1.9"
April	49°F/9°C	1.5"	October	52°F/11°C	2.2"
May	55°F/13°C	1.8"	November	46°F/8°C	2.5"
June	61°F/16°C	1.8"	December	42°F/6°C	1.9"

not stay on the ground for long except for the highest peaks in the Lake District.

TRAVEL DEALS *and* PACKAGE TOURS

START WITH YOUR LOCAL TRAVEL AGENT

FINDING A GOOD TRAVEL AGENT TO HELP with trip planning is a boon to any traveler. A travel agent can save you time and money by booking your flights, scouting out special package deals, reserving hotels, arranging car rentals, and issuing BritRail passes. If you don't already have a travel agent, ask your friends if they can recommend one. Or, contact the **American Society of Travel Agents** 1101 King Street, Suite 200, Alexandria, VA 22314; ☎ 703-739-2782; **www.astanet.com**), or the Association of Canadian Travel Agents (130 Albert Street, Suite 1705, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5G4; **www.acta.ca**). Ask the travel agent if he or she has experience with booking trips to England, or has visited the country—if the answer is no, find someone else. You are not charged for a travel agent's services—although this could change in the future, now that agents no longer receive the same kind of commissions from airlines and hotels.

CHECK THE TRAVEL SECTION OF YOUR LOCAL NEWSPAPER

ONE OF YOUR BEST SOURCES of information on package tours to England is the travel section of your local newspaper. England (especially London) is a popular destination, and there are frequently special money-saving deals that combine airfare and hotel costs. The paper may also advertise special cut-rate charter flights to London. Blackout dates and a host of restrictions generally apply to these offers.

SURF THE WEB

WITH ALL THE INFORMATION that's available on the Web, more and more travelers are acting as their own travel agents. By using the Web, you can find and book special airline fares, surf for discounted hotel rooms (see Part Three, Lodging, Dining, and Shopping in England, for specific Web sites), order BritRail passes, and much more. Special low prices and seasonal deals are often available only on the Web.

Many travel-related Web sites offer reservations and tickets for airlines, plus reservation and purchase capabilities for hotels and car-rental companies. Some to check out are **Travelocity** (**www.travelocity.com**), **Expedia Travel** (**www.expedia.com**), **Yahoo! Travel** (**www.travel.yahoo.com**), **Cheap Tickets** (**www.cheaptickets.com**), **Frommers** (**www.frommers.com**), and **Orbitz** (**www.orbitz.com**). We find some of the lowest prices available on **Hotwire** (**www.hotwire.com**), but there's a catch—you provide the

dates you want to travel, Hotwire comes up with a fare, and you buy the ticket—but you don't know departure times or the airlines until you've finalized the purchase. Many other Web sites offer similar approaches. Likewise, you can also get some great deals on **Priceline** (www.priceline.com)—you provide the price you want to pay, along with your credit card info; if your price is accepted, your credit card is charged before you know departure times and airlines.

It's also useful to check out the Web sites for the airlines flying to England. Frequently they post special discounts that are not available except by reserving online. Some airlines will send you weekly e-newsletters and special last-minute e-fares, including specials for weekend travel from major North American hubs to London.

unofficial TIP

The airlines are among your best sources for finding package tours to England.

When searching for fares on the Web, whether on a site of one of the travel-service providers above or an airline's site, try being flexible to save money. For example, you might bring down the cost considerably by trying different dates (flights on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday are generally, but not always, the least expensive); flying out of or into different airports (fares can vary considerably, even to and from airports in the same metropolitan region); or making a stopover, which often lowers rates considerably.

There's no reason why you shouldn't call an airline directly—except for long waits on the phone and the possibility that you may get a cheaper deal by using the Web. If you call the airline, be prepared to ask questions such as “Will this flight cost less if I fly on a different day of the week, or at a different time?” and “What is the cancellation policy if I can't use the tickets I've already paid for on my credit card?” Your goal is to get the lowest fare to your destination. You can be direct and simply ask what the lowest fare is from your city to London. Chances are,

AIRLINE CONTACT INFORMATION FOR NORTH AMERICA

Air Canada	☎ 888-247-2262	www.aircanada.com
Air India	☎ 800-223-7776	www.airindia.com
American Airlines	☎ 800-433-7300	www.aa.com
British Airways	☎ 800-AIRWAYS	www.britishairways.com
Continental Airlines	☎ 800-231-0856	www.flycontinental.com
Delta Air Lines	☎ 800-241-4141	www.delta.com
Icelandair	☎ 800-223-5500	www.icelandair.com
Northwest Airlines	☎ 800-447-4747	www.nwa.com
United Airlines	☎ 800-538-2929	www.ual.com
U.S. Airways	☎ 800-428-4322	www.usairways.com
Virgin Atlantic Airways	☎ 800-821-5438	www.virgin-atlantic.com

the service rep will tell you; if he or she won't, hang up and try again. If you've done some comparison shopping, the airline will usually match the lowest fare you've already found for specific flights on their airline.

PACKAGES VERSUS ESCORTED TOURS

ESCORTED TOURS DIFFER FROM PACKAGE TOURS in several fundamental ways. With a package tour, you generally get your airfare and hotel and are left on your own to tour at your leisure (and expense). Escorted tours offer full-service itineraries that generally include transfers to your hotel(s), meals, sightseeing, nightlife, and the like. Dozens of companies offer escorted tours to London and destinations in the rest of England. Many cater to special interests, such as theater or history; others are more general. A good travel agent can help you find a tour that suits your particular interests. It's also a good idea to scan the travel section in your local paper for tour possibilities. American Express and many of the airlines offer escorted tours.

It's important to know the basics of what is and is not offered on an escorted tour before you sign up. Call the tour operator and ask questions: When and how much do you pay? Will the trip be canceled if not enough people sign up? If so, what must you do to get a refund? You'll also want to know how big the group will be, and if the daily schedule is reasonable or so jam-packed that you won't have time to breathe. Don't assume that anything not specifically spelled out is included in your fee. For example, you may have to pay to get yourself to or from the airport, or admission to attractions may not be included.

Cosmos (www.cosmos.com), **Trafalgar Tours** (www.trafalgartours.com), and **Maupintour** (www.maupintour.com) are some of the major companies that offer escorted tours to London and the rest of England.

GATHERING INFORMATION

VISIT BRITAIN OFFICES

FOR GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT ENGLAND, contact these offices or visit www.visitbritain.com.

In North America

Visit Britain

551 Fifth Avenue, Suite 701
New York, NY 10176-0799

☎ 800-462-2748; FAX 212-986-1188

In Australia

Visit Britain

Level 2

15 Blue Street

North Sydney, NSW 2060

☎ 02-9021-4400; FAX 02-9021-4499

In New Zealand

Visit Britain

British Consulate
Level 17, 1AG House

151 Queen Street
Auckland

☎ 800-462-2748; FAX 212-986-1188

☎ 0800-700-741 (toll free)

FAX 09-377-6965

REGIONAL TOURIST BOARDS IN ENGLAND

FOR MORE SPECIFIC INFORMATION on a particular region, contact the following regional tourist boards. We strongly recommend that you visit their excellent and information-packed Web sites before you try contacting them by mail or phone.

Cumbria (the Lake District) Tourist Board

Ashleigh
Holly Road
Windermere, Cumbria LA23 2AQ
☎ 01539-444-44

www.cumbria-the-lake-district.co.uk

East of England Tourist Board

Toppesfield Hall
Hadleigh, Suffolk IP7 5DN
☎ 0870-225-4890

www.eastofenglandtouristboard.com

Heart of England Tourist Board

Woodside
Larkhill Road
Worcester WR5 2E2
☎ 01905-763-436

www.visitheartofengland.com

North West England Tourist Board

Swan House
Swan Meadow Road
Wigan Pier, Wigan WN3 5BB
☎ 01942-821-222

www.visitnorthwest.com

South East England Tourist Board

The Old Brew House
Warwick Park
Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN2 5TU
☎ 01892-540-766

www.southeastengland.uk.com

Southern Tourist Board

40 Chamberlayne Road
Eastleigh, Hampshire SO50 5JH
☎ 01703-620-006

www.southerntb.co.uk

West Country Tourist Board

60 St. David's Hill
Exeter, Devon EX4 4SY
☎ 01392-425-426

www.westcountrynow.com

Yorkshire Tourist Board

312 Tadcaster Road
York YO24 1GS
☎ 01904-707-961

www.ytb.org.uk

TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRES

YOUR BEST SOURCE OF UP-TO-DATE INFORMATION in any city or town is the Tourist Information Centre. You'll find addresses for them in every "Planning Your Visit to . . ." section in the regional chapters later on. Tourist Information Centres are always centrally located, usually in the busiest areas of a city or town. In larger cities, you'll often find a branch in the train station. What are they good for? First and foremost, they offer easy-to-use maps and guides to the city or town. These local sightseeing maps used to be free, but nowadays you usually have to pay for them, generally £1 or less for a local map. You'll also find racks of brochures on local attractions. Something might catch your fancy, but remember that the brochures are advertisements—the fact that they are in a Tourist Information Centre doesn't automatically mean they're worth your time or money. There will often be a currency exchange window in the Tourist Information Centre, and a convenient hotel-booking

service. For hotel booking there's usually a fee (10% of room cost) that is refunded when you pay for your room. Some Tourist Information Centres have a small bookstore stocked with titles of local interest, regional maps and guides, and souvenirs.

The best service any of these centers can provide is personalized advice from the locals who work in them. In general, staffers aren't allowed to recommend specific hotels and restaurants, but they can lead you to choices within your price range, and they are often a font of knowledge on local walks and outings, nearby towns and villages, and other insider info that might enhance your visit. Do these folks a favor by making a list of what you need to know before you get to the counter—tourist offices are often understaffed by overworked employees who are genuinely eager to make your stay in England pleasant.

unofficial TIP
Many Tourist Information Centres offer free or low-cost guided walks of a city or town. We advise joining one of these informative tours if you have the time.

WEB SITES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

THE WEB IS AN INVALUABLE TOOL when it comes to travel research, so even if you don't have Web access at home, we suggest you arrange to

OUR FAVORITE TRAVEL SITES

www.acprailnet.com/britrail Online source for rail passes and point-to-point tickets.

www.nationaltrust.org.uk and **www.english-heritage.org.uk** Info on hundreds of historic properties throughout England.

www.nationalexpress.com Timetables and fares for the National Express coach network.

www.guardianunlimited.co.uk *The Guardian* and *The Observer* newspapers online.

www.visitlondon.com and **www.londontown.com** Up-to-the-minute info on events, hotels, restaurants, sightseeing, exhibits, and more in London.

www.metoffice.gov.uk The official line on the weather.

www.nationalrail.com Timetables, information, and fares for rail travel throughout Britain.

www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk Free downloadable maps for all of Great Britain.

www.raileurope.com A good and well-organized source for train passes, travel cards, and other getting-around essentials.

www.ramblers.org.uk All you need to know about walking in England, from trail listings to guided walks to walking holidays.

www.royal.gov.uk Info on royal palaces, castles, and museums, and other links; especially fun for royal watchers.

www.traveline.org.uk Timetables and other info for all travel by rail, air, coach, bus, ferry, and tram within the United Kingdom.

www.uk250.co.uk Links to museums, galleries, and other cultural institutions throughout England—thousands of U.K.-related Web sites in 250 categories.

spend some time in front of a computer, perhaps one of those available for free use at local libraries. Web sites often contain the most up-to-date information (provided the site is well maintained)—hotels, for instance, list current prices and discounts (and provide pictures of their rooms), and attraction Web sites provide current prices and opening and closing times. We list Web sites whenever possible throughout this guide.

The Web sites on the previous page should be able to provide you with enough info, as well as links to other sites, to keep you glued to your computer for weeks. We also recommend that you contact the tourist-board Web sites on page 30, as well as the sites we list throughout this guide for Visitor Information Centres in cities, towns, national parks, and elsewhere; you'll find a wealth of information specific to the places you most want to visit.

BRITISH CONSULAR OFFICES

BRITISH CONSULATES ABROAD CAN ADVISE YOU on visas for work or study in England and address many other legal and administrative questions prior to your trip.

IN THE UNITED STATES (www.britainusa.com)

British Consulate General

Georgia Pacific Centre, Suite 3400
133 Peachtree Street NE
Atlanta, GA 30303

☎ 404-954-7700; FAX 404-954-7702

British Consulate General

1 Memorial Drive, Suite 1500
Cambridge, MA 02142

☎ 617-245-4500; FAX 617-621-0220

British Consulate General

The Wrigley Building, 13th Floor
400 North Michigan Avenue
Chicago, IL 60611

☎ 312-970-3800; FAX 312-970-3852

British Consulate

2911 Turtle Creek Boulevard
Suite 940
Dallas, TX 75219

☎ 214-521-4090; FAX 214-521-4807
bc1@airmail.net

British Consulate

World Trade Center
1675 Broadway, Suite 1030
Denver, CO 80202

☎ 303-592-5200; FAX 303-592-5209

British Consulate General

Wells Fargo Plaza, 19th Floor
1000 Louisiana, Suite 1900
Houston, TX 77002

☎ 713-659-6270; FAX 713-659-7094

British Consulate General

11766 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 1200
Los Angeles, CA 90025-6538

☎ 310-481-0031; FAX 310-481-2960

Visa telephone ☎ 310-481-2900

Visa FAX 310-481-2961

British Consulate

Brickell Bay Office Tower
1001 Brickell Bay Drive, Suite 2800
Miami, FL 33131

☎ 305-374-1522; FAX 305-374-8196

British Consulate General

845 Third Avenue
New York, NY 10022

☎ 212-745-0200; FAX 212-754-3062

British Consulate General

1 Sansome Street, Suite 850
San Francisco, CA 94104

☎ 415-617-1300; FAX 415-434-2018

British Consulate

900 Fourth Avenue, Suite 3001
Seattle, WA 98164

☎ 206-622-9255; FAX 206-622-4728

IN CANADA**(www.britain-in-canada.org)****Honorary British Consul**

British Consulate

1 Canal Street

Dartmouth, Nova Scotia B2Y 3YN

☎ 902-461-1381; FAX 902-465-2578

British Consulate General

Suite 4200

1000 De La Gauchetière West

Montreal, Québec H3B 4W5

☎ 514-866-5863; FAX 514-866-0202

Honorary British Consul

British Consulate

Le Complexe St-Amable

700-1150 Claire-Fontaine

Québec City, Québec G1R 5G4

☎ 418-521-3000; FAX 418-521-3099

Honorary British Consul

British Consulate

PO Box 452, Station C

St. John's, Newfoundland A1C 5K4

☎ 709-579-2002; FAX 709-579-0475

British Consulate General

777 Bay Street

Suite 2800, College Park

Toronto, Ontario M5G 2G2

☎ 416-593-1290; FAX 416-593-1229

British Consulate General

1111 Melville Street, Suite 800

Vancouver, British Columbia V6E 4V6

☎ 604-683-4421; FAX 604-681-0693

Honorary British Consul

British Consulate

229 Athlone Drive

Winnipeg, Manitoba R3J 3L6

☎ 204-896-1380; FAX 204-269-3025

WHAT to PACK

AS LITTLE AS POSSIBLE. Be brave. Resist the urge to cram your entire closet into your luggage. Take just *one suitcase*, preferably the kind with wheels. Augment that with a backpack or some kind of useful, zippered, waterproof carry-all. Add a practical purse or bag that you can sling over your shoulder and use every day.

Keep in mind that not all English hotels have elevators or porters. In many, especially smaller, less expensive establishments and bed-and-breakfasts, you're going to be lugging your own bags. Remember, too, that airlines now allow only one carry-on bag plus a purse, briefcase, or laptop. They are strict about this, and you will have to go through various security checkpoints before boarding with your personal luggage. Leave behind as many electric and electronic doodads as you can survive without; you'll have to squeeze them into your luggage, and you'll have to get a special adapter plug to use or recharge them in England.

Remember, too, that in the wake of September 11, the airlines now confiscate all sharp objects, no matter how innocuous, if they are in your carry-on luggage. This includes tiny scissors, knitting and hypodermic needles (unless you have a note from your doctor explaining why you need one), corkscrews, Swiss Army or any kind of knife, and sporting equipment. And one more thing: If you forgot something, you have a good excuse to slip into a shop and indulge in a "Made in Britain" item.

PASSPORTS AND VISAS

IF YOU ARE AN AMERICAN, CANADIAN, AUSTRALIAN, OR New Zealand tourist visiting the United Kingdom for less than three

months, a valid passport is the only legal form of identification you'll need to enter the country. Visas are required for any stay over three months. The U.S. State Department's Consular Affairs Web site (www.travel.state.gov) provides exhaustive information about passports (including a downloadable application), customs, and other government-regulated aspects of travel for U.S. citizens. Copy the information page of your passport, and keep it in your luggage to expedite replacement in case your passport gets lost or stolen.

HOW TO DRESS

SINCE WEATHER IN ENGLAND IS SO UNPREDICTABLE, it's wise to think in terms of layers of clothing. Bring mix-and-match coordinates that you can shed or add to as needed. Even in the summer, a sweater will be welcome. A waterproof coat or jacket with a hood will come in handy, or bring a separate rainproof hat and/or folding umbrella. A comfy and casual pair of waterproof loafers or walking shoes is a good idea. If you're traveling to England in the winter months, bring gloves, a scarf, and a warm coat.

A WORD ON TOURIST GARB

THE BRITS ARE PRETTY CASUAL ABOUT THEIR CLOTHES, so wearing a pair of blue jeans while sightseeing will not set you apart as a gauche tourist. But add a pair of dirty running shoes and a baseball cap and try to enter a nice restaurant, and they'll instantly peg you as an outsider and possibly suggest that you'd enjoy dining elsewhere. If you're planning to eat in good restaurants, be aware that a "smart but casual" dress code generally applies. This doesn't mean gents have to wear a tie, but they do have to wear a jacket, slacks, and something other than running shoes. Women should wear a dress or good slacks and top. There are still a few places where gentlemen are required to wear a coat and tie, but not many. You can get away with wearing just about anything to the theater, or even the opera, but you'll be in a minority if you show up in a running suit or jeans. When it comes to fashion, London is more sophisticated than the rest of England, and Londoners like to dress up for their evenings out.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

kids TRAVELING WITH CHILDREN

WE HAVE A RATING SYSTEM in our attraction profiles that attempts to gauge suitability for children and adults of various ages, but all children have different interests and differing levels of tolerance for museums and attractions. All in all, though, we find that kids love England—the common language provides a level of comfort, there are enough castles and suits of armor around to

satisfy romantic notions of days of yore, and a ride on a double-decker bus or in a London taxi can be sheer heaven.

You'll find kid-friendly amusements throughout England. Audio guides are available at many historic castles and palaces, making them more fun and interesting for children ages nine or ten and up. Something as low-tech and old-fashioned as the Model Village in Bourton-on-the-Water can also be enchanting to children. If your kids are resistant to visiting England, say the two magic words: "Harry Potter." That's usually all that's necessary to interest any kid in England nowadays.

If you're traveling as a family, you can usually buy money-saving "Family Tickets" at the major attractions. These tickets are available for two adults and two children (three children in some cases). Kids under age 5 get in free almost everywhere. Finally, remember that kids get jet lag, too, so plan your first day accordingly.

TRAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES

MANY BUT NOT ALL ENGLISH ATTRACTIONS are accessible to disabled visitors in wheelchairs. There are portions of some historic properties that cannot be changed to accommodate chairs. Before visiting any major attraction in England, you need to call ahead or check out an attraction's Web site (which we provide) to find out what, if any, arrangements have been made for wheelchairs. We try to give information relevant to travelers with disabilities throughout this guide.

Accommodations pose another problem. Bed-and-breakfasts and many hotels occupy historic buildings with steep, narrow staircases, no elevators, and doors that are too narrow for a wheelchair. Many older hotels, though, are outfitting rooms on the ground floor for travelers with special needs, and larger and newer hotels and hotel chains usually have some rooms designed for the disabled.

Restaurants, too, may have stairways and no ramps. The size and layout of some restaurants in old quarters make it difficult for them to accommodate wheelchairs. The following list of resources will help you plan your trip:

- *Access to the Underground*, a brochure published by London Transport, is available at tube stations or by writing the London Transport Unit for Disabled Visitors, 172 Buckingham Palace Road, London, SW1 9TN.
- *Artsline*, a charitable organization that provides access information for cultural institutions and entertainment and arts venues, distributes *Access in London*, researched by disabled people and updated regularly. Call ☎ 0207-388-2227 or visit www.artsline.org.uk.
- *Can Be Done* is a tour operator specializing in holidays and tours in Britain and beyond for travelers with disabilities; call ☎ 0208-907-2400 or visit www.canbedone.co.uk.
- *Flying Wheels* is a U.S.-based organization that leads many overseas tours for travelers with disabilities, including many to England. For

information, write to Flying Wheels, 143 West Bridge Street, Owatonna, MN 55060; call ☎ 507-451-5005 or visit www.flyingwheelstravel.com.

- *Holiday Care Service* offers advice on disabled-friendly lodging throughout Britain, and also operates a booking service; call ☎ 0129-377-4535 or visit www.holidaycare.org.uk.
- *Information for Wheelchair Users Visiting London* is a pamphlet that you can find in any tourist office in London.
- *The National Trust* provides accessibility information for its more than 300 historic buildings and gardens at www.nationaltrust.org.uk.

SENIOR TRAVELERS

IF YOU'RE A SENIOR WHO GETS AROUND EASILY, England won't present any particular problems for you. If you have any mobility or health issues, be aware that not all hotels have elevators, particularly less expensive bed-and-breakfasts. Before reserving a hotel room, ask whether or not you'll have access to an elevator, or lift, as it's called in England.

Being a senior may entitle you to some money-saving travel bargains, such as lower prices for BritRail passes and reduced admission at theaters, museums, and other attractions. Always ask, even if a reduction isn't posted; we give prices for seniors throughout this guide. Carrying ID with proof of age can pay off in all these situations. You may find that some discounts, such as public transportation reductions in London, are available only to U.K. residents. Most of the major U.S. domestic airlines, including American, United, and Continental, offer discount programs for senior travelers—ask before booking your flight.

The following sources can provide information on discounts and other benefits for seniors:

AARP (American Association of Retired Persons); 601 E Street NW, Washington, DC 20049; ☎ 888-687-2277; www.aarp.org) Offers member discounts on car rentals and hotels; \$12.50 yearly memberships (with reduced rates for larger memberships).

ELDERHOSTEL (75 Federal Street, Boston, MA 02110-1941; ☎ 800-454-5768; www.elderhostel.org) Offers people 55 and over a variety of university-based education programs in London and throughout England. These courses are value-packed, hassle-free ways to learn while traveling. The price includes airfare, accommodations, meals, tuition, tips, and insurance. And you'll be glad to know that there are no grades. Popular London offerings have included "Inside the Parliament," "Legal London," "Classical Music and Opera in London," and "Treasures of London Galleries."

GRAND (Circle Travel 347 Congress Street, Boston, MA 02210; ☎ 800-959-0405; www.gct.com) Another agency that escorts tours for mature travelers. Call or go online to order a copy of the publication *101 Tips for the Mature Traveler*.

GAY AND LESBIAN TRAVELERS

THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT encourages gay tourism. Check out the “Gay Britain” section of the Visit Britain Web site (www.visitbritain.com) for information on gay venues and events throughout England.

Gay theaters, shops, pubs (more than 100), discos, and community groups of all sorts abound in London. Old Compton Street in Soho is filled with dozens of gay pubs, restaurants, and upscale bars and cafes; the Earl’s Court area, long a community bastion, is home to gay and lesbian hotels and restaurants. Brighton, the resort town on the Sussex coast, is also known for its gay pub and club scene and its huge Gay Pride parade and celebrations in June, as is Manchester, in the Midlands. Elsewhere in the country, at least in the larger cities, there’s usually a gay pub or two, and nightspots with at least one gay-friendly night a week.

Lesbian and gay events in London include the **London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival** in March, the **Pride Parade** and celebrations in June, and the big outdoor bash known as **Summer Rites** in August. You can obtain information and dates by phone or online from the **London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard** (call ☎ 0207-837-7324; www.lgs.org.uk).

Several gay magazines, useful for their listings and news coverage, are available in London’s gay pubs, clubs, bars, and cafes. The most popular are *Boyz*, *Pink Paper*, and *QX (Queer Xtra)*; (www.qxmag.co.uk). *Gay Times* (www.gaytimes.co.uk) is a monthly news-oriented mag available at most newsagents. Indispensable for its city-wide listings in London (including gay listings), *Time Out* appears at newsagents on Wednesdays. **Gay’s the Word** in London (66 Marchmont Street, WC1; ☎ 0207-278-7654; tube: Russell Square), the city’s only all-around gay and lesbian bookstore, stocks a selection of new and used books and current periodicals. For a thorough online guide to gay clubs, restaurants, hotels, and events in London, visit www.gaylondon.co.uk.

OTHER TRAVEL CONCERNS

CELL PHONES

HAVING A CELL PHONE AT THE READY while you’re visiting England is convenient, but be prepared for some challenges. First, the cell phone you use in the United States probably won’t work in England. That’s because cell phones in England operate on a frequency and a network—the Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM)—that your phone probably doesn’t support. Plus, even if you have the right equipment, your carrier may not have global roaming arrangements that will allow you to receive calls overseas. If it does, you will probably pay at least several dollars a minute for the privilege.

So consider some options. One is to rent a GSM phone and a calling plan geared for use in the United Kingdom, either before you leave home or in England once you arrive. You’ll find several cell-phone

rental outlets at Heathrow, Gatwick, Manchester, and other British airports, and many Britain-based firms will deliver a cell phone to your hotel. Many U.S.-based firms also rent cell phones and offer calling plans for use in England (some offer special plans through rental-car agencies, so ask when renting your car). They will usually ship the phone to your home. The disadvantage of these rentals is that you will be using a phone number different from your regular cell-phone number, and you will be incurring some considerable expense: a weekly rental fee for the phone, plus hefty fees for each incoming and outgoing call. A cheaper alternative is to rent or buy a GSM phone and use a prepaid SIM (subscriber-identity module), or “smart card,” the removable computer chip that stores the phone number, messages, and settings. You can buy a SIM for use specifically in England or one that can be used in other countries as well. The advantage of using a prepaid SIM is that incoming calls are much cheaper than they are with carrier plans, but they’re cheapest when you buy a module for use in England only. Many GSM phones will work with any SIM, but be aware that some wireless providers lock their phones—that is, they configure them to work only with the SIMs they supply—so check whether your phone is locked or unlocked before you buy.

To buy a GSM phone for use in England, you can check out **UStronics.com** (580 Eighth Avenue, New York, NY 10018; ☎ 800-765-0020; www.ustronics.com). To rent a GSM phone in the United States for use in England (with calling plan), try **Cellhire USA** (45 Broadway, New York, NY 10006 [and other U.S. locations]; ☎ 877-244-7242; www.cellhire.com). To rent a mobile phone in England, contact Rent a Mobile Phone (191–192 Temple Chambers, London EC4Y 0DB; ☎ 0207-353-7705; www.rent-mobile-phone.com). To purchase SIM cards for use in England or multiple countries, check out **Telestial** (1804 Garnet Avenue, San Diego, CA 92109; ☎ 800-707-0031; www.telestial.com).

ELECTRICITY

LEAVE ALL BUT THE MOST ESSENTIAL ELECTRIC GADGETS and appliances at home. The electricity supply in England is 220 volts AC, which will blow out any American 110-volt appliance you may have unless it is plugged into a transformer. British outlets are made for large three-prong plugs; you will also need to get an adapter, available at any hardware store, chemist (drugstore), supermarket, or gadget store. *Don't plug anything in until you've checked the voltage on the transformer!* It should be set to “Input AC 110 volt, output AC 220 volt.” You’ll know by the pop, flash, and smoke if you got it wrong. You can equip yourself with transformers and adapters before you leave home or once you arrive in England at most major electronic stores, or order them online from Web vendors such as www.shopper.cnet.com, www.shopping.com, and www.tempestcom.com.

EMBASSIES AND HIGH COMMISSIONS IN ENGLAND

IF YOUR PASSPORT IS LOST OR STOLEN, or you need some other kind of special assistance while you're traveling in England, the following embassies, all located in London, will be able to help or direct you.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA The American Embassy is housed in Mayfair at 24 Grosvenor Square, London, W1A1AE; ☎ 0207-499-9000 (tube: Bond Street). This is where you will go if your passport gets lost or stolen or if you have some emergency. The embassy's Web site is at www.usembassy.org.uk. The hours are 8:30 a.m.–5:30 p.m. Passports are handled Monday–Friday, 8:30–11 a.m.; and Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, 2–4 p.m. The Passport Office is on 55 Upper Brook Street, around the corner from the main entrance (tube: Marble Arch or Bond Street).

CANADA The high commission is at MacDonald House, 38 Grosvenor Square, W1; ☎ 0207-258-6600 (tube: Bond Street). The office is open Monday–Friday, 8–11 a.m.

AUSTRALIA The High Commission is at Australia House, Strand, WC2; ☎ 0207-379-4334 (tube: Charing Cross) and is open Monday–Friday, 10 a.m.–4 p.m.

NEW ZEALAND The High Commission is at New Zealand House, 80 Haymarket at Pall Mall, SW1; ☎ 0207-930-8422 (tube: Charing Cross). It's open Monday–Friday, 9 a.m.–5 p.m.

IRELAND The Irish Embassy is at 17 Grosvenor Place, SW1; 0207-235-2171 (tube: Hyde Park Corner). Open Monday–Friday, 10 a.m.–4 p.m.

HEALTH

YOU MAY WANT TO TAKE OUT MEDICAL INSURANCE before you leave, since you won't be covered by the National Health Service unless you're a citizen of the European Union. Depending on the insurance you carry, you may be eligible for free emergency care, but anything else, including follow-up or specialist services, will be paid for out of your pocket. Check your existing policies to see whether they cover medical services abroad. If they don't, call **Travelx** at ☎ 800-228-9792 (www.travelx.com) or another company that offers a policy for travelers.

Pharmacies, or *chemists*, are open 24 hours and on Sundays on a rotating basis. Call your hotel's front desk or the local police station for a list. In London, **Bliss Chemist** is open until midnight every day; they're at 5 Marble Arch, W1; 0207-723-6116. **Zafash Pharmacy** (233-235 Old Brompton Road, SW5; ☎ 0207-373-2798) is open 24 hours a day.

Dentists

For dental problems, call the **Dental Emergency Care Service** 24 hours a day at ☎ 0207-937-3951. They will give you the name of the nearest dental clinic.

Doctors

The better hotels will have their own doctor on call. If not, contact **Doctor's Call** at 0700-037-2255. In England, the emergency room is called the Casualty Department. Call 999 or 112 for an ambulance. You'll be taken to the nearest hospital, or, if your symptoms are not life threatening, you'll be advised which is the closest hospital to you.

Prescription Medication

Be especially careful to bring with you a full supply of any prescription drugs you need, as you will find it difficult to have a prescription filled in England. British pharmacies can honor prescriptions only if they are written by physicians who are registered in the United Kingdom. This means you will have to see a doctor in England to obtain a prescription. One option is to go to a national health clinic, which will inevitably involve a wait and, unless you have travel medical insurance, an out-of-pocket expense. An alternative is to visit a private walk-in clinic, such as **Medicentre**, which has branches in Victoria Station in London and elsewhere and charges £50 for a basic consultation; call ☎ 0870-600-0870 or visit www.medicentre.co.uk. Check first with a pharmacist (chemist), though; in some cases you may learn that a drug that requires a prescription in the United States is available over the counter in England.

MONEY

Pounds and Pence

The British are going slowly into this European Union business, taking a wait-and-see attitude toward the euro unit of currency. At this writing, they're still using pounds (£), one of which converts to about 1.5 U.S. dollars. Check any major newspaper's business section for current exchange rates, or go to www.travlang.com or www.x-rates.com. The pound is divided into 100 pence, abbreviated *p*.

While £1 notes are extinct, you will find red 50s, purple 20s, brown 10s, and green 5s. Coins come in £2, £1, 50p, 20p, 10p, 5p, 2p, and 1p variations. They can't be changed into foreign cash, so spend them while you're in England; better still, donate them on your way home to the UNICEF Change Collection sponsored by most airlines.

ATMs, Banks, and Bureaux de Change

There are ATMs with Cirrus, MAC, and credit-card account systems all over London and in cities and towns throughout the country. This is your best bet for getting the best rate when you withdraw money. Just slip in your ATM card or a credit card with cash-advance privileges, punch in your code, and the machine will dispense pounds, drawn against your bank account at home. Remember, you can't access funds from a bank account or credit-card account without a PIN (personal identification number). If you're unsure of how to

access funds electronically, call your bank or credit-card company to find out how to access your money while in England.

You can change cash or traveler's checks for pounds at a bank or *bureau de change*. Currency-changing services are available at major airports, at any branch of a major bank, at all major rail and underground stations in Central London, at post offices countrywide, at many tourist-information centers, and at American Express or Thomas Cook offices.

Weekday hours for banks are generally 9:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m. All banks are closed on public holidays, but many branches have 24-hour banking lobbies with ATMs and/or ATMs on the street outside. Banks and bureaux de change exchange money at a competitive rate but charge a commission (typically 1–3% of the total transaction). All U.K. bureaux de change and other money-changing establishments are required to clearly display exchange rates and full details of any fees and rates of commission. Before exchanging your money, always check to see the exchange rate, how much commission will be charged, and whether additional fees apply.

unofficial TIP

Steer clear of bureaux de change that offer good exchange rates but charge a heavy commission (up to 8%). You'll find them in major tourist sections of London (some are open 24 hours).

Value-Added Tax (VAT)

The VAT is a 17.5% tax slapped on everything from hotel rooms to lipstick; the only exceptions are food, children's clothing, and books. There are ways to get this tax refunded (see "VAT Refunds" on page 68). Almost everything has the VAT added into the sticker price, except for merchandise sold in some small shops, as well as various services. Before you book a hotel room, check whether the quoted price includes the VAT.

TELEPHONES, E-MAIL, AND POSTAL SERVICES

Telephones

Three types of public pay phones are available: those that take only coins (increasingly rare), those that accept only phone cards, and those that take both phone cards and credit cards. Phone cards, available in £2, £4, £10, and £20 valuations, are usable until the total value has expired. You can buy the cards from newsstands and post offices. At coin-operated phones, insert your coins before dialing. The minimum charge is 10p. The credit-call pay phones operate on credit cards (Access or MasterCard, Visa, American Express, and Diners Club).

LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL PHONE CODES The country code for the United Kingdom is ☎ **44**. To call England from the United States, dial ☎ **011-44**; the area or city code; and then the six, seven, or eight-digit phone number. If you're in England and dialing a number within the same area code, the local number is all you need.

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

☎ 00	International dialing code if calling from England: dial 00 + 1 for U.S. and Canada, 61 for Australia, 64 for New Zealand
☎ 100	General operator
☎ 112	Emergency for police, fire, or ambulance
☎ 153	International directory inquiries
☎ 155	International operator
☎ 192	U.K. directory inquiries

To make an international call from England, dial the international access code (☎ 00), then the country code, then the area code, and finally the local number. Or call through the long-distance access code affiliated with your phone card. A few are **AT&T USA Direct**, ☎ 0800-890-011; **Canada Direct**, ☎ 0800-890-016; **Australia**, ☎ 0800-890-061; and **New Zealand**, ☎ 0800-890-064. Country codes for these nations are as follows: United States and Canada, ☎ 1; Australia, ☎ 61; New Zealand, ☎ 61. You can also purchase prepaid international calling cards at newsstands and other shops. These often provide extremely low rates for overseas calls.

E-mail

You'll find Internet cafes all over London and in England's major cities. It's more difficult to find them in smaller towns. If you're outside of London and in dire need of a computer to check or send e-mail, go to the local library. Even the smallest libraries have at least one computer; you may have to pay for the service, or you may have to wait to use it. Using computers at an Internet cafe is not cheap: £1 for 15 minutes is not unusual. That wouldn't be so bad, but the connections are often slow.

The telephone jacks in England will not fit a standard American modem cord, so if you have your laptop and want to get online, you may have to ask the hotel desk for a telephone cord adapter, or buy one. You should be able to find one easily at major electronics stores in both England and in the United States, or you can order one online from sources such as www.shopper.cnet.com, www.shopping.com, and www.tempestcom.com.

One of the handiest inventions to come along in a while is **Wi-Fi**, and if you travel with a wireless-equipped laptop, you're in business—many British hotels, even those in the lower price ranges, now provide free Wi-Fi connections, at least in the lobby and other public areas. You'll also come across Wi-Fi in coffee shops, cafes, and other public places.

unofficial TIP
Wi-Fi is often available free or at relatively low cost.

Post Offices

Mail is called *the post* in England. Mailboxes (*postboxes*) are red with “Royal Mail” lettered on them. In London, the **Main Post Office** (24 William IV Street, WC2; ☎ 08457-223-344; tube: Charing Cross) is open Monday–Friday, 8:30 a.m.–6:30 p.m., and Saturday, 9 a.m.–5:30 p.m. Other post offices and sub-offices throughout the country are open Monday–Friday, 9 a.m.–5:30 p.m., and Saturday, 9 a.m.–12:30 p.m. Many sub-offices and some main post offices close for an hour at lunchtime. In the post office, you can buy phone cards and often cash traveler’s checks. You can also buy stamps at a newsagent.