

LOVIN' LONDON by Lauren Price

Scads of honeymooners are crossing the pond to London these days. Not so surprising, given its refined blend of stiff-upper-lip tradition and cool trendsetting – to say nothing of the giant London Eye that slowly rotates glass capsules made for nuzzling up at sunset and O' can you see views as far as Windsor Castle. One minute it feels like the city where Christmas was invented, what with its Dickensian maze of tangled streets lined in royal households and churches – and the next minute it's about Prada-wearing attitude and fashion designers like Emma Hope (oh, those exquisite shoes) and Lulu Guinness (ah, those luxurious blast-from-the-past purses) who've recently cast a spell on the fashion industry. Streets are generously sprinkled with dripping-with-glamour shops, and luxurious afternoons usually include afternoon tea (the Ritz is ritzy, Brown's is chintzy, the Dorchester swanky, but nothing beats the just-out-of-the-oven scones slathered in luscious lemon curd and clotted cream at the Lanesborough).

When the more-often-than-you-think sun dusts the city in glorious light, holding hands for peripatetic romantic strolls are in order. If losing yourselves among London's small side streets is a worry, make like locals and carry an A-Z street finder which can be picked up at most newsstands or get around by hopping aboard any one of the many double-decker tour buses. Some allow you to get on and off over a 24-hour period – making it one of the best albeit touristy ways to see the sights. Even rainy days can translate to donned raincoats and swank hotel umbrellas in hand for indulgent pas-de-duex spas treatments that will practically make you both purr at

Spa NK on Westbourne Grove

London's grand hotels are essentially titled nobility and more than a handful have lustrous dark mahogany staircases rising to upper floor guestrooms dressed up in four-poster beds covered in plump-filled crispy white duvets and crackling log fires for dreamy tête-à-têtes. Booking a room replete with bells to summon the maid or valet at the stately Connaught is like stepping into a Merchant-Ivory film and the jewel-like Pelham Hotel in a Victorian townhouse has the aforementioned crackling fire in the cozy main drawing room, sweet chintz-laden bedrooms stuffed with antiques and colorful, fragrant blooms everywhere. The Ian-Schrager Sanderson is probably one of the most visually stimulating and stylish hotels in town – and perhaps the gold standard for London's new glamour and vogue. Philippe Stark designed the luxuriously appointed pure white guestrooms – with carpets woven with excerpts from Voltaire's letters. Each guestroom has a private fitness area (in addition to the hotel's luxurious Agua Spa) and bathrooms are behind opaque silk screens. Other posh-plush options include the Lanesborough (their Royal Suite comes with a 24/7 chauffeured Bentley and two beck-and-call butlers), the Dorchester overlooking Hyde Park with its marbled bathrooms begging sexy tub-lolling and One Aldwych serving up equal amounts of high style and romance.

London's chefs are as famous as rock stars and that means there's no shortage of top-drawer romantic restaurants throughout the city. But for what some say is *the* most the romantic, the hipster-haunted modern-French-food-serving Belvedere in Holland Park should top your list. If running into like-minded romantic duos like Brad and Jenn or maybe Guy and Madonna – try Kensington Place on Kensington Church Street. For a room with a view (not the sleeping kind) of St. Paul's Cathedral and beyond, try the Oxo Tower Brasserie on the South Bank of the River Thames. If the Food Network's fresh-faced *Naked Chef* makes your heart beat almost as much as your dearly beloved – head over to Fifteen – Jamie Oliver's hot spot on Westland Place.

New museums such as the Tate Modern and Saatchi Gallery are usurping top positions from beloved standards such as the Victoria & Albert – but these days you don't have to be a royal to arrange for a private appointment at the Houses of Parliament – or have the Tower Bridge opened in honor of your wedded bliss. A private viewing of the Crown Jewels at the Tower of London is another just-for-two option. Or at least try to send away for tickets to the Ceremony of the Keys – when at exactly 9:53 p.m., the red-coated, Tudor bonneted Chief Warder carries a candlelit lantern and the Queen's Keys to lock the tower gates – as all the guards and sentries salute the keys. To questions and rejoinders like who goes and all's well – they all proceed through the Bloody Tower archway and up towards the steps where the main guard is drawn up. Finally, the Warder halts at the foot of the steps – raises his Tudor bonnet high and calls "God preserve Queen Elizabeth" (request free admission to the late night ceremony in writing: Queens House, HM Tower of London, EC3N 4AB.). Take a private tour of Kensington Palace, home to England's royal family since the 18th-century, including Queen Victoria and Princess Diana. Though you can't see Diana's apartment, you can peek in on the State Apartments, Queen Victoria's childhood bedroom and the Royal Ceremonial Dress Collection. After strolling some of the now-completed seven-mile long Diana Memorial Walk – have a lovey-dovey lunch in The Orangery – an 18th greenhouse built for Queen Anne. If you don't mind short train trip to Althorp to see where Princess Diana is now laid to rest, do it only July through August (except August 31, the anniversary of her death). The Spencer home for the past 500 years, it's one of England's most beautiful country homes, where and out in the gardens, in the center of a small island, is where she's buried. It isn't necessary to book in advance as tickets are available each day at the West Gate (all profits go to the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund). Consider it a two-for-one stop at the 17th century neoclassical Kenwood House. First, take a tour-for-two to see works by Vermeer, Hals, Rembrandt, then follow it up with a lakeside picnic and evening concert, topped off with fireworks (we say stop the Food Hall at Harrods or Selfridges for picnic staples).

If you fully intend to shop on your honeymoon, stop in for signature tan plaid anything at chic-tweaks-on-classics Burberry, if-they-don't-have-it-they'll-get-it Harrods and luxe-plus Harvey Nichols. For Gucci, Hermes, and Prada (oh

my) head for Sloane Street – but for channeling your inner young aristocrat – get over to Beauchamp Place. Portobello Road is now a favored stop for trendsetters (where it's still a kick to wander its flea market on Saturday morning) and on nearby Ledbury Road and Westbourne Grove – you'll find a great mix of must-haves shops and hot hot cafes perfect for espressos and smooching. Check out Jermyn Street for gentlemen's haberdashery bearing royal warrants (Turnbull & Ausser is where Prince Charles buys his pj's) and the Burlington Arcade off Piccadilly for shelves loaded with cashmere from N. Peal. One boutique that seems to make London's fashionistas swoon is Matches on High Street. If the two of you would rather be off doing romantic stuff, but can't bear the thought of any trip without some aisle-browsing, consider this a one-shop-fits-both kind of place given that the racks are bursting with hot brands like Chloe and Julien McDonald.

With 159 theaters in London's West End, famous actors from Dustin Hoffman to Nicole Kidman have treaded the boards – and this year's hot tickets include Diana Rigg in Tennessee Williams *Suddenly Last Summer*, Julia Stiles in David Mamet's *Oleanna* and Luke Perry in *When Harry Met Sally*. Hang on to your hats for Mel Brooks' *Producers*, with Richard Dreyfuss (previews begin October 22) and Michael Crawford in Andrew Lloyd Webber's *The Woman in White* (previews begin August 28). The best place to sample the bard is at Shakespeare's Globe.

For more information, visit the London Tourist Board's website at www.londontouristboard.com