



Martin Randall's London

Architectural highlights – great and small – on foot across the capital

5–10 October 2026 (MM 189)

6 days

Speaker: Martin Randall

A unique study of London's architecture, art and history, planned and led by Martin Randall, architectural historian and founder of the eponymous company.

Includes famous sites but also many lesser-known gems and charming enclaves.

Some emphasis on houses, the special interest of the lecturer.

London is the most varied and fascinating city in the world, unmatched for the range of its architecture, for the number and quality of the museums and for the charm of its smaller buildings. Its major streets, back alleys, open spaces, assorted precincts and buildings both monumental and minor are unsurpassed for beauty, historical detail and surprise – if one knows where to look.

How is it possible to compress such profusion into just six days? One route is to submit to the direction of a single person, someone who is singularly well qualified to open your eyes. Martin Randall, our founder, is unusually well-informed about the metropolis and is an astute architectural historian – with an exceptional skill for designing cultural tours. A student of the capital's buildings for half a century, he is currently researching a book about London's houses built between the Great Fire and the First World War.

Martin's selection on this tour includes some of London's greatest buildings, known the world over, but the backbone consists of precincts and sights that even residents pass over or rarely see – or, rather, rarely look at. The tour spans West to East; the City is rich in splendid historic architecture, assertively ornamented banks and warehouses, and much thrilling modern. We aim to transform perception of both familiar and unfamiliar places through the presentation of context and history, and through a close study of the buildings themselves.

Walking, the best way to explore a city, is a feature of the tour; between three and five miles a day. Transport where necessary is limited to the Underground for speed and directness.



London, view towards Westminster, wood engraving c. 1880.

Itinerary

Day 1. We begin at the hotel at 11.15am with a walk through Horseguards, once HQ of the British Army, and St James's Park, an exemplar of the Picturesque. Buckingham Palace is viewed from The Mall, London's leafy processional route, and we continue past Lancaster House, a Georgian mansion, and Henry VIII's St James's Palace. After lunch, there is a special visit to Spencer House, whose innovative 18th-century interiors remain among the finest in London.

Day 2. The City is the historic core of London whose boundaries have changed little for a thousand years. It encompasses the Roman settlement – stretches of the Roman wall are visible – and some of the street layout dates to the ninth century. Among the buildings we enter are St Paul's Cathedral, the 18th-century Great Hall of St Bartholomew's Hospital, a livery hall (t.b.c.) and Romanesque and Wren churches.

Day 3. Queen Anne's Gate, a splendid assembly of 18th-century town houses. Westminster Abbey is of enormous importance and filled with memorials to the mighty. Historically the most significant half mile in England, Whitehall has been the centre of the executive and bureaucratic arms of government since the 16th century. Major buildings include Inigo Jones's Banqueting House and George

Gilbert Scott's Foreign Office, but these jostle with modest houses such as those in Downing Street. Adjourn to Regent's Park to enjoy the theatrical magnificence of John Nash's stuccoed terraces.

Day 4. To the City again to explore the Cluster of Towers, the high-rise zone where international architectural talent has dramatically transformed the Square Mile in the last 25 years. Temple is an extreme contrast, an oasis of calm with 17th-century lawyers' chambers, beautiful Gothic church and Elizabethan hall. The Law Courts are the culmination of the 19th-century Gothic Revival, Somerset House of 18th-century Palladianism. Sir John Soane's Museum was the architect's residence, drawing office and museum – it offers intimate insight into the man and his times.

Day 5. With 300 acres of residences, gracious and grand, large scale and small, Mayfair remains the most desirable district in London. The walk from Bond Street to Hyde Park Corner elucidates estate development, the terrace phenomenon, and 200 years of changing styles. Apsley House is one of the few aristocratic residences to have survived intact; a series of spectacular rooms display the Duke of Wellington's art collection. The theme continues with a study of the stuccoed grandeur of Belgrave Square.

Martin Randall's London continued

Day 6. The Houses of Parliament is the Gothic masterpiece by Barry & Pugin which incorporates some of the medieval Palace of Westminster. Alternatively, visit the Churchill War Rooms. Trafalgar Square embodies much that is idiosyncratic about London planning and architecture. The National Gallery, a Greek Revival building with secret surprises, contains perhaps the best-balanced collection of Old Masters anywhere, recently rehung. Leave when you want; the hotel is only a few minutes away.

Lecturer

Martin Randall. Martin has a degree in the History of Art from the Courtauld Institute, London University, and undertook post-graduate work at the University of York. He travelled widely in Europe, lived in Italy and Germany and worked for London-based travel companies before founding Martin Randall Travel in 1988. Under his leadership it became not only Britain's leading cultural tours specialist but one of the most respected travel companies in the world. He retired in July 2024. He has been on the boards of ABTA – the Travel Association, the Association of Independent Tour Operators, Classical Opera (The Mozartists) and *History Today*, and is a trustee of the Georgian Group and chair of the Echo Chamber Ensemble. He is currently writing a book on London's houses 1660–1920.

Practicalities

Included: accommodation as described below; breakfasts, 5 lunches and 2 dinners with wine, water and coffee; 7-day travel pass for journeys by Underground; all charges for museum admission and special arrangements; all tips; all taxes; the services of the expert speaker and tour manager.

Accommodation. **Royal Horseguards Hotel, London** (guoman.com/royal-horseguards-hotel): a historic hotel just off Whitehall, made up of the National Liberal Club and its apartments. The style is that of an international hotel and bedrooms are comfortable with all mod cons. *Single occupancy rooms are doubles for sole use.*

How strenuous? There is a lot of walking on this tour, between 3 and 5 miles a day. Participants should be able to walk at 3 miles per hour for at least an hour without a break. Transport is by Underground railway, on which a seat cannot always be guaranteed, though most journeys are less than 15 minutes.

Group size: between 10 and 20 participants.