

Thank you for choosing to take a self-guided tour with Free Tours By Foot. We believe in operating quality tours that are affordable to everybody, regardless of their budget and we hope that you enjoy your tour with us today.

You have chosen to come along on our Self-Guided Tour of Kensington Gardens. On this tour, you're going to explore the most noteworthy locations in the park and some of the most beautiful places in our city. From a royal residence to art gallery, from a Princely memorial to a tiny temple and from Peter Pan to Princess Diana this tour will show you all that the stunning Kensington Gardens has to offer.

On the tour today you can expect to walk just over 2 miles or just over 3 kilometres, and take around 90 minutes. Although this may change depending on your walking pace or stops you wish to make along the way.

For guests with mobility issues, or those with prams or buggies, there are no steps on the route, and most everything can be seen while staying on paved paths.

If at any point you wish to explore a location further - please do. And if at any point you wish to stop at a pub and have a pint - please do that, too!

To make the most of your visit to this Royal Park, consider also taking our Self Guided Tour of Hyde Park, just nearby. These two parks used to be considered a single location so it's worth exploring them both. You'll find only two overlapping locations and the tours can easily both be completed in the same day.

Now, your Kensington Gardens Tour will begin just outside Lancaster Gate Underground Station.

To begin, take the main exit onto Bayswater Road and immediately turn RIGHT toward the traffic junction. Once there, cross Bayswater Road and enter the gardens through the gate.

Your first stop is straight ahead. Walk to the RIGHT of the small white building ahead of you then take the first LEFT toward the fountains. When you are standing within them, play the next clip.

Stop 1 - Italian Gardens

A real gem, the Italian Gardens sit at the northernmost edge of Kensington Gardens at the top of The Long Water.

Designed by architect James Pennethorne in the 1860s, the fountains were built to mimic those that Queen Victoria and her husband, Prince Albert, had built at their private home, Osborne House, on the Isle of Wight and were given as a gift from the Prince to the Queen.

Albert was a keen gardener and had overseen the creation of the Italian-style water garden at Osborne House himself, focusing on large raised terraces, geometric flower beds, statues, urns, and fountains.

Various features of the garden are made from Carrara marble as well as Portland Stone which you find a lot of in London, being the base stone of St. Paul's Cathedral and Buckingham Palace.

The small building at the head of the fountains, where you can sit, is the pump house, where the steam engine that kept the fountains running used to be kept (note the chimney at the top - the exit point of the steam generated within).

A pump is still used here today and water from this area is piped under the park to places like the Round Pond, which we will see later.

There is much to see here including the large urns, decorated with five main designs: a dolphin, an oval, a ram's head, a woman's head and a swan breast.

There is also the Tazza Fountain, supported by carved mermen and an unusually placed bronze statue of Edward Jenner, the developer of modern vaccination.

You'll also notice native water lilies, flowering rush, and yellow flag iris thriving inside the beautiful pools as well as small walkways constructed specifically to help ducks get in and out of the water!

If the Italian Gardens look oddly familiar to you, it may be that you have seen it on screen.

The gardens are featured in the films *Wimbledon* and *Bridget Jones: Edge of Reason* where Daniel and Mark fight each other in the water.

Return to the path you came into the Italian Gardens on, but instead of returning to your right, turn LEFT. Continue along this path until you come to the Peter Pan statue on the RIGHT and play the next clip.

Stop 2 - Peter Pan Statue

Everybody around the world knows Peter Pan, but when he's not in Neverland, he lives in Kensington Gardens! Sculpted by Sir George Frampton in 1912, this bronze Peter Pan statue was commissioned by J. M. Barrie, the author of the story, himself.

Barrie had, at one time, lived on nearby Bayswater Road and he stated that his stories were partly inspired by Kensington Gardens. And it's in this neighbourhood where the non-Neverland parts of his stories take place.

The placement of the statue is precise as it rests in the exact spot Peter lands in Barrie's 1902 book *The Little White Bird* and it was placed here entirely without permission.

Barrie's idea was to erect it overnight, giving children the idea that fairies themselves had placed it in the park.

The morning after it was put up, on the 30th of April 1912, he published a notice in *The Times* that read: "*There is a surprise in store for the children who go to Kensington Gardens to feed the ducks in the Serpentine this morning.*"

It wasn't a hit with everybody though - many critics objected to what was seen as Barrie's advertising of his own work by putting a statue in a public space with no permission.

It was even targeted by vandals in 1928 and was tarred and feathered! By 1970, however, it was declared a Grade II listed building, which means it will be preserved here for now and always.

With your back to the statue, turn RIGHT and continue on the path. When it splits into two take the LEFT toward the banks of the Long Water. When you are opposite the large arch opposite, play the next clip.

Stop 3 - Long Water / Henry Moore Arch

You are now standing on the edge of the Long Water, the northwestern part of the body of water known as the Serpentine, made by damming part of the River Westbourne which rises in the north of London in Hampstead and flows underneath the city toward the River Thames.

Created by Queen Caroline of Ansbach, wife of King George II, in 1730 this recreational lake has a surface area of 14 acres and marks the boundary between Hyde Park on the East, and Kensington Gardens where you stand now.

Caroline was the spearhead for a total renovation of Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens - and most of what you see here today is down to her.

At the time of construction, most artificial lakes were built long and straight so the Serpentine was considered strange, having purposely been designed to look natural.

Today, the Long Water is a designated bird sanctuary so you may well see a few of our winged friends around. It is an important place of breeding and also a popular spot for migratory flocks during the winter months.

And it's not just birds - a 2005 survey revealed the existence of over 90 species of moths who live in this area.

Now, if you look directly to the opposite bank you'll notice a marble arch (no, not THE Marble Arch!). Henry Moore was one of England's most renowned artists and was particularly known for his series depicting Londoners sheltering from the Blitz.

He was a master abstract sculptor as well, and this is one of his pieces, *The Arch* 1979 - 1980. Moore gifted the statue to the park in 1980, the piece is made of travertine marble and was restored and placed into the current position in 2021.

With your back to the water, walk forward across the grass to the other path. When you get to that path turn LEFT. Walk until you see the small temple on your RIGHT, then play the next clip.

Stop 4 - Queen Caroline's Temple

This neoclassical building was designed by William Kent, who was also responsible for the interior design of much of Kensington Palace.

It was built in 1735 for Queen Caroline, who, as we have learned, is responsible for most of what you are surrounded by today when you stand here.

Originally, the temple was intended to be just about glimpsed down one of the tree-lined avenues that led off from Kensington Palace - a somewhat hidden, slightly magical, private place for the Queen to enjoy.

If you explore it today, you may be surprised to find some graffiti and maybe even more surprised to notice that some of it dates as far back as 1821! (It seems some things don't really change...).

It was briefly used as park keeper's home in the 1970's but returned to its' original state, as you see it today, in 1976.

With your back to the temple, turn RIGHT and continue down the path. Follow it in the same direction until you get to the Serpentine Gallery. Make your way to the front of the Gallery and play the next clip.

Stop 5 - The Serpentine Gallery

The Serpentine Galleries actually consist of two separate buildings, each one on either side of the Serpentine Bridge. The Kensington Gardens side was the first, established in 1970 and located inside a former 1930's tea pavilion. The second gallery, on the Hyde Park side, was opened in 2013 and is located inside a former gunpowder store from 1805.

The Serpentine Gallery features contemporary art by both well-known and up and coming artists and presents an expanded programme of contemporary art and architecture.

The exhibitions here are timed to change with and reflect the seasons with new exhibitions specifically designed to change four times throughout the year. Also, there is a yearly tradition in the summer where the Serpentine commissions an architect who has not previously built anything in the UK to design a temporary pavilion.

The pavilion is erected on the lawn in front of the Gallery and must be constructed so that the public can walk in and amongst the structure. If you're visiting in the summer months - make sure to take a look - it's all FREE!

Continue walking on the same path until it comes to an end. Then take a LEFT and an IMMEDIATE right onto what's called Flower Walk. Follow this path as it curves around and walk until you get to the Albert Memorial on your LEFT. Feel free to get as close as you can to the statue before you play the next clip.

Stop 6 - Albert Memorial - Royal Albert Hall

Prince Albert, Queen Victoria's beloved husband of 21 years, died unexpectedly in 1861 at the age of just 42. Victoria, who never recovered from the loss, commissioned a memorial dedicated to her husband and the Albert Memorial was revealed to the public in July 1872.

The memorial consists of an ornate canopy, sheltering a statue of the Prince, covered in real gold leaf (!). His figure is looking south, to the Royal Albert Hall and the Victoria and Albert Museum, both projects begun by the Prince. The memorial stands 176 ft (or 54m) tall and was built at a cost of £120,000 - which is the same as over £10million today!

It took ten years to complete the structure as the level of detail was so high. There's almost too much to point out here. The four statues on the four corners represent the four

Victorian industrial arts and sciences: Agriculture, Commerce, Engineering and Manufacturing.

There are also corner figures that represent the areas of the Globe (as the Victorians saw them): Asia, Africa, America and Europe - there are four animals to represent each one: an elephant, a camel, a bison and a bull.

The central part of the memorial is surrounded by an elaborate sculptural piece known as *the Frieze of Parnassus*, depicting 169 individual musicians and poets (placed on the south side), painters (placed on the east side), sculptors (on the west side), and architects (on the north side).

Note that on the first Sunday of each month, public tours are held which allow guests to get up close and take a great look at the detail of the frieze surrounding the base.

The canopy features mosaics along the sides as well as the underneath, all of which were manufactured in Venice. The four external mosaics show allegorical figures of the four arts (poetry, painting, architecture and sculpture) supported by two historical figures on each side.

The beauty of the mosaics partially come from their construction, as they are made up of enamel, marble, granite, stone, jasper, onyx, crystal - and even more. No detail is unintentional or less fantastic than another.

Albert himself is facing the Royal Albert Hall and you can get a good view of it here, too. Built around the same time as the Memorial, The Royal Albert Hall is a beautiful concert hall just a stone's throw from the Gardens.

Opened by Queen Victoria in 1871, the building quickly became one of the most high-profile musical venues in the country - and later, the world - hosting more than 350 events each year.

It's possible to tour the Hall with a paid-for-guided tour but it's completely free to walk the entirety of the outside and admire the beautiful construction, carvings and decorations that surround it. If you wish to do that now, just come back to the Memorial when you are done to continue your tour.

Stand with your back to Alberts back and walk AWAY from the statue, back toward Flower Walk. When you get there, continue STRAIGHT, past the other path that will cross the one you are on.

About a minute after that you will come to Mount Walk, another path that will cross the one you are on. Here, take a LEFT. Walk until you can see the small path that leads right off of Mount Walk directly to the Round Pond. Once you are on the banks of the pond, play the next clip.

Stop 7 - Round Pond

Created in 1730 by King George II, the Round Pond is one of the smallest, but most picturesque, bodies of water in the city. Back at the start of this tour, we saw the Italian Gardens and I mentioned that there was a pump house there that led under the park.

If you take a look you will see two mushroom-type structures in the Pond. These are the inlets for fresh water, pumped in all the way here from the Italian Gardens.

The water here is constantly being monitored to make sure it doesn't stagnate, or overheat in the summertime and all of this is controlled by 'twiddling with some knobs and buttons' back at the pump house.

Part of the reason the Pond is monitored so closely is because it's a breeding ground for swans, geese and ducks. If the water doesn't provide the right habitat, no breeding can take place!

The Pond is so perfectly maintained that injured swans who have been rehabilitated are released here, as this is the safest and most comfortable place for them.

It may seem strange to some to put some much effort into looking after these birds, so it's worth pointing out that, technically, all the swans in England officially belong to the King!

With your back to Mount Walk, facing the Pond, turn to your LEFT and follow the pond around. Walk until you get to the SECOND path on your LEFT and take this one directly towards the white marble statue of Queen Victoria. Once there, play the next clip.

Stop 8 - Queen Victoria Statue

On the 29th of May, 1819, Princess Alexandrina Victoria of Kent was born here at Kensington Palace. Although she was a possible heir to the throne, few people could've imagined that she would go on to become, what was at that time, the longest serving British monarch - Victoria, Queen of the British Empire.

On the throne for almost 64 years, Victoria presided over a century of great change and advancement in the United Kingdom and the numerous marriages between some of her 9 children and members of other royal houses in differing countries led to her being known as 'The Grandmother of Europe.'

Today, when people think of Queen Victoria it's usually as a slightly grumpy old lady always dressed in black and never smiling, but when she came to the throne at age 18 she was both stylish and beautiful. This statue is a testament to that, depicting her on her coronation day, although it was carved much later.

Interestingly, it was carved by her fourth daughter, Princess Louise, Duchess of Argyll. It had been decided that to commemorate Victoria's Golden Jubilee, a statue should be erected in her honour.

Princess Louise was persuaded by a friend to submit her design to the committee in charge of the project, and she did so anonymously. You can imagine their surprise when the artist of their winning design turned out to be the Queen's daughter herself!

The statue has remained here since its' erection in 1893, although during the Second World War it suffered bomb damage and the nose of the statue was blown off.

The nose has since been replaced twice, once in 1952 and again in 2012 - both dates marking Jubilee years of our late queen, Elizabeth II who surpassed Victorias' record as our longest serving sovereign on the 9th of September 2015.

Facing the statue, with the Pond behind you, take either the right or left path forward. When the path ends, turn RIGHT and follow along until you reach the Princess Diana Memorial Garden, once you've entered (assuming it's open), play the next clip.

Stop 9 - Kensington Palace Gardens and Princess Diana Memorial Garden

The gardens of Kensington Palace are an event all on their own. Comprising of four parts: The Sunken Garden, The Cradle Walk, The Wildflower Meadow and the Formal Garden, these stunning grounds are completely FREE for the public to explore!

We owe the enjoyment of these gardens to Queen Anne, who lived in Kensington Palace after the death of her brother-in-law, King William III in 1702.

She commissioned the reconstruction of the gardens and the building of the Orangery in 1704, leading to the majority of the layout that you see today. Anne entertained in the Orangery and gardens throughout her reign, until her death at the Palace in 1714.

For most of its' existence, the gardens were only open to the public on Saturdays and only to those who were 'respectably dressed!' Today, the gardens are open to us 7 days a week and all four parts are there for us to explore:

The Sunken Garden, laid out in the current design in 1908. That part of the Garden was previously home to a potting shed. It was completely replanted with white flowers in 2017 to commemorate Princess Diana and is now also home to the newly created statue of the Princess, unveiled by her sons on what would have been her 60th birthday in 2021.

The Cradle Walk , an arched arbour of red-twigged lime that guests can walk through with arched viewpoints along the sides. Some locals refer to it as 'Nanny Walk' as it's a popular place for the many nannies of Kensington to meet and walk with their charges!

The Wildflower Meadow , located to the southeast of the Palace. That part of the garden is filled with hundreds of beautiful wild flowers including poppies, campion, daisies and countless others.

And, **The Formal Garden**. Nearly exactly how it looked in the reign of Queen Anne, the Formal Garden became a destination for many of the well-to-do during her reign. That area is also home to the Orangery. Originally built on the order of Anne as a place to protect her citrus trees from the harsh winter frosts, it doubled as an entertainment space during the summer. Today it is open to the public for afternoon tea.

Leave the gardens the way you entered, but instead of turning LEFT back toward the Queen Victoria Statue, keep straight ahead, with the ticked entry to the Palace on your RIGHT.

You may want to stand here to get a close up view of the Palace, or play the clip as you continue walking until the path dead ends, then make a RIGHT and view the Palace through the gates, which is the primary view.

Stop 10 - Kensington Palace

This Palace was built during the reign of King William III and his wife, Queen Mary II - the only royal couple in our history to rule equally as King and Queen. Constructed in the 1680's, much of the work seen today was completed by noted architect Sir Christopher Wren (who also designed St. Paul's Cathedral, among his dozens of other projects).

It began as a modest mansion known as Nottingham House, and was transformed in the decades to come into a stylish and beautiful palace, suitable for royalty.

William and Mary already had many properties and palaces in London to choose from, however, William suffered particularly with asthma, and even in the 17th century, the air of London was considered polluted!

To ease his health maladies, William and Mary decided to base themselves outside of the city in what was, at the time, the countryside: Kensington. In fact, it was their move here that turned Kensington into the fashionable and expensive district it remains today.

Speaking of William, the statue that stands between the front gates and the palace is that of the King - who wasn't exactly a popular person. His wife, Queen Mary II absolutely was, but when she died in 1694, leaving William as sole monarch, the public were not impressed.

Now, we mentioned earlier that J. M. Barrie took a lot of inspiration from Kensington Gardens when writing his stories of Peter Pan, and it's said that it is no coincidence that if you were to imagine William's statue with a hook instead of a right hand, he may just resemble a certain famous pirate...

Throughout the years, many royals have departed this earth, and arrived, right here at Kensington Palace. King William III, Queen Mary II and her sister Queen Anne all died in the Palace, and our late Queen's grandmother was born here in 1867.

Most famously of all, it was at Kensington Palace where Queen Victoria came into the world in 1819, and where she would live (under a strict regime led by her mother) until her accession to the throne upon the death of her uncle, King William IV in 1837 - the news of which she received inside the Palace.

In more modern times, it also served as the home of Queen Elizabeth II's sister, Princess Margaret and, perhaps most famously, Elizabeth's daughter-in-law, Diana, Princess of Wales.

It was in the 1990's that Diana and her sons moved here after her divorce from Prince Charles and it was while she was living here that she was killed in Paris on the 31st of August 1997.

The night before her funeral, her coffin was kept in the Palace and it was from this location that it was taken, on a gun carriage, on the 6th of September 1997, to Westminster Abbey for her funeral.

You may recognise the golden front gates as this was the location for the millions of flowers and tributes (reaching over 5ft deep!) that were placed here shortly after her tragic death. After the funeral, her apartments inside were stripped bare and lay vacant for the next 10 years.

On a happier note, it was here at Kensington Palace where Harry and Megan, the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, announced their engagement. They lived at the Palace after their marriage, until their son was born in May 2019.

Today however, the Palace is better known as the official home of the Prince and Princess of Wales, who lived here full time from 2017 until the summer of 2022. Back then, it wasn't uncommon for park visitors to catch a glimpse of William or Katherine doing the school run for one of their three children - although these days they spend most of their time at Windsor.

Conclusion

And with that, we have come to the end of our Self Guided Kensington Gardens Walking Tour.

If you've enjoyed your Walking Tour with us and wish to take another self-guided tour, visit our website at www.freetoursbyfoot.com. There you will find self-guided tours of Royal Westminster, Harry Potter, the Beatles in London, Greenwich and more. You will also find information on other audio-tours that we offer and also our full tour schedule. Free Tours By Foot offers pay-what-you-like walking tours on a daily basis here in London and we'd love to have you join us - simply book online.

Thank you for touring with Free Tours By Foot today and we hope you've enjoyed every step of your journey.