Introduction

Discover central London's most famous sights along this stretch of the River Thames. The Houses of Parliament, St. Paul's Cathedral, Tate Modern and the Tower of London; the Thames Path links these and other great icons in a free and easy level walk that reveals both the historic and contemporary life of London.

London developed because of the Thames and the river is at its very heart. From elegant Chelsea to the Tower of London, the walk reflects the history, heritage, architecture and activities that make this one of the great capital cities of the world.

Enjoy ever-changing views and vistas, following the Thames to the cultural complex of the South Bank, or the Temple and Inns of Court on the north side, the Pool of London, once-bawdy Bankside with its Dickensian alleys, passing such outstanding features as Wren's Chelsea Royal Hospital, Battersea Power Station and the wheel of the London Eye. There are plenty of distractions along the way!
Directions

Pick up the Thames Path at Albert Bridge, where signs instruct soldiers from Chelsea Barracks to 'break step' when crossing. Considered too weak for modern traffic, the bridge was only saved from demolition by public outcry, led by the poet Sir John Betjeman, who also famously led the battle to save St. Pancras railway station.

With the Thames on the right, set off along the Chelsea Embankment past the plaque to Victorian engineer Sir Joseph Bazalgette, who also created the Victoria and Albert Embankments. His plan reclaimed land from the river to accommodate a new road with sewers beneath - until then, sewage had drained straight into the Thames and disease was rife in the City.

Carry on past the junction with Royal Hospital Road, to peek into the walled garden of the Chelsea Physic Garden on the opposite side of the road.

Did you know?
The Chelsea Physic Garden was founded by the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries in 1673 to promote the study of botany in relation to medicine, known at the time as the "physic" or healing arts. As the second-oldest botanic garden in England, it still fulfils its traditional function of scientific research and plant conservation and undertakes 'to educate and inform'.

Carry on along the embankment past gracious riverside dwellings that line the route to reach Sir Christopher Wren's magnificent Royal Hospital Chelsea home of the famous Chelsea Pensioners in their red uniforms.

Did you know?
The Royal Hospital Chelsea was founded in 1682 by King Charles II for the 'succour and relief of veterans broken by age and war'. The first Pensioners were admitted in 1692. The imposing Great Hall and Chapel are open to the public, reached from the river through the spacious grounds that have hosted the Royal Horticultural Society's Chelsea Flower Show since 1913.

At Chelsea Bridge, cross at the traffic lights and go under the railway. Battersea Power Station is dominating the far bank (now under redevelopment). The path leaves the river here for a short while, dipping back again at little Pimlico Gardens. In the Gardens is the statue of William Huskisson, the world's first railway victim, killed in 1830 as he stepped in front of Stephenson's Rocket, one of the first steam locomotives.

Continue along the main road (if level access is required), or go through the gates into the peaceful riverside walk which provides a close-up of the huge bronze figures adorning the piers of Vauxhall Bridge: Agriculture, Architecture, Engineering and Pottery on this upstream side; Local Government, Education, the Fine Arts and Astronomy facing downstream.

Go up the steps, cross the road at the traffic lights and take the pavement, or steps, back to the Thames where the giant bronze 1963 statue 'Locking Piece' (by sculptor Henry Moore) announces Tate Britain.

Did you know?
Tate Britain is housed in the Tate's original premises on Millbank, once the site of Millbank Prison. Amongst its incomparable art collections are many memorable river views by Turner, Whistler and other masters that were inspired by scenes along this very route. From here, to reach Tate Modern on the south bank by a swift river ride, take the Damian Hurst decorated Tate-to-Tate catamaran, which leaves from Millbank Pier.
After passing Tate Britain, the next landmark is the 1960s 32-storey Millbank Tower. As the Thames Path enters the little garden by Lambeth Bridge, look left to the mature and handsome Thames House - the discreet home of MI5. Continue on, with the Thames on the right, to Lambeth Bridge.

Take the steps up to street level and cross over Lambeth Bridge. Take the steps down on the other side into Victoria Tower Gardens. Follow the path parallel with the river, passing the ornate Buxton Memorial, the centrepiece of the garden, commissioned to commemorate the emancipation of slaves in 1834.

Turn inland to follow the diagonal path past the bronze of Rodin’s Burghers of Calais, towards the gate onto the street, where the statue of the suffragettes Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughter Christabel stand. Emerge beneath the Victoria Tower of the Palace of Westminster and the very heart of British political life. This entrance is where The Queen comes every year for the State Opening of Parliament.

Across the road is the Jewel Tower of the old Royal Palace of Westminster and beyond that, Westminster Abbey and Westminster’s parish church of St. Margaret.

Did you know?
Edward the Confessor founded Westminster Abbey in the 11th century. The Abbey has overseen the coronation of every English monarch since William the Conqueror in 1066 and provided the burial place for over 3,000 people ranging from Elizabeth 1st to Charles Dickens and the Unknown Warrior from World War I.

The Houses of Parliament, officially known as the Palace of Westminster, survived a notable attempt by Guy Fawkes to blow it up in 1605, but was eventually burnt down in 1834 and rebuilt. The only original part of the building that was untouched, apart from the crypt and chapel, was the Jewel Tower and Westminster Hall. When it was completed Westminster Hall was the largest hall in Europe, and today it is still a breath-taking structure. It has seen many significant events, such as the trial of Charles I and the lying-in state of Winston Churchill. There are guided tours of Palace of Westminster in the summer months.

Walk past the Houses of Parliament to the corner of Westminster Bridge where Big Ben stands, though its official name is the Elizabeth Tower. The clock tower is an iconic London landmark the world over. It is referred to as Big Ben from the nickname for the 16 tonne Great Bell.

Did you know?
When it was cast in 1856, the first bell was transported to the tower on a trolley drawn by sixteen horses, with crowds cheering its progress. Unfortunately, it cracked while being tested and a replacement had to be made. The second bell was cast at London’s Whitechapel Bell Foundry. The Foundry is still in the East End today. In October 1858 the bell was pulled 200ft up to the Clock Tower’s belfry, a Herculean task that took 18 hours. Big Ben first rang in July 1859 but, again, the bell cracked in the following September. However, this time the bell was simply rotated so the hammer didn't strike the crack, which is still there.
Look back onto Parliament Square with its statues of Sir Winston Churchill, Nelson Mandela and other notables. A detour can be made into Whitehall, straight ahead, to see Downing Street, home to the Prime Minister and Chancellor, or to see the Churchill Museum and Cabinet War Rooms (Britain's underground nerve centre throughout World War II).

At the corner with Big Ben, turn right to reach the Thames again. Cross the road at Westminster Bridge and continue along the embankment with the Thames on the right. Follow the river east along the highway known as Victoria Embankment all the way to Waterloo Bridge.

There are many interesting memorials and statues, including the dramatic bronze statue of Boudicca on Westminster Bridge; Queen of the Iceni people of Eastern England and who led an uprising against the Romans in AD 60-66.

On the other side of the road are the backs of buildings on Whitehall. Memorials now come thick and fast: the vibrant bronze relief of the new Battle of Britain London Monument is followed by the golden eagles of the RAF Memorial.

Approaching the twin footbridges of the Golden Jubilee Bridge by Embankment Tube station, set into the Embankment wall opposite Northumberland Avenue, is a plaque relief to Sir Joseph Bazalgette, designer of the London Embankments. The Latin inscription Flumini vincit posuit translates as 'he put the river in chains', in recognition of his solving the 1858 Great Stink, when sheets soaked in lime chloride were hung across the windows of Parliament to counter the stench and cholera that resulted from the river polluted by sewage.

Beyond Embankment Pier is Cleopatra's Needle, the Egyptian obelisk brought from Alexandria to commemorate the defeat of Napoleon. Across the road is the Savoy Hotel built in 1889 and the buildings of Shell Mex House, built in 1931.

Emerging from under Waterloo Bridge the magnificent range of 18th century buildings at Somerset House is on the left.

Did you know?

Before the Embankment was constructed, Somerset House would have risen straight out of the water - in fact the watergate can still be seen. Since the 18th century it has been the nerve centre of the nation's naval power. It is now a major cultural hub, with cafes, courtyard fountains, galleries and even an ice rink in winter and an outdoor cinema in summer.

Beyond the silver dragons, which mark the boundary of the City of London, a possible side visit is to the Submariners' War Memorial and to visit the Middle and Inner Temple, two of London's four Inns of Court. Barristers' chambers are set amongst ancient courtyards and passageways, still lit by gas. The Inns provide libraries, dining facilities and professional accommodation. Each has a church or chapel attached to it and is a self-contained precinct within London, and feels similar to college quads at Oxford or Cambridge.

Otherwise continue along the Embankment passing a number of moored ships, some of which have restaurants and conference facilities, to Blackfriars Bridge.

From Spring 2017, Tideway is building a new sewage tunnel under the River Thames which will cause closure of the Thames Path between Temple Avenue and Blackfriars Bridge until approximately 2021. During this time, follow the footpath on the Victoria Embankment slip road and use the crossing on Blackfriars Bridge to re-join the Thames Path using the new lift and steps on the Eastern side of the bridge.
Victoria Embankment is one of twenty-four construction sites across London as part of the Tideway project. The project will upgrade the capital's Victorian sewage system which is now at capacity and create more than four acres of new public space next to the River Thames. To see a map of diversions on the Thames path visit http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/thames-path/plan

At Blackfriars, where the entirely hidden River Fleet discharges into the Thames, the Thames Path continues along the river, sheltered from traffic by the buildings on Upper Thames Street.

**Did you know?**
The River Fleet is the largest of London's underground rivers and gives its name to Fleet Street, famous as the old home of London's newspapers.

After Blackfriars Bridge, follow the pleasant landscaped walkway along the waterfront to millennium Bridge, which links St. Paul's to Bankside and the Tate Modern on the far bank - the historic core of the City to its historic pleasure grounds.

To visit St. Paul's Cathedral take the ramped steps up towards the cathedral and away from the river.

**Did you know?**
A Cathedral dedicated to St. Paul has overlooked the City of London since AD 604, a constant reminder to this great commercial centre of the importance of the spiritual side of life. The present Cathedral (the fourth on this site) was designed by Sir Christopher Wren between 1675 and 1710, after its predecessor was destroyed in the Great Fire of London in 1666. Cathedral highlights include the burial places of Nelson, Wellington and Wren and the three galleries set within the great dome, including the famous Whispering Gallery. The Whispering Gallery runs around the interior of the Dome and is 259 steps up from ground-level. It gets its name from a charming quirk in its construction, which makes a whisper against its walls audible on the opposite side.

From the Millennium Bridge, follow the Thames Path signs. The walk leaves the river at Broken Wharf and goes via the lane at the far end of Queens Quay buildings, rejoining the Thames beside the inlet of Queenshithe. Look out for the information plaque on the wall. Continue along the river going under Southwark Bridge and Cannon Street railway bridge to Waterman's Walk.

**Did you know?**
Nearing London Bridge, a gap in the offices on the left reveals the golden flame-topped Monument to the Great Fire of London in 1666 and the rebuilding of the City. It is still the tallest freestanding stone column in the world at 202 feet. The Great Fire began in a baker's house in Pudding Lane on Sunday 2 September 1666 and burned for three days, after destroying most of the City which at that time had many timber buildings. After the Great Fire, Sir Christopher Wren's plan for London included only stone or brick buildings. It is possible to climb the Monument's 311 steps to the viewing platform for a heady panorama of the City and the Thames.
Arriving at London Bridge, the Pool of London marks the ancient heart of London's international port, established when the Romans built the first bridge here. Pass underneath London Bridge and walk past glazed modern offices to the yellow brick facade of Old Billingsgate Market.

**Did you know?**

Billingsgate flourished from 1000 AD right until 1982, when the market moved to Canary Wharf. In Tudor times, this was the heart of the legal quays, where goods liable for duty were checked by customs. Beyond Billingsgate is the old Custom House of 1817, built close to the site of its 14th-century predecessor, where the writer and poet Geoffrey Chaucer, author of The Canterbury Tales, was Controller of Customs.

Stroll on along on Sugar Quay walk to the Tower of London.

**Did you know?**

The Tower area grew up around the original White Tower, founded by William the Conqueror in 1100. The Tower is a complex of several buildings set within two concentric rings of defensive walls and a moat. After 900 years of constant service as a royal palace, fortress, prison, place of execution, arsenal, royal mint, menagerie and jewel house, this national icon remains the best-preserved medieval castle of any European capital. The Tower of London is famous for its Yeoman Warders, popularly known as Beefeaters, in their distinctive Tudor uniforms, and for the legendary ravens.

The Thames Path follows the river past the Traitors' Gate to Tower Bridge. Celebrate arriving with a visit to the Tower Bridge Exhibition, which offers superb river views from its high walkway.