

ROYALLY REGARDED

Take a Stroll Along the Rarified Streets of St. James's

It's rated as one of the world's most alluring neighbourhoods. And it's as elegant, charming and quintessentially British as an area that houses Buckingham Palace is bound to be. From atmospheric side streets and beautiful townhouses to clothing and consumables fit for royalty, here's *Signature's* guide to what to do, buy, eat and know in swish, stylish St James's.

Complex, layered and endlessly fascinating, the city of London was never deliberately planned in the way Paris and New York were. And therein lies its appeal. From one zone to the next, the capital changes and morphs — glamorous in one area, gritty in the next, a series of closely bound villages, each with its own character and mood. St James's, the concentrated area between Haymarket, Green Park, The Mall and Piccadilly, is one of the most exclusive and historic of those neighbourhoods. In St James's, Henry VIII seduced Anne Boleyn, King Charles II set up court while his mistresses set up mansions, Churchill shopped, and Ian Fleming dreamed up the shaken-not-stirred martini. At the same time, like London itself, St James's is constantly upgrading, renovating, and reinventing itself.

Read on for an insider take on the area's most fabulous places and experiences.

ST JAMES'S STYLE

Luxury, craftsmanship and tradition





Buckingham Palace



Jermyn Street bedecked with Union Flags for The Queen's Diamond Jubilee

are the leitmotifs of an area renowned for its high-end tailors and specialist stores. This was, after all, the domain of Beau Brummell, the style-obsessed Regency dandy, who shopped, loved and paraded about here, spending his nights at White's, a gentleman's club consuming claret and betting on random happenings like which raindrop would be first to run down the club's front window.

Jermyn Street dates back three centuries and is the leading destination for well-heeled fans of custom-made clothes

and all that goes with them. Royalty, celebrities, international millionaires and movie stars come here for suit and shirt stores like Turnbull and Asser and the family-owned Harvie & Hudson. Tricker's has produced handmade shoes since 1829. And the splendid John Lobb is where Prince Charles, among others, buys his shoes. Even if you're only buying laces, it's a delight to see the tools of the trade and the wooden blocks used for custom-made orders.

Backes and Strauss, founded in

1789, stocks incredible watches and is the world's oldest diamond company. Floris stocks outstanding perfumes, colognes and aftershaves, all in wonderful packaging. The milliners Lock and Co. first set up shop here in the 1660s, subsequently producing iconic accessories like Lord Nelson's bicorne, Charlie Chaplin's bowler, Oscar Wilde's fedora and Winston Churchill's top hat.

While Jermyn Street caters primarily to men, the elegant and enchanting Burlington Arcade and Piccadilly Arcade are lined with luxurious delights for women, including cult perfumes, glamorous accessories, designer shoes, and jewellery shops whose windows dazzle with diamonds and more.

ST JAMES'S FLAVOURS

Paxton and Whitfield, which opened in 1797, is packed with the very best British cheeses, and if they're good enough to supply the Palace, they're surely good enough for the rest of us! Fortnum and Mason, just a few blocks away, is a world of foodie wonder, from deli counters, teas by the score, and glamorous groceries to the grand Fountain Restaurant and incredible ice cream sundaes. For outstanding tipples, the master vintner Berry Bros & Rudd is the UK's oldest wine and spirit merchant with two Warrants for supplying the royal family. And, to conclude with a final indulgence, head for the plush old-school cigar merchant



DUKES London

James J. Fox.

ST JAMES'S CULTURE

You'll find literary heaven at Waterstones, which was previously the site of London's oldest bookshop, Hatchards. Floor after floor of incredible reading and brilliant advice from the staff make for hours of pleasure, and the cherry on the literal top is the cafe, which overlooks the area's streets and rooftops.

Theatre lovers should head for the Jermyn Street Theatre, a delightfully intimate venue for cabaret and musical comedy. Haymarket is also home to Her Majesty's Theatre, the setting for marvellous works since it opened in 1705, and the equally historic and prestigious Theatre Royal Haymarket.

And when it comes to art, you'll be spoiled for choice, with great local galleries like the renowned modern art specialist White Cube Mason's Yard, auction houses like Christie's and museums like The Royal Academy of Art,

which is set in the stunning Burlington House. Stroll up St James's Street to Jermyn Street, and you'll be face to face with the wildly fashionable Beau Brummell – or, at least, his likeness in bronze. The man said to have taught King George IV how to dress well, is commemorated with the declaration, "To be truly elegant, one should not be noticed."

ST JAMES'S ARCHITECTURE

The elegant townhouses of St James's include the standout Lancaster House, a neo-classical stone mansion that's home to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Marlborough House, which was designed by Sir Christopher Wren and his son, and St James's Church Piccadilly, another Wren design.

Clarence House, the former residence of King Charles and Queen Camilla, is, ironically, just a stroll away from Spencer House, an elegant 18th-century mansion with a connection to Princess Diana.

And, of course, it simply wouldn't do to miss out on Buckingham Palace when it's right on your doorstep. However cliché this touristy visit may seem, the Palace is so beautiful that it never fails to inspire admiration and awe. Plus, some State Rooms are open for viewing in summer – an incredible chance to see treasures from the Royal Collection.

For an altogether different experience, St James's winding, shadowy historic side streets are wonderfully atmospheric. One of the best is Crown Passage, with its tiny cafes and the Red Lion, which bills itself as London's oldest village inn.

ST JAMES'S HOME AWAY FROM...

Turn off Piccadilly's jampacked thoroughfare, stroll down buzzing St James Street and take a left down the narrow St James Place side street, and you'll find yourself in a tranquil cobbled cul de sac – and a red-brick Edwardian landmark complete with immaculate



Great British Restaurant



DUKES Drawing Room

window boxes and a billowing Union Jack flag. As welcoming and luxuriously traditional as it is cosily tucked away, DUKES London is a hotel with lineage: the place where Edgar Elgar once composed symphonies, Ian Fleming drank Martinis, Princess Di came for tea, and the likes of Hugh Jackman now revel in British heritage and hospitality.

“DUKES is quite unexpected in its way, like a luxurious country house in the middle of the city,” says the hotel’s General Manager, Michael Purtill. “You can relax here in total peace. And, at the same time, you’re right on the doorstep of Jermyn Street, Green Park, Buckingham Palace

and Piccadilly, and just a 20-minute walk from attractions like the National Gallery and Bond Street.”

Tradition, pedigree and genuine care shine through, from the dark-wood lobby furnished with oil paintings and antiques to the incredible charm and efficiency of the staff. The 90 rooms – classic, deluxe and suites – all come with marble bathrooms, flat-screen TVs, fabulous beds, crisp linen, designer toiletries and complimentary Wi-Fi. Personal touches could include being surprised with balloons, cake, and bubbly on a birthday or a specially decorated space for a marriage proposal. Along with this, DUKES London’s curated

experiences include exclusive store visits, gifts like custom-made fragrances or a tray of caviar and champagne, or, in the case of families, fun and games like London scavenger hunts.

Good food is synonymous with St James’s, and the hotel’s Great British Restaurant (GBR) is rated as one of London’s best spots for classic British cuisine. All the dishes on the all-day dining menu can be ordered in starter, or main course servings, and the offerings include standouts like Loch Duart Salmon, rich and tender Cambrian Lamb Neck, Potted Shrimp and Beef Rib. The service and wine list are notable. The polished decor combines plush banquettes, mirrored walls, gleaming chrome, and granite and glamorous society photographs.

As a cosy alternative, the Drawing Room serves light meals, snacks, coffee, teas and drinks in an old-school home-meets-private-club setting of pastel shades, oil paintings, and gently ticking clocks.

But, of course, the star attraction is the world-renowned DUKES Bar. A regular haunt of the writer Ian Fleming, DUKES Bar is said to have inspired his hero James Bond’s cocktail of choice. And even though the 17-page menu includes superb wines, whiskeys and more, there’s little to beat the thrill of a white-jacketed barman deftly wheeling a rosewood trolley to your table and crafting your Martini in a frozen glass topped with a bright twist of Amalfi lemon peel.

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