

In the Neighbourhood

Every day, a number of visitors to the Capital alight at Paddington Station and transfer to the tube to complete their journey, but should they step outside, there's much to enjoy in this vibrant part of London.



The facade of Hotel Indigo London Paddington



Little Venice

Paddington, located between two Royal Parks, is often overlooked. Yet wander through the suburb and you'll find a plethora of pretty gardens, squares, cafes and the Grand Union Canal. The station itself is Grade I-listed, designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel. It's possibly best known though, for its connection to Paddington Bear. The station gave the iconic children's fiction character its name as the bespectacled bear was found there, having come from "deepest, darkest Peru" with a note attached to his coat reading "please look after this bear, thank you". His journey has been immortalised in a bronze statue by Marcus Cornish, located under the clock on platform 1.

panel running the length of the corridor ceiling of blue sky, puffy white clouds, and building tops, taken on the street outside.

The bedrooms are individually designed, with vast murals depicting architectural features from the locale; the entire wall behind my bed is a scene from Little Venice, making me want to explore. I stroll back past the station to Paddington Basin, where a few stand-up paddle boarders are drifting in lazy circles, and follow the towpath by the Grand Union Canal. The 13.5-mile long Paddington Canal Arm is dotted with benches for contemplation of the waterway, which is lined with canal boats. It's hard to believe I'm still in London.

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Like Paddington Bear, I find myself in a swirl of people at the station, but I know exactly where I'm going. I'm checking in to Hotel Indigo London Paddington, in the heart of the busy neighbourhood. This urban oasis takes its location seriously, tipping its hat to its vibrant location as part of its creative design.

Built in a beautifully converted Victorian townhouse overlooking a leafy London square, the boutique hotel blends historical elements with contemporary design inspired by the Fibonacci sequence, perfectly capturing the character of the bustling Paddington and Hyde Park area. The pictures on the walls are all from the local district, including a photo

A short distance along, I find Beany Green, an artsy café, the tables decorated with bright red and yellow gerberas. Here I sit with a coffee, listening to a singer strumming his acoustic guitar by the door at just the right sound level, before I continue on my way. A few minutes' later, Grand Union Canal meets Regent's Canal. This picturesque pool of water, known by the grand moniker of Little Venice, is home to a number of waterside cafes, pubs and eateries. It's the perfect spot for lunch, or a stroll through Rembrandt Gardens across the water. Created in the 1950s, these lovely gardens feature numerous ornamental beds, shrubs, and a low wall flanking the towpath.

I could follow Grand Union Canal on its meandering path through the city, it runs all the way to Birmingham – but instead, I follow the Regent’s Canal branch, winding up in The Regent’s Park. Designed by John Nash, The Regent’s Park covers 395 acres and includes Queen Mary’s Gardens with more than 12,000 roses of 400 varieties, as well as the gloriously restored William Andrews Nesfield’s Avenue Gardens. The park also houses the Open Air Theatre, London Zoo, and Primrose Hill, but I’m happy just to lose myself in the greenery, popping out near Madame Tussauds. I’m tempted to pop in and see Chewbacca, the two-metre tall Wookiee from *Star Wars*, but the light is starting to fade, so instead I head back towards the hotel.

The night is closing in by the time I make it back and I pop in to the hotel’s London Street Brasserie for a dinner. The food is simple and unpretentious, using locally sourced, natural ingredients, and the service is impressively efficient. After dining, I take a glass of wine to the first-floor terrace, to sip under the stars and enjoy the remainder of the balmy evening.

In the morning, after breakfast back at the Brasserie, I survey my options. There are plenty of places to explore from here, from the white Carrara marble edifice of Marble Arch, a 15-minute walk away, to Portobello Road antiques and flea market in Notting Hill, 25 minutes’ away. I’m tempted to stroll to Abbey Road Studios, the legendary

recording studio in St. Johns Wood that is an icon of Rock’n’Roll history courtesy of the Beatles. Instead I choose something a little different.

St Mary’s Hospital is only 10 minutes’ away and it is home to the Alexander Fleming Laboratory Museum. Fleming discovered penicillin at St Mary’s Hospital in 1928, a breakthrough that revolutionised medicine and earned him a Nobel Prize. The museum is small, but fascinating, the highlight being Fleming’s laboratory, restored to its 1928 condition.

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Once a gritty part of London, where part of *Trainspotting* was filmed, Paddington has now softened its edges and is becoming a destination in its own right. With access to parks, shopping, restaurants and markets, it’s a great base for exploration. Paddington Bear just may have been on to something.



A fountain in The Regent’s Park



A room at the Hotel Indigo London Paddington



Paddington Station



Along the canal

For more information about the charming Hotel Indigo London Paddington, see indigopaddington.com.