

St James's, London UK

www.allwaystraveller.com

True historical grandeur in the heart of London

St James's is a grand area of London edged by the city's landmark tourist attractions of Buckingham Palace, Houses of Parliament, Piccadilly Circus and Trafalgar Square.

And while these provide a lure for visitors, from all over the world, there is a great deal to offer the discerning visitor within St James's itself.

One has St James's Palace and the adjoining, delightful, St James's Park; over 150 listed buildings; the historic clubs along Pall Mall and truly one of a kind shops that can claim a pedigree stretching back centuries.

A long standing determination and ongoing commitment to the preservation of St James, as an area of distinct character, has been helped by the St James's and Green Parks providing a natural barrier.

And so today, St James's retains a sophisticated grandeur in one of the world's great city's.

The Stafford, in the very heart of St James's, is a hotel that epitomises and reflects the areas personality and appreciation of tradition.

Ashley Gibbins
Managing editor
AllWays traveller



Greywolf © The Royal Parks



www.stjamestrust.london



Graham Wiltshire © Getty Images



© Edward Parker

A personal view of St James's



Once a year, to mark the Queen's official birthday Trooping the Colour is held on Horse Guards Parade, travelling up The Mall in St James's Park. © Henry Dallal

An area steeped in Royal patronage

By Ashley Gibbins

The St James's area of London was originally an open space and parkland surrounding the royal palace. This was built by Henry VIII between 1531 and 1536 on the site of the Hospital of St James.

It remained the official residence of kings and queens of England until, in 1837, Queen Victoria decided to 'up sticks' and move across the road to Buckingham Palace.

Much of the Palace's original red-brick building survives and the great Tudor Gatehouse, at the southern end of St. James's Street, still bears Henry VIII's royal cypher HR, surmounted by his crown.

The king's favour

It was, however, Charles II (1630 - 1685) who must be credited with the first development of St James's when, in the 1660s, he gave the right to develop part of Green Park and St James's Park to Henry Jermyn, the 1st Earl of St Albans.

Jermyn used the land to build grand boulevards of equally grand town houses centred on St James's Square for, what became, a thriving residential community of aristocrats and the very well to do.

The patronage that King Charles and subsequent 'royals' bestowed on the area also saw England's finest purveyors of goods setting up shop in St James's - particularly gentleman's ware and wine sellers.



King George VI and Queen Mother memorials, St James's Park

The memorial to The Queen Mother, who died in 2002, aged 101 shows her at 51 years and incorporates the existing bronze statue of her husband, King George VI. Greywolf © The Royal Park.

While in the area

St James's Square



St James's Square, laid out in the 1670s, was one of London's earliest squares.

It was lined by exclusive houses for those people whose business made it essential to live near St James's Palace.

For 50 years St James's Square was the most fashionable address in London, with seven dukes and seven earls in residence by the 1720s.

Many of the buildings seen now date from the 18th and 19th centuries and have had many famous residents.

During World War II both Generals Eisenhower and de Gaulle had headquarters here.

No private houses now survive on the square. No.10 on the north side is Chatham House, dating from 1736, home of the Royal Institute for International Affairs.

In the north-west corner is the London Library, dating from 1896, a private lending library founded by the historian Thomas Carlyle and others in 1841 in disgust at the inefficiency of the British Library.

The private gardens in the middle of St James's Square are dominated by an imposing statue of William III astride a horse, which was erected in 1808.

St James's Church

St James's Church is a Christopher Wren design consecrated in 1684, which was bombed during the Blitz of 1940 and rebuilt shortly afterwards.

A small market in the church courtyard offers an eclectic range of food, arts, crafts, antiques, collectables, complementary therapy goods, cosmetics and clothing from around the world.

www.sjp.org.uk
www.piccadilly-market.co.uk



www.bbr.com

Stores of distinction

Many of the original stores - and others that arrived during the 17th and 18th Centuries - remain to this day and welcome those who merely wish to browse.



Lock & Co and St James's Street

Located in St James's Street, and held by many as '*the best hatters in the world*', has been making fine English hats since 1676

www.lockhatters.co.uk

Berry and Rudd

Vintners Berry and Rudd, which first opened in 1698, and is still under the guidance of a Mr. Berry, has a weighing book with entries from the likes of Lord Byron and Beau Brummel.

www.bbr.com

Paxton and Whitfield

Paxton and Whitfield that has been selling cheese from the same store in Jermyn Street since 1797.

www.paxtonandwhitfield.co.uk

Others include D R Harris (chemists and perfumes), which was first established in 1790 and gentleman's hairdressers Truefitt and Hill, which has been cutting hair since 1805.

www.truefittandhill.co.uk

www.drharris.co.uk



Strolling around St James's I was also enthralled by the many historic shop fronts of Bates gentlemans hatter(1898), Crockett and Jones shoes (1879) and Turnbull & Asser, which has been selling handmade clothing for gentlemen since 1885.

Even those of you, like me, who get anything but excited at the thought of window-shopping, will enjoy doing so in St James's.

Fortnum and Mason



Finally there is the flagship store of Fortnum & Mason, which was founded on its site on Duke Street in 1707 by William Fortnum and Hugh Mason.

This stunning store is known worldwide as purveyors of fine foods, hampers, teas and wine. It has five restaurants, a wine bar and an ice cream parlour.

www.fortnumandmason.com

The Mall



The Mall is a road running down from Buckingham Palace and goes to Trafalgar Square. It was created as a ceremonial route in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

A grand processional route in honour of Queen Victoria, it has seen innumerable historic Royal processions including coronations, state openings of Parliament and state visits.

Other countries send their royalty and heads of state up this route to visit the Queen.

Pickering Place



This tiny courtyard, through a passageway between two old 16th century shops, St James's Street is the smallest square in Britain.

In the 18th century the square was notorious for its gambling dens, bear baiting and duels - and is the last place in London where a duel was fought.

It was also home to the Texan Republic's embassy, until it joined the United States.

As you walk through the passageway a plaque reads : *In this building was the legation for the ministers from the Republic of Texas to the Court of St. James 1842-1845.*

An area of character and characters

If St James's is an area of great character it also has a history rich in characters including Beau Brummell and his feline namesake.

Beau Brummel



George Bryan 'Beau Brummell' (1778 - 1840) was an iconic figure in Regency England and the arbiter of men's fashion.

A close friend of the Prince Regent, the future King George IV, he was a much lauded and remarked upon character of St James's.

Brummell established the mode of dress for men that rejected overly ornate fashions for understated, perfectly tailored bespoke garments.

He pioneered dark coats, full-length trousers (rather than knee breeches and stockings) and immaculate shirt linen with an elaborately knotted cravat, which Brummell invented.

Beau was proud to claim he took five hours a day to dress. His statue is to be found in Jermyn Street.

Frank Laino

And then there is Frank Laino, executive concierge at the Stafford Hotel, who is a real life character and champion of St James's today.

In his 17 years with the Stafford, Frank has been recognised as the *Virtuoso 'Best of the Best Concierge in the World'*; the *Andrew Harper World's Favourite Concierge* and the *World's Top Concierge Luxury Travel Adviser*.



Succeeding at the highest level, in a profession as demanding as any, requires character and personality in spades, a detailed knowledge and real influence.

In his time Frank has sorted bespoke doggie suits from Saville Row for one lady guest and hand wrapped a Mercedes sport car as a surprise from another guest for his true love.

Then there was the American couple who were regulars over the years at the Stafford. For their 50th anniversary Frank arranged a park bench inscribed with their names in nearby Berkeley Square.

On a day to day basis Frank with answer questions, resolve problems and arrange itineraries for guests.

He has also devised and leads a Secrets of St James's tour for guests.

At three hours and travelling no more than one half mile from the Stafford, it reveals the wealth of historical interest in this area.

www.thestaffordlondon.com

Bustopher Jones

And finally, of course, there's *Bustopher Jones the Cat About Town* from T. S. Eliot's Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats, and more recently a 'star' of Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Cats*.

*Bustopher Jones is not skin and bones
In fact, he's remarkably fat
He doesn't haunt pubs - he has eight or nine clubs
For he's the St. James's*

Clarence House



www.royalcollection.org.uk

The home of the Queen Mother from 1953 to 2002, a tour of Clarence House is an excellent way of appreciating the history of the British Royal Family.

It is now the official London residence of The Prince of Wales, and is only to the public during August and September.

www.royalcollection.org.uk/visit/clarence-house

Graspan Royal Marines memorial



Greywolf © The Royal Parks

Erected in memory of Royal Marines who died in the Boxer Rebellion Campaign in China and the Boer War in southern Africa.

In 2000 it became the Royal Marines National Memorial.

Street Cat!



Greywolf © The Royal Parks

St James's Park

The 'green lung' of St James's Park is the oldest of London's Royal Parks.

The park was once a marshy water meadow until, in 1532, Henry VIII acquired the site as yet another of his deer parks and built the Palace of St James's.



© Edward Parker

When Elizabeth I came to the throne she indulged her love of pageantry and pomp, and fetes of all kinds were held in the park.

Her successor, James I, improved the drainage and controlled the water supply.

A road was created in front of St James's Palace, approximately where the Mall is today, but it was Charles II who made dramatic changes.

He oversaw the redesign of the park, with avenues of trees planted and lawns laid.

The King also opened the park to the public and was a frequent visitor, feeding the ducks and mingling with his subjects.

The park was transformed again in 1837 when John Nash redesigned the more romantic style enjoyed today.

A canal was transformed into a natural-looking lake and water birds were introduced by the Ornithological Society of London.



© The Royal Parks

The birds in the park

The park lake and its surrounds remain a haven for several species of duck, particularly mallard and tufted, as well as swan, geese, coot and moorhen. A flock of pelicans also live here as do many other species of birds.

This provides year round entertainment for those who come to feed the birds - and the squirrels - but be warned

Feeding ducks bread is notoriously bad for them and has no nutritional value.

Give bird-seed, duck pellets, or whole wheat.

The pelicans in the park



© Edward Parker

Living near Duck Island are St James's Park's famous resident pelicans. Pelicans were first introduced into St James's Park in 1664 as a gift from the Russian Ambassador.

In March 2013, an additional three Great White pelicans - a gift from the City of Prague - were introduced into the park.

Regular visitors can see the pelicans basking on their favourite rocks and getting fed fresh fish between 2:30 pm and 3:00 pm every day

The St James's Trust

Upon understanding a little of the historic relevance of St James's, one is more able to appreciate the importance of preserving one of London's grand quarters.

This mantle is held by the St James's Trust, which has championed careful planning controls to 'avoid the risk of developers, striving to make a profit for themselves and their investors, from maximising the use of the land here from a purely commercial standpoint'.

www.stjamestrust.london

More information



© René Mansi

A place to stay: the Stafford London



By Ann Mealor

The Stafford London, St. James's Place enjoys a history and ambience that suits its location perfectly.

The property was originally built as private residences in the 17th Century, with one owned by Lord and Lady Lyttelton, daughter of the then Earl Spencer, was pressed into service as nanny to Queen Victoria's children.

It became a hotel in 1912, and enjoys a serene setting and just steps from the bustle of St James's.

A hidden gem

Tucked away in St James, London behind The Ritz is The Stafford, a hidden gem of a boutique hotel.

Refined yet homely, elegant yet comfortable, traditional yet modern, *The Stafford* is a place to relax and unwind, an oasis in the heart of a hectic city.

After a busy morning shopping or taking in the sights of London, it is a pleasure to take a break and sink in to one of the comfy sofas in the luxurious lounge.

Coffee and home-made biscuits can be enjoyed in front of the roaring fire whilst admiring the quintessentially English decor, the modern artworks and the eclectic mix of curios that are on display.

The American Bar

From early evening onwards *The Stafford's* cosy American Bar is packed to the rafters and buzzing with guests and local city folk.

With its green leather bar stools and sofas, comfortable chairs, wood panelling, picture covered walls and sweeping marble and brass bar, it has the feel of a gentleman's club.

It also enjoys a quirky American touch- the ceiling is covered with USA baseball caps, pennants, ties and even model aircraft.



A stay at The Stafford

Our stay at The Stafford started with a welcome and efficient check-in by the friendly and professional staff.

We were then shown to our room, a suite, which overlooked the quaint, cobbled courtyard.

Large, comfortable and very well furnished it had a cream marbled hallway, a spacious, chic lounge and a large bedroom with a super soft kingsize bed.

The large marble bathroom equipped with ample, deliciously scented Floris toiletries.



A place to relax

The lounge was ideal for working and relaxing in, with its large sofa, two armchairs, work station, TV and espresso coffee machine.

Interesting modern artworks decorated the walls and a selection of current magazines lay waiting to be read on the coffee table.

Service was discreet and efficient with a fine attention to detail, for example hot milk is automatically provided with coffee, and usually that is something I have to ask.

Nothing disappointed at this small luxury hotel that will make any trip to London special.

www.thestaffordlondon.com

AllWays somewhere to dine : the Lyttleton Restaurant

By Ann Mealor

The Lyttleton Restaurant is, which is *The Stafford's* fine dining restaurant, certainly lives up to the hotel's high standards.

We started our dining experience with signature cocktails in the American Bar.

Served in the old style, wide brimmed, champagne glasses I enjoyed a gin based White Mouse and a Marmalade vodka based Spitfire.

Both were topped with champagne and had real bite! We also tucked in to the olives, crisps and savouries that came with them.

Stylish and elegant

We were then shown to our table in the Lyttleton dining room, stylish and elegant with crisp white table cloths, napkins and silver cutlery glinting in the candlelight.

After enjoying a selection of warm bread rolls we were presented with a parsnip mousse Amuse Bouche from the Chef.

It was a dainty morsel of deliciousness.

Next came our starters of choice; two small steaks of Cured Loch Duart salmon with roasted apple, creme fraiche and pickled mustard seeds.

The salmon was melt in the mouth tender and the flavour complimented by the sweet apple.

Succulent dishes

For mains I chose the pork, two succulent pieces of succulent pork fillets with a wild mushroom fricassee and pea puree.

It was beautifully presented with the green puree really adding colour and complimenting the texture of the pork.

Ashley chose the South Coast monkfish fillet with grapefruit and pickled Sussex river mussels.

The sharp, citrus tang worked very well with the meaty fish.

The chips were delicious- hot and crispy on the outside and fluffy inside.

We each complimented our meal with a glass of Chablis.

With room for dessert, and it being the Festive Season, Ashley chose the Christmas pudding, full of nuts spice and fruit and served with orange ice cream.

I went for the architectural sounding reconstructed lemon meringue pie.



Cubes of lemon marshmallow were interspersed with lemon curd, crisp shortbread discs and tiny whirls of meringue.

Delicious coffee and petit fours followed in the lounge.



There was also a delicious mix of fresh fruit, cheese, cereal, yoghurts and cold meats on the breakfast buffet.

Breakfast at The Stafford

The next morning, breakfast was equally delicious.

My full English with fried eggs, bacon, sausage, mushroom and tomato was perfectly cooked as was Ashley's smoked haddock and poached eggs.

Afternoon teas are a speciality at *The Stafford* and dining alfresco is available in the courtyard.

www.thestaffordlondon.com

A snapshot of St James's



Giles Barnard © The Royal Parks



AllWays traveller and the International Travel Writers Alliance



AllWays traveller provides travel features to destinations worldwide from the journalists in the International Travel Writers Alliance.

www.allwaystraveller.com



Ann Mealor is a professional travel writer and photographer and Commissioning Editor of *AllWays traveller*



The International Travel Writers Alliance is the world's largest association of professional travel journalists.

www.itwalliance.com



Ashley Gibbins is a professional travel writer and photographer and Chief Executive of the International Travel Writers Alliance.