



A Perfect Winter's Day in London

By Emma, Ciao Bella Travel's London Correspondent

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I've been living in London for almost 3 years now. There are so many great things about the city that keep me here. Perhaps one of the less obvious motives is the seasons. For a girl hailing from Brisbane, where the days go from warm to hot to sweltering, it's a joy to see leaves change colour, to own a scarf and a woollen coat (maybe even two or three!), and to understand why Vogue features trench coats in Spring when surely you don't want to be wearing anything more than a Zimmerman bikini.

To a visitor, London might seem bleak and unbearable in the colder months but it really comes into its own in winter and there's a lot to appreciate both indoors and out. So how would I spend a cold, wintery day in this capital that has everything to offer?

Rug up in your latest woolly fashions and start your day with a traditional English breakfast or Viennese pastry in the grand European dining room of **The Wolseley** on Piccadilly. I recommend booking in advance, however, they do reserve a few tables for walk-ins.

After a leisurely hour of star-spotting (I saw Sir Ian McKellen last time I was there) and espresso-sipping, wander down the Strand to **Somerset House** and take a turn skating around the ice rink against this spectacular backdrop. Ice rinks pop up all over the city at this time of year and this has to be the pick. Somerset House also boasts one of the city's best Christmas trees that's not too late to see - the decorations are inspired by Tiffany's which is sponsoring this year's event. Once you've twirled off breakfast you will no doubt deserve one of

the turquoise-iced Hummingbird Bakery (gals across London indulge in their treats) cup cakes on offer!

The chill outside makes it a great time of year to explore the myriad galleries and museums. The Annie Leibovitz photography exhibition on at the **National Portrait Gallery** at the moment is excellent so pop in here next and see some of her well known Vanity Fair cover shots and the more intimate family photographs.

A great London tradition is the pub lunch. Don't worry, I'm not talking about meat and 3 veg in an RSL! Gastropubs are all about good quality, simple food in a comfortable, less formal atmosphere. Warm up in a cosy spot by the fireplace at the **Holly Bush** in Hampstead and while away an hour or two over lunch. Book a table downstairs – it has the same menu as the dining room upstairs but is a little more lively.

After lunch, take a stroll through the village and make your way to **Hampstead Heath** for a brisk walk in the fresh air and join the kite flyers for one of the best views of the city (avoiding the queues at the London Eye). From Downshire Hill, enter the heath, turn right and stroll past the 3 Hampstead Ponds and ascend Parliament Hill.

Switch your wellies for stilettos once the sun sets and make your way to Soho for a pre-theatre dinner at **Arbutus**. The set menu is terrific value for a Michelin-starred restaurant and if you let them know what time you need to leave they'll get you out in time without rushing you.

Finish off the perfect day at the opulent **Royal Opera House** where The Royal Ballet is performing a traditional version of The Nutcracker. Afterwards, if you aren't quite ready for your beauty sleep, have a nightcap at **Milk & Honey**. It's a private club that allows non-members when they're not so busy - ring ahead to secure a table. Sit back, enjoy your apple martini and plan to do it all again tomorrow!

NB If the weather really is against you and there's sleet falling from the sky and salt grit on the footpaths, you can always head to Westfield's new mecca in west London and update your winter wardrobe before trying again tomorrow.

Contact details:

www.thewolseley.com

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