**London**

London is the capital of Great Britain, its economic, political, and cultural center. It is situated on the both banks of the Thames. London is a very old city. It is more than twenty centuries old. The original walled city of London founded by Roman was quite small. Slowly it grew into a large city. And now it is the largest city in Europe and one of the largest cities in the world with the population of 11 million people. About a fifth of the total population of the UK lives in the Greater London area, that is in London and its suburbs.

London is home for the headquarters of all government departments, Parliament, the major legal institutions and the monarch. It is the country’s business and banking center and the center of its transport networks. It contains the headquarters of the national television networks and of all the national newspapers.

London consists of three main parts: the City of London, the West End and the East End.

The City is the financial center of London. It is the district where most offices and banks are concentrated. The Royal Exchange, the Stock Exchange and the Bank of England are situated here. During the daytime, nearly a million people work there, but less than 8 000 people actually live there. Many people live outside the center of London in the suburbs, and they travel to work, in shops and offices by train, bus or underground.

The West End is a symbol of wealth. This district is known for its many theatres, cinemas, luxurious hotels and restaurants and expensive shops. By the day the whole of London is busy. At night offices are quiet and empty, but the West End stays alive, because this is where Londoners come to enjoy themselves. There are two opera houses here, several concert halls and many theatres, as well as cinemas. In nearby Soho the pubs, restaurants and night clubs are busy half the night.

The East End is known as the poorer residential area of London where mostly working people live. Many factories, workshops and the Port of London is situated here. The old port area is now called “Docklands”. There are now new offices building in Docklands, and thousands of new flats and houses. This district of London is very unattractive, but very important to the country’s commerce.

Like all big cities, London has streets and concrete buildings, but it also has many big parks, full of trees, flowers and grass. The most famous of them are Hyde Park with its famous Speaker’s Corner and Kensington Gardens.

London is also the main tourist attraction of the country. There are a lot of places of interest in London, which attract thousands of tourists every year. They usually want to see Trafalgar Square, Piccadilly Circus, Westminster Abbey, the House of Parliament, Buckingham Palace, St.Paul’s Cathedral, the London Bridge, the Tower of London and many other places.

Trafalgar Square is the geographical center of London. Around the Square there are several large buildings including the National Gallery and the Church of St.Martin-in-the-Fields, but it is dominated by Nelson’s Column. The monument was erected in 1881 to commemorate Nelson’s triumph at the battle of Trafalgar in 1805. The monument is guarded by four bronze lions.

At one side of the Square is the National Gallery, which was built in 1924. It has a rich collection of pictures.

At the other side of the Square is Buckingham Palace, the Queen’s official London residence. It is a beautiful building with a flag over it standing in large gardens. If the Queen’s flag flies over the Palace, it means that the Queen is in the residence. Londoners usually watch the Changing of the Guards in the forecourt of the palace. It lasts 30 minutes.

Another well-known square of London is Piccadilly Circus. It is the entertainment center for the West End of London. In the middle of it there is a statue of Eros, the God of Love. The statue is made of aluminium and is so light that can be easily lifted by 2 or 3 men.

On the left bank of the Thames stands Westminster Abbey, which is now the political center of London. In the 11th century King Edward the Confessor decided to build a great abbey church there. There are many royal tombs in the Abbey, like the tomb of Edward the Confessor himself, and memorials to famous men and women. The most popular ones are those to writers, poets and musicians in the Poet’s Corner. William the Conqueror was crowned there, and since then all the coronations have taken place in the Abbey. During the reign of Edward the Confessor the Palace of Westminster was built too. It was the royal residence and also the country’s main court. The Parliament met here since the 16th till the 19th century. The present Houses of Parliament designed by Sir Charles Barry were built in 1850 after the fire in the Palace of Westminster in 1834. There are two houses in the Parliament: the House of Commons and the House of Lords. St.Stephen’s Tower of the Houses of Parliament contains probably the most famous clock in the world Big Ben.

Another place, which attracts tourists, is St.Paul’s Cathedral. St.Paul’s Cathedral is Sir Christopher Wren’s masterpiece. It was built since 1675 until 1709. It is crowned with a huge dome. Inside the dome there is the famous Whispering Gallery. There are many memorials in the Cathedral. Such people as Wellington, Nelson and Wren himself are buried here.

The Tower of London was planned as a castle. It was built about 9 centuries ago by William the Conqueror. It is associated with many important events in the British history. It was a place of State intrigue and executions. The Tower has been a fortress, a palace, a prison, a mint. The Tower is now the home of the Crown jewels protected by Yeomen Guards more known as «Beefeaters».

London is also noted for its museums and art galleries. Among them are the National Gallery, the National Portrait Gallery, the Tate Gallery of sculpture, the Museum of London, the Museum of Moving Image, Madam Tussaud’s Museum of life-size portraits in wax and many others. But the most well-known and one of the largest in the world is the British Museum. The British Museum was founded by Act of Parliament in 1753 to bring together the collection of Sir Robert Cotton, some others and future addition to them. Anthony Panizzi designed the famous circular Reading Room at the British Museum. The first thing that strikes a visitor is its unusual shape.