

OSCAR WILDE TOURS

Oscar Wilde's London and Paris

August 14-22, 2018

Probably the greatest wit that ever lived, possibly the most important comic playwright in English history, novelist, essayist, fashion columnist, and the hero/victim of one of the great romantic tragedies—as well as probably the best-known gay icon of history. Who could it be but Oscar Wilde? Mr. Wilde was also an important figure in the history of both London and Paris, so his story makes an excellent hook for an exploration of these two great cities—and in particular of their rich gay history, from the days of Shakespeare and Henri III to those of Yves Saint Laurent and Ian McKellen.

Come along for a daring new look at these magnificent cities. Over eight days we will introduce you to their history as you've never seen it before: London and Paris with a special emphasis on their usually ignored gay sides. And especially, with lots of delicious anecdotes and quotes from Oscar Wilde. With superb accommodations, ravishing meals and expert guides versed in gay history, you're about to embark on a journey of a lifetime...



Tuesday, August 14

Day 1

After resting from your international flight, you'll meet Professor Lear and our Gay London guide for an afternoon's walk. We start with a tour of England's quintessential monument, Westminster Abbey, England's coronation church since 1066. For all its official grandeur, the Abbey is rich in gay history, with memorials of gay kings, authors, and actors—including the Oscar Wilde memorial window, dedicated in 1995, 100 years after his conviction and imprisonment. After the Abbey, we proceed to afternoon tea at one of London's most famous tearooms—a favorite of Wilde, Virginia Woolf, and Noel Coward. With a lovely selection of teas and three courses of sandwiches, warm scones with clotted cream, and cakes, you'll be immersed in the greatest British culinary tradition of all.

Wednesday, August 15

Day 2

We spend today on further exploration of London. The morning begins with a stroll down London's famous shopping street, Piccadilly, where we discover many connections with "dear Oscar." Our stroll ends at the National Portrait Gallery, where we will enjoy Professor Lear's special Gay Secrets tour, covering the remarkable number of gay personalities on display, from King James I and his boyfriend to David Hockney and diver Tom Daley. We have lunch at the gallery's top-floor dining room, with one of London's loveliest views. After lunch, we stroll through London's gayest neighborhood, Soho, on our way to the British Museum, where we stop to see, among other things, the Warren Cup—probably the most scandalously gay piece in any major museum and the most expensive item ever purchased by the Museum. The museum also has connections with Wilde and with Forster's long-repressed gay novel *Maurice*. Our tour concludes with a stroll around Bloomsbury's famous residential squares, where the Bloomsbury group famously "lived in squares and loved in triangles." Evening free.

Thursday, August 16

Day 3

Today we take the train past Reading Gaol (as in "The Ballad of...") to Oxford, home to the oldest university in the English-speaking world. On arrival, we start with a walking tour of its breathtaking architecture, following in the footsteps of its many famous gay graduates, such as T. E. Lawrence and W. H. Auden. We lunch in a charming 17th century pub, which you may often have seen in the *Inspector Morse* mysteries. After lunch, we tour Magdalen College, the most beautiful of Oxford's colleges—Wilde's college (and also Tolkien's!)—and then take a tour of the university museum, the Ashmolean, to see some of its curiosities (including a Renaissance majolica plate with a portrait head made up of penises!). This year, in particular, there is an exhibit from the British Museum on "Desire, Love, Identity: exploring LGBTQ histories." After some free time to enjoy Oxford's bookstores and cafés, we return to London for a free evening.

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Friday, August 17 **Day 4** Another excursion occupies our morning: we go by train to visit Bletchley Park, the top-secret research center where the great mathematician Alan Turing (subject of *The Imitation Game*) invented the computer and broke Nazi Germany's military codes. After having helped save the Western world, Turing was repaid by being convicted for cruising in 1952—though he was pardoned in 2009 and inspired the UK's 2017 Alan Turing's Law that pardoned **all** men convicted for homosexual acts under earlier laws. We then return to London for a free afternoon and evening—your time to explore other museums, the city's great shopping, and London's many famous restaurants. Note that an entire season of Wilde plays is being put on in the West End (London's version of Broadway) this year; we will keep you informed.

Saturday, August 18 **Day 5** Today we take the famous Chunnel train to Paris and begin our explorations of Europe's other great capital. After lunch in one of Paris' most charming street markets, we explore our hotel's neighborhood, the Left Bank, from Montparnasse to the Seine. This is Paris' great bohemian neighborhood, where poets, artists, and exiles spent their days at the cafés in the 19th and 20th centuries. As we meander, we see sites from literary, artistic, and gay history, from Gertrude Stein's studio, to the café where James Baldwin wrote *Giovanni's Room*, and finally to the hotel where after his sad last years as an alcoholic pauper, Mr. Wilde died. The evening is free, and with our hotel in the middle of the Left Bank, you won't have any trouble finding places to eat...

Sunday, August 19 **Day 6** We start our morning by crossing the Seine to visit the other half of Paris. We begin in the world's great monumental cemetery, Père Lachaise, famous for the graves of Wilde and Jim Morrison. In fact, we see the graves of many famous people, some gay (Proust, Gertrude Stein), and some not (Abélard and Héloïse, Chopin, Maria Callas). After a typical French lunch, we tour the Marais, one of Paris' most interesting neighborhoods, including everything from the city's best collection of 17th century palaces to its traditional Jewish ghetto and the city's main gayborhood, where we end our afternoon with a drink. Evening free.

Monday, August 20 **Day 7** The Valley of the Loire, south of Paris, beckons today: one of the most beautiful parts of the country, where the kings of France built during the Renaissance the world's most fantastic collection of castles. We visit two castles with gay connections: Clos Lucé, where the great gay genius Leonardo Da Vinci spent his last three years, and Chenonceau, a favorite of France's gayest king, Henri III—and well-loved by a line-up of other fascinating people as well, including Catherine de Médicis, her husband's mistress Diane de Poitiers, and her daughter-in-law Mary Queen of Scots. We will have lunch at the castle's superb restaurant (with wines from the estate!) before our tour, and then return to Paris for another free evening for exploring the city's magnificent restaurants and nightlife.

Tuesday, August 21 **Day 8** Back in Paris, we spend the morning visiting one of the world's greatest art museums, the Musée du Louvre. We view its famous masterpieces, with a special concentration on the Museum's astonishingly rich collection of gay-themed works—from its four statues of the Roman emperor Hadrian's boyfriend Antinous, to portraits of all of France's gay kings, to a rich collection of homoerotic works from the Napoleonic period. The tour is a true eye-opener, covering thousands of years of gay history in one place. As in London, we leave your last afternoon free for your own explorations—of the city's wonderful museums, architecture, bistros and boutiques. Our evening is rounded out with a farewell dinner at one of Paris' great bistros—where Barack and Michelle Obama had dinner on their trip to Paris. It's a great place to toast the two great cities we have visited and the new friendships you have made on the tour!

Wednesday, August 22 **Day 9** Our tour ends this morning with breakfast in Paris, but we are happy to arrange your other travel plans, to Amsterdam (for our 4 day Gay Amsterdam extension) or elsewhere. But please let us know about your return to the US, especially if you are leaving today.

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OUR HOTELS

This tour stays in specially selected four-star hotels, where available. The hotels listed are our accommodations of choice; when they are not available for booking, we provide accommodations of equivalent level.

LONDON-The Chesterfield Mayfair

Set in the heart of London's most chic neighborhood, Mayfair, around the corner from Berkeley Square and Bond St., the Chesterfield occupies a row of townhouses with a fascinating history of aristocrats and parliamentarians. Today's hotel is a model of old-fashioned British charm and hospitality.

PARIS-Hotel Pont Royal

In the heart of the St. Germain neighborhood, steps away from Paris' most famous cafés, the Pont Royal has a fascinating history, starting in the '20s when Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald held court in its bar. Today it is a hotel of quiet grace and elegance, and an ideal center for your visit to Paris.