



Senior Scribe FBC, Baltimore MD: In these days of rising travel costs, the historic city offers some of its most fascinating attractions absolutely free. I've visited London many times over nearly 70 years, and have actually found several free places actually the most interesting.

Some people go to London for its great theaters. Others enjoy the historic royal pomp. The city's beautiful parks attract many. When I went to London recently, I revisited memories of my first time there in May of 1945 as a young GI.

1. Buckingham Palace Gates, London SW1A 1AA, www.royal.gov.uk. When the Royal Family appears on the palace balcony these days, Queen Elizabeth II, now age 89, is only survivor of those who were there to celebrate the World War II victory in May 1945. We GIs happily joined in with the British celebrants and had the time of our lives.

This year the queen will mark her 90th birthday, and there will be many events in May to mark the occasion. They include the famed Horse Guard parades and Changing of the Guard ceremonies. You can view that free if you can get close enough to the Palace gates. If you want to tour inside, it costs about \$30 per person for a three-hour visit to the palace and surrounding grounds.

2. Trafalgar Square, Westminster, London WC2N 5DS, www.londontown.com. I always enjoy visiting this busy gathering place for tourists, students and locals. In the center is a huge column with the statue of Admiral Nelson atop. He commanded the British Navy to victory in 1805, but was killed during the Battle of Trafalgar.

On the day WWII ended in 1945, I was at Trafalgar Square with hundreds of other GIs to join in on the enormous celebration. On many London visits since, I return to remember those historic moments.

3. Imperial War Museum, Lambeth Road, London SE1 6HZ, UK, www.iwm.org.uk. See familiar artifacts from Britain's past. They include uniforms, weapons, captured enemy equipment, photos, city bomb shelters, period aircraft and many more interesting historic images.

4. Old Royal Naval College, London SE10 9NN, UK, www.ornc.org. Visiting the magnificent ORNC Painted Hall is a step back in history. It was designed by famed British architect Christopher Wren, and completed just in time for the state funeral of Admiral Nelson in 1805. The massive enclosure of soaring columns and rare woods is still the setting today for patriotic and festive occasions.

When there several years ago, the hall inside was blocked from visitors because of a military wedding. As we stood nearby, we watched the crossed swords ceremony as the bride and British Naval officer groom left on their honeymoon.

5. St. Martin in the Fields, Trafalgar Square. London. WC2N 4JJ, www.smitf.org. The original structure was built in the 13th Century on a burial site that dated back nearly 1,000 years. When I first saw the church in 1945, it had been heavy damaged by German bombers, and wasn't rebuilt until five years later.

When visiting, go below to the Cafe in the Crypt. This is where early Christians buried their dead. Now in the space is a lively restaurant and music hall. There are free daily lunchtime concerts and many other events in the crypt area and the church above.

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