

Made in Marylebone

Moments from London's Marble Arch lies an area steeped in history and intrigue, finds **Katie McGonagle**

I've passed by Marble Arch hundreds of times – sailing by on the bus to Edgware Road, en route to a shopping trip along Oxford Street or on my way to a day out in nearby Hyde Park. Yet I'd never stopped to look closer, until now.

Just a few strides from the triumphal arch, moved here in 1851 from its original spot outside Buckingham Palace, sits an unsuspecting plaque that proclaims it as "the site of Tyburn tree". This was no leafy oak, but rather the location of the city's notorious gallows, where tens of thousands of Londoners once came to see the spectacle of a public hanging.

This gruesome practice even gave rise to two well-known sayings: 'one for the road', as prisoners would be permitted to stop off at inns along the way for a final drink before they met their fate, and the word 'hangover', said to come from the day of drinking and revelry as people would come to watch the public executions then suffer the consequences the next morning.

These grisly yet fascinating facts were just some of the revelations of a weekend spent exploring a place close to

home. After a year in which many of us have walked every inch of our surrounding area, discovering woodland paths or local landmarks we might not have seen before, the new Discover Marylebone package from the Hyatt Regency London hotel – set a few moments away from Marble Arch – aims to recreate that sense of adventure in the midst of the city centre.

MAGIC OF MARYLEBONE

This area has long been home to high-profile figures – Charles Dickens, Dodie Smith, Jimi Hendrix and Paul McCartney have been among its residents – but ask many Londoners to pinpoint it on a map and they might struggle.

Nonetheless, taking the time to stop and read the numerous blue plaques that grace its grand buildings – including one commemorating the home of Lord Randolph Churchill (father of Winston) and another where John Lennon lived at the height of his 1960s fame – is a timely reminder of just how central this small district is to the cultural life of the capital. ➤

DESTINATIONS

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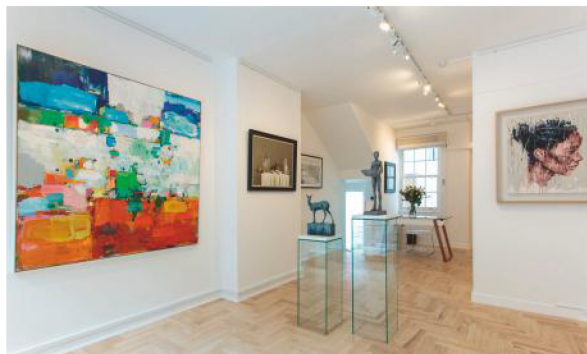


CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:

The Wallace Collection; St Mary's Church; oyster dish at Hyatt Regency London's summer terrace; Thompson's gallery

PREVIOUS PAGE: Marble Arch

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Its religious significance is notable too, with grand churches including the imposing facade of the Church of the Annunciation and the impressive semi-circular portico and domed tower of St Mary's. Nearby, and just a few steps away from the bustle of Oxford Street and Hyde Park, lies one of the more unusual religious landmarks in the area, Tyburn Convent. Its unassuming frontage hides an order of cloistered nuns cut off from the busy life of the capital, living in a convent established to pray for the souls of Catholic martyrs, and now a curious anomaly in the midst of this buzzing London district.

CAPITAL CREATIONS

With so many creative minds concentrated in such a small space, it's no surprise this area has a vibrant artistic bent. Most prominent are the Renaissance artworks on display at The Wallace Collection, a stately home filled with French fine art and masterpieces from the likes of Titian, Velazquez and Van Dyck. The gallery is due to reopen on June 3. Entrance is free, but Covid restrictions mean times must be reserved online in advance.

Yet it's not just about the Old Masters here, with a host of independent shops and awning-fronted eateries showcasing the area's entrepreneurial spirit as well.

Hidden between artisan bakeries and elegant fashion boutiques sits the small Thompson's gallery, showcasing contemporary British art and sculpture. This little treasure trove of modern art, tucked away behind a modest timber-framed shopfront, is a family-run gallery first established in Aldeburgh, Suffolk, to showcase the work of contemporary British artists. Its small premises



HYATT REGENCY LONDON - THE CHURCHILL

Occupying an entire block opposite the green space of Portman Square, this 440-room behemoth embodies Britishness at every turn, from the Union flags adorning its entrance to the Winston Churchill-inspired flourishes woven into its decor, which was revamped last year. Its location makes it a great base for shopping and West End theatre breaks, while the artistic works on display – mainly paintings and sculptures on loan from nearby Thompson's gallery – add a sense of character. The hotel's small on-site restaurant offers well-thought-out seasonal menus, the adjoining bar provides a stellar cocktail menu, while a new nautical-themed pop-up terrace, open this summer, offers drinks and light bites.

Book it: Rooms start at £218 room-only.

[hyatt.com](https://www.hyatt.com)

REVIEWED BY Katie McGonagle

is now home to an ever-changing array of exhibitions shining a light on the work of modern sculptors, painters and more, both in its airy galleries and small outdoor terrace. Further works are on loan to the Hyatt Regency London (see *Tried & Tested*), where they can be seen dotted around the lobby and lounge, offering another opportunity to enjoy this striking collection in everyday life.

That creative spirit extends to the local foodie scene, with a host of small chef-led restaurants and artisan shops such as cheesemonger La Fromagerie and butcher The Ginger Pig. Their reverence for high-quality ingredients continues through Marylebone Farmers' Market, a smorgasbord of stalls selling fresh ingredients alongside steaming portions of mac and cheese and hearty home-made pies, drawing locals and tourists alike each Sunday.

All this is still just moments away from the flurry of activity in Oxford Street and the familiar sights of the capital. Yet spending a weekend as a tourist in the heart of Marylebone opened my eyes to the interesting stories that lie behind each London landmark, proving that stopping to explore your own area – wherever that might be – can offer just as rich a reward as travelling farther afield. **TW**