



Dazzling South Bank

Distance: 4 km=2½ miles

very easy walking

Region: Central London

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Refreshments: everywhere

Map: A-Z of London

Problems, changes? We depend on your feedback: feedback@fancyfreewalks.org

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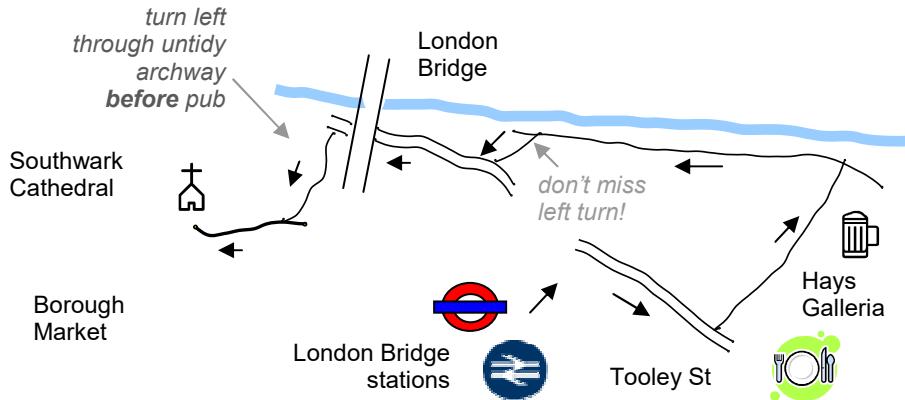
River, history, famous London sights, restaurants and bars

In Brief

You can hardly take a step along the South Bank of the Thames without passing something of interest. This dazzling walk is absolutely crowded with sights. It begins at **London Bridge station** (Underground or rail), postcode **SE1 2SZ**. It can be joined end-to-end with the **Docklands to Tower Bridge** walk in this series making a fantastic walk from Docklands to Westminster. You could also start at Tower Bridge, crossing the bridge from the north side and walking the short distance to London Bridge. (See the Docklands walk for a description of the sights along the way.)

The Walk

- 1 If you came by rail, follow the exit for Joiner Street, Tooley Street or Southwark Cathedral. If you came by Underground, take the exit by the railway station (*not* the Borough High Street exit). Go out into Tooley Street. If you need directions, ask for the *London Dungeon*. Turn **right** along Tooley Street past this lurid hellhole. *The London Dungeon is a tourist attraction with all-too-realistic exhibits including Sweeney Todd, Jack the Ripper, and Bloody Mary.* Cross to the north side of Tooley Street and, just after Hays Lane, turn **left** into Hays Galleria, a converted wharf with shops and cafés and a charming metal sculpture as a centrepiece.



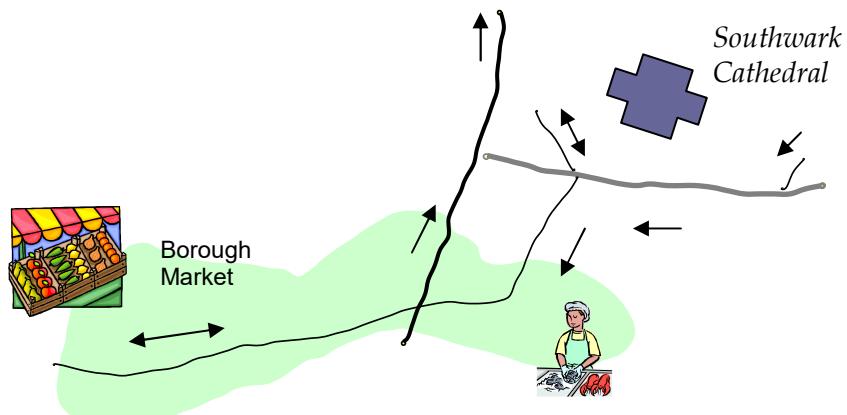
If you began with the [Docklands to Tower Bridge walk](#), this is where the walk continues.

Exit Hays Galleria to the riverside. On your right is HMS Belfast, a WWII museum ship. On the other side of the river, you have a fine assemblage of the City's best architecture. The *Gherkin* (Swiss Re) and the *Tower 42* (ex-Natwest) are the best known.

Turn **left** along the Thames Path passing several riverside buildings. Look out for one with white square columns and then a metal fence with a zigzag top. Here turn **left** at a Thames Path sign. (If you reach steps up to London Bridge you have gone 50m too far.) Soon you have a good view of the *Shard*, Western Europe's tallest inhabited building. *The "Shard" has a viewing gallery, offices, restaurants, a hotel, apartments and 44 lifts. At 310m, it is only a little shorter than the Eiffel Tower (324m).* Turn right at a T-junction, passing through an archway under London Bridge. The blue-green lights announce the *London Bridge Experience*. Just **before** the Mudlark pub, turn **left** under a long untidy arch through a rather scruffy yard. Keep left round *Boro Bistro* and turn **right** with the looming edifice of Southwark Cathedral on your right.

- [2]** You can enter the grounds of the Cathedral and then the Cathedral itself via a gate on the right.

This big medieval church has been the mother church of the Anglican diocese of Southwark (which has no bishop) for only a century but as Southwark Priory it goes back to the 1200s. Its massive gothic structure was damaged by fire several times although, being on the South Bank, it survived the great fire of 1666 which proved the final blow to its cousin (old) St Pauls on the other bank.



After visiting the cathedral, return the way you came and cross to Borough Market on the other side. Turn **right** through the market beneath the railway viaduct.

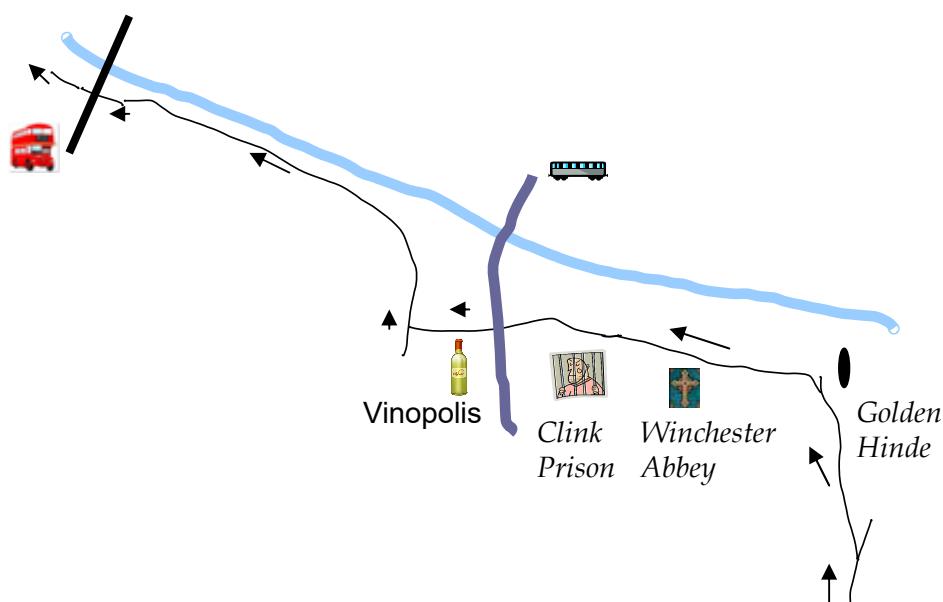
Borough Market sells food of all kinds and is a favourite place for Londoners to pick up fresh meat, fish, vegetables, bread and so on. It may not compete with the great covered markets of the Continent but it has its own special colour and atmosphere. It is also a hub for restaurants and fine independent food shops.

When you reach the tarmac lane, Cathedral Street, that divides the market, it is worth crossing it to see the rest of the market. If you reach Stoney Street on the far side, it is rewarding to look at Park Street with its well preserved green frontages and the Neal's Yard Dairy, whilst just to the right in Stoney Street are the mega-popular Monmouth Coffee Company and Wright Bros

Oyster Bar. Go back through the market and turn **left** on the tarmac lane, going past the jubilee market and passing the west side of the cathedral.

- 3** Fork **left** on a narrow cobbled lane leading to a replica of the ship *The Golden Hinde*.

The original Golden Hinde was Sir Francis Drake's ship, in which he sailed round the world, looting several ships carrying treasure. This faithful replica repeated the feat (but without the looting). For further historic detail, go to www.goldenhinde.com. The ship is open daily to visitors and even arranges "sleepovers" for children.



Turn **left** just before the Golden Hinde on a narrow ally, Pickford's Wharf. On your left are the remains of Winchester Palace.

Winchester Palace was built in the 1100s as the London residence of the Bishops of Winchester. Southwark was (and still is) outside the jurisdiction of the City of London, and this area was full of brothels in medieval times. The prostitutes were known as "Winchester Geese" and were regulated by the bishops, bringing them much extra income. At any time when the taverns were open, a steady stream of people would be seen crossing old London Bridge to avail themselves of these pleasures.

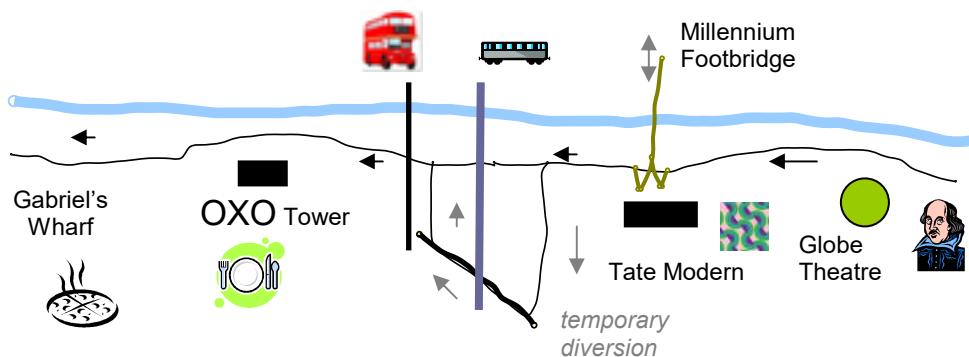
Shortly after, you pass the Clink Prison on your left.

This famous jail was so notorious that the term "in the clink" now means "in prison" generally. It was built about the same time as Winchester Palace (see above) and was run by the same bishops. It was so hated that it became a target for several riots. Now it is a museum, open daily, with many lurid exhibits, which also offers an unusual venue for office parties.

As you pass under the railway lines, the large complex at the corner on your left is Vinopolis. *Vinopolis is a large wine tasting establishment and restaurant. It offers several wine tasting tours and masterclasses. Beers, cocktails and spirits are also featured. Turn **right** at the T-junction and **left** along the riverside. Zigzag left-right under Southwark Bridge.*

- 4 The next sight on your left is Shakespeare's Globe, a visitor centre and a magnificent replica of the old Globe Theatre.

The original Globe Theatre was built in 1599, 17 years before Shakespeare's death, as a rival to the Rose Theatre on the north side of the river. This type of wooden open round theatre was referred to in Henry V as the "wooden O". The current Shakespeare's Globe was the vision of actor Sam Wanamaker. It was completed in 1999 and stands about 230m from the site of the original. It is built entirely without structural metal and has a thatched roof – the first one to be allowed in London since the Great Fire of 1666. Shakespeare's plays are staged with music and costumes but very few "props" and, however tragic, always end in a general dance. Plays by his contemporaries, such as Marlowe, are also staged, as are modern plays, both historically relevant and entirely modern. Seats are available (really wooden benches) on three levels, protected from the rain, and much cheaper standing space in the open pit.



A little further along the bank are the Millennium Bridge and Tate Modern.

The Millennium Bridge is a footbridge of unique design that spans the Thames and joins the area near St Pauls to Tate Modern on the South Bank. It was opened in 2000 but started to wobble when the first people crossed it and had to be closed. The designers found the cause to be a kind of "positive feedback" effect and spent two years fitting dampers.

Tate Modern is the converted old Bankside Power Station. It was opened in 2000 as a sister to the older Tate Gallery in Millbank, now Tate Britain. Entry is free, apart from the special exhibitions on Floor 4, and this helps to make it the most-visited modern art gallery in the world. The vast turbine room provides a (literally) fantastic opportunity for mind-blowing exhibits, which included Anish Kapoor's huge trumpet-shaped creation, Olafur Eliasson's famous "sun" and Doris Salcedo's "crack in the floor". A new ten-storey extension was opened in 2016, known as the Switch House, with a basement formed from the old oil tanks.

Continue along the riverside and pass through the new Blackfriars Railway Station and then Blackfriars Bridge. Note the insignia and pillars of the derelict older railway bridge. The road bridge was built in 1869. Note the pillars built above the piers that look like church pulpits, recalling the Dominican priory that gave the region its name. The next sight is the OXO Tower.

The "OXO" sign formed from the art deco windows in the top of this building was a familiar sight for Londoners since the start of the 1900s. The tower was refurbished in the 1990s and now features long alleys of interesting small shops on different levels, apartments, a cultural centre and arena and, on the top, a restaurant and brasserie with a fine view, not quite matched by the food.

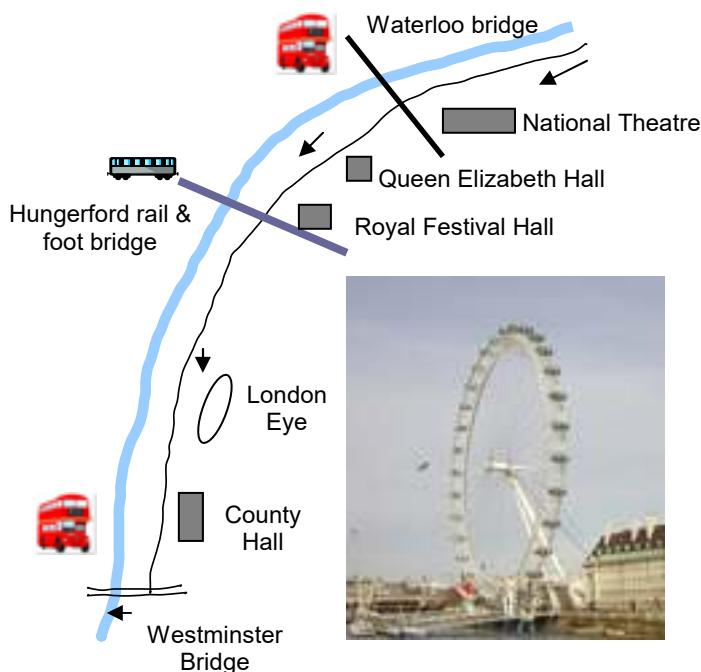
You are now in the Borough of Lambeth. Next is Gabriels Wharf.

Gabriel's Wharf is part of the Coin Street Community, a now legendary social enterprise that resisted unwanted development and demolition (it saved the Oxo Tower) and made this part of the South Bank a pleasant place for people to live in. Gabriel's Wharf is a very-low-rise arts and crafts development famous for its pizza cabins, children's fun areas and nifty and colourful little shops.

The river walk zigzags round a bank of the Thames with sand which some people fashion into artistic creations and reaches the long walk of the Southbank Centre itself with its dolphin lamps and plane trees which are delightfully lit nightly in blue and white.

- 5 The first great modern building of the Southbank Centre is the National Theatre.

The National Theatre was a publicly funded institution since the 1960s but the present theatre complex was finished in the late 1970s. It is in fact three theatres in one, the Olivier, the Lyttelton and the Cottesloe (shortly to be renamed the Dorfman). The brutalist architecture that looks a bit like the moulding that holds the pieces of a home cinema inside their packaging is totally vindicated by the interior. Outside, there is an area used for free shows in the warmer months.



Continue under Waterloo Bridge (the second of that ilk, built 1945) where there are long tables of paperbacks for sale. On the left is the British Film Institute. The next building is the Queen Elizabeth Hall, a music and performance venue that plays second fiddle to the Festival Hall. *The ramps and terrace above you also house the Hayward Gallery, an innovative contemporary space, though not free. The upper level has undergone changes over time and each designer seemed to forget to provide stairways to enable visitors to reach it.* The next building is the oldest of the Southbank Centre, the Royal Festival Hall.

The Festival Hall is the only substantial remaining structure from the Festival of Britain of 1951 which was devised as a "tonic for the nation" after the austere war years. At the time it was supposedly an architectural and acoustical wonder and its reputation has endured following a renovation in 2007. It is the home of the London Philharmonic but also presents heavy metal and world

music. The large foyer, situated underneath the “acoustic box”, was designated a kind of “people’s space”. Free events are held there and it is always a lively open area. The champagne bar was closed long ago for being too elitist but the privately-run Skylon restaurant on the next level is definitely superior and has a fine cocktail bar.

Walk under Hungerford Railway Bridge, with its two suspended walkways. (As an alternative end to this walk, to avoid the crowds, you can go up the stairs (or use the lift) to Hungerford Foot Bridge (either side) and cross the river that way. You can then turn left along the riverside, or through Victoria Gardens, with good views of the London Eye and County Hall, to reach Westminster Underground.) Pass an open area with its human statues and occasional funfairs and reach the big ferris wheel of the London Eye.

The London Eye is a cultural icon as well as a national landmark and nearly 40 million people has ridden in one of its big capsules. Other cities have built or designed larger wheels but the London Eye came first by many years. It is also unique in being cantilevered, that is, held up from one side only. It was run by British Airways and is now run by Merlin (who own Tussauds) emphasising its entertainment purpose. There are 33 pods each of which can hold 24 people, but pod 13 is always kept empty. (Why did they number them?, you may ask.)

Continue past the old County Hall which houses an aquarium and numerous attractions and eateries. Shortly you reach steps up to Westminster Bridge. You can of course go through the underpass and continue the adventure to Putney, Kew, Richmond, Kingston, Hampton Court, Windsor and Oxford – but perhaps another day. Meanwhile, the Underground and all the sights of Westminster are across the river.

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