

## Using the London Underground

The London Underground (also called the Tube) can be very daunting to anyone using the system for the first time – the crowds of people and bombardment of new sensory input can present a challenge in itself! To help you prepare for your journey, here's some information on what to expect, as well as other tips and tricks to improve the experience.



Entrance/Exit 2, Marble Arch

### Where do I need to go?

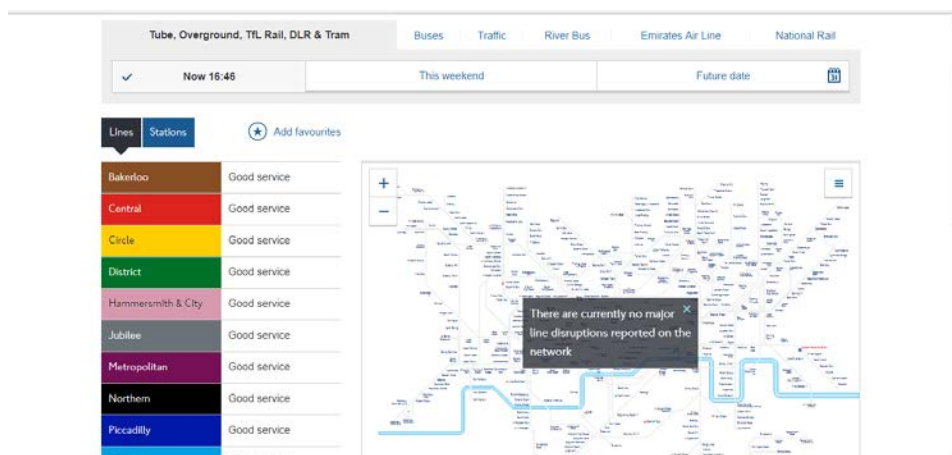
The famous [Tube map](#), available online and as a leaflet at Tube stations, shows which lines run through which stations across the entire network, allowing you to work out a route between your starting point and your destination. Stations where you can change lines are normally marked on the map with a white circle, although stations with step-free access will instead be marked with a white or blue circle including a wheelchair symbol.



Part of the Tube map, showing central London

Alternatively, various map websites and apps offer a journey planner tool – just type in two stations and you'll be shown the quickest route and an approximate journey time. [Transport for London's own journey planner](#), which also includes other TfL-run transport such as buses, allows you to request step-free access, routes with fewest changes, and a host of other accessibility options.

Always check for closures and delays on the day before you travel, for example on the [TfL website](#) – sometimes lines close at the weekend for maintenance, and this information will be available in advance. If you have Twitter, you can follow the accounts for TfL and the specific accounts for your most commonly used lines for up-to-date information. It might be a good idea to come up with one or two alternative routes using different lines, in case there are any unexpected problems with your line on the day.



Screenshot of TfL Status Updates webpage

### **Anything else worth knowing when I plan my route?**

- The Tube is particularly busy in the early morning and evening as commuters travel to and from work, and some stations are much bigger and busier than others – [these maps show the busiest stations and times](#). Covent Garden is particularly busy – instead, consider walking from Leicester Square or Holborn.
- Despite the name, the Underground is not entirely underground, particularly outside the centre of London. TfL have recently released [a map showing where the tunnels are](#), which may be useful if you are anxious about being in enclosed spaces.
- [This map shows the location of toilets in the Tube network](#) – those marked with a red symbol are inside the barriers, meaning you can use them without having to pay for a new journey (though note that some toilets do charge a fee, as listed in the link).
- The Tube map is designed to be clear to use, rather than to reflect the true distance between each station – this means that sometimes stations are closer together than they look, and it may be easier and cheaper to walk, particularly at busy times. [This map shows the average walking time between stations in Zones 1-3](#).
- Some stations use lifts as the main form of entrance/exit, with no escalators – the full list is available [here](#) (third list on the page). These stations do also have staircases for emergencies, but they're particularly high and rarely used, so if you really want to avoid lifts consider going to a different station nearby.
- Trains on the Circle, District, Hammersmith and City and Metropolitan lines are air-conditioned. (If this does happen to break, you could always get out and wait for the next train!)
- Trains on some lines are smaller than others – in particular, the lines mentioned above have taller trains than the deep-level tube lines.
- It might be also useful to find out which part of the train to get on for the quickest exit at the station you're going to – some journey planner apps, such as Citymapper, will have this information.
- The [TfL accessibility page](#) includes more information on accessibility features and adjustments that can be made – in particular, if you struggle to ask for help from staff, you can order or download a [Travel Support Card](#) and write in any accessibility or information requirements.

### **How do I pay?**

The cost of your Tube journey will depend on how far you're travelling – the stations are divided into different Zones (shown on the Tube map) based on their distance from the centre of London. Depending on your payment method, it may also be more expensive to use the Tube during peak times (Monday to Friday from 6.30am-9.30am and 4.00pm-7.00pm). [TfL's single fare finder](#) will show you the cost of a

single journey between any two stations. Even if you have to change lines within a station, it all counts as a single journey until you leave a station completely (passing through exit barriers, see below).

Usually, the cheapest way to use the Tube is to get an [Oyster card](#), available [online](#) or from ticket machines at Tube stations for a £5 deposit. You can then add credit online or at ticket machines as and when you need it. This allows you to pay as you go for individual journeys, sometimes for up to half the price of individual cash tickets. Oyster cards also include a daily cap, so even if you make several journeys in one day you won't pay more than a set limit (which will depend on the Zones you travel to – more information [here](#)). Under 18s can apply for a [Zip Oyster photocard](#) for discounted fares, whilst some adults can also receive discounted fares with an [Oyster photocard](#) – this includes students and apprentices living in London, people in receipt of certain employment benefits, and eligible disabled people. If you have a 16-25 Railcard, you can ask a member of staff to link this to your Oyster for discounted off-peak fares.

If you have a contactless payment card, you can use that in exactly the same way as you would use an Oyster, without having to pay the deposit for a new card! You will need an Oyster or contactless card (or Travelcard, see below) if you want to use TfL buses, which are now cash-free – they can also be used to pay for other transport in London, such as trams.

Alternatively, you can buy a paper Day Travelcard from Tube ticket machines and offices, allowing unlimited travel within the stated Zones for that day. If you're already booking train tickets into London, you might be given the option of including a Day Travelcard on your ticket – these tickets will show the TfL roundel.

### **What else can I do to prepare?**

- If it's helpful to have a visual idea of what to expect, there are lots of pictures and videos of various lines and stations available online.
- If you can, leave early and give yourself more time than you need for the journey – this can prevent you from being late if there's a problem, but also gives you extra processing time if you need it.
- If you can avoid the commuter rush hour (which isn't actually a fixed hour – use the Oyster peak times as a guide), do so. But balance this with allowing yourself enough time!
- The underground network can be very warm – carry water with you, and aim to wear layers that can be taken off and carried easily.
- Secure pockets may also be useful as it can be difficult to take things from a bag in crowds.

- If noise is an issue for you, earplugs or headphones are likely to come in handy – just remain aware of your surroundings and be careful not to disturb other people.
- You may also want to bring a stim toy or some other distraction with you (a scent on your wrist or clothing was a popular suggestion in planning this guide), again keeping in mind your own safety and consideration for others.

### **At the station**

The station may be very busy, particularly at peak times, and you may hear announcements about how TfL services are currently running and other travel advice. Depending on delays, weather and other events, there may be signs and announcements with more specific safety advice. This does not mean something *will* go wrong on your journey, but it is a good idea to follow the advice to avoid any potential problems.



Summer travel advice,  
Marble Arch – spot the  
London Underground  
roundel hidden in the  
picture!

Follow the signs for the line and platform you want, checking the sign at the platform to ensure your destination is listed.





Directions to different Tube lines, King's Cross St Pancras



Signs for Piccadilly line platforms going in opposite directions, King's Cross St Pancras



On your way to the platform, you will reach the ticket barriers where you will have to insert your paper ticket or tap your Oyster or contactless card on the yellow reader. This area can be very busy, so make sure you have your ticket or card ready as

soon as you enter the station to avoid blocking other people at the barriers as you look for it. The gates should have an amber light in the top-left corner above the yellow reader, which will turn green when your ticket or card is accepted and you can go through. A red light means that gate is not working. If the gate fails, then try again, try a different gate or find a member of staff. You will need to do the same when you exit, so keep your ticket or card safe. At busy times, exit gates may be kept open – don't worry, TfL keep track of this and your card should be refunded on a future journey. A few stations don't have gates at all – remember to tap your card on the yellow reader as you pass to avoid being overcharged!



Exit ticket gate, Marble Arch – tap your card against the yellow circle or insert your paper ticket in the slot underneath

Most stations include escalators down to the platform. If you want to stand on the escalator and wait, stand on the right-hand side. If you want to walk down the escalator, walk down the left-hand side. Make sure you hold on to the handrail! For the stations which use lifts instead of escalators, wait for a lift to arrive and move as far into the lift as you can to allow space for other passengers.

### **On the platform**

When you arrive at the platform, move along the platform to avoid blocking the entrance. Platforms can be very busy – you may find it easier to keep close to the wall to avoid people on all sides. There are sometimes a few seats available. You

must stay behind the yellow line, or the screen doors at some stations, until you are boarding a train.

It may be the case that not all trains on the platform will go to your destination:

- The Circle, Hammersmith and City, District and Metropolitan lines share platforms at certain points, so make sure you get on a train which will follow the line you want.
- Some lines branch out in different directions. If your destination is on one of these branches, make sure you get on a train which will follow that branch.
- Some trains will not go all the way to the end of the line – make sure the train is going as far as your destination or further.

On the platform, there will be boards and announcements with information about trains on their way to the platform. These boards usually show the station where the train will terminate (with the exception of Circle Line trains, which will come up as “Circle Line via [station]”). You can then use the map on the platform wall to check if this train will go to your destination.



Electronic board showing westbound Central line trains, Holborn

When the train arrives, the line and final station will be shown on the front and side of the train. Before getting on the train, check again that the train is going to your destination.

### **On the train**

- The trains themselves can be very loud – again, headphones are a good idea if noise is an issue for you. There will also be announcements before the train



arrives at each station, and a beeping sound before the doors close – you may wish to avoid doorways and speakers if this is an issue.

- If there are no seats empty or you wish to stand, hold on to one of the handrails where possible. If the platform is busy, you should move in towards the middle of the carriage to make space for other people boarding the train.
- Where possible, aiming for the end of the carriage might be helpful by avoiding people on all sides – this is also where the windows are located on many trains (good news if you want a breeze, bad news if a really strong breeze is itself a sensory trigger!)
- Make sure you have all your belongings with you when you leave the train.

### **If something goes wrong**

The chances are that nothing *will* go wrong on your journey, so hopefully this section won't be necessary – however, it's better to be prepared for any problems just in case they do arise.

- Sometimes, services are delayed or cancelled at short notice. It's a good idea to check online and at the station before you travel, allow more time than you need for your journey, and think of a possible alternative route using different lines just in case. If you are stuck, there are maps in every station and staff will be able to help you re-plan your journey.
- If you miss your stop, leave the train at the next stop and follow the signs to the platform for trains in the opposite direction – as long as you do not pass through ticket gates, you will still be charged the same fare for your journey.
- If you become ill whilst on the train, get off at the next station and find a member of staff.
- If your Oyster card is lost or stolen, you can order a replacement online or by telephone. Alternatively, you can get a new Oyster card from the station as usual and transfer credit and season tickets over the phone. Details of the process are available [here](#). Lost or stolen contactless cards should be cancelled as soon as possible by contacting your bank.
- If you leave anything behind on the train, contact TfL [here](#) to check if it has been found and sent to their lost property office – you will then be able to collect it from there.

### **For more information:**

- Transport for London website: <https://tfl.gov.uk>
- TfL accessibility information, including downloadable Travel Support Card: <https://tfl.gov.uk/transport-accessibility/>
- TfL Travel Alerts on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/TfLTravelAlerts> - each individual line also has its own Twitter account for more information