



Portobello Road, Notting Hill, Holland Park

Distance: 6 km=3¾ miles

easy walking

Region: London

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Canal, famous market, smart city houses, forest park

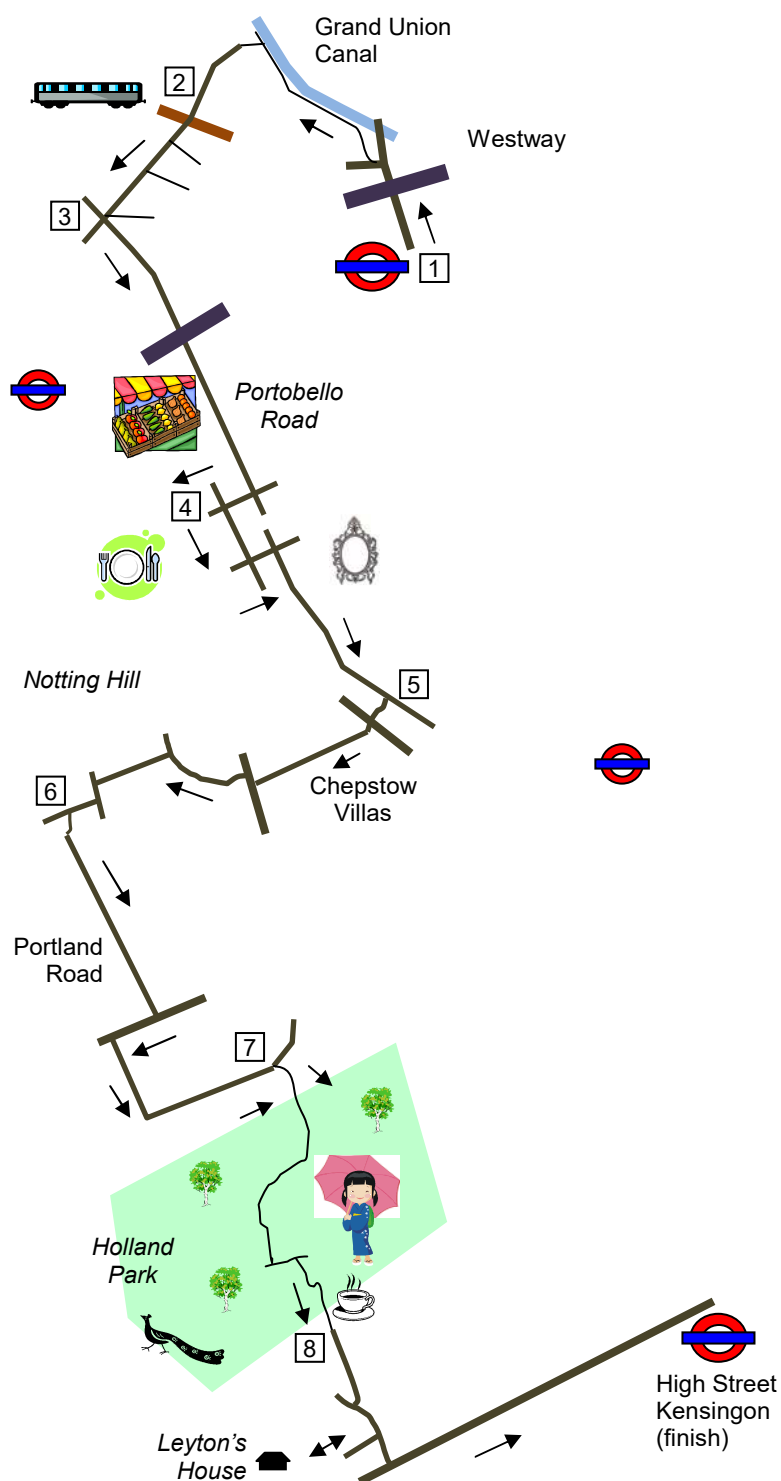
In Brief

This is a fascinating walk taking you through some iconic parts of west London, including the nearly mile-long Portobello Road market, the suave Notting Hill and an unexpected gem which is Holland Park. You will never be far from the centre of London but some of the districts will be unfamiliar and will provide a few eye-openers.

Unusually, there's a definitely preferred day-of-the week: **Saturday**, when the market is open. It's fabulous at any time of the year but the best month might be mid-April when the flowering cherries in Notting Hill are at their best.

The walk begins at **Westbourne Park** Underground Station. This is on the Hammersmith and City line (pink on the tube map) and can be reached from Kings Cross, Baker Street or Edgware Road stations, and many others. (If you change at Paddington, you have a chance to walk the length of Brunel's great station.) The walk ends at **High Street Kensington** (or at Notting Hill Gate if you cut the walk short).

The Walk



- 1 Turn **left** out of the station and follow the main road under the Westway flyover. At the first junction, **Elkstone Road**, cross at the zebra crossing, turn **left** on the road but in 20m go **right** into a small park. Follow the path straight over a crossing path, directly to the towpath beside the Grand Union Canal, and turn **left**.

The Grand Union Canal is the largest of what was a huge network of waterways, built in the early 1800s to bring goods and raw materials across the country. The main section is 220 km=137 miles long running from Brentford (west London) to Birmingham, but there are many smaller "arms" to link other cities.

After 100m, on the other side of the canal, there is a little garden running the length of the canal with two lines of trimmed conifers. Visible in the spaces between them are small stone figures of composers, nymphs, bewigged kings and earls. They were made by Gerry Dalton, a quiet self-taught Irishman. With the property passing to another tenant, a campaign has been launched to preserve the sculptures, supported by celebrities such as Jarvis Cocker.

Follow the canal until you are well past a tall tenement tower on your left. Opposite a new development over the water, turn **left** at a black signpost indicating *Portobello Market*, walking close to the tower on your left. This controversial building is either a concrete monstrosity or a landmark of architecture, depending on your point of view.

The iconic Trellick Tower was designed by the brutalist architect Ernő Goldfinger, after whom that James Bond novel was named (see the "Hampstead" walk in this series). But when it was finished in 1972, crime was putting high-rise blocks out of fashion. The flats were then largely bought by tenants and the building is Grade II listed – a cult landmark. The separate lift shaft is distinctive.

- 2 At a junction, go straight ahead over a railway bridge into **Golborne Road**. The market fun now begins! But In fact, Golborne Road is a quite separate market, selling mainly food and bric-à-brac. It is sometimes known as "Little Morocco" as you will clearly see. It is also well-known as part of London's Portuguese community. In 250m, you reach the junction with **Portobello Road**. There are some interesting shops on the right but your route is **left** down this iconic market street.

Portobello Market is a huge tourist destination. The name comes from a farm that originally stood here and which was named after a town in the Caribbean, captured during the War of Jenkins' Ear in 1739. The market started in the late 1860s mainly as a food market when Notting Hill became a prime residential area. After World War II, the bric-à-brac stalls began to appear and the bargains offered made the place so renowned.

- 3 The market begins very modestly at first, with odd household goods, clothes and street art. It crosses Raddington Road and you have shops as well as market stalls. At the Westway flyover the market extends left and right. For *Ladbroke Grove Underground station*, you can follow the Westway to the right. There are more permanent shops, such as García's Spanish shop, Mau Mau a live music venue and Alchemy tattoo parlour, before you cross Lancaster Road and you enter the main fresh and cooked food section of the market. You cross Westbourne Park Road, go past the Salvation Army hall and reach Blenheim Crescent on your right.

- 4 You could now simply continue along the market. But we suggest a small diversion to find the place where "Will" (Hugh Grant) might have had his independent travel bookshop in the film *Notting Hill*.

Notting Hill is the northern part of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and its wildest and most paradoxical area. Bordering Holland Park is the realm of the super-rich with the fine stuccoed terraces of the Ladbroke and Norland Estates. In the centre is a mixed area of boutiques, one-off shops and chic restaurants. But the north, where this walk began, was a slum only fifty years ago "crawling with rats and rubbish". Afro-Caribbean immigrants arrived here from the 50s and racial tensions led to the notorious Notting Hill riots. The image changed, thanks to the Notting Hill Carnival and this has expanded every year since, becoming the world's biggest street festival outside Rio.



Turn **right** on **Blenheim Crescent** passing bistros, boutiques and independent bookshops, so typical of this diverse area. In 70m, turn **left** at the next junction, **Kensington Park Road**, **left** again in 100m on **Elgin Crescent** and **right** again to re-join the market. You now enter the most famous part of the market, the section devoted to antiques and bric-à-brac. The *Admiral Vernon Antiques Market* is a large indoor bazaar. (*It was Admiral Vernon who captured Puerto Bello in 1739.*) The market passes Westbourne Grove on the right where there are other galleries, with a traditional pub *The Earl of Lonsdale* on the corner. The next junction is with **Chepstow Villas** where the market continues on a very narrow lane. The route is now **right** on Chepstow Villas. But first you could see the last section of Portobello Road and return to this point. There are attractive terraced cottages on view and No. 22 was the home of *1984* and *Animal Farm* author George Orwell.

If you would like to end the walk here, missing Holland Park, continue to the end of Portobello Road, turn **right** into Pembridge Road, straight on at a junction and, at a T-junction, **left** to Notting Hill Gate Underground Station.

- 5 Having turned **right** on Chepstow Villas (or left if you looped back), cross straight over Kensington Park Road into **Kensington Park Gardens**. This long straight road is lined with fine stuccoed terraces that were built as part of the Ladbroke Estate. The tall St John's Church marks the end and you will glimpse as you go several garden squares and private gardens. *If you come in April, the wonderful white snowy tree blossom will be on show.* After 250m on this road, turn **right** on Ladbroke Grove in front of the church and immediately **left** on **Lansdowne Crescent**. Follow it as it curves right and take the **second left**, **Lansdowne Rise**. Go down, crossing Lansdowne Road and, after 100m, turn **left** at the bottom on **Clarendon Road**.
- 6 In just 20m, turn **right** again on **Clarendon Cross**, passing shops and, before it narrows, go **left** on a pedestrian-only section which gives an intimate village atmosphere to this area. In 50m, take the **left** fork, **Portland Road** (actually straight ahead) and follow it to its end, about 400m. Turn **right** on the busy **Holland Park Avenue**. Cross the road by the lights and, in 100m, turn **left** into **Holland Park** (the road by that name). *A well-known feature of these roads is the black cast-iron and glass porticos that stand at the entrance of nearly all these perfect mansions.* Ignore the first left turn and the entrance of the mews and, after 150m on this road, turn **left** on the next road, also called Holland Park, also lined with plane trees and those terraced mansions with their porticos. As the road finally curves left, you see on your right a white concrete wall. Go **right** here through a doorway into the little urban woodland of Holland Park.

Present-day Holland Park was once the wooded grounds of Cope Castle, a large Jacobean mansion, built in the early 1600s by Sir Walter Cope who was Chancellor of the Exchequer under James I. It was renamed Holland House when the Earl of Holland's wife Lady Rich inherited the property. The house was badly damaged during World War II. The original front terrace is now used in the summer for the open-air theatre and concert venue.

- 7 Veer **left** up several flights of steps (or use the path on the right) to reach a junction of five paths. Keep straight ahead, a fraction right, on a path between fences. At the next junction, you find a statue of Lord Holland. *He was a major figure in Whig politics in the early 1800s who lived at Holland House.* At the statue, turn squarely **right** on another wide path. In 100m, take the

first major path **left**, leading to the Kyoto Garden where you will also find peacocks.

The Kyoto Garden is a peaceful sanctuary, a place to forget the city rush and spend a few minutes of calm. It was designed by renowned Japanese designer Shoji Nakahara, leader of the Kyoto Garden Association, to celebrate the Japan Festival in 1992. It is perfect in every season, with the colours subtly changing, but especially in April and May when the cherry blossom or “sakura” is so delicious.

You can go through the garden either on the right, or on the left where there is a bridge and a waterfall. At the end, go **left** into a smaller Japanese garden, the Fukushima Garden, opened in 2012 to commemorate the natural disaster that struck Fukushima in 2011. Turn **left** on the path at the bottom and veer **right** towards the main buildings and the formal gardens. Here there is a terrace with benches, several small gardens and sculpture. On the wall by the arches at the other side is a mural painting by Mao Wen Biao showing a garden party that took place in Holland House in the 1870s, hosted by the Earl of Ilchester. Turn **left** along the mural out into the yard. To the left is the Holland Park Café and the open space where the huge marquee is erected in summer for the Opera Season.



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Turn **right** on a wide path, passing the office, the toilets and the children’s playground, exit by the main gate and proceed straight on along Ilchester Place. Continue ahead joining Melbury Road to meet Holland Park Road on your right. A short diversion here will take you to *Frederic Leighton’s House*, an unexpected gem, not to be missed.

The Victorian painter Frederic, Lord Leighton built this house in 1865, as a smart home and cavernous studio and as a place to act out his extravagant aesthetic imagination with his famous soirées and rich and famous visitors. When you enter, you will gaze at the Arab Hall, with its golden dome and indoor fountain, and at the dining room, a red jewel-box hung with glittering Middle-Eastern ceramics and set off by crimson floorboards. The Leighton House Museum is open daily except Tuesdays, £5 or £3 entrance fee with a 50% reduction for National Trust members.



Continue along Melbury Road, retracing you steps if necessary from Leighton’s House, and turn **left** on Kensington High Street. There are buses here and, in 600m after passing many interesting shops, High Street Kensington Underground (Circle and District Lines) for your return home.

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