



This is the route taken by the No.23 bus.

The No.23 bus comes about every 10 minutes.

Take a seat on the top deck near the front on the pavement side of the bus. The very front seats are the best if you are lucky enough to find them empty.

Stay on the bus and just enjoy the ride or jump on and off for further exploration. Use an Oyster card or Travelcard for your rides.

The route goes approximately West-East but remember it's a 'return' trip so you can concentrate on the sights on one side going and the other side coming back.

Tip: The No.15 bus also follows the same route between St. Paul's and Regent Street

You can start anywhere on the route.



1 Paddington Station



The bus heads towards central London along Praed Street near to Paddington mainline station. The glass and iron roof of the station was an engineering marvel of its day, and the Great Western Railway connecting London to Bristol acquired the nickname 'God's Wonderful Railway' for its comfort and

speed. Today the station is also the terminus for fast trains to Heathrow airport — a journey which, cost per mile, is one of the most expensive in the world.

2 Paddington Basin



As the bus approaches the traffic lights at the end of Praed Stret, look out for a new development of flats faced in red brick and with shops at street level (Tesco express). Behind here is the Paddington canal basin, a spur off the Grand Union canal which connects London to the

Midlands. There is access to the basin at the corner of the block, and from here it is a 15 minute walk to the grandly-named Little Venice. On the way there are some intriguing bridges, one which unfolds like an armadillo and another which is designed like a giant screw.

3 Edgware Road



Turning right onto Edgware Road, the bus heads south towards Marble Arch. The road is unusually straight as it still follows the route of the Roman road that connected London to Chester. Today Edgware Road is best known for the Middle-Eastern businesses and restaurants which line both sides

of the street. There are lots of shisha cafes, but shisha pipes were not exempt from the anti-smoking laws and they now have to be used outside on the pavement tables. The bus will stop at the Odeon cinema before turning left at Marble Arch.

4 Marble Arch



After the turn, look to the right and you will see Marble Arch looking rather out of place on the traffic island. It was moved here from its rightful home outside Buckingham Palace after it was found to be a little too narrow for the Royal carriages to pass though comfortably. There are two

small rooms within the structure which, for many years, the Metropolitan police used as a local office. The white marble of the arch comes from the famous Carrara quarries in Italy.

5 Oxford Street



And here is the start of Oxford Street. One and a half miles of shops all the way to the tower in the far distance (Centre Point) Loved and loathed by Londoners in equal measure, the street is said to receive more pedestrian traffic than any other in Europe. Our bus will go as far as Oxford Circus,

(about halfway) along the smartest part of Oxford Street with the big-name department stores and the wider pavements. Things gets very shabby towards the other end but Oxford Street caters for just about everyone.

6 Selfridges



Occupying an entire block, Selfridges is the largest of the department stores on Oxford Street and the imposing facade was restored in 2011 for the building's centenary. The central main entrance is in the Art Deco style, with the Queen of Time in blue and gold standing above the

porch. Selfridges window displays are known for being some of the most imaginative in London.

7 John Lewis



Three more huge department stores are on this side of the street before the junction at Oxford Circus: Debenhams, House of Fraser and John Lewis. John Lewis is notable for its status as a workers' co-operative. The staff own the business and take a share of any profits. The store's

slogan is interesting too: "Never Knowingly Undersold". The job of beating competitors prices has become more difficult with the growth of the internet but they will still refund the difference if and when a discrepancy occurs.

8 Oxford Circus



The bus will pause at the Oxford Circus junction as it waits to turn right into Regent Street. Beneath the road is the Oxford Circus Underground station which handles more passengers than any other station on the tube network. Looking straight ahead at the junction, Oxford Street

continues to Tottenham Court Road. Topshop and Top Man (first block on the left) together make up the largest fashion outlet in London. NikeTown is on the corner, a vast emporium dedicated to the US Nike brand sportswear and shoes.

9 Liberty



Onto Regent Street, just after the first bus-stop, look down the first turning on the left to see the Liberty department store with its famous mock-Tudor frontage. (The store is actually only the same age as the other buildings on Regent Street). The fake Tudor styling runs throughout the store, giving an old-world atmosphere. There are creaky stairs but no escalators. In

Italy the the Art Nouveau period of the 1890s is called Stile Liberty due to the shop's involvement in promoting fabrics with this particular decoration.

10 Carnaby



Roads and alleyways off to the left of this part of Regent Street lead to the pedestrian-friendly area of Carnaby. It is an area that has seen a complete renaissance over the last few years and is the first place to visit if you are interested in the latest trends and fashions. In particular, Kingly Court has three

floors of studios and workshops overlooking a central courtyard where you can find items that are not for sale anywhere else in London.

11 Piccadilly Circus



There is a sweeping curve at the end of Regent Street and then the advertising lights at Piccadilly Circus come into view. The name Piccadilly comes from 'piccadills' which were big lace collars fashionable in the time of Elizabeth I and sold hereabouts. 'Circus' is the Latin word for a ring or circle. The

brilliant moving displays employ state-of-the-art LED technology and the familiar Sanyo sign, here for at least 25 years, has now gone and the space taken by Hyundai.

12 Shaftesbury Avenue



Shaftesbury Avenue leads through London's Soho district. Chinatown is about 200 yards up on the right-hand side. Soho's red-light district doesn't amount to much these days (the area is better known for its cafes, theatres and restaurants) but there

remains a cluster of sex shops and related entertainment at the top end of Rupert Street which is the third turning on the left by the Gielgud Theatre.

13 Leicester Square



Just as the bus leaves Piccadilly Circus and swings right into Haymarket, look down the one-way street by Aberdeen Steak Houses and in the distance (the trees) is Leicester Square. Well known for hosting the major film premieres, there are cinemas on three sides of the square,

the largest of which is the black, marble-fronted Odeon with seating for nearly 2000 people. Friday and Saturday evenings see big crowds gather in Leicester Square for the start of a night out.

14 Nelson's Column



Nelson's column comes into view at Trafalgar Square. The column is made of granite; Horatio Nelson, facing you from the top, is made of sandstone; and Landseer's four lions at the base are cast in bronze. The sea Battle of Trafalgar took place off the coast of Spain and was the most decisive British victory of the Napoleonic war.

Nelson was mortally wounded although none of the British ships under his command was lost. The statue shows Nelson with just one eye and one arm, wounds he sustained during earlier conflicts.

15 Trafalgar Square



The square is regarded as the geographical centre of London. Over at the far side is the National Gallery with one of the finest collections of European paintings in the world. Outside the cafe in the square you can find some 'imperial measures' set into the stonework. These were

the definitive inches, feet, yards, links, chains, perches and poles once used for calibration purposes. Trafalgar Square used to be home to thousands of pigeons but as the mess from their droppings became unmanageable, feeding the birds had to be discouraged and was eventually banned.

16 Strand



The Strand (or sometimes, just 'Strand') takes its name from the old English word for 'beach' or 'riverside' as this was once the muddy path which ran along the north bank of the river Thames to connect Westminster (the centre of power) with the City (the centre of

commerce). In Victorian times, the river was brought under control with the construction of the Embankment and the water is now 200 yards away on the right. You can still get a sense of a sloping river bank if you look down some of the side streets off the Strand.

17 Covent Garden Market



Near the pedestrian lights, one of the streets going uphill to the left is Southampton Street, and the low building at the top with a tiled roof, is the Covent Garden market hall, the main fruit and veg market for London before it relocated to Vauxhall in 1974.

Fortunately, the area was saved from demolition and the buildings were restored. Today, the stalls in the North Hall of the market sell antiques on Mondays and art and crafts on other days. Jubilee Market, which is at the top of Southampton Street on the right-hand side, usually has more 'touristy' items on offer.

18 Aldwych



The bus goes into a one-way crescent called Aldwych. A few of London's well-known theatres can be seen down the first side street, before you pass the grand facade of the Waldorf Hotel (named after the original in New York) Across the road is Bush House, a name familiar to anyone who tuned into the

BBC's World Service over the years, but the overseas operation has now relocated to the new studios at Broadcasting House (see 43).

19 Law Courts



Leaving Aldwych, the bus continues back into the Strand. The big, Gothic-style building on the left is the country's main civil court, The Royal Courts of Justice. This is where high profile, civil disputes such as divorce and libel are dealt with. Criminal cases are heard at the Old Bailey near to St. Paul's cathedral. As justice 'needs to be seen to be done' the courts are fully open to the public and

there is a notice-board in the central hall which gives details of the day's proceedings.

20 Temple Bar



The dragon on a plinth in the middle of the road marks the end of the Strand. It is where a stone gateway called Temple Bar once stood as the western entrance into the City of London. Other gates around the city are

remembered in names you still see today such as Aldgate, Bishopsgate, Moorgate etc. The purpose of the gates was to control trade going in and out of the city.

21 Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese



Difficult to spot (the white-topped posts on the pavement might help) this ancient pub has no windows and is wonderfully gloomy inside. The entrance is down the alley on the right hand side with a list of all the monarchs who have reigned in the time that it has been here. The interior is surprisingly large, divided up into various nooks and crannies, and the names of some famous

regulars can be seen on wall plaques.

22 Ludgate Hill



Down Fleet Street to the cross-roads at Ludgate Circus and straight ahead, up Ludgate Hill, is our first view of St Paul's cathedral. The dome, the upper drum and the peristyle (with the columns) are visible from here, but not much below the roofline. There is a view

protection policy in place these days called 'St Paul's Heights'. This imposes planning restrictions on any new developments in order to protect the existing views of the cathedral from all directions.

23 St. Paul's Cathedral



The dome of St. Paul's is said to be the second largest in the world after St. Peter's in Rome but the construction is very different – St. Paul's has a wooden dome covered with lead, while St. Peter's is of stone and brick. The ingenious part of Wren's dome is the hidden internal structure that is necessary to support the heavy lantern that sits on the top. The bus swings past the front of the cathedral which is the main ceremonial entrance. Unusually for a church, there is an admission charge to go inside.

24 Guildhall



There is a moody, green office block at the next junction and, looking left, at the end of King Street is the Guildhall, the town hall of the City of London (the 'Square Mile'). The day-to-day administrative work is carried out in the building behind but parts are open to the public.

Amongst many other things, in the art gallery, there is a large painting, spanning two floors, known as the Siege of Gibraltar. In the Clockmakers' Museum there is a decimal watch from 1862 with the day divided into 10 hours. And there is even the remains of a Roman amphitheatre in the basement here, which was unearthed in 1988.

25 Bank of England



At the next crossroads you are entering into the heart of the city's banking district. The Bank of England, 'The Old Lady of Threadneedle Street', is the solid looking building on the right. It is similar to an iceberg in the way that what is visible on the surface is only a fraction

of what lies beneath. There is more space below ground than is contained in the grey Tower-42 office block which looms in the distance. The bank has a small museum open on weekdays with free admission.

26 Turkish Baths



Through the archway is the green space of Bishopsgate churchyard, popular with city workers on their lunch break. In addition to the church of St. Boltolph, there is a curious tiled kiosk with an onion dome on top, which was the entrance to underground Turkish baths that were fashionable in Victorian

times. The interior with mosaic floors, and tiled walls and ceilings in a number of cubicles, have been well preserved, but it can be difficult to find a modern use for such a building, and after periods as a storage depot, a nightclub and a pizza restaurant, the venue is currently unoccupied.

27 Tower42



This skyscraper held the title of tallest in the City for over 30 years, but is now overshadowed by the Heron Tower, and the new Shard by London Bridge is taller than them all. Tower42 was built to accommodate part of the NatWest bank and the floor plan is shaped like the company logo with three, outward-pointing chevrons.

Damaged by an IRA bomb in 1993, the bank refurbished and sold the building and it is now multiple occupancy including the top-floor champagne and seafood bar, with spectacular views of London.

28 Royal Exchange



Swing round to see the front of the Royal Exchange as the bus approaches the junction at Bank. Now converted to an elegant shopping centre, this was originally the official place for traders to do deals and raise money, and the forerunner of today's Stock Exchange. There

was less regulated trading taking place in the city coffee houses, notably at Jonathan's or Garraway's in nearby Exchange Alley, and the brokers, while not necessarily dishonest, had a reputation for coarse behaviour.

29 Mansion House



Home of the Lord Mayor of London (not to be confused with the Mayor of London) who is elected by the City livery companies (trade associations) for a term of one year. The best known Lord Mayor is Dick Whittington from the children's

story of a poor boy from Gloucestershire who comes to London with his cat, hoping to get rich. Records show that there was a real-life Mayor called Richard Whittington in the 14th century, but also that the cat story was common throughout Europe at this time.

30 Wobbly Bridge



Opposite St. Paul's, looking to the left and down a pedestrian-only side street, is the steel Millennium footbridge. It is usually busy with people crossing over the river to Tate Modern, the art gallery in a converted power station. The bridge is sometimes known as the 'wobbly bridge' after the swaying motion that was evident soon after the initial opening. Engineers were eventually

able to fix the problem by attaching dampers to the structure. From here to the art gallery is about 10 minutes walk.

31 Express Building



The print industry was originally concentrated in Fleet Street to supply legal documents to the four Inns of Court nearby. It then became home to Britain's newspapers until the move East to Wapping and Canary Wharf. The front of the Daily Express building has been kept as a example of Modernist design at its peak in the 1930's, with glossy black Vitrolite panels, chromium strip detailing, and the 'streamlined' rounded corners.

32 Inns of Court



The projecting, black and white timber-frame building was a tavern for much of its history, but, while it is a rare survivor of the Great Fire of 1666, stories that it had connections with Royalty are unproven. The wooden gates lead to Middle and Inner Temple, the 'Inns of Court' where newly-qualified barristers receive their vocational training (pupilage). The Inn no longer provides lodgings but the

historical buildings are still used for offices and libraries and the best preserved 'chambers' dating from the 17th century can be found in the Inner Temple. There is also a secluded three acre garden open on weekdays between 12.30 to 3pm.

33 Twinings Tea Shop



When he opened his tea import business over 300 years ago, Thomas Twining invited Londoners to forgo their coffee and try his new drink from China. The premises are still here on the Strand and the company logo has not changed since 1787, making it the world's oldest 'branding' in continuous

use. There are over 100 varieties for sale in the shop today and customers can drink tea at a 'sampling counter' to help choose their favourites.

34 Dr. Johnson



Ahead, there are two churches which have ended up as traffic islands as, over the years, the widening of the roadway has taken priority. Outside the first (St. Clement Danes) is a small unflattering statue of Samuel Johnson, the writer and poet who led an impoverished life for nine years while compiling his exhaustive 'A Dictionary of the English Language' It was not the first dictionary to have been created, as about 150 were

already in use, but Dr. Johnson's is regarded as the definitive work. The house where he worked is nearby in Gough Square, with a small museum.

35 Somerset House



Just after the second church (St. Mary le Strand) the grey stone arches of Somerset House come into view. Contemporary art shows take place through the year, and if you are a fan of Impressionist paintings, be sure to visit the permanent collection at the Courtauld Gallery, with world-

famous masterpieces such as van Gogh's 'Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear', and Manet's last painting 'A Bar at the Folies-Bergère'. The courtyard at Somerset House becomes an ice-rink for the period around Christmas but normally there are just fountains.

36 The Savoy



Re-opened in 2010 after a three year refurbishment. The gold figure standing on the canopy is of Count Peter of Savoy who had a palace on the riverside on this site in 1246 (Savoy is an area of France in the Western Alps). The road that leads to the hotel entrance is the only one in the

UK where motorists must drive on the right rather than the left. It is said that this came about to help cab drivers who are first able to drop passengers at the Savoy Theatre on the right side of the road and then simply continue round to the hotel entrance to pick up the next fare.

37 Charing Cross



Similar to Paddington station, Charing Cross station has a hotel attached, this one built in a French renaissance style. The pointed stone monument on the forecourt is a Victorian copy of the original Eleanor Cross which stood nearby. There were once 12 of these crosses leading down the country from Lincoln to Westminster Abbey which marked the 12 day journey of the funeral cortege of Queen Eleanor in 1291. Only three of the original crosses survive.

38 Admiralty Arch



Admiralty Arch is the gateway to the Mall, a wide tree-lined avenue with red coloured surface tarmac leading to Buckingham Palace. Used by the civil service, there is office space above and on either side of the 3 arches, and sticking out of the wall of the third arch (on the right) is an unusual model nose. Possibly an urban myth, the nose is said to have been put there as a good luck talisman in honour of the Duke of Wellington who was known for his prominent nose, and it is positioned at a convenient height for horseriders to touch when they are in the saddle.

39 Florence Nightingale



A statue of a woman is a rare sight in London, but here is Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing, and known as 'the lady with the lamp' after her practise of making ward rounds throughout the night. At the battlefields of Crimea, before Nightingale introduced her improvements in sanitary conditions, ten times the number of soldiers were dying of diseases such as typhoid and cholera than they were of their injuries.

40 Eros



The winged archer on top of the memorial fountain at Piccadilly Circus is known everywhere as Eros, despite the fact that he is actually Anteros, the brother. The memorial was dedicated to Lord Shaftesbury, a devout and serious Christian, so the portrayal of a naked god of love, selfless or otherwise, was considered by many to be in bad taste. The statue was the first in the world to be cast in aluminium at a time when the metal was not yet produced in commercial quantities and was more expensive than silver.

41 Regent Street



Onto Regent Street and you will notice how the architecture changes to something a bit more European in appearance. The elegant uniformity is a result of the street's complete rebuilding in a short period at the start of the 20th century, a process made possible by having just a single landlord,

the Crown Estate. Today Regent Street has listed status and the shops are required to conform to a certain style to 'fit in'. Discreet signs mean that sometimes the shops can be difficult to tell apart.

42 Hamleys



The red blinds tell you that you are approaching Hamley's, the famous toy shop and one of London's top tourist attractions. There are five floors of playthings for kids of all ages and the store always seems to be buzzing with excitement. The original Hamley's toy shop was opened

in London by William Hamley nearly 250 years ago and was called 'Noah's Ark'.

43 BBC



Before the bus turns left at traffic lights at Oxford Circus, look ahead up the last section of Regent Street for a glimpse of BBC Broadcasting House. The now-famous, 1930's curve-fronted headquarters are just out of sight to the left of the church spire. These original studios, equipped with the very best radio

('wireless') technology of the era, were curiously designed and decorated to reflect the on-air content. For example, the religious programming studio was kitted out with an altar and other religious artefacts.

44 New Bond Street



Just after Swarovski and the Next clothing store are traffic lights at the junction with New Bond Street. Generally, it is just called 'Bond Street' but there are two sections, with the 'new' joining with the 'old' at the Southern end at Piccadilly.

Many of London's most expensive shops are to be found on this street – big international fashion houses, jewellers, art galleries, plus the auctioneers Sotheby's and Bonhams.

45 Primark



At the Marble Arch end of Oxford Street is Primark, selling vast quantities of clothing at low prices, with long queues to the checkouts on the busiest days. Much of the merchandise is imported from the Far-East where labour costs are rock-bottom and this has raised

questions about the conditions and rights of the workers in 'sweatshop' factories. Primark claims to adhere to high ethical standards, and other, more expensive, High Street stores stand accused of using the very same suppliers but are just charging more for the end product.

46 Speaker's Corner



The bus goes around the traffic island at Marble Arch. On the left in Hyde Park is the location of Speakers' Corner where anyone can turn up to exercise their right to free speech. At the weekend, there is normally a small crowd gathered here to listen and heckle, but nobody regards this as a venue for

serious debate. In the distance, the large grassed area is where the concerts in Hyde Park are staged. The Rolling Stones played here free in 1968 and in 2005 this was the site for the Live8 charity event when over 1000 performers were seen worldwide on 182 TV networks.

47 St. Mary's Hospital



The arched bridge is at the entrance to the huge St. Mary's NHS Hospital on Praed Street. Under the arch on the left is the lab where penicillin was discovered in 1928, eventually leading to modern-day antibiotics and the saving of millions of lives. The room has been

kept as museum and is open to the public. Alexander Fleming won the Nobel prize for his work, but he warned that bacteria would develop resistance to antibiotics whenever too little was used or when they were used for too short a period.

The 23 bus continues to Portobello

Other recommended bus routes:

19 (Battersea - Islington)

RV1 (Tower Bridge - Covent Garden)