

You are going to have an awesome time in England! I am glad to help as much as I can; here are some basic travel tips as well as some football suggestions.

Getting from Heathrow to Islington

There are three ways to get into Central London from Heathrow:

- A taxi, which looks like it would be close to 90 pounds. There are also private companies such as [Minicabit](#), [Green Tomato Cars](#), and [Eco Express](#) which would be a bit more. I haven't used any of them.
- Taking just the Underground (Tube) from Heathrow would be close to 90 minutes.
- My advice is to take **The Heathrow Express**: a clean, comfortable train with WiFi; it's an express to Paddington Station that leaves every 15 minutes and is a 15-minute trip. On Christmas Day it would be £12.10 each – if you book ahead [here](#).

From Paddington, take the Underground's Bakerloo Line to Oxford Circus and then the Victoria Line to Highbury & Islington Underground Station. That's a 45-minute trip.

Getting Around London

You will want an **Oyster Card**, which can be bought at almost any rail or Tube station; I would go ahead and get one each at Heathrow. The machines are self-service, and you simply wave the card at the entrance gate; it takes the fare off your balance. Then you just "top up" with cash or a card at the same machines. The Oysters covers the Tube, buses, and above-ground trains all over London.

They are also phasing in the use of contactless debit cards and mobile-phone payments; see [here](#) for more info.

There are a few web sites and apps to know about:

- [Transport for London](#) has a Journey Planner and Status Updates for the whole system.
- [Tube Map](#) is a very handy app, with a full map of the system and a trip planner.
- There are lots of other cool apps about London [here](#), including the official city guide, bike rental locations, and street art locations.
- [Londonist.com](#) is a truly incredible blog about all things London.
- Uber also exists in London and can be very handy.

Games During Your Trip

First, you might enjoy this [introduction to the leagues and cups of English soccer](#). To summarize, in a baseball comparison:

- Premier League = Major Leagues
- Championship = Triple A
- League One = Double A
- League Two = Single A
- FA Cup = a nationwide tournament.

Another possibility while in London is stadium tours at Premier League clubs. In particular, the tours at [Chelsea](#) and [Arsenal](#) are fantastic. At either, try to get on a “Legends” tour, led by a former player. You won’t have heard of him, but it makes the tour more fun.

Boxing Day (December 26) is a very traditional thing where every single club in the country plays a game. This means there are eight fully professional games that day, in and around London. If you want to catch a game on this day, here are some suggestions:

- In the Premier League, Chelsea is at home (3 p.m.) against Bournemouth at Stamford Bridge Stadium in West London. Big club, old stadium remodeled to be quite comfy, nice neighborhood, raucous crowd. A membership (£25 each) may be required; tickets will be around £50 for an adult and £25 for kids. Tickets go on sale [here](#) November 14 for members, November 25 to the public.
- Arsenal of the Premier League are also at home, against West Bromwich Albion at 3 p.m. If you are really up for this, I might be able to help get two tickets; they would be more expensive than at Chelsea.
- One league down, in the Championship, Brentford are at home in West London that day, at 1 p.m. against a team from Wales. It’s a beautiful, small old ground which I visited last year on Boxing Day, when I was able to buy four tickets. [Read about that here](#). Tickets are £8-30. This is old-fashioned soccer at its best!

New Year’s Eve may be your best bet to see Manchester United at home, against Middlesbrough at 3 p.m. Anyone wanting tickets for this game will need to have an official [Man U membership](#), which is £32 for an adult and £22 for a kid. I exchanged emails with their ticket office, and they said you can buy memberships at the same time as tickets. I am more than happy to keep up with this and help out.

Old Trafford Stadium Tours are also worth doing; your kid will love it! You get to walk on the sidelines, sit in the manager’s seat, go in the locker room, tour the museum, etc. There is good

availability for the first several days in January [here](#); you will want to book ahead if you can. There are no tours on game days, so the 31st is out.

Other possibilities on December 31, if you don't get into Man U and decide instead to stay south:

- Bristol Rovers are at home that day, at 3 p.m. in Bristol, which is about 10 miles from Bath. It's a really cool town, and Rovers (in League One) are a true family, local club. I have a blog post about the club [here](#), and one about the city [here](#). Tickets (which range from 10 pounds for kids to 26 for adults) could almost certainly be bought the day of the game, but if you're interested in this game, I would be happy to stay on top of it for you.
- Oxford United are also at home that day, at 3 p.m., in the same Oxford that is famous for all the spires and colleges. It's a really great town for tourists, and is about a two-hour drive from Bath. You could, for example, send some of your group to the game while others tour the town; there's a hop-on, hop-off double decker tour bus. Game tickets are £7-20 and should be easy to get.

January 2 is the next time there will be games. At this point, it sounds like you'll be headed towards York, so I have taken that into account.

- Leeds United (Championship) are at home that day, at 3 p.m., against a team from only 45 minutes away – this means a rivalry and a particularly fun atmosphere. Leeds, which is on the way from Manchester to York, is a neat university town, also famous for its Victorian shopping arcades, and is worth a day's visit ([info here](#)).

The club is loaded with history and plays in a wonderful old stadium with some of the best fans in the country. Tickets will go on sale about two weeks before the game, shouldn't be hard to get, and run from £15-30

- A fun possibility is to see York City FC play at home on January 1. They are in the National League, which is *below* League Two, and tickets are £15-21.

A little out of the way, but another cool town worth visiting, is Nottingham – the same one from Robin Hood lore. You can tour the castle, eat in a 12th Century pub in caves, and enjoy great architecture. [Here is a blog post I wrote about it.](#)

There is also a man in town who is something of a legend for his Robin Hood tours. Looks like he doesn't have set tours in January, but you can probably book him for a private tour [here](#) if you'd like.

One of their clubs, Nottingham Forest, is at home that day at 3 p.m. Their opponent is Barnsley, just over an hour away. Tickets should be a snap and run from £12-25; they go on sale December 12. Lovely stadium by the river, great fans; [I went to a game there](#) on my last tour.

January 7 will be the last game day on your tour. There are two possibilities here: Manchester United in the FA Cup (we hope!), or some League One and League Two games around London. We will almost certainly know about the FA Cup on December 5. The other games in London will be easy tickets, so we don't need to worry about them now.

My Suggestions Going Forward

So, that is a lot of information! Of all these games, the only tickets we would need to book ahead would be for Manchester United or the Premier League games in London on December 26 – and I kind of doubt you will want to spend your first day in England going to a game. Let me know if that's not right, and I can go to work on that.

Let me boil it down for you into some basic suggestions:

1. I will keep an eye on those Man U tickets for December 31. My guess is that they will go on sale around mid-November.
2. I will also keep an eye on FA Cup tickets and get in touch with you around December 5 – we hope with news of a Man U home game on January 7!
3. As you make decisions about where you think you will be after December 31, and which of the above games seem attractive to you, let me know and I will work on tickets. *For the most part*, any game not in the Premier League won't require advance purchase, but I will watch this for you.
4. Don't forget, I can book hospitality packages to most games for you; these would include benefits like great seats (often in a box), meals, a bar, meeting former players, and sometimes a 3- or 4-star hotel.
5. If there is anything else at all I can help with, don't hesitate to email or call. I love planning trips and helping people!

I hope this has been helpful. Adding a game or two to your tour will bring another layer of excitement and genuine English culture to your trip. I am happy and grateful to be part of your planning process.

Enjoy your planning, and I will be in touch!
Paul