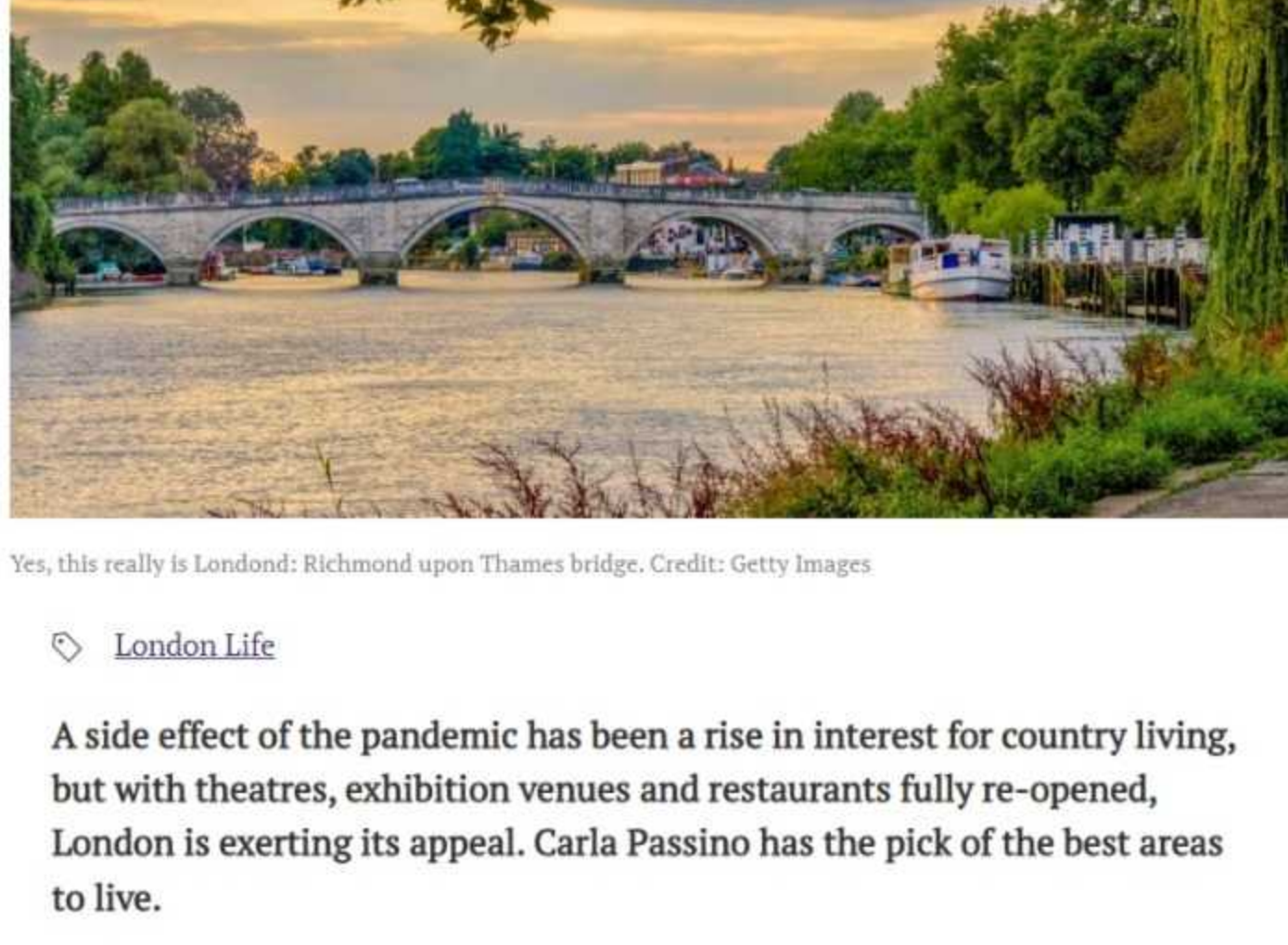


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The best places to live in London, whether you want culture, shopping, bright lights, food... or a slice of relaxing country life within the M25

Carla Passino
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Yes, this really is London: Richmond upon Thames bridge. Credit: Getty Images

London Life

A side effect of the pandemic has been a rise in interest for country living, but with theatres, exhibition venues and restaurants fully re-opened, London is exerting its appeal. Carla Passino has the pick of the best areas to live.

Best for culture: Mayfair

Covid restrictions permitting, you could attend a different cultural event almost every day in Mayfair, spanning from the Arts (the Royal Academy) and history (the Society of Antiquaries), to science (the Royal Institution and the Faraday Museum; the Royal Astronomical Society and the Geological Society) and music (Handel & Hendrix in London, plus countless live music venues). 'A sense of history and charm is hard to avoid [in Mayfair],' says Alexander Millett of the eponymous property consultancy.



Best for shopping: Marylebone

Quiet, sophisticated and studded with independent boutiques, Marylebone is the antithesis to Oxford Street. Shops here range from the chic (Rixo, Sophie Hulme, Matches Fashion) to the stalwarts (The Conran Shop, Anthropologie, Space NK), the quirky (the Kolbird concept store, with its changing collections, Gallery Eclectic, with its Japanese ceramic art, or VV Rouleaux, with its whimsical haberdashery) and the traditional (Daut Books' Edwardian store and Penton's hardware, Marylebone Lane's oldest shop). The weekly Farmers' Market is the perfect place to source everything from the plumpest tomatoes to traditional English roses.

Best for Swimming: Hampstead and Highgate



It takes a brave heart, but open-air swimming is an invigorating experience and, for devotees, there's no better place in London than Hampstead Heath, which has not one, but two open-air swimming options. Opened in 1938, the Parliament Hill Lido's unheated pool is accessible 365 days a year, although those who prefer wild swimming head to Hampstead Heath Ponds.

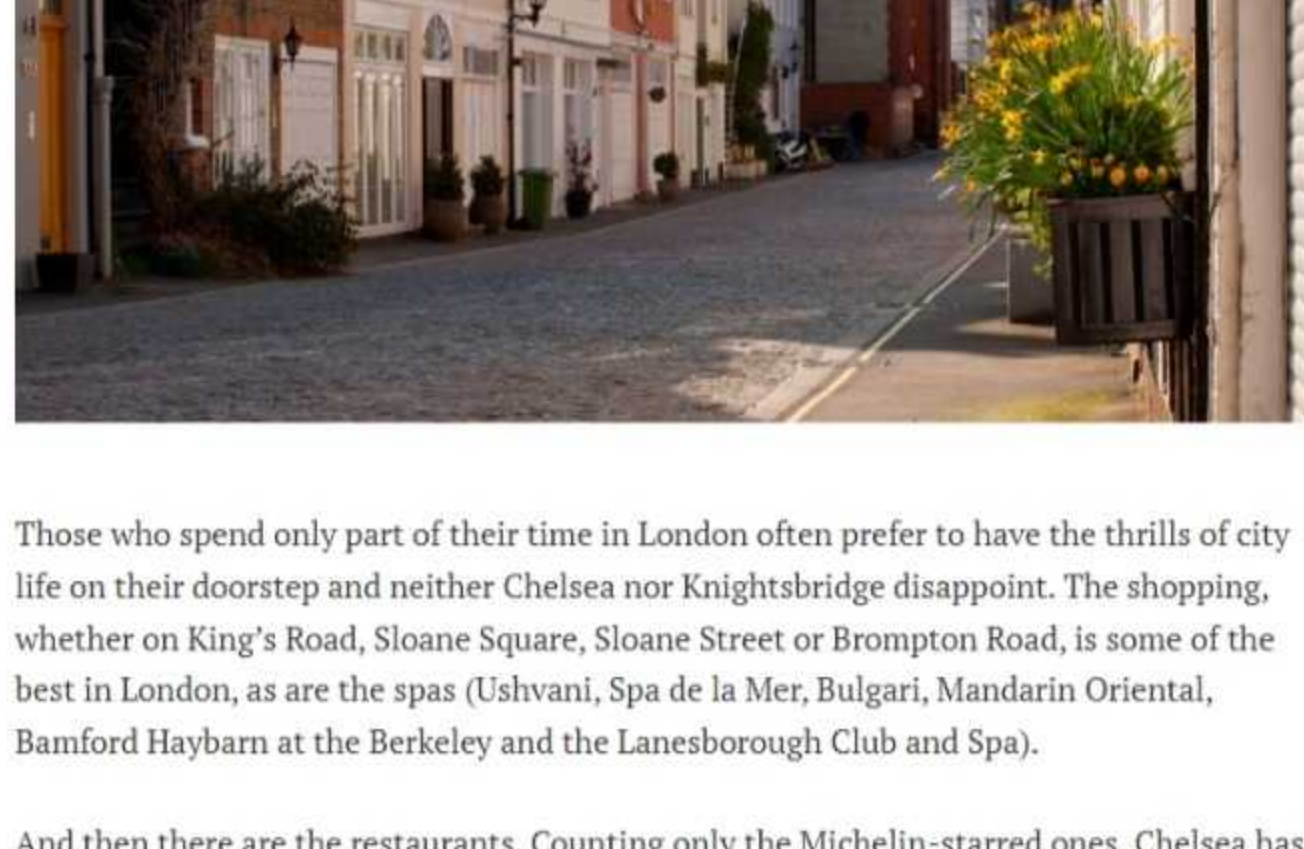
The Mixed Pond is on the Hampstead side of the Heath; the Gentlemen and Ladies Ponds are both on the Highgate side. Once you've dried off, you have all the many draws of Hampstead and Highgate within reach.

Best for bright young things: Hackney and Hoxton



Both cosmopolitan, exciting and creative, Hackney and Hoxton are perfect for younger Londoners — they have art aplenty (Hundred Years Gallery, A-Side B-Side), great restaurants, pubs and cocktail bars (Colours Hoxton, The Ginger Pig Café, Marksman, E5 Bakehouse, P. Franco, the hilariously named My Neighbours the Dumplings, and, for vegans, Temple of Seitan), markets (Hoxton Street market, Mare Street, Victorian Broadway) and multi-purpose spaces, such as the Hackney Empire, for cabaret, dance, drama, music and even opera, or the Queen of Hoxton for eating, drinking, clubbing, theatre, films and a spot of outdoor Prosecco. The Burberry outlet in Chatham Place is ideal for presents, too.

Best for part-time Londoners: Chelsea and Knightsbridge



Those who spend only part of their time in London often prefer to have the thrills of city life on their doorstep and neither Chelsea nor Knightsbridge disappoint. The shopping, whether on King's Road, Sloane Square, Sloane Street or Brompton Road, is some of the best in London, as are the spas (Ushvani, Spa de la Mer, Bulgari, Mandarin Oriental, Bamford Haybarn at the Berkeley and the Lanesborough Club and Spa).

And then there are the restaurants. Counting only the Michelin-starred ones, Chelsea has Claude Bosi at Bibendum, The Five Fields, Elystan Street, Restaurant Gordon Ramsay; Knightsbridge has Célestine, Dinner by Heston Blumenthal, Marcus and, on the border with Belgravia, Pétrus and Amaya. There's a wide selection of events, too, whether the Chelsea Flower Show, exhibitions at the Saatchi Gallery or the Harrods sales.

Best for international atmosphere: South Kensington



You can visit at least half a dozen countries without ever leaving South Kensington. Explore Chinese ceramics, sculpture and paintings at the V&A Museum, discover Polish culture and food at Ognisko Polskie and Daquise, or enjoy a Russian-style spa session at the South Kensington Club (beware the icy water). Brush up on your German at the Goethe-Institut or have a beer and schnitzel at Stein's Berlin; sample tapas at Brindisa ahead of enjoying the Spring Weekend and London Spanish Film Festivals at Ciné Lumière or watch a French classic (also at Ciné Lumière), before tucking into an éclair at Maitre Choux or popping into the Librairie La Page for a novel.

'South Kensington has always been considered a very cosmopolitan and international area, but the borough is particularly popular with French buyers, so much so that it is sometimes referred to as "little Paris",' says Tristan Garton of Dexors. And for truly international families (or the truly French), the Lycée Charles de Gaulle offers a choice of French Baccalauréat and A-levels.

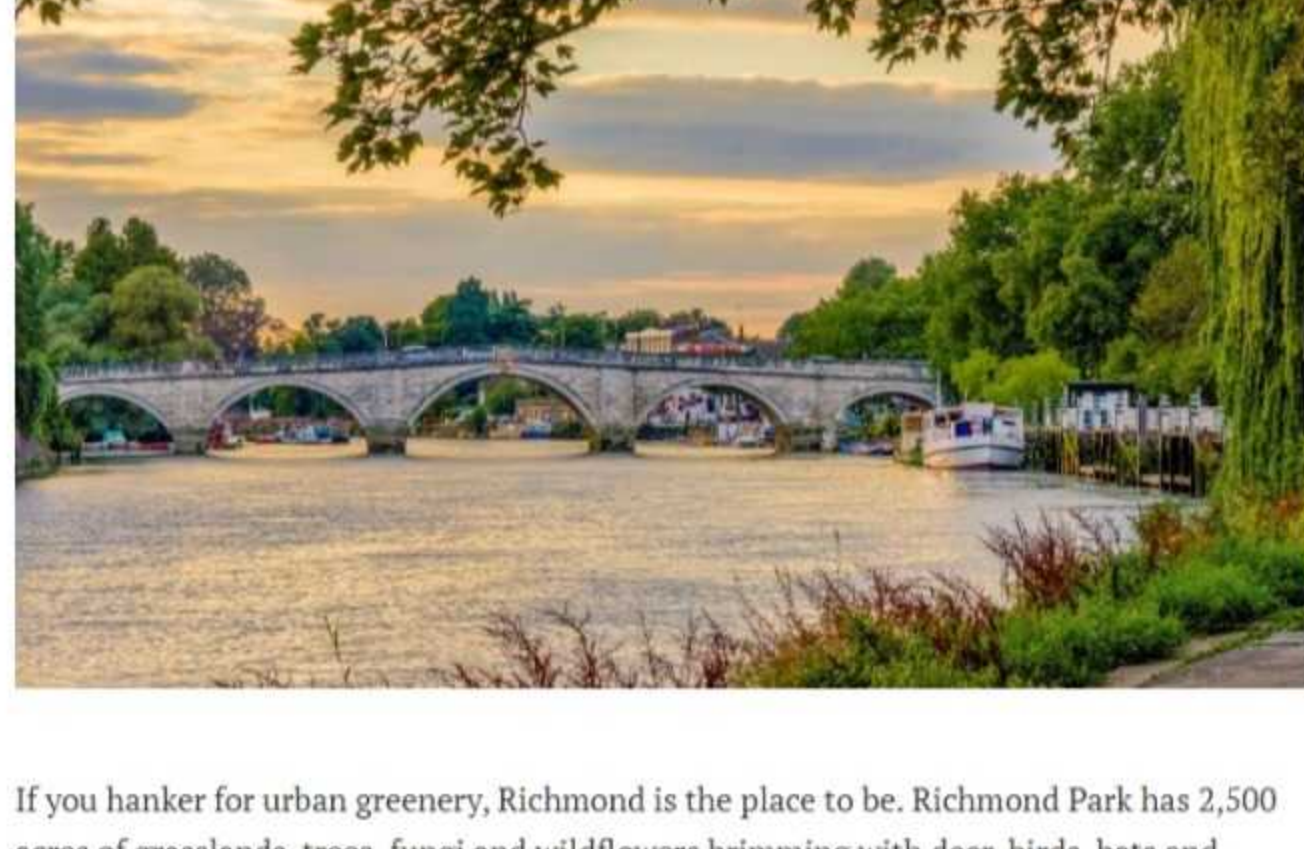
Best for food: Bermondsey



Once best known for its antiques market, Bermondsey has become the capital's gourmet hub. Its food markets (plural) have everything to rival nearby Borough, whether it's the weekend offering of arepas, gyozas and jamón at Malby Street, charcuterie, oysters and ice-cream sandwiches at Druid Street Market, or the pastas, pizzas and rum shacks at Vinegar Yard.

All this — together with the offerings of myriad restaurants (such as Cisse-Croûte, cafes (Watch House, Hej) and tapas bar and restaurants (José, Pizarro) that line the local streets — provides much-needed sustenance to tackle the Beer Mile, a crawl of the craft brewery bars around Druid Street, Enid Street and Almond Road.

Best for country life in the city — especially if you love to live alfresco: Richmond



If you hanker for urban greenery, Richmond is the place to be. Richmond Park has 2,500 acres of grasslands, trees, fungi and wildflowers brimming with deer, birds, bats and butterflies, but the town also has the vast Old Deer Park, with its sports pitches, tennis courts, outdoor gym and the Royal Mid-Surrey Golf Club, the Royal, framed by Maids of Honour Row, and scenic Thames-side walks north towards Royal Botanic Gardens Kew and south towards Ham House (via the Petersham Meadows).

All the trappings of alfresco living are also available, from three excellent ice-cream parlours (Danielli, Amorino and Venchi) to riverside dining and drinking (Gaucho, Stein's, The White Cross).

Best for professional couples: Shoreditch



For couples looking for a great place to enjoy life after a day's work and at the weekend, Shoreditch is hard to beat. It has countless bars and pubs for an evening drinks crawl, great restaurants, cafes and street food (The Clove Club, The Bikes Shed Motorcycle Club, Trattoria Gloria, The Old Blue Last, Bar Kick, most places at Boxpark), cinemas and performing-arts venues (Rich Mix Arts Centre, Shoreditch Town Hall) and quirky, independent shops and vintage markets (pretty much anywhere on Brick Lane) — plus it feels like living in an open-air museum, thanks to the extraordinary production of street art that graces the area's walls.

Best for families: Dulwich and Muswell Hill



It's a tie between Dulwich and Muswell Hill, both of which have parks, boating lakes, an array of local shops, good transport, a great selection of pretty family homes — and a crop of excellent schools. Muswell Hill has four outstanding primaries (Muswell Hill, Rhodes Avenue, St James's Church of England and Coldfall), plus Fortismere and, among the independents, top-performing Highgate and Channing. Dulwich has several well-regarded independents (Dulwich Prep, Dulwich College, Alleen's Junior and senior schools, Rosemead Prep, Oakfield Prep, James Allen's Prep and Girls' School), as well as the outstanding Dulwich Hamlet Junior School, Dulwich Village Church of England Infants' School, Rosendale and Harris Primary Academy, plus The Charter School North Dulwich, Kingsdale Foundation School, Harris Boys and Harris Girls.

Best all rounder: Notting Hill



Whether you are looking for quirky independent shops (People's Store, Denbigh, The Cloth Shop), Instagram-perfect streets (Lancaster Road, Elgin Crescent, Denbigh Terrace) or a strong community, few places can compete with Notting Hill for urban lifestyle. '[It] is a blend of the very best that London has to offer,' believes Arthur Hill of Knight Frank.

'A village within a city, rich in counter culture, history, colour and beautiful architecture at every turn, from the secret communal gardens and green spaces to the exquisite local cafes, antique shopping and world-class restaurants.' Not to mention a certain film bearing its name.



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Maida Vale took its name from a small Italian town and an even smaller pub, so it's the perfect place

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