West End
Christmas Tracker
Report 2017
Foreword from Jace Tyrrell

With the clocks about to go back, it’s time for some Christmas sparkle and fizz to light up the long nights ahead.

To mark this, I am delighted to present New West End Company’s fourth annual Christmas Tracker report – which takes a deep dive into the spend, footfall and trends expected in the world’s number one retail destination over the festive season.

We are the global business partnership for London’s West End, representing 25 streets across the district including the world-famous Bond, Oxford and Regent Streets, with over 600 stores and 219 flagship outlets for globally renowned brands.

The West End is the economic powerhouse for the UK. Within just 6.34 hectares, it generates £51 billion GVA per year, which is more than the City of London and nearly as much as the whole of Wales. It employs 150,000 people in retail alone, 3% of the total UK working population, and attracts millions of tourists from around the world to shop on its iconic streets.

The West End has continued to perform well this year despite the economic and political upheaval following the Brexit referendum vote in 2016 and the heightened security in the UK and around the world. 65 new stores have opened this year including new including UK firsts such as Reserved, Arket and Weekday. However, both domestic and international shoppers, who have once again come to the West End in bigger numbers helped by the weak pound, are expected to continue to treat themselves, friends and families this Christmas.

A number of exciting attractions will draw more shoppers to our streets, including the star-studded Christmas lights and illuminations across Bond, Oxford and Regent Street, and the key shopping dates of Black Friday and the Boxing Day sales.

The long-term horizon is challenging. Inflation is climbing because of increasing import costs whilst retailers are also facing the pressure of significant business rate increases, up an average of 80% over the West End, equivalent to an additional £125 million a year.

It is vital at these times that the West End comes together to find solutions. New West End Company has on behalf of its member businesses secured a Business Rate Discretionary Relief Fund from Westminster City Council worth £19.6 million. We also set out a ‘Future for the Oxford Street district’ earlier this year addressing challenges such as poor air quality, road safety and inadequate public realm. We have also committed £10 million investment into improving Bond Street, ensuring that the district is ready to take full advantage of the 60 million extra visits that will come to our district following the opening of the Elizabeth Line in December 2018.

Retailers, hotels and restaurants are increasingly working together to help each other improve the experiences of our shoppers and to help them make the best use of their time out of store to improve dwell time in the district. There has been massive investment into infrastructure on the three main streets with The Crown Estate investing £1 billion into Regent Street alone.

We are working hard to keep boosting the vital economic contribution the West End makes to UK GDP. We hope the Government, as it continues Brexit negotiations with the EU, takes measures to ensure we do not hamper the growth and prosperity of our retail heartland.
Executive Summary

Retailers in London’s West End have faced a challenging 2017, but are forecast to end the year in good spirits. For the six weeks running up to Christmas, sales are tipped to come in at £2.61 billion, up 1.5% on a total of £2.57 billion.

- International shoppers will once again boost sales figures as they continue to be attracted to the West End by the post-Brexit decline in the value of sterling. International demand in the district has gone from strength to strength this year with sales to non-EU tourists up 28% between July and August. Sales to Chinese tourists have been essential to this growth increasing by 59% over the period. American, Indian and Russian shoppers have also flocked to the West End stores. Despite a slowdown in sales during September, demand is still expected to be strong at Christmas.

- Domestic shopper spend has been strong in the West End so far this year although there are indicators that they are becoming more cautious, particularly on ‘big ticket’ items such as fitted kitchens. However, they are still expected to treat themselves, friends and families this Christmas.

- Footfall is expected to slide by 3.2%. This is down to both the growth of online shopping and shoppers becoming more targeted in their visits to the area. The average consumer spends just 26 minutes in the West End per visit. However, lower footfall frequently doesn’t translate to lower sales. Retailers continue to invest in more personalised and exclusive products as well as in-store digital technology and ‘experiences’ to tempt shoppers inside.

- The West End is becoming a more popular destination for leading and independent retailers. A total of 65 new West End stores have opened in 2017 so far, up from 52 the previous year.

- Retailers will create 4,700 seasonal jobs as they flex their staffing upwards to meet visitor demand.

- Attractions bringing in the shoppers will be led by the Christmas lights switch on across Bond, Oxford and Regent Street. Festive parades and world-leading theatre productions will also delight the public as they mix entertainment with Christmas shopping.

- Early weather forecasts reveal that there are likely to be above-average temperatures in London in the two weeks before 25 December.

- Retailers are optimistic about 2018 trading helped by increased investment in the West End, more collaboration to drive sales throughout the district and the opening of the Elizabeth Line. Opening next December, the new transport service will bring 60 million further visits to the West End every year and boost retail sales to £11.25 billion by 2020.


All international figures courtesy of Global Blue
West End Sales Set For Christmas Cheer

It has been a difficult year for UK shoppers and businesses.

Consumers have shown increasing signs of uncertainty as inflation hikes up prices in the shops and they see their wage growth struggle to keep pace. A general election, the second in two years, heightened security and continued confusion over what a Brexit Britain will look like when negotiations between the Government and the EU are finally completed in 2019 has also weighed on sentiment.

According to the Office for National Statistics, growth in UK household spending slowed to 0.1% in the second quarter from 0.4% in the first, with business investment flat. Gross Domestic Product for the UK came in at 0.3% in the second quarter, half that seen in the Eurozone.

Retailers along London’s busiest shopping streets are looking forward to a merry Christmas buoyed by strong international demand and domestic shoppers looking for festive treats. A plethora of exclusive and highly ‘experiential’ in-store seasonal activities from prosecco parties to sleepovers and 24-hour public transport services will also attract visitors to the heart of the West End.

Bond Street, Oxford Street and Regent Street, together with 22 surrounding streets, boast more than 600 stores between them. Till receipts are forecast to rise by 1.5% to £2.61 billion during the six weeks running up to Christmas, with average takings of £51.1 million per day or an expected £5.1 million spend per hour during the peak period.

The estimation is based on footfall, consumer survey and retailer trading data, with footfall at this time of year traditionally 30% higher and spend per person 65% higher.

The Christmas peak has always been the cornerstone of the UK retail trade calendar and the West End is no exception. For many retailers this period can account for over 25% of total annual trade. It is unsurprising then that some retailers begin planning for peak early. Selfridges made headlines earlier this year when it opened a dedicated Christmas store in July, a whopping 147 days before 25 December. Many other retailers have followed suit, moving their Christmas range launches earlier into the year.

However, if we look at footfall analysis from last Christmas there was a pronounced decline in early season shoppers. Footfall for the period between the first and 14 November declined by 1.6% on 2015. The November footfall appears to have been cannibalised by Black Friday which on 25 November gave the West End its busiest day last year. Indeed, the whole Black Friday weekend saw 3.6 million shoppers hit the West End, up 5.1% on 2015.

The second busiest period was the first weekend in December. Other notable trends were a rise in last minute shoppers in the last two weeks of Christmas, both weekday and weekend trade. The week beginning 12 December saw a massive 5.5% increase on 2015, suggesting that the wealth of options available to shoppers in the West End are a favourite of the less organised.

Both the luxury and jewellery product categories saw strong sales last year. Growth in luxury exceeded 50% in November compared to 2015. Watches were popular.

Some of the main West End retailers performed well with department store House of Fraser enjoying a 2.7% year-on-year rise in sales at both its bricks and mortar shops and online with beauty products doing well. John Lewis saw sales rise 7%.

The overall performance of UK retail last Christmas surprised many analysts and experts who believed economic uncertainty would dampen demand.

The British Retail Consortium said UK sales rose 1% in the five weeks to 31 December with Barclaycard stating that a 4.8% rise in spend in the fourth quarter was the highest in four years. Spending growth remained strong.

The second busiest period was
in 2017 until May when it began to slow as shoppers felt the squeeze of inflation and subdued wage growth. In August 54% of Brits said they felt confident about their household finances compared to 69% in June.

Household goods and clothing products have been most affected.

GfK’s long-running monthly consumer confidence index, which is carried out on behalf of the European Commission, has noted negative consumer confidence all year, with a huge 12% dip in July being the lowlight.

In August it found that expectations for the general economic situation over the next 12 months are five points lower than this time last year.

Joe Staton, Head of Market Dynamics at GfK, says the two main themes during the year have been increasing inflation and sluggish wage growth. By mid-year, wages had fallen in real terms since 2008 once inflation was considered. The UK’s household savings ratio also fell to a record low by mid-year. UK inflation jumped to 3% in September, its highest in over 5 years and is likely to continue rising in October and November.

“That kind of climate might suggest that consumers will be more cautious this Christmas. But what’s clear is that consumers have repeatedly defied predictions of a downturn since the June 2016 Brexit vote,” Staton says. “As we approach the end of the year, there is a sense of defiance among consumers. If consumer confidence in the state of personal finances continues to hold up then we will see a good Christmas. But at the same time, the likelihood of Bank of England interest rate rises against a background of already worryingly high levels of unsecured debt is potentially challenging.”

He says London’s retail sector has had a good year in terms of sales, with much of this having been driven by price rises, all prompted by the pound’s depreciation delivering higher import costs.

“But amid that sense of value released by the weaker pound, it’s clear that people still want to secure traditional ‘good value’ regardless of how currencies are fluctuating. Whether they are shopping online or offline, people will be shopping around for the best value in terms of quality and price. We will see a trend towards more ‘considered purchasing’, which sees consumers buying people what they really want rather than buying what is affordable. Hand in hand with that is the trend towards buying less but better.”

He believes the West End will be a clear winner. “Christmas is not a time for cutting back. It’s the time of year where hearts are stronger than heads,” he states. “I’m sure we’re about to witness record footfall from both domestic and international shoppers all looking to hit the West End for that Christmas magic. As ever, it will be the stores that can supply the best choice, glitz and glamour that will triumph. The search for a new, different and immersive experience will draw the crowds.”

Jonathan De Mello, head of retail consulting at Harper Dennis Hobbs, agrees that the West End will still prove popular this Christmas despite caution over Brexit and world events such as tension over North Korea and terrorism. “People will still shop over Christmas because they want to buy presents for their loved ones. Although there could be a slowdown in big ticket items,” he states. “I am concerned though that a lot of mass market retailers have already launched 30 – 50% off sale offers. It is unusual for them to go on sale so early. They want to drive volumes into store and to shift stock but they will depress their margins in the run up to Christmas. Others are mitigating costs through more just in time production, having less stock out and negotiating better deals with suppliers.”

He adds that London’s West End is a unique shopping experience in the UK as it, more than other major cities, sees the benefits of the weak pound in tourist spend. “You don’t see the same effect in Birmingham or Manchester stores. The West End store has always been the cash cow in a retailer’s portfolio but it will be even more so this year,” he states. “West End flagship stores generally trade at circa three times that of stores elsewhere in the country and this has risen to 4-5 times post the Brexit vote and consequent sterling depreciation. Retailers are investing more in flagship stores partly due to this, and also for the ‘halo’ effect such stores provide in boosting online sales, given they
tend to be in high footfall/visibility locations.”

Indeed, the West End continues to be an attractive setting for British and international retailers. Lululemon, Reserved, Arket, Weekday and Tory Burch have all opened new locations in the area. Most of these stores represent a UK first for their brands. Microsoft has also announced that it is opening its first European flagship store on Regent Street.

Joanna Lea, director of retail at the Grosvenor Group, says there is more of a mixture of stores in the West End including gyms, food and beverage and retail. “Brexit is not having an impact. These are special buildings in the West End and their availability doesn’t come around that often,” she states. “The majority of the demand we are seeing is from international businesses.”

The West End View
Retailers Perspectives

Retail bosses in the West End are overwhelmingly in a bullish mood as they head into Christmas 2017.

They acknowledge the challenges of domestic consumer uncertainty and the punishing rise in business rates, but bolstered by international demand and innovative strategies they expect sales to climb over Christmas.

Department store Debenhams says it is “completely optimistic” about Christmas trading expecting to grow like-for-like sales over the period. “Last year we were very strong in areas such as gifting, health and beauty and we have planned even more in these categories this year,” says Regional Retail Director Susan Reid.

The company has just acquired a stake in on-demand beauty services firm Blow which will mean that beauty treatments can be booked to take place at a customer’s home, office or in Debenhams Oxford Street’s dedicated beauty bar. “It is a major new in-store experience for our customers this Christmas,” explains Reid. “It is about connecting emotionally with our customers and making shopping more sociable and fun. It is still a challenging and uncertain retail environment but people want to deliver for their friends and families at Christmas. Shoppers remain cautious in large places given the recent terror attacks and footfall does dip in the aftermath of an event. But if nothing untoward happens shoppers will love the festive spirit of the West End and be out in force.”

Over at John Lewis’s Oxford Street store, Karen Lord, head of branch, is also counting down the days to a buoyant Christmas. “As of today, it is only 75 more sleeps so we are gearing up. We’re really confident in our inspiring Christmas proposition with our wide assortment of innovative gifts and exclusive products, supported by in-store customer experiences that will inspire and delight our customers. Truly bespoke activity taking place in our Flagship store including personalisation of products makes me feel all the more confident that we are going into this trading period in a really strong place.”

Lord sees the ‘3 Peaks’ of Black Friday, the lead up to Christmas and the Clearance sales helping the group once again this year. It is also focusing more on exclusive and personalised products such as baubles and chocolate as well as the ‘experiential’ namely its Residence apartment where shoppers can sleep overnight and host dinner parties. “The role of shops is
to inspire and to provide great experiences,” Lord says.

Mark Drummond, head of marketing at iconic toy shop Hamleys, is very excited ahead of Christmas highlighting the key trend of ‘Toy-Telligence’ this year – namely interactive robots, animatronics and even AI features. “We have our largest designated Christmas shop on the third floor of Regent Street where you can also get personalised Christmas sacks and baubles;” he says. “As part of our Luvley offering we are testing a range of in-house designed partywear called ‘Glitter Squad’ for 3 to 10-year olds. Our Hamleys Parade is also designed to increase audience dwell time, push the Christmas shopping season and encourage spend in all Regent Street stores and restaurants both on event day and throughout the Christmas period.”

Eleanor Dalley, general manager at House of Fraser, Oxford Street, is confident that Christmas will get shoppers spending. “We have some great new brands and amazing gifting lines that customers will fall in love with. The Christmas light switch on and the planned activity in the run up to Christmas will bring customers to the West End and will put Oxford Street on the map as the destination for Christmas shopping;” she says. “Last year beauty performed exceptionally well and with new brands including Deciem and The Ordinary offering cult products which not only offer quality but low price points, I am confident our cosmetics department will once again prove to be a hit.”

Dalley says Black Friday will again be important with a week of activity culminating in the store extending opening hours on the Friday evening itself. “We’ll also do that on Saturday 23 December when we will be open between 8am and 11pm. It will be a huge day given that Christmas Eve is on a Sunday and we have only limited trading hours that day. It will be big for all retailers.”

At the top end of the market, Michael Wainwright, Managing Director of Bond Street jeweller Boodles is hoping to continue the double-digit sales growth it has experienced so far in 2017 over Christmas. “It is a rotten retail environment with Brexit and the political situation making things unsettled,” he says. “But we are optimistic because we make beautiful jewellery and have wonderful customer service and ambience in our shop. There is a shortage of consumer confidence amongst UK shoppers, where the vast majority of our customers come from, but people are still making money and helping our store do well. We have very loyal customers."

Wainwright says he has increased his staff’s entertainment budget this year allowing them to take their customers out into London’s West End for meals or plays. “It’s about developing one to one relationships,” he states.

He bemoans a “horrible” doubling in the store’s rent as part of a recent review and the climb in business rates. “There is such demand for Bond Street space that the rental increase is what the market dictates. It means we have to work an awful lot harder to get the sales in to pay for it;” he says.

Barratt West, Managing Director of fellow jeweller Tiffany & Co, says it goes into Christmas as optimistic as ever. “We are synonymous with gift giving and customers naturally navigate to us at this time of year. We are as confident as we have ever been,” he states.

“New collections and a brand-new fragrance means we will also be giving our customers something fresh this year.” He says international shoppers are still coming into store in very large numbers especially people from China, the Middle East and Russia. “We are also seeing Europeans coming to London for the weekend to shop to take advantage of the weaker pound. Their hotels and meals out are costing them a little bit less than previously so they are spending more of that saved money on shopping;” he states. “International shoppers love coming to London over Christmas because it is so magical.”

He says domestic shoppers are “giving more consideration to what they are spending their money on but are amazingly resilient.”

Matthew Shields, UK Retail Director at Watches of Switzerland, expects growth this Christmas buoyed by international and domestic shoppers. “We had an incredible Christmas last year and we hope for growth again. International and domestic demand is healthy and we are using in-store events such as drinks and canapes to develop more of a personal relationship with them;” he states. “We are also using geo-location techniques to tempt shoppers into our stores and using our customer data to attract back lapsed customers.”
Tourists and International Shoppers

The continued purchasing power of those holding yens or dollars following the post Brexit referendum in sterling continues to encourage tourists to visit and spend in London stores.

Of the 30 million visitors to London, two thirds are international tourists. Total spend is more than three times that of domestic visitors at £11.8 billion every year. Bond Street has the highest exposure with 48% of turnover generated by non-EU international shoppers.

Between January and September this year sales rose 17% on the same period in 2016. Chinese sales were up 33%, US sales were up 26%, India up 27% and Russia up 43%. Average spend per person was up 4% with China climbing 11% to £1,583, Saudi Arabia up 10% to £1,527 and US up 8% to £894.

September itself was more of a struggle with West End international sales down 15% compared with the same month last year. Only Nigerian, Indian and Brazilian shoppers saw sales rise. However, overall average spend amongst all tourists was up 4%.

“The post-Brexit effect has been strong all year,” says Kimberly Urbaniak, marketing sales manager at Global Blue. “September came up against very strong comparisons from last year because that was the time when tourists really began to appreciate how beneficial the weak pound could be for them. The data has confused the picture for Christmas a little but flight bookings are up and we expect the West End festivities will lead to key international spend once again.”

She expects retailers to hold off price rises – as a result of inflationary pressures - until the New Year.

Susan Reid of Debenhams says international spend has remained consistent to date this year with “solid growth” coming from Chinese visitors. “They love our British brands such as Ted Baker as well as beauty,” she states.

Karen Lord of John Lewis adds: “We are still seeing strong international shopper growth though not at the amazing level we saw last year.”

Michael Wainwright of Boodles says it is trying to woo more international shoppers into its stores. “We are doing more overseas shows and advertising in overseas market and in airline magazines,” he states.

Barratt West of Tiffany & Co says he is seeing very strong international numbers though with some “disturbances” such as political troubles in the Middle East. “The tourist business is extremely strong and we will continue to see that over Christmas. We have staff who speak Mandarin, Italian, Spanish, French and German,” he states.

Matthew Shields, UK Retail Director at Watches of Switzerland, explains international shoppers are one of its biggest strengths. “Like other retailers we are finding that demand is still strong but not as big as last year when it switched on like a tap after the Brexit referendum. We have to work a little bit harder this year to get the international trade;” he explains. “We are doing more work in the Chinese social media space such as live streaming our Regent Street store on Weibo.”

Kumar Mishra, general manager of Radisson Blu Edwardian Hampshire hotel, says his guests are split between 55% domestic and 45% international. North American, Europeans and a growing number of Chinese dominate the spend. “We got a 20% booking growth last Christmas and we expect double-digits again. We find that guests are having shorter stays but their rate per night is higher. The demand of London is not dying.”

Both he and Jonathan De Mello however caution hoteliers and retailers that they can’t rely on a weak sterling for ever. “Demand will slow. It can’t continue at record levels;” says Mishra. De Mello adds: “Sterling will bounce back in the short-term so retailers need to be careful around their hedging policies not to be caught out.”
West End United

Over the festive period, the West End provides a major boost to the capital’s employment market with retailers taking on an additional 4,700 staff to assist customers. Many of these jobs go to young Londoners and to working parents, providing a lift to households at a time of year when finances can be stretched.

Department store Debenhams is looking to take on 163 extra seasonal workers at its Oxford Street store while John Lewis is looking at a mixture of 460 full and part-time staff.

In addition to hiring extra staff, most retailers offer their existing employees the opportunity to work a significant number of extra hours over the festive period, giving them an income boost over Christmas.

West End retailers are making this contribution despite suffering an economic blow earlier this year with new business rate charges. They have led to a rise of 80% for West End retailers equivalent to an additional £125 million cost a year.

John Lewis’s Karen Lord says the rates have had a “significant impact” with Barratt West of Tiffany & Co describing it as a “tax burden”. He adds: “We have to pay our fair share of tax but this property value based increase is neither fair nor equitable.”

New West End Company has lobbied on behalf of West End retailers and has helped reduce rate rises by £10 million and win a Business Rate Discretionary Relief Fund from Westminster City Council worth £19.6 million.

It is one example of the collaboration between retailers, industry and Government bodies helping to bolster the West End.

Another example is the £10 million Bond Street public realm improvement works led by New West End Company and major owners on the street, New West End Company, Transport for London and Westminster City Council.

An even greater prize is the multi-million-pound transformation of Oxford Street to remove traffic and create much more space for pedestrians. New West End Company is working with Westminster City Council and Transport for London to seek over £300 million funding from the Government in the November budget.

Leicester Square based Radisson Blu Edwardian Hampshire Hotel already collaborates with local retailers. “We work together to offer bespoke shopping experiences to our guests,” explains Kumar Mishra, general manager. “We collect and receive deliveries for our guests prior to their stay.”

Debenhams is also working with West End hotels offering its new Blow beauty service for guests in their rooms. “If they want this service in their hotel we can offer it to them,” explains regional director Susan Reid. “We want to see more collaboration in the West End to create a better environment and a seamless shopping experience for customers.”
Christmas in the West End

Key Dates

The West End will play a large part in stimulating excitement and anticipation in kids and adults alike in the lead up to the big day on December 25th.

There will be a series of eye-catching and colourful events in the district which will lead to thousands of revellers and shoppers taking to the streets.

The key dates for the West End this year are:

- **Regent Street**
  - Motor Show
  - Saturday 4 November
  - Regent Street is pedestrianised between Piccadilly Circus and Oxford Circus as hundreds of classic and electric vehicles go on display. Music, stunt motorbike teams and dance acts attracted 400,000 petrolheads in 2016.

- **Oxford Street**
  - Christmas Lights Switch On
  - Tuesday 7 November
  - The whole mile of Oxford Street will be covered in a blanket of bright white lights and 1,778 baubles. Once again Oxford Street will partner with the NSPCC charity in this year’s display. A million visitors are expected to see the lights switched on and be entertained by live music and celebrity guests.

- **West End**
  - Black Friday
  - Friday 24 November

- **Online Shopping**
  - Order Deliveries
  - Week Beginning 18 December
  - The US retail phenomenon which tempts Thanksgiving revellers with cut price goods has made a huge impression in the UK in recent years. Its original focus may have been on electrical goods but it now extends to a range of other sectors such as fashion and homewares. Expect retailers to launch a series of promotions in the West End. “Black Friday is getting bigger and bolder and we have huge plans again this year,” says Susan Reid, Regional Retail Director at Debenhams. “Shoppers even take holidays around Black Friday to do their Christmas shopping.”

  - Retailers set online ordering cut-off dates for standard and next-day deliveries. With the online option gone last minute shoppers will take to the high streets to get their gifts in time. Shops with click and collect offerings will do well.
Bond Street
Christmas Illuminations Switch On
Thursday 9 November

To mark the start of the festive shopping season and to welcome the end of phase one of the Bond Street public realm development works, the Christmas Lights will be switched on at a special drinks reception.

Regent Street
Illuminations
Thursday 16 November

‘The Spirit of Christmas’ display will include 300,000 twinkling LED lights. The street will be closed for live entertainment with guests enjoying exclusive late-night shopping and in-store surprises. Katerina Mercury, retail asset manager, Regent Street at The Crown Estate, says: “We are extending the traffic-free hours to 9pm this year, creating a real festive buzz for late night shopping on the street, which we hope will attract even more visitors than the 400,000 who took part last year. Traffic free events on Regent Street are always hugely popular and this Christmas will be no exception, with retailers creating some fantastic experiences in store.”

Regent Street
Hamleys Christmas Toy Parade
Sunday 19 November

Hamleys toy parade is back for the third year running. The all-day traffic free extravaganza, which is tipped to attract 600,000 visitors throughout the day, includes marching bands, toy vehicles, cartoon characters and even Santa himself.

West End
Christmas Eve
Saturday 23, Sunday 24 December

The last shopping weekend before the 25th. Expect Saturday to be particularly busy as shoppers, including many husbands and dads, flock to the stores to buy last minute gifts. Most shops will be trading at full price, rather than running sales.

West End
Boxing Day
Tuesday 26 December

This is the traditional start of sales season in the West End. Shoppers full of festive spirit and mince pies will be out in search of a bargain.

West End
New Year’s Eve
Sunday 31 December

Party time in the West End as 250,000 revellers welcome in the New Year with champagne and fireworks.
Entertainment and Travel

Nothing beats a quintessentially British movie at Christmas so get set for Paddington 2 to become a firm favourite amongst families visiting the West End this year.

The sequel to the hit 2014 movie stars Hugh Grant, Peter Capaldi, Julie Walters and Hugh Bonneville and sees the marmalade-loving Paddington in a bit of sticky bother over a birthday gift.

Also packing out the cinemas will be the next installment in the Star Wars franchise – ‘The Last Jedi’.

Musicals are also expected to draw in the crowds once again cheered by a distinctive American flavour through legendary Broadway show ‘42nd Street’ at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane and Christmas With The Rat Pack at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket.

Treading the acting boards this Christmas will be the Oscar winner director Sam Mendes and his acclaimed play ‘The Ferryman’ at the Gielgud Theatre.

This huge influx of people onto the streets of London and the West End as they get into the festive spirit of shopping, dining or watching entertainment poses a tremendous challenge for the capital’s transport network.

On an average day in London there are more than 31 million journeys, according to Transport for London, across modes such as tube, rail and bus. Christmas adds extra numbers with passenger figures up by between 20% and 40% higher than usual.

West End stations are among the busiest on the network.

Typical weekday tube station entries and exits:

- Oxford Circus 278,149
- Green Park 124,590
- Piccadilly Circus 117,857
- Bond Street 112,729

Source: Transport for London

Transport for London has worked hard over recent years in improving station layout and technology to improve travellers experience, particularly during busy periods such as summer and Christmas.

It has installed new ticket machines on the network offering guidance in 17 languages, including Mandarin.

It also puts on extra staff and travel ambassadors at its most popular stations at the busiest periods.

“The West End is one of the nation’s great assets, vital to our city’s economic growth, and we’re investing hundreds of millions of pounds in making life better for people who live or work in, or visit, the area,” says David McNeill, Transport for London’s Director of Public Affairs and Stakeholder Engagement.

“This Christmas, shoppers and revellers in the West End can make use of our staffed stations, bus services and the Night Tube, running on the Victoria, Central, Northern, Piccadilly and Jubilee lines. By next Christmas, the Elizabeth Line will be open. It will significantly increase the Capital’s rail capacity, boosting the economy by billions of pounds and supporting thousands of new jobs and homes. It’s a massive opportunity and will transform the West End.

“This time next year, work will have already started on the transformation of Oxford Street. The introduction of the Elizabeth Line provides a once in a generation opportunity to tackle the challenges of poor air quality and congestion to help ensure that Oxford Street retains its iconic status for years to come. We want to make the Oxford Street district a globally renowned public space, helping to support business growth and to create better neighbourhoods for residents.”
Products in demand
Ten Gifts Set To Sparkle This Christmas

1. Lego Creator Winter Holiday Train
2. Trolls Hug Time Poppy
3. FurReal Friends Makers Proto Max Interactive Pup
4. Mini Micro Deluxe Scooter
5. Fitbit Alta
6. Samsung Gear VR Headset
7. Coco Mademoiselle, Chanel No 5
8. Edinburgh Gin Advent Calendar
9. Tyler the Playful Tiger
10. Luvabella Doll
2018

The New Year bells are unlikely to ring in a sudden change in the economic and political pressures faced by consumers and businesses in post-Brexit UK.

But how are the West End retailers feeling about the challenges and opportunities over the next 12 months?

Susan Reid, regional director for Oxford Street at Debenhams, says: “We will continue with our 3D’s strategy of destination, digital and different. We are on a mission to improve our technology, personal service and in-store experience. We want to offer new and exclusive ranges and fashion pop-ups in store. Customers are increasingly looking for newness.”

Michael Wainwright of Boodles is concerned about the continued uncertainty around Brexit and the threat of more terror attacks but remains optimistic in its ability to continue to prosper.

Karen Lord of John Lewis says: “The transformation of Oxford Street is a great opportunity for retailers. We will also keep investing in new services and products. There will be more happening.”

Indeed, New West End Company is powering this change, having set out a ‘Future for the Oxford Street district’ earlier this year addressing challenges such as poor air quality, road safety and inadequate public realm.

Other structural changes to look forward to include the opening of the Elizabeth Line in December 2018, which is set to increase retail sales to £11.25 billion by 2020 (from £9bn currently).

Jonathan De Mello, head of retail consulting at Harper Dennis Hobbs, is enthusiastic. “Dwell time in the West End could go up as people will not have to rush off to catch the last tube. When the visitors come we need to do a better job in ‘waysigning’ through the use of apps to let them know where the nearest shops or eateries are.”

Barratt West of Tiffany & Co adds: “The Elizabeth Line is creating such a buzz around the West End that it will help attract more people to the area this Christmas as well. For us the new year is very exciting with a new chief executive, new energy and new direction.”
Acknowledgements

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Boodles
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The Grosvenor Estate
Hamleys
Harper Dennis Hobbs
House of Fraser
John Lewis Partnership
Premier Tax Free
Radisson Blu Edwardian Hotels
Springboard
Tiffany & Co
Transport for London
Watches of Switzerland

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