

Tower of London

Guide for parents/carers of children and people on the autistic spectrum and related conditions.

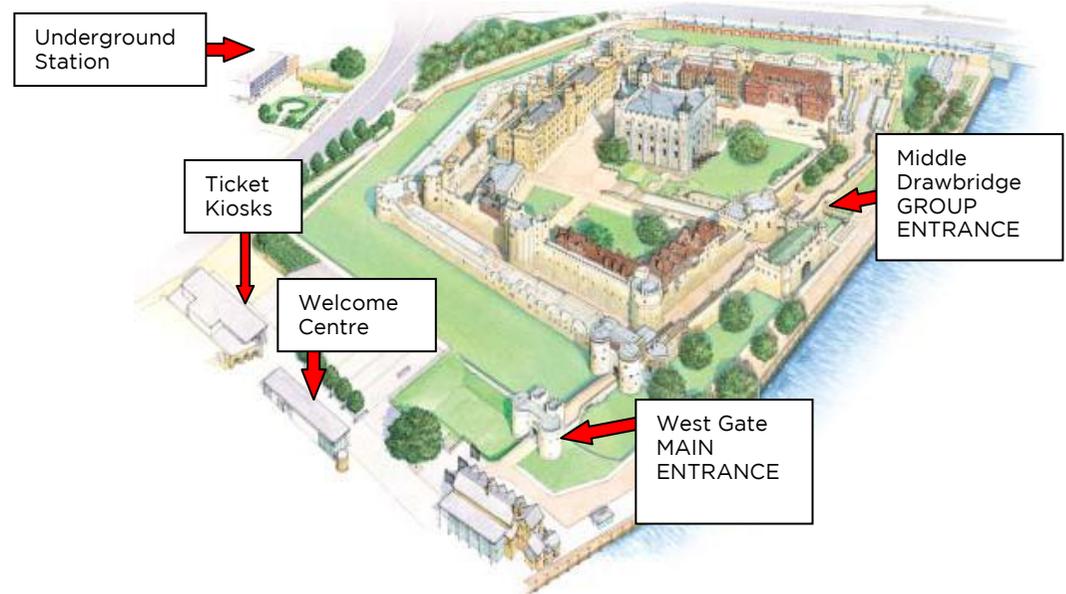


This guide was compiled with the help of the National Autistic Society and families with children on the Autistic Spectrum.

This guide aims to give information and suggestions which may help inform people who bring children on the Autistic Spectrum to the Tower of London. As every child on the Autistic Spectrum is different, and responds to things differently, parents/carers need to decide how to plan and undertake a visit, and we hope this guide will answer common questions and highlight issues of relevance.

Visiting times

- Try to arrive as early as possible – preferably getting to the Tower of London within the first hour after opening, so that you can be some of the first visitors in.
- Generally, visitors to the Tower arrive in the afternoon so by coming early you can avoid the crowds at the Jewel House and the Yeoman Warder tours.
- The peak visiting period is Easter to October, but Christmas and the Spring and Autumn school holidays are also busy. Weekends throughout the year are busier than weekdays.
- For information on how to get to the Tower of London, please look on our website: www.hrp.org.uk/TowerOfLondon, or for help in planning your journey, visit www.tfl.gov.uk



Ticketing

- If you are a member of Historic Royal Palaces, you can go straight to the main entrance.
- If you are not, and you wish to avoid queuing, tickets can be purchased in advance from our website or by telephone. They will be posted to you if you order more than seven working days in advance (10 days for non UK addresses). Tickets purchased in advance are valid for seven days from the date selected.
- If you would prefer to buy tickets on arrival, and the main ticket kiosks are busy, you can go to the Welcome Centre if paying with a credit/debit card, or the Group Ticket office if paying by any other means.



Ticket kiosks



Welcome Centre

- If you buy your tickets through our website, you may need to collect carer tickets from the Welcome Centre as they cannot be issued in advance. Check our website or ask an assistant for what will be the best option for you and your family. Carer tickets are issued free if a concession ticket is purchased.
- Child wristbands are available to collect from the Welcome Centre which carry contact details of parents/carers.



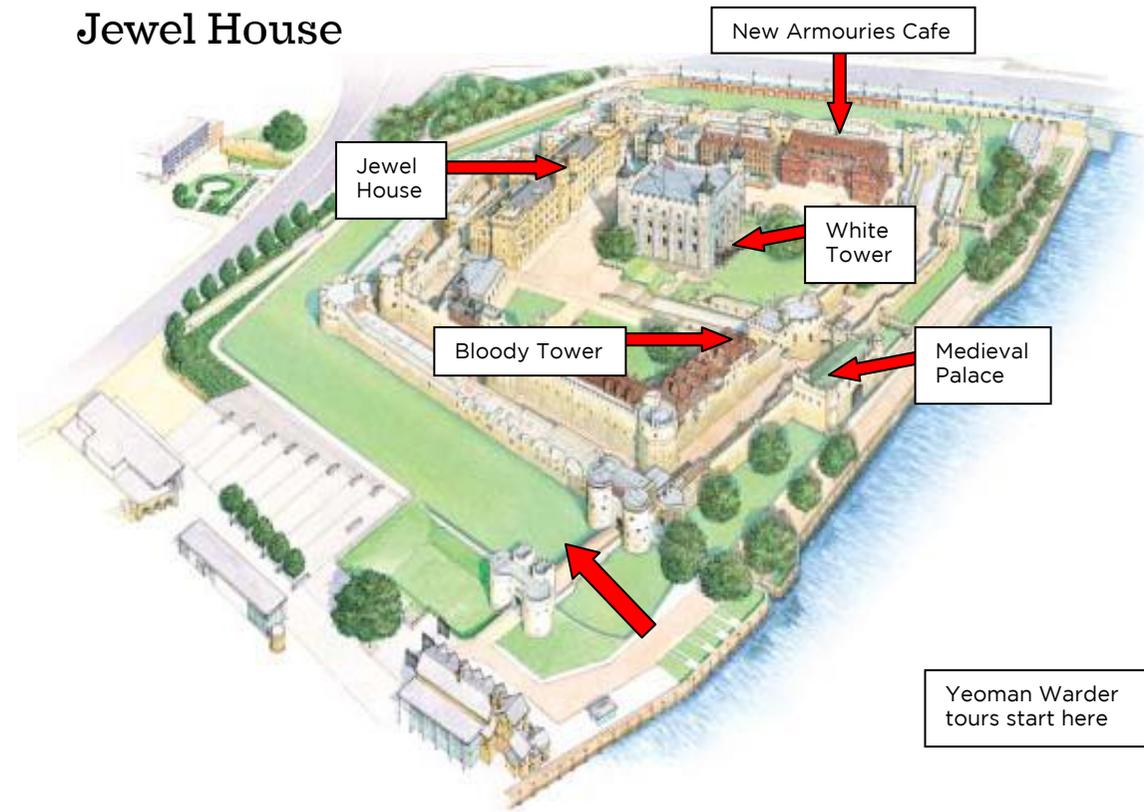
Make sure you visit the Welcome Centre on Tower Hill. Our highly trained staff can help you plan your visit and answer any questions.

Remember to pick up a free Family Trail from there too! These trails feature activities for children, which guide them around areas of the Tower and help to explain the Tower's history. Children get badges and pencils from the Welcome Centre too.

Entrance

- You can enter the Tower of London either by:
 - The main entrance at the West Gate, opposite the Tower Shop or the Middle Drawbridge opposite the River Thames.
 - The Middle Drawbridge is the group entrance, but as long as you have admission tickets you can enter through here.
- Bags will be searched on entry, so it is advisable to let children know this in advance so that they are prepared.

Jewel House



- We advise you to go to the Jewel House first – at any time of year – so that you can see the Crown Jewels without having too many crowds or queues.

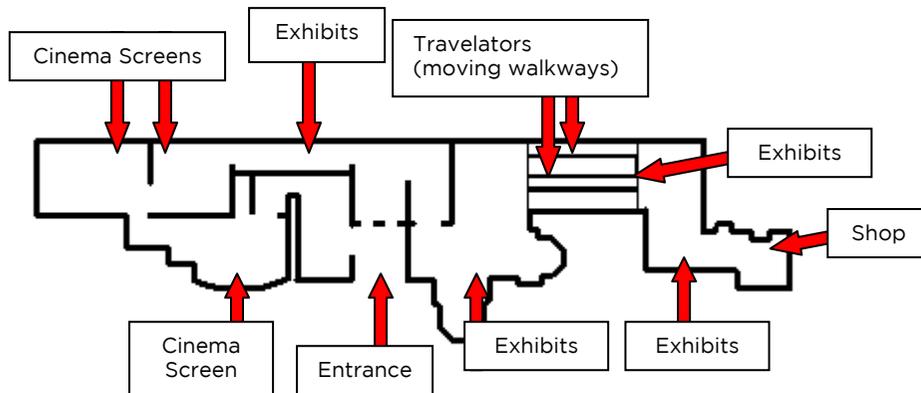


The Jewel House



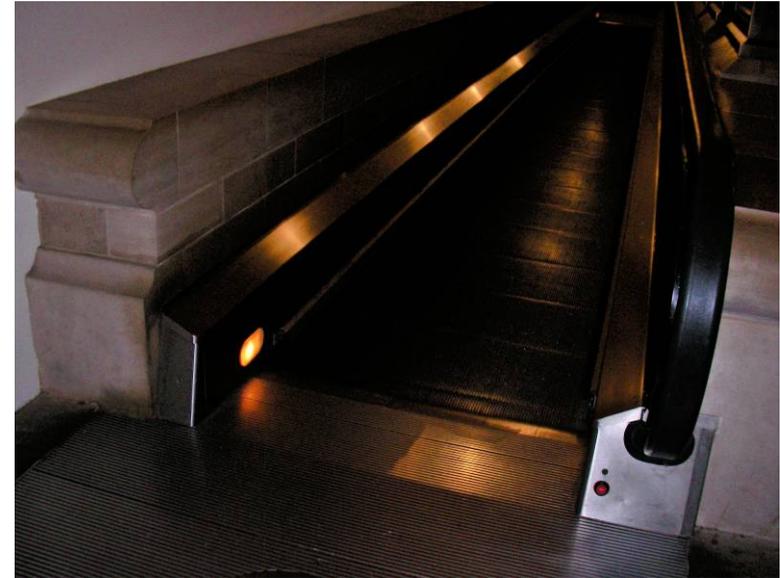
...there are sometimes queues.

- The first section of the display shows a short video of footage of Queen Elizabeth II's coronation and close-ups of the crown jewels. Fairly loud background music accompanies these films. The actual crowns, orbs and sceptres are in the next section.



- Lighting is low but you can see other people/children around.

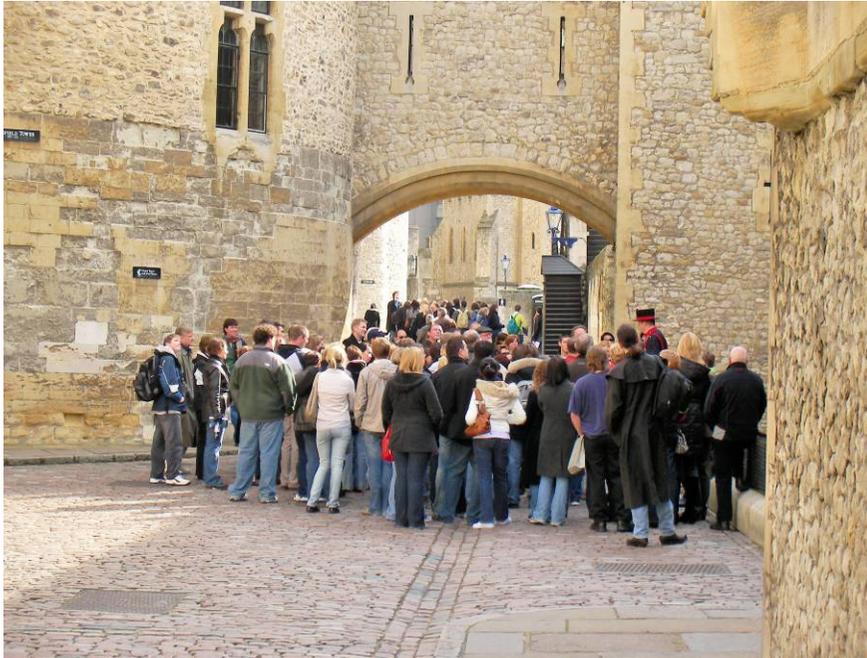
- If there is a queue and you wish to go straight to see the crowns, please speak to a member of staff at the entrance.
- There is a 'travelator' (moving walkway) along the side of the main display of the Crown Jewels. It is there to prevent congestion. Visitors glide past the crowns, orbs and sceptres at a slow pace.



One of the 'travelators' or 'moving walkways' in the Jewel House

- Parents should warn children that the floor will start moving and that they need to stand still and watch the displays go past.
- They can go round again and there is also a viewing platform above the display where visitors can take a longer look.
- There is limited information about the Crown Jewels in the Jewel House. Families with a child on the autistic spectrum may like to buy the specific guide book on the Crown Jewels before they visit. The Jewel House Warders are also very knowledgeable, so please speak to any of them.

Yeoman Warder (Beefeater) guided tours



- The Yeoman Warder tours start from the West Gate (opposite the Tower shop) and last for about an hour. They run every half an hour and visitors walk around the outside of the buildings and into the Chapel Royal of St Peter ad Vincula. They offer a limited tour in bad weather. Please see the signage at the main entrance for availability.
- Yeoman Warder tours are very popular and get very crowded. It is worth aiming to go on an early tour - possibly making it the second thing you do after the Crown Jewels.
- The tours are very entertaining, involve shouting and highlight the more gory aspects of the Tower's history. Children are generally encouraged to come to the front but it is not compulsory.

White Tower



- Visitors start their experience on the first floor, and work their way up to the third floor, before coming down to exit through the basement and the shop.
- Therefore the White Tower is three floors up but four down! Several staircases are spiral and some are narrower and the steps more worn than others. Not all the steps are the same height. Please ask a member of staff should you need to exit the White Tower quickly or do not wish to go all the way to the top.
- There is a regular wooden staircase between the first and second floors.

- The White Tower is very popular and often busy. Please ask the staff at the entrance if you are concerned about the number of other visitors already inside.
- The White Tower contains arms and armour displays. There are models of horses, model heads of people and also suits of armour – some standing empty, others with mannequins in them. There are displays of weapons. Some of these items are on open display, others are in glass cases.



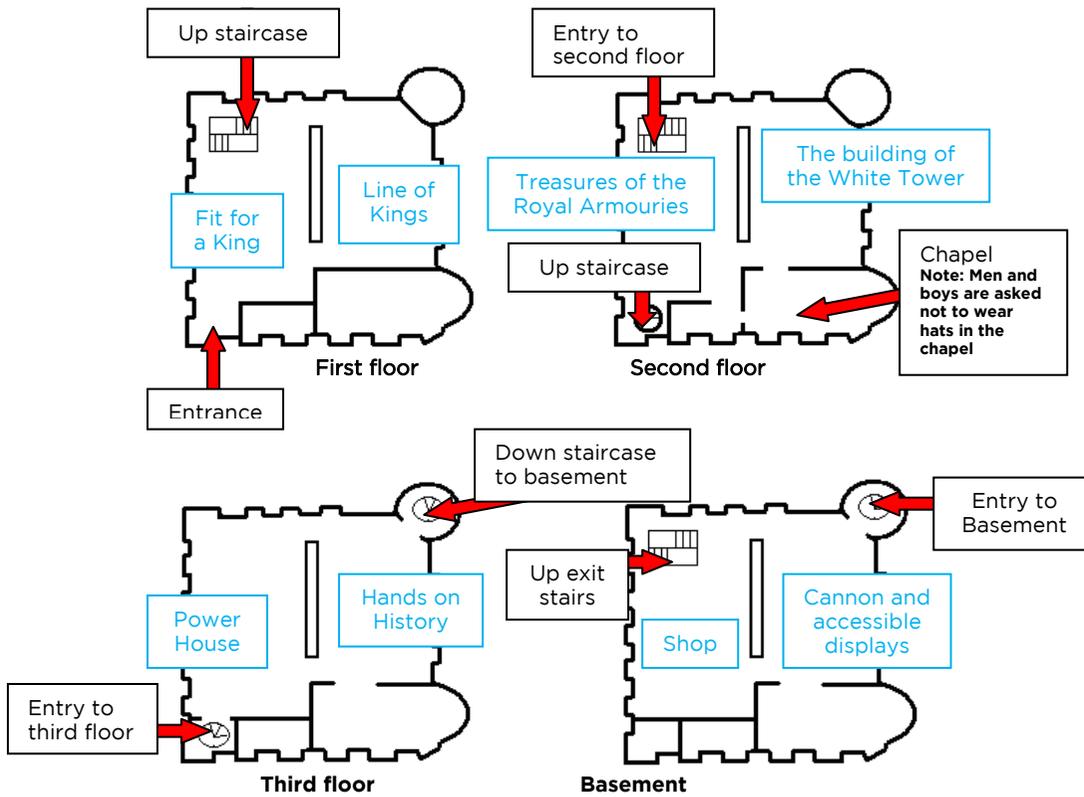
- There are audio visual displays with flashing images and sound effects on all floors. Probably the most exciting is the dragon at the entrance to *Power House* which is made from a variety of different objects that all formed part of the Tower's history. He doesn't breath fire but he does roar!



- The *Hands on History* display located on the top floor has lots of activities, e.g. pulling a bow, lifting weapons, which will entertain children of all ages. There are sound effects and audio descriptions for some of the objects.



- Visitors exit through the White Tower shop in the Basement. As visitors entering the shop will have recently passed through the interactive exhibits of *Hands on History* which can be touched, bear in mind that retail items should only be handled if you plan to buy.
- Note: the White Tower shop sometimes closes early, meaning that the exit is re-routed through a side door off the first gallery, leading to the exit staircase.



Floor plan of the White Tower

Bloody Tower

- This is one of the most interesting buildings at the Tower of London, but is very small.
- On the lower floor (accessed via a straight stone staircase outside the Tower) is a recreation of Sir Walter Raleigh's room, and on the upper floor there is information about the Princes in the Tower.
- The spiral staircase from the lower floor to the upper floor is very narrow and dark, and once started, visitors have to keep going up. This may be claustrophobic for some people.
- The steps are not all the same height.
- Queues often develop at this tower, particularly in the afternoon. They are created by the narrow spiral staircase so cannot be avoided.



The Bloody Tower's narrow staircase

Medieval Palace

- This is a re-creation of some of the living areas of the medieval kings who used the Tower as their homes. As part of the interpretation, costumed guides can be found in some of the rooms in the winter months.
- There are also some interactive exhibits – such as smells and sounds.
- The Medieval Palace includes the South Wall Walk, with views over the River Thames, so visitors exit some distance from the entrance.



Part of the recreation of a room in the Medieval Palace

Fortress: Wall Walk, Broad Arrow Tower and Constable Tower

- On the south Wall Walk between the Medieval Palace and the Salt Tower is a cast iron model of a soldier. There are several of these soldiers around the Tower.
- Be aware of the walls/railings on the Wall Walk in case they are low for your child.
- To get to the Broad Arrow Tower, visitors climb up a small, narrow spiral staircase in the upper floor of the Salt Tower to get to the next part of the Wall Walk (the east Wall Walk) and onto the Broad Arrow Tower. The steps are not all the same height and it can be cramped as you go up the few steps.
- The Broad Arrow Tower has objects to handle, such as a cross bow and a helmet.

- Between the Broad Arrow and the Constable Towers is a covered wooden walkway, which has sound effects.
- In the Constable Tower, there is a model of the Tower of London being attacked, and there are loud shouting sounds to simulate the noise of an attack.



Metal model of a soldier



Covered walkway with sound effects

Martin Tower

- The Martin Tower, the final tower on the east Wall Walk and directly above the Jewel House shop, has a display about crowns through history.
- Some of the displays are quite high up for small children. It is all on one level but there is a specific route to follow and the rooms are small. Consequently, at peak times, this tower gets quite busy, with queues along the Wall Walk.
- Toilets are located behind the exit from the Jewel House.



Royal Beasts exhibition

- This is on the first floor of the Brick Tower, behind the Jewel House and above the public toilets.
- It is part of the North Wall Walk – so most visitors will get to it via the Martin Tower – but can be reached on its own via a narrow spiral staircase.
- The exhibition is in one room only and visitors continue along the North Wall Walk and exit down a spiral staircase.
- It has lots of buttons to push and lids to lift to get information. The display includes sounds and (limited) smells of wild animals.
- Although the room that the exhibition is in is large and the Brick Tower is tucked behind the Jewel House, this is a popular display so can get crowded when the Tower of London is busy.
- To enhance the exhibition there are life-sized models of some of the animals that once lived at the Tower: a polar bear, some monkeys and three lions that you may have spotted when you came in.



The three lions at the entrance



The Royal Beasts exhibition

Staff

- All our staff are happy to help you – please ask if you have any special requirements.

Other areas to visit

- There are other visual displays and/or interactive exhibits in other parts of the Tower, such as the **Salt Tower**, **Bowyer Tower** and the **Beauchamp Tower**. The Salt Tower and Bowyer Tower contain video screen displays.
- The same applies to the **Fusiliers Museum** about the history of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers who were formed at the Tower in 1685 and whose Headquarters are still here.
- For those with an interest in the Tower's history of torture, the basement of the **Wakefield Tower** has torture implements on display. Parents should note that sensitive children might not like going into the underground room and seeing torture equipment. Like the Bloody Tower, unavoidable queues often develop in the afternoon, and it is accessible via a small staircase.
- These outlying towers tend to be less crowded than the more popular ones, such as the Jewel House and the White Tower.
- They generally have low door frames, steps, spiral staircases and narrow or small areas.
- Please watch out for the rope barriers that protect the artefacts and/or act as path markers.



The Fusiliers Museum



Part of the display in the Wakefield Tower

Catering

- The New Armouries Café inside the Tower stocks a wide range of hot meals, snacks and drinks. Some gluten-free food is available while stocks last. Sample menus are available on the Tower website.



- Meals usually have set options which means that different elements from different meals cannot be mixed without incurring extra cost.
- Like most catering outlets, the busiest period is at lunchtime. We therefore recommend that you plan to have an early or late lunch to avoid too many crowds and too much queuing.
- Customers have to queue separately for food, drinks and paying.
- There are no toilets inside the New Armouries Café. The nearest facilities are by the Cradle Tower. There is a male toilet and accessible toilet next to the Salt Tower which is a bit closer. The accessible toilet requires a Radar key; the one behind the Jewel House doesn't.
- Visitors can bring their own picnics and eat them on any of the benches around the grounds or – during the summer months – on the grassed area by the White Tower.
- There are a number of fast food outlets on Tower Hill. In order to get back into the Tower of London after lunch, please ask for a re-entry ticket as you leave the Tower.



Serving area



Dining area

- The hot food is at the far side of the large serving area near the till points. The first things you see on entry are the cakes!
- Child portions are available.
- There are tables of 2 and tables of 4, and some have been put together to accommodate larger parties.
- The tables are quite close together and there is no clear route through them.

General information

- The Tower of London is an enclosed site but there are a number of places where children may hide or get lost.
- We suggest that, upon arrival, you might wish to identify a suitable location where you can all meet up should you get separated. It needs to be simple to remember and easy to find particularly from several directions. Perhaps somewhere like the entrance to the Jewel House, opposite the soldier on duty, but please feel free to choose your own location.
- Parents are advised to bring a ratio of 1 adult to 1 child on the autistic spectrum.
- Part of the moat is open to visitors and there are benches around the edges. There are some actual-sized siege weapons on display. During the summer months they are used by the costumed guides. These displays can get very crowded.



- Visitors are not allowed onto the grassed areas in the Tower, except the grassed area by the White Tower during the summer months (this is a summer picnic area).
- You should have no trouble from the famous Tower ravens but they are wild birds and are much larger than most visitors imagine, being the largest of the crow family. Please do not attempt to touch or feed them!



Far left: Raven

Left: Summer picnic area on grass by White Tower.

- The costumed guides, who can be found in the Medieval Palace during the winter months, perform in various locations around the Tower during the school holidays and in the summer. They can often be seen just wandering around and are happy for visitors to have their photo taken with them.
- Between the costumed guides and the Yeoman Warders there is often a lot of shouting. Visitors are also encouraged to react to and participate in the tours and presentations.
- The Tower is a working barracks and soldiers are stationed outside the Jewel House and the Queen's House (the Queen's House is not open to the public). Check the daily programme for when the soldiers undertake ceremonial duties. The public will be asked to keep back when these ceremonies take place - for example, when the guards are inspected and when they are walking through the Tower on duty.



- The daily programme shows the times of the tours and presentations. It is available on our website in advance or in the Welcome Centre on arrival.

- The Chapel Royal may only be visited as part of a Yeoman Warder tour. It is still a place of Christian worship so is not usually open to visitors on Sunday mornings.
- If your child has other access needs, there is an access leaflet available in the Welcome Centre, and there is detailed access information available on the Historic Royal Palaces website - www.hrp.org.uk
- Owing to necessary conservation work, occasionally routes around/within buildings are subject to change.

Contact details

Telephone information: 0844 482 7777
Textphone: 18001 0844 482 7777

Ticket booking line: 0844 482 7799
Textphone: 18001 0844 482 7799

Membership: 0844 482 7788
Textphone: 18001 0844 482 7788

Email: visitorservices_TOL@hrp.org.uk

Website: www.hrp.org.uk

Catering enquiries: telephone 020 3166 6991 or email:
Deputy.Tower@digbytrout.co.uk