

**London Eye**, or **Millennium Wheel** is a giant 135-metre tall Ferris wheel situated on the banks of the River Thames in the British capital.

It is the tallest Ferris wheel in Europe, and the most popular paid tourist attraction in the United Kingdom, visited by millions people annually.

The London Eye is located at the western end of Jubilee Gardens, on the South Bank of the River Thames in the London Borough of Lambeth, between Westminster Bridge and Hungerford Bridge. The site is adjacent to that of the former Dome of Discovery, which was built for the Festival of Britain in 1951.

### Design and construction

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The wheel carries 32 sealed and air-conditioned egg-shaped passenger capsules, attached to its external circumference, each capsule representing one of the [London Boroughs](#). Each 10 tonne capsule holds 25 people, who are free to walk around inside the capsule, though seating is provided. It rotates at 26 cm per second so that one revolution takes about 30 minutes. The wheel does not usually stop to take on passengers; the rotation rate is slow enough to allow passengers to walk on and off the moving capsules at ground level. It is, however, stopped to allow disabled passengers time to embark and disembark safely.

The rim of the Eye is supported by [tie rods](#) and resembles a huge spoked bicycle wheel. The lighting for the London Eye was redone with LED lighting in December 2006 to allow digital control of the lights as opposed to the manual replacement of gels over fluorescent tubes.

The wheel was designed by architects David Marks, Julia Barfield, Malcolm Cook, Mark Sparrowhawk, Steven Chilton, Frank Anatole and Nic Bailey. [Mace](#) were responsible for construction management with Hollandia as the main steelwork contractor and [Tilbury Douglas](#) as the civils contractor. Consulting engineers Tony Gee & Partners designed the foundation works while Beckett Rankine designed the marine works.

The wheel was constructed in sections which were floated up the Thames on barges and assembled lying flat on piled platforms in the river. Once the wheel was complete it was raised into an upright position by a strand jack system, at 2 degrees an hour until it reached 65 degrees. It was left in that position for a week while engineers prepared for the second phase of the lift. The total weight of steel in the Eye is 1,700 tonnes.

The project was European with major components coming from six countries: the steel was supplied from the UK and fabricated in The Netherlands by the Dutch company Hollandia, the cables came from Italy, the bearings came from Germany, the spindle and hub were cast in the Czech Republic, the capsules were made in France (and the glass for these came from Italy), and the electrical components from the UK.

[Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners](#) prepared planning and listed building consent applications for the permanent retention of the attraction on behalf of the [London Eye Company](#). This has involved the co-ordination of an Environmental Statement and the production of a planning supporting statement detailing the reasons for its retention.

## History

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The London Eye was formally opened by the then Prime Minister, [Tony Blair](#), on December the 31<sup>st</sup> 1999, although it was not opened to the public until March the 9<sup>th</sup> 2000 because of technical problems.

By July 2002, more than 8 million people had ridden the Eye. It had planning permission only for five years, but at that time Lambeth Council agreed to plans to make the attraction permanent.

Since January the 1<sup>st</sup> 2005, the Eye has been the focal point of London's New Year celebrations, with 10-minute displays taking place involving fireworks fired from the wheel itself.

In 2006 [the Tussauds Group](#) bought out the other two joint owners, British Airways and the Marks Barfield family (the lead architects). British Airways continued its brand association, but from the beginning of 2008 the name 'British Airways' was dropped from the logo.

On August the 12<sup>th</sup> 2009 the London Eye saw another re-brand, this time calling it "The Merlin Entertainments London Eye" to show Merlin Entertainments' ownership. A new logo was designed for the attraction - this time taking the actual form of an eye made out of London's famous landmarks. This also came at the time when the new Merlin Entertainments London Eye 4D Experience pre-flight show was launched underneath the ticket centre in County Hall.

On 5 June 2008 it was announced that 30 million people had ridden the London Eye since its opening in March 2000.

When erected in 1999, it was the tallest Ferris wheel in the world, until 2006. It is still described by its operators as "the world's tallest cantilevered observation wheel" as the wheel is supported by an A-frame on one side only.

The London Eye marked its 10th anniversary on 9 March 2010. Since its opening, the Eye has become a major landmark and tourist attraction.