

11. saturday markets

Saturday is traditionally London's day of leisure. The working week is at an end and Friday-night hangovers are easing away by the time Londoners emerge into the fresh air to visit the city's weekend markets. Though shopping is on their minds – some new clothes and accessories for the big night ahead, perhaps; or a quirky antique to improve the look of the bedroom? – they come mainly to places such as Portobello, Dalston and Hackney to meet friends, browse the stalls and pick up some lunch from the many street food vendors. This journey places the emphasis on fun rather than functional, though its first stop – Billingsgate Fish Market – is included for its exciting atmosphere and sense of history. It does, however, have sole.



Start point: Canary Wharf DLR
End point: Ladbroke Grove tube
Duration: 4.5 hours

● Though financial centre Canary Wharf may be known for an altogether different type of market, its gleaming towers and glitzy shopping arcades provide the gateway to one of London's most ancient trading centres. **Billingsgate Fish Market** didn't always exist out here in the Docklands – its original location, from the 16th century onwards, was at Billingsgate Wharf near London Bridge – but it has occupied its current 13-acre site since 1982. Until very recently, only licensed fish porters (recognisable by their white sailcloth smocks and flat-topped hats) were permitted to move boxes of fish around the market – a law that went back to mid 1600s – but, in 2012, these restrictions were lifted, bringing an end to nearly 400 years of tradition. Many porters are still employed at the market and, other than the occasional glimpse of modernity, the scene here is still very similar to how it would have been in Tudor times.

● On Saturday mornings, Billingsgate Fish Market is open from 5am to 8.30am, and it's best to get there as early as possible – if only to see the staggering variety of fish and seafood that's quickly bought up by London's early rising food retailers. To walk there from **Canary Wharf DLR**, come out of the station via the South Colonnade exit, turn left and walk onto Trafalgar Way. Follow this road for a few minutes and you

will arrive at the entrance to the market, which is situated on a small roundabout.

● Once you've had your fill of all things piscatorial, exit the market the same way you came in and cross Trafalgar Way. Catch the northbound **277** from the **Billingsgate Market** bus stop and take this all the way up to **Dalston Junction**. Get off the bus and continue walking up Dalston Lane, then turn right up Kingsland High Street. Situated opposite Dalston Kingsland overground station, the colourful **Ridley Road Market** began as a small collection of stalls in the late 19th century. Nowadays, it's a much bigger affair, and its pitches are a true reflection of the district's large Caribbean and African population. Salfish, goat meat, mangoes and yams sit next to potatoes and peas on the displays, and cheap goods – from budget deodorant to knock-off CDs – are available wherever you turn. Though Dalston is rapidly becoming something of a Shoreditch spillover, with artists, musicians and other hipsters moving in to take advantage of cheap rents and good nightlife, Ridley Road Market shows little sign of gentrification. It's scuzzy, smelly and a bit boisterous. And it's all the more fun for that.

● Walk all the way through Ridley Road Market and turn left up St Mark's Rise at the far end. Catch the southbound **236** from the **Ridley Road Market** stop and take the bus all the way to the **Broadway Market** stop in Hackney. **Broadway Market**, which stretches down from the acres of

greenery at London Fields to the Regent's Canal, is a much more fashionable hangout – and is the epicentre of London's ultra-trendy street food scene. Though trading has taken place here for 50 years or so, it is only since the establishment of a dedicated food market in 2004 that the area's fortunes have really taken off. Nowadays, stalls selling everything from specialist Scotch eggs and homemade bread to Indian thalis and hot-pork sandwiches have been joined by pitches specialising in cutting-edge fashion, crafts and records. And, what with all the trendy boutiques and cafés that have opened up alongside, the market has become an essential Saturday experience for any East Londoner with aspirations of coolness.

● After exploring Broadway Market, return to the bus stop and continue walking up Westgate Street. At the end of the road, turn left up Mare Street, cross over the road and catch the southbound **48** from the **King Edward's Road** bus stop. The bus then travels through Hackney, Shoreditch and the City, before crossing London Bridge and terminating at **London Bridge Station**. Once you get off the bus, walk back out of the bus station and turn left down Borough High Street. There are entrances to **Borough Market** on Bedale Street and Southwark Street, both on the right. This famous food market is one of London's largest, and sells to both trade and the public. Like the much smaller Broadway Market, it's as much of a social hangout as a place to fill your shopping bag, and the cafés and pubs that surround the cast-iron market hall are every bit as popular as the stalls. Though it's these, which sell everything from artisan cheeses and homemade pies to Spanish chorizo and spiced cider, that are the real stars of the show.

● Return to Borough High Street, turn right and catch the **35, 40, 133** or **343** from the Southwark Street bus stop down to **Elephant & Castle/Newington Causeway**. Continue down the road and use the admittedly complicated underpass system to get to St George's Road (the second road on the right off the roundabout), then cross over and catch the westbound **148** from the **Elephant & Castle Station** bus stop all the way to **Shepherd's Bush Green**. Get off the bus and carry on walking up the road before turning left onto Uxbridge Road. **Shepherd's Bush Market**, the entrance to which is a couple of minutes further along on the left, is another local market in the Ridley Road tradition – albeit with a more Indian influence. Low prices rather than high fashion (and indeed high quality) are to be found here, and the rows of stalls that line the railway line down to Goldhawk Lane tube station specialise mainly in bargain clothes, shoes and accessories. There are plenty of food stalls, too; as well as pitches selling all

the household items, cheap toys, London souvenirs and Hindi DVDs you could ever need.

● Return to the Uxbridge Road end of Shepherd's Bush Market and walk back to the **Shepherd's Bush Green** stop. Catch the eastbound **94** or **148** from here to **Notting Hill Gate Station/Hillgate Street**, then get off the bus and bear left up Pembridge Road, following the signs – and the people – to **Portobello Market**. This world-famous market – featured in everything from 1971's *Bedknobs and Broomsticks* to the 1999 Hugh Grant and Julia Roberts film *Notting Hill* – began life as a centre of the fruit and vegetable trade in the Victorian era. The arrival of antiques dealers in the 1940s and 1950s made it a must-visit for anyone with an eye for aesthetics, and the fashion set moved in shortly afterwards to cement the market's reputation. It's now one of the best – and certainly the most interesting – places in London to pick up vintage clothes, jewellery and stylish homeware. A fascinating reflection of the district's incongruous mix of aristocratic and Caribbean residents, the market is a heady and often bewildering experience, which can take dedicated Saturday shoppers several hours to work their way through. So you'll probably need a drink and a bit of a sit-down afterwards. The Castle, towards the Ladbroke Grove end of the market, is an excellent place for settling down with a pint and watching the people go by.

