

23. sunday markets

Confirming its reputation as the city that never rests – even on the Sabbath – London hosts several busy markets every Sunday. Fabulously unfunctional, these wildly varied collections of stalls have never really existed to keep the city's wheels of commerce turning; the Sunday markets are much more about life's little luxuries – the non-essential goods that make shopping such an enjoyable and fun experience. So whether you're after fresh flowers in Hoxton, cutting-edge fashion at Brick Lane or original art in Greenwich – or simply some freshly cooked street food to accompany a lazy-afternoon pint with your friends – this journey will serve you well. Remember to take cash – and a large shopping bag.



Start point: Hoxton underground

End point: Cutty Sark DLR

Duration: 4 hours

● To make the most of London's Sunday markets, it's worth making an early start – try to get to **Hoxton underground** station by 9.30am. Once there, come out of either of the station exits and walk the few metres down to Cremer Street. Turn left here, then right down Hackney Road. After a few minutes, turn left into **Columbia Road** and walk along until you see the beginnings of the famous flower market. It was Huguenot weavers who introduced a taste for fresh flowers into the East End and several markets in this part of London began to supply this demand from the 16th century onwards. Columbia Road got its first stalls in 1869, when philanthropist Angela Burdett-Coutts decided to redevelop what had become one of the city's most notorious and dangerous slums. As the area around Hoxton and Spitalfields had a predominantly Jewish population at that time, special dispensation was given to allow Sunday trading. Nowadays stalls are piled high with everything from cut flowers to bedding plants, and the surrounding streets are filled with people struggling to carry trees and ornamental shrubs to the nearest tube stations. This regular Sunday-morning influx has attracted several stylish shops and cafés to the road and, like so many of the capital's best markets, Columbia Road has become a favourite weekend hangout for early rising Londoners.

● Once you've explored the market, retrace your steps to Hackney Road. Before you reach it,

though, turn left down Virginia Road. Follow this road around the corner and turn left down Swanfield Street. When you reach the bottom, turn left along Bethnal Green Road, then right into **Brick Lane**. This street is well known for being the heart of Bangladeshi London, but on Sundays it gives itself over to a street market that is one of London's most idiosyncratic. You'll find all the East London staples – Cockney apple-sellers, Indian saris and jewellery, student-run juice bars – here, but it's the market's sheer unpredictability that makes it special. Nobody really knows what the stalls will be hawking from week to week, and there are always fantastic bargains to be had – especially for those with an eye for fashion and interiors. The Upmarket, in The Old Truman Brewery around halfway down the street, offers more than 140 stalls that specialise mainly in food or fashion. Check out the one run by Studio Ochee (www.studioochee.com) – designer of this book's cover illustration – which sells stunning, ethically made clothing you won't find anywhere else.

● Turn right onto Hanbury Street – immediately passing the spot on the right (now covered by a large modern building) where Jack the Ripper's second victim Annie Chapman was discovered in 1888 – and walk straight ahead until it meets Commercial Street. Cross the road and bear left into **Old Spitalfields Market**. This Victorian market hall may have been gentrified and spruced up in recent years – note the number of gleaming permanent shops and restaurants now incorporated into the structure – but it's still an East End raggle-taggle of pitches at heart. It's

an excellent place in which to pick up budget fashion, art and homeware. And though the occasional piece of tourist tat makes an appearance, the market is close enough to east London's design schools to ensure a steady stream of innovative stallholders.

- Exit Old Spitalfields Market onto Brushfield Street (to the left of the point at which you entered) and turn right. When you reach Bishopsgate, cross the road, turn right then left into Primrose Street. At the end of this road, turn left into Appold Street and follow the road around the corner – at which point it becomes Sun Street – until you emerge in Finsbury Square. Walk straight ahead, then cross City Road and turn left to reach the **Finsbury Square** bus stop. Catch the northbound **214** from here.

- Get off the bus at the **Camden Town Station** stop and continue walking along Camden High Street, passing the tube station on your right. Though it's open all week, **Camden Market** is particularly busy on a Sunday. Ignore the touristy shops along Camden High Street and don't bother with the tacky enclosed section to the right – which, thanks to it being signposted 'Camden Market', has sucked in many a naïve visitor who's left without seeing the real thing. Carry on walking until you've crossed the canal and turn left into the market just before the railway bridge. From here, you're on your own. The warren-like lanes and paths through this sprawling and expansive market are almost un navigable, so simply lose yourself for an hour or two amid stalls selling everything from vintage clothing and antique furniture to rare vinyl and rubber fetish gear.

- Head back towards Camden Town tube then, once you've passed it, turn left onto Camden Road (the one with The World's End pub on the corner). Catch the southbound **24** or **29** from the **Camden Town Station** stop on the right-hand side and take the bus all the way down to **Leicester Square Station**.

- Continue walking down Charing Cross Road from the bus stop, then turn left into Cranbourn Street. At the crossroads, head along Garrick Street and turn left into King Street. Follow this road into **Covent Garden Market**. Though the market hall ahead of you hasn't dealt in flowers, fruit and vegetables since 1974 – when traders moved their operations to New Covent Garden Market in Battersea – it still retains a little of its original independent spirit amid the upmarket shops that now dominate. Several stalls, specialising in jewellery, arts and crafts, operate from the Apple Market in the front section of the main marketplace; and the Jubilee Market Hall, to the right of the piazza, provides a scuzzy contrast to the elegance across the square. If

you've ever wondered where tourists bought their Union Jack top hats, you'll find the answer here.

- Walk to the back of the piazza (the end at which the Royal Opera House is situated) and head along Russell Street. Turn left up Bow Street then right along Long Acre; then, at the end of the road, head straight along Great Queen Street. When you reach Kingsway, cross over and turn right. Catch the southbound **188** from the **Holborn Station** stop.

- It's a long journey over Waterloo Bridge, and through Bermondsey and Rotherhithe, to the **Greenwich Town Centre/Cutty Sark** stop, so you'll no doubt be feeling hungry by the time you arrive. It's just as well, then, that **Greenwich Market** – the entrance to which can be seen from the bus stop – has a wonderful selection of street-food stalls at the northern end of its covered marketplace. As well as all the delicious, aromatic steam coming from that section, the pitches dedicated to fashion, accessories, art and crafts are colourful enough to send you into sensory overdrive. With a genteel air appropriate to this refined section of southeast London, the market is a lovely place to end up on a Sunday afternoon. Especially when there are pubs as good as the Greenwich Union and the Richard I just a few minutes walk away on Royal Hill.

- When you're ready to leave, simply retrace your footsteps to the **Greenwich Town Centre/Cutty Sark** bus stop and turn right off Creek Road to get to **Cutty Sark DLR**.

