



START
Christchurch Gate Entrance

Southwark Park trail



Uncover your Southwark

Located in Bermondsey, Green Flag Award winning Southwark Park offers a wide range of sporting facilities, a boating lake, wonderful gardens, a new cafe and an art gallery.

Southwark Park trail

STOP 01 Bandstand

Welcome to Southwark Park, the first municipal park in London opened on 19 June 1869 an important landmark in London's history. Renowned novelists Charles Dickens and George Orwell wrote about parts of Bermondsey and Rotherhithe in their books.

This trail begins at the Christchurch Gate entrance on Jamaica Road. Walk to the elegant bandstand. A classic feature of Victorian parks, this is a replica of one of a pair bought from the Royal Horticultural Society by the Local County Council in 1899. View the narrow avenues of London plane trees which replaced earlier plans for building plots which local people campaigned against. The trees that you see would have been young trees in the 19th Century.

STOP 02 Drinking fountain

Leaving the bandstand, walk towards the bowling green, you will come to a drinking fountain memorial to Jabez West, a member of the local temperance society. It is said to be the first public memorial in London dedicated to a working man and was erected by public donation. On the way to the wildlife garden you'll pass the bowling green where Southwark Park Bowls Club was formed in 1908.

STOP 03 Wildlife garden

Follow the map to the wildlife garden. Southwark Park is home to many plants and animals including a rare bat, Leisler's bat recently discovered in the park. There are five bat species found in Southwark.

STOP 04 Garden plots

A short distance from the wildlife garden to the side of the café you will find garden plots. Before the park was built market gardens occupied much of the land. During World War 2 the "dig for victory" campaign encouraged the growing of vegetables in parks. Today this tradition continues with the young people's garden plots you can see through the gates.

STOP 05 Ada Salter garden

Walk to the Ada Salter garden. Alfred (1873-1945) and Ada Salter (1866-1942) were active in getting health care for local working class people to alleviate extreme poverty and ill-health they witnessed in the area. Ada became a member of the London County Council beautification committee and instigated the building of this garden. There are many interesting plants and it is a peaceful place to sit and reflect.

STOP 06 Trees with knees

Leave the garden and look out for the Swamp Cypress tree to the left of the lake. These trees have distinctive 'knees', scientists are still debating their function. See how many different water birds you can find. In the 1890s there was an aviary with many birds including yellow buntings, linnets and jays.

STOP 07 Public right to meet

Look across the sports pitches to the China Hall entrance. The London plane tree you can see in the distance marks the area where the "public right to meet" was designated. Before 1883 ordinary people could not hold political public meetings and unlawful gatherings were broken up by police.

STOP 08 Blue fountain

The next stop is the blue fountain by the children's playground. This is all that remains of the swimming pool built in 1923. Outdoor lidos used to be a familiar sight in parks all over London. Take some time to visit the free art gallery in the old lido café building. On the side of this building is a plaque dedicated to famous cricketer Bobby Abel who regularly played cricket here.

STOP 09 Children's playground

Walk to the playground, which if you have young children in your family, will be the place to stop for a while to play. Grace Kimmins (1871-1954) the driving force behind the Guild of Play, felt that education should not just be schools and timetables but 'invade all public playing-spaces, parks and open places'. Remember this as you walk round the park exploring the sights and sounds of nature with your children.

STOP 10 Ceramic collage

Before you leave the park at the Gomm Gate entrance take a moment to look at the ceramic collage on the side of the café.

