

## SECRET SPOTS

Discover London's little-known outdoor spaces, from wildlife walks to water sports. By **Rachel Howard**

### Be bowled over on the Square Mile's green

Gone are the days when City bankers wore bowler hats. These days, the only bowlers around are members of the City of London Bowling Club, whose pitch sits right in Finsbury Circus. On Tuesday evenings, watch the weekly tournament with cucumber sandwiches and Pimm's from the pavilion. And there are occasional jazz concerts in the bandstand (check [colf.org](http://colf.org) for details). *Finsbury Circus Gardens, EC2, [cityoflondonbc.co.uk](http://cityoflondonbc.co.uk)*

### Walk with the animals

On the gritty Isle of Dogs, set amid 32 acres of parkland, Mudchute City Farm is the largest of London's 15 working farms. As well as going horse riding, visitors can interact with more than 200 animals, including a family of llamas. The café does fantastic English breakfasts and homemade lemonade. *Pier Street, Isle of Dogs, E14, [mudchute.org](http://mudchute.org)*

### Join the mudlarks

Deptford Creek is a lively wildlife habitat in a desolate industrial landscape. When the tide ebbs, the riverbed becomes a solid trail of mud, embedded with the skeletons of old boats and docks. As you wade along, guides from the Creekside Centre point out local wildlife and history, ranging from tales of Russian tsars to the mating cycle of eels. *14 Creekside, SE8, [creeksidecentre.org.uk](http://creeksidecentre.org.uk)*

### Set sail on a disused reservoir

After several cholera outbreaks in the 19th century, two reservoirs and a water-purification plant were built in Stoke Newington. The former pump station is now a water-sports



**Clockwise from above** Escape the crowds and explore the wildlife in Deptford Creek; the City of London Bowling Club is a peaceful haven in the Square Mile; dinosaurs rule at Crystal Palace Park



centre. Go sailing, kayaking and canoeing among swans and seagulls on West Reservoir, or just marvel at the hydraulic machinery. *West Reservoir, Green Lanes, N4, <http://homepages.rya-online.net/nlsail>*

### Pay your respects at a pet cemetery

The Victorian upper crust buried their beloved pets in special cemeteries. Hundreds of miniature, mildewed gravestones in Hyde Park stand testament to this tradition. More than 300 animals – dogs, cats, birds and even a monkey – are commemorated in maudlin epitaphs. Today, the place George Orwell called 'perhaps the most horrible spectacle in Britain' can only be viewed by appointment. *Victoria Gate, Hyde Park, W2, +44 (0)20 7298 2000*

### Don't feed the dinosaurs

Walking around the lake in Crystal Palace Park, lumpy dinosaurs loom out of the undergrowth. These life-size concrete creatures were built in 1853 to educate the British underclasses about evolution. Their anticipation of Darwinism outraged the religious establishment. Today, the notion that these animals could have been domesticated around a duck pond seems far more outrageous. *Crystal Palace Park, SE19*

### Go all out at a cricket match – for free

Cricket has been played at London Fields since 1802, a tradition continued on weekend afternoons in summer. Plane trees provide shade in the unlikely event that it's sunny and the Pub on the Park offers refreshments for spectators. Afterwards, cool off in London Fields Lido, a 1930s gem revamped in 2006. *London Fields Westside, E8, [hackney.gov.uk/c-londonfields-lido.htm](http://hackney.gov.uk/c-londonfields-lido.htm)*



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