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Clothes Shopping in London: A Guerrilla Guide for Female Tourists

By Louise Jensen

‘I shop, therefore I am’

This Guerrilla Guide to clothes shopping in London, aimed at those of us who live to shop, is packed with pointers on how to make your hard-earned cash last longer without compromising your style.

The first rule to a happy shopping experience is knowing what you’re looking for and determining how much you can afford to spend. Having a small budget doesn’t mean that you have to settle for less. However, a budget can help you determine which shops are off limit and which are all good - and save you a great deal of time and blisters. This might all seem rather boring and pointless, but as with all things, you need to do the research to reap the rewards, especially since London, to say the least, can be rather daunting shopping-wise. If you’re used to shopping in places like Milan, NY or Paris, you’ll know that thinking that it’s possible to tackle an entire city during a weekend away or a holiday is a huge mistake. This is why planning is of extreme importance if you want the ultimate shopping experience!

We made this guide to make shopping in London more accessible for the tourist, who thinks she/he misses out on a great deal if all she/he sees is Oxford Street, Camden and Carnaby Street. And how true that is! Because if that’s all you see, then you haven’t been to London at all!

Essentially the easiest way to grasp London is to divide the city into five shopping ‘areas’:

1. The East
2. The West
3. The West End
4. The North
5. The South

East London

If you're into affordable vintage shopping then East London is the place to go! The area around Brick Lane is packed with markets and vintage shops. The short walk from Liverpool St. station to Colombia Rd. (at the top end of Brick Lane) takes you through markets such as:

1. Spitalfields Market: A mixture of arts and crafts and, vintage and food. Prices vary but all in all it's not very expensive. The market is only open on Sundays from around 9-5 pm.
2. Sunday UpMarket: As the name suggests, is only open on Sundays, go here between 9-5pm. Like Spitalfields this market mainly does arts and crafts and vintage.
3. Brick Lane Market: Great for brick-a-back, furniture and very cheap vintage. There are stalls all along Brick Lane on Sundays between 9-2 pm.
4. Columbia Flower Market: Obviously flowers and plants! Go here on Sundays and buy everything your garden requires or if. The flowers are very cheap circa half price of what you'd normally pay.

While you're in the East end also check out some of the Vintage shops:

1. Absolute Vintage: The shop is situated at 15 Hanbury Street, E1 6QR, London, Tel: 0207 247 3883 or Email on info@absolutevintage.co.uk. Opening times is Monday: By appointment only. Tues - Sat 12-7 and Sun 11-7. Go here for shoes, shoes and more shoes! This is mixed with a great selection of vintage clothing, hats, belts or men and women. Even if you're not a great fan of vintage shopping its worth visiting the shop for the décor, which is like an Aladdin's cave. Prices are very reasonable (not to say very cheap!).
2. Beyond Retro: The shop is situated at 110-112 Cheshire Street, London, E2 6EJ Tel: 0207-613-3636. Open 7 days a week from 10 till 6 (and during the summer till 8). All stock in this shop is from North and Central America. This is a great place for exceptional vintage dresses, but their collection of everyday wear is so worth checking out! Also, this shop is adored by every stylist in town and has featured in countless magazine shoots.

3. Rocket: The shop is situated on Brick Lane. Smaller selection than the other stores, but more manageable! The items in this shop are slightly more pricey than the others, but they have a very good selection of American style vintage for both men and women. Just next to this is the other more expensive branch of Rocket. Except from clothing this shop also has a small selection of 70s style home wear.
4. Sam Greenberg Factory Outlet: The shop is situated at 92-108 Cheshire St, E2 6EH, London. Opening times are Tue - Fri 12-6, Sat - Sun 10-6, Mon closed. Email: info@samgreenbergrnwl.co.uk. Smaller than the other shops, but very reasonable prices and excellent deals to be done!

A few quick guidelines for vintage shopping:

1. Always haggle for the price - but be realistic; at the end of the day they are vintage clothes. If you buy a couple of items then it is nearly always possible to have a reduction. Anyways, no harm in asking.
2. Never buy stained clothes; don't buy the sales assistant's spiel about the stains coming off with ease - stains that are twenty years of age or older will always be extremely difficult to remove.
3. Don't buy clothes that don't fit you; you might think that the item only needs taking in a bit here or there, but realistically the clothes almost always end up at the bottom of your wardrobe. That way a great buy can end up being money down the drain!

West London

West London is home to one of the most famous markets in the world; the Portobello Rd. Market. The market has existed since 1837 but really caught the attention of the rest of the world after the film 'Notting Hill' in 1999. Today the market ranks as one of the top ten most visited tourist sites in London. Vendors trade at Portobello Rd. Market Mon-Tues-Wed-Fri 8.00am - 6.30pm, Thurs 8.00am-1pm and Sat 8.00am - 6.30pm. Sunday is not officially a market day, however its worth stopping by if in the neighbourhood since more and more vendors are trading here on Sundays. The market runs all the way from the top end of Portobello Rd. just by Notting Hill Gate station and to Goldbourne Rd. It is divided into different

areas selling various things. The first part of the road is an antiques market, this is followed by the food market and finally the third part sells bric-a-brac, vintage clothing/shoes, music/books, décor etc. During the week the market is mainly a fruit n' veg-market, which is mostly used by the locals. From early Friday morning till late Saturday evening the market is swamped by tourists. So be warned, though going to the market may seem like a good way to pass a few hours idling through the streets. .its not! The streets can get very crowded and be prepared to jostle.

Getting the best deals means:

1. getting up early,
2. be an adamant haggler and most importantly,
3. find out how much you maximum offer is before you begin haggling and be ready to walk away if the price is not right.

One more thing, while in the area round Portobello Rd. pop into Matches on Ledbury Rd. The shop (actually two shops just across from each other) carries a huge variety of designers and during the sale there are really great bargains to be found here. Also, Diane Von Furstenberg's west London shop is situated just next to matches.

However, west London is of course much more than Portobello Rd. South of Notting Hill Gate lies South Kensington High St. If you're tired of all the hoo-ha on Oxford St. go here instead. The street is not nearly as touristy and has almost the same shopping potential. Another area worth checking out is Knightsbridge. With two of the most famous department stores in London, Harrods and Harvey Nichols, as well as a wide variety of boutiques, High St. chains and a fantastic collection of designer flag ship stores, this area is expensive but offers something for every budget.

The West End and Oxford Street

If you're into High Street shopping in places such as H&M, Zara, TOPSHOP, Urban Outfitters etc. then this is the place to go! Oxford St. runs all the way from Tottenham Court Rd. tube station to Bond St. tube station (and even a bit further), and its packed with High Street shops in all shape and forms. These shops used to

be at the bottom of the fashion food chain, but ever since celebs such as Sienna Miller and the ever fashionable Kate Moss started shopping things have been looking up. It is now okay and even cool to have picked up a great buy in Dorothy Perkins or Marks & Spencer. Also the high street shops have put a lot of effort and money into reinventing themselves to suit a younger audience and they have no qualms ripping off designer couture in order to make the British people more affordable stylish! See a dress you like by Chloé? You can be damn sure that at least one of the stores has something similar. TOPSHOP has even gone as far as creating a special, classier range of clothing and they have introduced a biannual fashion show like the established designers.

No doubt about it... this street is great for shopping! However there is another thing it's good for as well and that's wearing you out! This place can be hell on earth just about any day of the week; snow, rain or sun does not stop the determined shoppers. Here are a few tricks to surviving Oxford St. on a busy day (i.e. any given day):

1. Wear comfortable shoes and clothing; the shoes because you're in for a lot of walking and the clothing because you're going to try a lot of clothes on so you want to wear something that's easy to get on and off.
2. Water, water, water; essential not to dehydrate, especially on days during the sales as you might miss out on a great buy due to fatigue!
3. Leave anyone behind who's not into shopping as much as you are; they're deadweight and will slow you down!

There is however another option! What you could do is avoid Oxford St. altogether and head for some of the other High Streets, such as Kings Rd. or Kensington High St. These streets have basically the same choice of shops, but also a number of independent boutiques and are nowhere near as busy and crowded as the west end.

Aside from High Street chain stores, Oxford St. is home to a silly number of department stores. The most famous of them being Selfridges; this is famous for its breathtaking window-decorations. Aside Selfridges there are amongst others department stores such as John Lewis and Debenhams. The best time to visit the department stores is during the sales because you can bag some really great

designer bargains at a fraction of the original price. The summer sales typically run through June and some of July, while the winter sales are from around December 27th and till the end of January.

Also, the West End has another great draw Aside from the High Street shops and the department stores, namely designer shops such as Alexander McQueen, Burberry, Chloé, Mui Mui to name a few. If you can afford luxury shopping then there are only three places you will want to go to: Old/New Bond Street and Sloane Street.

If your budget is at the cheaper end of the shopping scale, but you still enjoy shopping in nice, cool shops then head down to the area round Covent Garden, SoHo and Carnaby Street. This is where a lot of the less pricey brands such as Miss Sixty, Vans, Puma etc. flag ship stores are situated. Also, the area has a lot of smaller independent fashion shops and boutiques. Look at the section 'Links' below for further info and addresses for the shops.

North London

North London is home to the famous/infamous Camden area. This area overflows with markets such as the Camden Lock Market, which was the first of the markets in Camden, established in 1974, the popular Camden Stables Market, Camden (Buck Street) Market and Inverness Street Market. The markets primarily sell vintage clothing, hemp-clothing/Indian style décor and extreme gothic-inspired clothing. The markets are all open every day (opening hours vary) meaning that the area is well worth a visit mid-week as well. However, to see the markets at their best try to go there during the weekend, when all shops trade fully and the Camden Canal Market (open Friday to Sunday) and the indoor fashion market at the Electric Ballroom (open on Sunday only) are open.

Islington is another part of the North London area worth while looking up. Aside from a multitude of bars, shops and independent boutiques on Islington Green, the area also has a number of great markets. Two markets in particular are worth checking out: Chapel Market, situated between Liverpool Rd. and Penton St. (Open 9am - 6pm, Tuesdays to Saturdays, and 8.30am - 4pm on Sundays). This market

trades in bric-a-brac and various other sorts of goods. Torrens St. Market (open Saturdays only from 11am - 5pm) is situated next to the Angel Art Arcade. This market trades solely in arts and crafts.

South London

South London is largely regarded as the trashier part of town and...well... it is... But if you dig deep there are some real pearls not to be missed . Just south of the river by London Bridge station, next to Tate Modern, lies Borough Market (just follow the crowd heading there, you can't miss it). This market trades solely in food grown by independent producers around the country and contains everything from ecological wine to cheese. So if you're even remotely interested in excellent food you should really take time out and visit this extraordinary market. It is open Fri - Sat from about 8am - 2pm.

Another great pearl in south London is Greenwich. Surrounded by run down areas such as New Cross and Deptford, people often tend to overlook this little village-like area. Situated directly on the bank of the Thames, this area is extremely idyllic and it even has a great market - the Greenwich Village Market. The market trades every Sat - Sun and has, aside from vintage, clothing a great collection of jewellery and second hand furniture. Also, this is the place of the famous Greenwich Observatory. Go here for a great day out to get away from the usual overcrowded London.

Links

East London

Spitalfields Market:

http://www.indielondon.co.uk/shopping/shops_markets_london.html

Sunday Upmarket:

<http://www.sundayupmarket.co.uk/>

Brick Lane Market:

<http://www.bricklanemarket.com/>

Columbia Flower Market:

<http://www.eastlondonmarkets.com/crm-history.htm>

Absolute Vintage:

<http://www.absolutevintage.co.uk/>

Beyond Retro:

<http://www.beyondretro.com/>

Sam Greenberg Factory Outlet:

<http://www.samgreenbergnwl.co.uk/>

West London

Portobello Rd. Market:

http://www.londontown.com/LondonInformation/Shops/Portobello_Road_Market/Offa/

Matches:

<http://www.matchesfashion.com/>

Diane Von Furstenberg:

<http://dvf.com/>

Harrods:

<http://www.harrods.com/Cultures/en-GB/homepageindex.htm>

Harvey Nichols:

<http://www.harveynichols.com/output/Page1.asp>

The West End and Oxford Street

H&M:

<http://www.hm.com/do?action=viewhome&locale=nl>

Zara:

<http://www.zara.com/v06/index.html>

TOPSHOP:

http://www.topshop.co.uk/promostores/tops/index.html?make_live=yes&promo

Urban Outfitters:

<http://www.urbanoutfitters.co.uk/>

Dorothy Perkins:

<http://www.dorothyperkins.co.uk/promostores/dp/2006/>

Marks & Spencer:

<http://www.marksandspencer.com/>

Chloé:

http://www.chloe.com/version_en/home/index.html

Selfridges:

<http://www.selfridges.com/>

John Lewis:

<http://www.johnlewis.com/>

Debenhams:

<http://www.debenhams.com/>

Alexander McQueen:

<http://www.alexandermcqueen.com/flash.html>

Burberry:

<http://www.burberry.com/Home.aspx>

Carnaby Street:

<http://www.carnaby.co.uk/>

Miss Sixty:

<http://www.missixty.com/>

Vans:

<http://www.vans.com/index2.html>

Puma:

<http://www.puma.com/pindex.jsp>

North London

Camden Lock Market:

<http://www.camdenlock.net/>

Camden Stables Market:

<http://www.camdenlock.net/stables/index.html>

Camden (Buck Street) Market:

<http://www.camdenlock.net/cammarket/index.html>

Inverness Street Market:

<http://www.camdenlock.net/inverness/index.html>

Camden Canal Market:

<http://www.camdenlock.net/canmarket/index.html>

Electric Ballroom:

<http://www.electric-ballroom.co.uk/>

Islington Green:

http://www.londontown.com/LondonStreets/islington_green_a45.html

Chapel Market:

http://www.touruk.co.uk/london_markets/chapel_market1.htm

Angel Art Arcade:

<http://www.libraries.islington.gov.uk/inform/published/3816/4265.html>

South London

Borough Market:

<http://www.boroughmarket.org.uk/>

Greenwich Village Market:

<http://www.greenwich.gov.uk/Greenwich/LeisureCulture/Attractions/GreenwichVillageMarket.htm>