Jog through the history, skyscrapers and wilder corners of the capital for the perfect combination of urban adventure and natural beauty by Matilda Egere-Cooper

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The beauty of leading a running community like Fly Girl Collective is the chance to

gardens south of the river, or ambling happily past a buzzy cafe in the east before returning later for brunch. We always discover somewhere new, because if there's

anything Londoners can bank on in this mighty city, it's plenty of wonderful places and

turn London into our playground - whether we're sprinting around picturesque

London's best running

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trails to run - all offering an assortment of terrain, from knobbly hills to the smoothest footpaths. Ready? Get set, go ... Richmond Park The chance to watch deer roaming free is the usual draw of Richmond Park - a certified

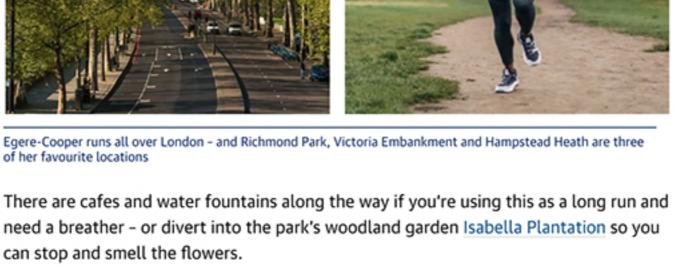
national nature reserve. Covering almost 1,000 hectares (2,500 acres), it is the largest

routes

royal park in London and feels like you're stepping into a whole new world, especially if you hit the Tamsin Trail. At just over 7 miles (11 km), this well-trodden, gravelly path offers the kind of adventurous landscape that'll convert even the most committed urban runner to the trail life. You get to enter the wild through woods and fields, and up a few moderate ascents.







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South Bank and Victoria Embankment loop

This swift jaunt around the Thames reminds me why I call London home. I like to time a run early enough to avoid the tourists, who love the South Bank in particular. For a 5K loop, start at Blackfriars station, run south over the bridge, take a right on Upper

Ground, then take another a quick right on to Marigold Alley. You'll hit the riverside, so

can stop and smell the flowers.

turn left to follow the Thames and you'll get to tread along a flat path as you fly past Oxo Tower, the National Theatre and the surprisingly sandy beaches you can spot at low tide near the Royal Festival Hall. You'll also catch the bright lights of the London Eye, before climbing the steps on to Westminster Bridge. Turn right under Big Ben so you are now going eastwards on the north bank of the Thames along Victoria Embankment. Stay on the riverside pavement, so you don't have to stop to cross roads and you can enjoy the great views of the Thames and the City beyond. Check out Cleopatra's Needle and - on the left - Somerset House, before crossing over the road at Temple station. Continue along the Embankment before finishing up at the peaceful Middle Temple Gardens. Hampstead Heath Why switch to trail Similar to Richmond Park, Hampstead Heath is a leafy, countryside-esque destination that offers escapism from the bustle of the city - but it's especially my go-to when I'm in the

snow and mud will inevitably try to spoil all the fun; swapping the usual kicks for trail shoes, like New Balance's Fresh Foam X

shoes?

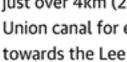
Hierro v5, can help runners get to grips with the chilly weather. They are surprisingly lightweight and supremely comfortable. Add to that the right headgear, gloves and layers combination, and you'll have everything you need for the perfect urban adventure, exploring these beautiful running routes around the capital. side of the heath. Victoria Park

It doesn't even matter that with the winter

training season around the corner, rain,

mood to tackle some ruthless hills or to get a bit muddy on the heath's countless trails. For an obstacle-filled adventure, I like

to start from Hampstead Heath overground station, and venture into the heath from South End Road. Follow the path and you'll soon spot Hampstead No 1 and No 2 ponds - in the summer, you might even be tempted to have a dip. Keep going until you see the path that runs between the No 2 pond and the mixed bathing pond; the terrain will become wilder as you start to make the taxing ascent to Parliament Hill. Catch your breath as you take in an impressive view of the capital - you should be able to make out the Gherkin, the Shard and St Pauls Cathedral in the distance. I might do a few hill reps here, then seek out the stunning Hill Garden and Pergola, a hidden gem on the west Like many runners in east London, I'm a massive fan of Victoria Park. From its vast fields and leafy avenues to the top-notch cafes and restored bandstand, Bonner Bridge, the Burdett Coutts fountain and new play areas, London's oldest park is still



just over 4km (2.7 miles) - but if you have more in your legs, slip on to the Hertford Union canal for eclectic scenes of street art and houseboats as you make your way towards the Lee Navigation. For another change of scenery, you can peel off towards the Olympic Park en route for a calisthenics gym and art installations commemorating the legacy of the 2012 Olympics.

going strong. The terrain's also nice and flat, which makes knocking out a speedy run

such a pleasure. Made up of two parts split by Grove Road, a full lap of the park covers



Tower Bridge to Islands Gardens via the Thames Path The London leg of the Thames Path, a pleasant national trail that follows the river, is

and the dinosaur sculptures of Crystal Palace Park are great distractions on a gruelling run

Bridge to Island Gardens is particularly fascinating. The first time I ran along it, I was riveted by how it unveiled the capital's Victorian past. You'll head through St Katherine's Dock and Wapping along cobbled lanes, fly past Execution Dock where pirates were once hung, and be tempted to swing by the Prospect of Whitby pub, once frequented by Charles Dickens. From here, you'll soon notice how the capital has evolved as you make your way through Limehouse, the glass and steel of Canary Wharf and eventually Island Gardens, where the multi-surface path officially ends. Crystal Palace Park The ladies from the Fly Girl Collective ran their first ever race here, so it'll always be

Egere-Cooper with her New Balance Fresh Foam X Hierro v5 trail shoes; the graffiti art by east London's canals

79.5 miles (128km) that's usually tackled in four sections either north or south of the

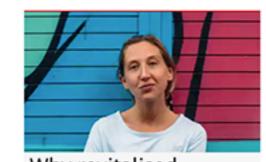
water. Though the entire route is a beaut, the 5-mile (8km) passage from Tower

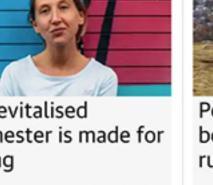
remembered as "very, very hard" - but in a good way. The mixed, hilly terrain of this south-east London park is one of the reasons why it's a big hit with trail-loving runners. It's got everything - cheeky hills, grassy and stony paths, and muddy puddles after the rain. Another draw, of course, is the Grade I-listed Dinosaur Court - a quirky collection of more than 30 dinosaur sculptures that have resided in the park since 1854. To see them in all their glory, enter the park from Thicket Road entrance on the south side and do a half a mile (0.8km) loop around Lower Lake. Then, explore the rest of the park by taking the 2.5-mile (4km) circuit around its periphery, taking on some challenging hills, or seek out the infamous Crystal Palace Park maze for a fun

diversion before heading back south past the athletic stadium, to swing by the park's charming urban farm - the goats are particularly curious about passing runners. The Fresh Foam X Hierro v5 is designed to go the distance. Engineered with a plush Fresh Foam X midsole, a Vibram® MegaGrip outsole for traction and an upper that's refined for

improved breathability and protection, this women's trail shoe will push you to reimagine

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