

Step by step guide to Singapore

Join a walking group to learn more about the city



Singapore's urbanites are increasingly taking to exploring the city on foot.

At least three walking groups have sprung up here in the last two years that focus on the city's heritage. "People complain that Singapore is too small and there's nothing to see," says Mr Jeya Ayadurai, 52, who started a walking group called The Jeywalkers two years ago with some friends. "But when you start walking, you discover the beauty of the country."

The group now counts about 15 members, who take turns to come up with a 10 to 12km walking route every Sunday morning, says Mr Ayadurai, who is the director of Changi Museum.

The group's heritage walks include one from the Padang to the museum – a route which Allied prisoners were forced to march during the Japanese Occupation.

Ms Solonia Teodros, who started a walking community here last year with her friend Abena Ofori, believes the fast pace of change in Singapore has prompted people to cherish what the city has to offer now.

"New areas are going to keep popping up so there is more interest in the underlying story of Singapore," says the 30-year-old American, who moved to Singapore four years ago and runs a social initiatives consultancy.

Ms Ofori, 27, who works as a team operations manager for the Earth Hour campaign, adds: "If you experience a city by walking instead of sitting in a bus or a car, you become more in tune with and connected to it."

The Ghanaian was born and raised here. The two women adapted a walking initiative that started in Vancouver, Canada, in 2007. Called Jane's Walk, the movement was started to honour American-Canadian Jane Jacobs, an urban activist who studied urban planning and championed walking



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as a way of getting to know a city. She died in 2006 at age 89.

While Jane's Walk events usually take place once a year in May, the group has held five events here this year that were attended by more than 100 walking enthusiasts, says Ms Teodros.

These included a food-themed walk in Katong, a heritage walk in Bukit Brown cemetery and a walk with a literary theme through the Bras Basah and Victoria Street areas led by poet-academic Kirpal Singh, an associate professor of English literature at

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MR LEOW JUN XIONG (above far right), on how people can benefit from walking groups. He is pictured with fellow members of the Singapore Footprints and its guests

the Singapore Management University.

Ms Teodros says: "It's so much easier to just hop on an air-conditioned bus here, but it's only when you walk that you get a real sense of places and how the character of each area and neighbourhood differs."

Her sentiments are echoed by undergraduate Leow Jun Xiong, 24, who is part of a walking group with about 40 members called Singapore Footprints.

Set up in January last year, the group, which leads two walks every Saturday, is

run by a group of students from the Nanyang Technological University tourism and hospitality management programme.

"In a bus or car, there's always a distance between you and what you're seeing," says Mr Leow. "We can share stories about places that we're exploring while in a walking group, and this helps people to learn more about our city."

The group, which is open to everyone, includes locals, expatriates and tourists. Three volunteer guides lead groups of about 10 people each time.

Singapore Footprints follows two fixed routes: One winds through the Singapore River area and another goes through the Bras Basah area. Each walk takes at least two hours.

Mr Ayadurai says his group aims to popularise the idea of walking with an eye towards history and culture.

"We plan to make this a formal movement and want to help people start their own walking groups around Singapore," he says. "Our objective is for people to really appreciate this country for what it is."

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Jane's Walk events have included one with a literary theme through the Bras Basah and Victoria Street areas led by poet-academic Kirpal Singh (left), an associate professor of English literature at the Singapore Management University.

