

Heritage walks redefined

Ruchika Talwar Posted online: Sun May 19 2013, 03:09 hrs

If you thought heritage walks meant only guided trips to historical monuments, where a tourist guide often adds fiction to facts, Delhi's new-age walking groups are here to change that image. Earlier a 'side business', heritage walks are fast becoming an industry unto themselves, led by qualified heritage enthusiasts, art curators and business management post-graduates.

Meet Himanshu Verma of 1100 Walks. An art curator who runs Red Earth, Verma likes to tell you that he "curates" a walk too. "There has been a profusion of walking groups. This growth is perhaps fuelled by the craze for experiential tourism for the inbound traveller, and, greater curiosity amongst locals to explore the city they live in," Verma says.

He has given heritage walks a new meaning by conceptualising the flower market walks, the urban village walks (Shahpur Jat, Lado Sarai, Hauz Khas, Khirki), the festival walks, nature walks to nurseries, gardens and urban forests, religion walks, night walks in Chandni Chowk, water walks (Delhi's lost baolis and lakes) and the 'colour walks'.

These groups get most of their assignments through their websites. They charge between Rs 400 and Rs 1,500 per person for a walk ranging from two to seven hours. Customised walks cost above Rs 2,500 per person.

One of the oldest walking groups is Delhi Heritage Walks. It is run by degree holders in history, archaeology and sociology. Kanika Sharma, a research scholar in history, says, "Many tour guides have attended our walks to get to know the route, the content and the method of leading walks. Unlike other groups, we have five people leading a walk and each one has anecdotes to narrate."

After an MBA from the UK and 20 years in travel and tourism industry, Dhruv Gupta, returned to Delhi and with his business partner, Anju, gave us Master Jee Ki Haveli. Gupta, who mainly caters to foreign tourists, says, "Interactive cooking sessions and personalised culinary classes are popular among foreign tourists. This gives them an insight into Indian heritage and culture."