

## Unravelling Delhi by foot

NIDHI GUPTA 20th Nov 2011

**H**eritage walks are increasingly gaining popularity in India thanks to the many awareness raising campaigns on social networking sites, like Facebook and Twitter. Every weekend, you'll find scores of men, women and children trailing across our monuments, ruins and by-lanes, led by heritage-enthusiasts, conservationists, teachers or even student volunteers.



Enthusiasts during a walk

Perceived as an elitist hobby once, the heritage walk has undergone a paradigm shift in the city. Delhi government's own Shahjahanabad Redevelopment Corporation (SRDC) has a Facebook page. The Indian National Trust for Arts and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), a conservation NGO, also has a Facebook page, apart from its website to spread awareness about heritage sites.

Kanika Singh of Delhi Heritage Walks agrees that it is a viable business avenue, but insists that to look at walks as an off-shoot of the tourism industry is wrong. "We shouldn't see it as an esoteric enterprise only for the culturally-discerning either," she adds. They are a collective of eight young enthusiasts who conduct walks on weekends for a small fee. But she stresses on the fact that they are not a travel agency and hence are not out to make commissions from these guided tours on foot.

According to Arun Pai, who heads Bangalore Walks, there is a need to contemporise history for the benefit of the emerging market: the high-level professional. "For instance the expat wants to understand Hinduism, not because they want to read the Rigveda, but because he wants to do business and live here," Pai points out. Cities like Mumbai, Bangalore and Hyderabad are now seen as gateways to corporate India, which thus need to be understood in details.

Abha Bahl of Bombay Heritage Walks echoes this view. She also feels that opportunities in this field are restricted by the lack of infrastructure and support from state. "Footpaths in even posh South Mumbai area are troublesome to walk on; entry is restricted in a lot of government-owned and private buildings. Moreover, we do not have many small museums or visitors' centres," she laments. "We (Indians) are not very good at marketing ourselves. But we are learning," concludes Pai.

Like 0

