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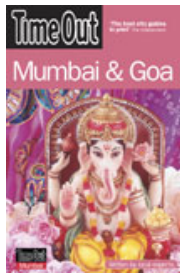
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Wander lust

Come winter, Dilliwalas learn how to take the city in their stride, says Aayush Soni.



As a student at Kirori Mal College in 1976, Wilson John would often round up friends to walk four kilometres to the Pir Ghaib tomb on the northern Ridge. The rest of the city often stayed holed up during the Emergency, and the streets would be empty for John to enjoy. Three decades later, John's passion for walking is intact – thanks to the Metro. "I used to find it very difficult to use DTC buses and there's no space to park your car," he said. "So I took the Metro and my walks would begin from the station." John has now compiled his notes from 12 of these strolls into a book, *Mind the Gap: Walking Delhi with the Metro*, due for release in February.

Wilson John is just one among a tribe of Dilliwalas who are turning walking, as a source of both physical and mental exercise, into a small movement. Conservationist Surekha Narain and history student Kanika Singh organise guided heritage and food walks in areas like Hauz Khas, Mehrauli and

Tughlaqabad. Cultural activist Sohail Hashmi reacquaints New Delhi with its older counterpart. Art curator Himanshu Verma uses walks to promote his campaign to preserve Delhi's flower mandis. The Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage also organises its own tours.

Every guide's agenda and style is distinct. "I like to teach, so leading a heritage walk allows you to share information with others and allows you to explore," said Singh, who as a member of Delhi Heritage Walks has guided people through the city since 2009. "It's the ideal way for me to practice my history upon others." Singh refers to "books, archaeological reports and old maps to get an idea of how things might have been." Meanwhile, Hashmi peppers his walks with anecdotes and folklore from the Walled City. You'll find yourself listening to stories about nautch girls and bania paper merchants or hearing about obscure mithai shops.

Journalist Sam Miller became an icon for *Delhi walkers* with his book *Delhi: Adventures in a Megacity*. Miller – a self-described "flâneur", a person who walks around a city without aim – followed a widening spiral that began at Connaught Place and took him through unloved and undiscovered parts of the city. "I walk, in part, to get a sense of what a city is like and I quite enjoy going to areas which are less well-known," said Miller, who also leads walks around Shahpur Jat and Panchsheel Park. "A lot of people who've lived in this city for many years have barely strayed on foot, beyond the boundaries of their own colony. If you don't get up and walk, you can't know what's happening in this city. In the end, you probably don't have a great right to give your opinion on the city because you don't really know about it."

Obviously, the lack of safe walking space has deterred people from exploring Delhi on foot. "The biggest problem in the city is the lack of things to walk on. You call those footpaths, and that word is very telling. It suggests something narrow that you can just about walk along," Miller said. "What I'd love to see is a move towards Delhi reclaiming the pavements that connect different parts of the city for walkers." One thing that may do just that is the Delhi Nullah Project, which has begun capping the southern city's nullahs – among them Lajpat Nagar and Barapullah – to turn them into pleasant promenades. It might just be what gets Dilliwalas to step outside.

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