

Let's Go Jogging!!



The paved area of the walking track in Oruthota

**Huff.... gasp... puff... left...right... left... huff... gasp... No I am not casting a spell, if that's what you are thinking! I am jogging along the newly laid tracks in Oruthota, Gampaha.**

***Words Udeshi Amarasinghe Photographs Menaka Aravinda***

At first I could not help but be curious - a jogging track in Gamapaha? And it was said to run through a paddy field as well...hmmm. Dressed in track bottoms and sneakers my friend and I decided to put our stamina to the test and jog the course in Oruthota.

At the entrance stood a sculpture of a majestic lion, reminiscent of the Yapahuwa tradition. A small sign made out of wood read '0m' indicating that we had yet to begin our run. And run we did along the neatly paved path with the trees shading us from the evening sun. What's unique about this track is that it runs the width of a paddy field for 3km, away from the hustle and bustle of the road. The track begins at the Oruthota Road and ends at Church Road. While jogging I could not help but be mesmerised by the surroundings, a mountain range loomed in the distance with a white stupa glistening in the sunlight. Furthermore, aquatic birds such as kingfishers, egrets, yellow wattle lapwings and storks were our constant companions. A herd of domesticated buffaloes were relaxing in the cooling waters of a small canal and one particular buffalo kept calling out to the joggers as they dashed by

and seemed to have a special liking for my friend.

A large canal runs along the jogging path and is said to have been dredged deeper thus preventing flooding during the rains. This has enhanced the scenic beauty of the location. A metal bridge connects the main path to the alternative path, which is where many engage in their cooling down exercises. Deep pink Bougainvillea have been planted on the well manicured lawns giving an aura... well let's say a hint of romance to the air... other than the fitness enthusiasts, young couples have found the Oruthota tracks to be the ideal location for a leisurely walk.

Along the track as you jog, the small wooden signs indicate the distance you have gone and we were quite surprised at how quickly we were covering it. In order to create awareness of the many plant varieties in the vicinity each plant has been labelled with its common name, scientific name and importance. Attikka (*Ficus recemosa*), Nuga (*Ficus benghalensis*) and Jacaranda (*Jacaranda minosaefolia*) are but a few of the large number of plants along the track. Furthermore on the banks of the canal, on a muddy patch you also find edible greens such as Mukunuwenna. A run along the Oruthota track is bound to be educational as well.

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The surface of the track changes, where the brick paved track gradually gives way to large granite stones, then pebbles, red soil, sand, grass and soil again which continues till the end of the track where the surface roughness changes again towards the end. A large board details the healing points in reflexology and how the changing surfaces contribute to give the best results. Joggers are to take off their shoes in this stretch so that they can experience the different surfaces and they are to wash their feet once finished as this too is part of the treatment, and run the rest of the track with their shoes on. I tried it but I must say that I chickened out as it is a bit difficult to walk on the varying surfaces although there were quite a few joggers just whizzing past barefoot!

As dusk fell the solar powered lights came on illuminating the path as the determined ran back and forth along the track. The bridge cast a beautiful reflection on the water.

The Oruthota tracks are for families too, and this was quite evident with the number of youngsters with their parents - some walking, some jogging and others just spending the evening with their loved ones. A cute sight was a mother and her young daughter teaching the baby son to walk. Another was a mother and her two sons jumping at a fast pace as they cooled down after a run. There were many such touching scenes.

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As dusk fell the solar powered lights came on illuminating the path as the determined ran back and forth along the track. The bridge cast a beautiful reflection on the water, while a young couple took photographs of each other. We jogged to the end of the track, which is at Church Road and walked back to the entrance on Oruthota Road, which says a lot about our stamina! Intermittently placed stools, which were the stumps of trees gave a moment's respite to the weary.

I was almost dragging my feet as we finished our jog/walk but I must say it was worth it. The jogging track in Oruthota, Gampaha is definitely the place to be healthy.

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