



Morning stroll at the Bellanwila track

There was a time when the average Colombo dweller found it challenging to find time and space to relax and enjoy exercise and recreation. Sometimes the more determined jumped into their jogging shoes and strolled along wide roads in Colombo, often in the face of heavy smoke or dust from passing vehicles. Well not anymore...

Words and Photographs Shyam Ranasinghe

The more determined found some limited spaces to exercise in niche spots within and around the city. The most common and famous of these was the Galle Face Green which hundreds chose to use as their recreational track. Nevertheless, it did not quite serve the purpose of the more “exercise hungry.” As such under the direction of Gotabaya Rajapaksa, Secretary to the Ministry of Defence and Urban Development, this need was identified and addressed by laying pleasant green jogging tracks in and around Colombo and its close suburbs.

One of the earliest jogging tracks lay in the vicinity of Independence Square, Colombo 7. Covering a distance of approximately 150m-200m, a key feature of this track is that it can be approached from three sides; from Independence Avenue, from Maitland place as well as from Prof Stanley Wijesundera Mawatha aka the Planetarium Road.

A second and new track, approximately 800m-1200m in length, is accompanying the old track which lies parallel to the picturesque Independence Square. The new track begins from across the road towards the SL Foundation Institute, and runs parallel to Independence Avenue, taking a left turn parallel to Reid Avenue, turning away from the main road before the Race Course pavilions and circumventing the Football Federation Headquarters and back to the SL Foundation Institute to meet its origin opposite Independence Square.

The “long jog” as it is known among users offers a unique urban sightseeing trail with the National Archives building, the Race Course stadium and pavilions among the key attractions. A small bridge adds to the colour of this route.

The short route, or the one opposite Independence Square with the recently opened Independence Arcade in full view, is more frequented by users especially in the evenings. It is a magnet to those who want to keep up a moderate jog, a quiet stroll or a simple pleasure

run with friends and family

While the Independence Square track can claim the title of the star attraction, the walking track alongside Diyawanna Oya in Battaramulla can easily claim to be the heavyweight. With a distance of approximately 4km (up and down) it offers the best track for the more serious jogger. Being in a convenient location for residents in Rajagiriya, Battaramulla, Malabe and Madiwela areas, it is not uncommon to see the parking lot full. The iconic Parliament building presents itself in full majestic view while the salubrious breeze that blows across the waters of Diyawanna Oya is more than soothing for an exhausted jogger. An interesting diversion is the *Kola Kanda* stalls set up in the vicinity of the track, offering healthy refreshment after the effort of exercise.

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Once a depot for construction materials, a sandy patch at Nawala was transformed into a picturesque jogging track about a year ago. Offering a scenic landscape the Nawala walking track has become a firm favourite for many. Beginning from the Nawala-Nugegoda road, the track takes the jogger past residential areas as well as across breathtaking scenery of another corner of the Diyawanna Oya. This track is such a favourite amongst late evening runners that often vehicles pull in even at eight in the night to find the parking area still full.

For the more nature loving jogger, the ideal running retreat lies at Bellanwila. In close proximity to the much venerated Pillewa Raja Maha Vihara, the Bellanwila jogging track lies beside the calm waters of what were once the Bellanwila marshes and bird sanctuary. An early morning jog is most inviting on this track with the chirp of birds whistling in your ear, the cool morning breeze to keep you refreshed and the exhilarating run to keep you fit. The fresh water lilies blossoming out of the water are a pleasing sight while exercising.

The salubrious breeze that blows across the waters of the Diyawanna Oya is more than soothing for an exhausted jogger

Not far from Bellanwila is a relatively shorter picturesque track at Kandawala Road, Ratmalana. Surrounding the serene waters of the lake that belongs to the Kotelawala Defence University (KDU), the jogging track offers a moment of respite for residents of

Ratmalana, Kandawala and surrounding areas. Unlike other jogging tracks, this is the only one located close to an airport. The occasional whizz of a passing aircraft is an awesome experience for joggers. Use of this track is allowed only with the authorisation of the KDU.

The Kandawala walking track in Ratmalana unlike other jogging tracks, is the only one located close to an airport

With such an abundance of walking tracks in and around the city of Colombo, it really is a tough challenge to decide which to enjoy since there is a flavour of variety, diversity, natural and heritage beauty unique to all of them.

