

How to Make Your Running or Walking Enjoyable

Warwick Ford

I have been an outdoor exerciser (mostly a runner, at varying levels of enthusiasm) for many years. I have also communicated with many would-be or actual outdoor exercisers for many years. One thing I so often think to myself or hear from others is – “Do I really want to go out today? Because of [reason x, y, or z] I think I’ll put that off.”

Keeping fit and controlling weight is so important to all of us but is not easy to achieve. Exercising can be a downright pain, so why not take the easy approach and skip it? But running or walking outdoors can be very enjoyable (compared with a treadmill, for example) so let us look at what we can do to increase that enjoyment to the point where the excuses start to fade.

One big point to start with is your running or walking company. A good running or walking buddy, or a good club to find like-minded company, is enormously beneficial in getting you outdoors more. I am very fortunate in having both a personal running buddy at home and a running club to give me additional options.

After that, consider your choices of places to go for that run or walk. If the routes you follow are inherently pleasant and enjoyable, you will unquestionably get outdoors more. So what should one look for in planning a running or walking route? Here is a good check-list:

- Good underfoot conditions;
- A “good” neighborhood; nasty surprises are unlikely;
- Not too many other people and not too few;
- Minimal disruptions from intersecting auto roads;
- Pretty scenery; interesting sites to pass along the way;
- Public transit to the start and finish points (leave the car at home);
- A loop route is more enjoyable than an out-and-back route;
- A suitable place to wind down for a refreshing beverage or snack at the end.

Hopefully you can find a place that satisfies such requirements near your home. I currently live in Uptown Manhattan, New York City. I am close to Central Park and can easily say that that beautiful place satisfies all my desires as a great running place. But is that the whole answer? No. I run so much (generally keeping fit and especially training for a marathon) that repeated loops of Central Park become very boring, putting my mind right back to the state of seeking excuses to stay home with my feet up.

Everyone needs variety so I believe it is important to know different places that satisfy all the above criteria, including some new ideas further afield.

Travelers (I was a frequent business traveler for many years) face very serious challenges in motivating themselves to get outdoors in strange places. For all of the above reasons, I feel strongly that we need good, consistent runners' and walkers' guides to all our major populated areas to help us fight the excuses to stay indoors or stay in the car.

That is what motivated me to start the Fun on Foot project. I hope that what we have put together for the New York and Boston regions, plus some other centers, will help many of you get outdoors more for your exercise. We all need every little bit of help we can find to chase away those excuses.

© Copyright, Warwick Ford, 2009

Warwick Ford is an outdoor enthusiast and principal author of the Fun on Foot series of urban runners' and walkers' guides, the latest of which is "Fun on Foot in New York" released in spring 2009. Visit www.funonfoot.com for more information or to link up with Warwick and his wife and running buddy Nola.

Image 1: The Brooklyn Bridge

Image 2: The Staten Island Boardwalk

