

Run, Regional Traveller, Run

By Philip Rowell

One of the best ways to get to know a new city is to jog around it. Here's some of the top jogs in the region.

■ Hong Kong

Wherever you are, the Peak looms over the city of Hong Kong behind every building. What may not be apparent from the warren of steamy streets in Causeway Bay and Central is that the mountain is full of spectacular running routes, just minutes away from the MTR stations and wontonmin sellers.

Best run Bowen Road. For visitors from less geographically spectacular parts of the world, the sharp inclines and severe gradients of Hong Kong's more hilly runs are out of the question: you'd be exhausted in minutes. But Bowen Road, following a contour of the hillside, offers a flat run with a spectacular view from above the city, giving you the feeling of gliding along halfway up the skyscrapers. Starting behind Hong Kong Park on Cotton Tree Drive, Bowen Road snakes eastwards all the way through Central and Wanchai and ends above Happy Valley. The shaded, wooded and car-free route is one of Hong Kong's finest attractions and is worth a good hour of running time, there and back.

■ Singapore

For one of the most urbanised societies on earth, there are plenty of places to run in Singapore that will have you scratching your head and wondering if you've suddenly been transported to the steamy jungles of Sumatra. It's shockingly easy to escape the high-rise surroundings in favour of greenery, oxygen-rich air and even the occasional monkey.

Best run MacRitchie Reservoir. The whole of Singapore's forested central catchment area is criss-crossed with jungle paths and shaded gravel roads. And it's so well planned that if you're feeling really fit

you could run a marathon without ever leaving the woods. But for starters, try the MacRitchie Loop. Starting from the entrance on Lornie Road (just a couple of minutes' cab ride from the Orchard Road hotel belt), run alongside the reservoir so that the water is on your left. From there, it's a simple matter of always turning left, running around the edge of the water along well-signposted jungle tracks. Eleven kilometres and one circuit later, you're back where you started: fitter, leaner, soaked with perspiration and with lungfuls of clean freshly-produced rainforest air to keep you going until the next visit.

■ Bangkok

The common image of the traffic-choked streets of Bangkok doesn't immediately conjure up thoughts of happy running experiences. However, there are enough kilometres of quiet lanes, canal-side paths and local sois to put together to make some very satisfying runs indeed.

Best run The Lumpini Loop. Any run in Bangkok has to take in at least a part of this Victorian-era city park with its wide old trees and boating lakes. But to really see Bangkok, it's worth branching out: leave the park from the Wireless Road/Sarasin corner exit, run up the steps to the overpass and then cut loose. The walkway will take you over traditional Thai housing, past a lovely old canal and deposit you at the entrance to Bangkok's newest park, Sirikit. You can run around that one then head back to Lumpini, or if you're feeling really adventurous, turn left up one of the quiet sois, cross over Sukhumvit Road, continue north and make a break for Saen Saeb Canal. The pathway along the canal stretches for miles in either direction, or you could literally run for hours along this

fascinating thoroughfare with not a car in sight, passing wooden Thai houses and canal boats.

■ Sydney


If Sydney was created by the Almighty, as Sydneysiders like to claim, then him upstairs must be a very keen runner. Clean streets, clear sidewalks, infinite choices between hills and flat surfaces, and glimpses of that gorgeous shimmering harbour peeking out from behind every tasteful 1930s apartment block and eucalyptus tree: Sydney is a runner's dream.

Best run Everywhere in Sydney is good, but it doesn't get any better than the **Botanic Gardens and Domain**, with their examples of all sorts of exotic antipodean flora to occupy your mind while you put one foot in front of the other. With the Opera House in your field of vision and the blue Australian sky setting off the greenery, you'll find it hard to run anywhere else ever again. And if your exertions cause you to heat up a tad too much, the Andrew 'Boy' Charlton public swimming pool is just around the corner, east towards Woolloomooloo, for a post-workout dip. Just don't get in the way of the lap swimmers.

■ Kuala Lumpur

Somewhere between Singapore and Bang-kok - both geographically and atmos-pherically - KL offers enough green spaces and lush parks on one hand, and sufficient seething streets and local colour on the other, to make running an entertaining as well as energetic pursuit.

Best run KL Bird Park surrounds. The area around the Petronas Twin Towers is nice, but serious runners might find the



area a little too small. To really stretch your legs, hotfoot it over to the green belt behind the Old Railway Station and National Mosque. Gorgeous forested paths pass the KL Bird Park, the Butterfly Park, the National Museum, the beautiful Carcosa Seri Negara (the former British Governor's mansion), the National War Heroes monument and countless other attractions, all within one sprawling green zone. After a few laps, you'll have earned a couple of guilt-free *roti canai* washed down with *kopi tarik*.

■ Shanghai

The wide sidewalks, gorgeous French villas and elegant plane trees of Xuhui's backstreets provide a lovely backdrop while you're bouncing on air. And the well-planned parks maintained beautifully by the municipal authorities only add to the appeal of lacing up in China's most exciting city.

Best run Fuxing Park is a good place to start; home to some of Shanghai's best bars and restaurants, it's apt that it should be a good place to burn the calories that you consumed here the night before. Warm up with a couple of laps, taking care to avoid the wushu practitioners and beret-sporting petanque enthusiasts (despite 58 years of communism and counting, there's still plenty of French in the Concession). When you've found your rhythm, head out of the north gate and keep on running, crossing Huaihai Lu and continuing north. After less than a kilometre you'll come across the southwest extension of People's Square, a modern manicured green spot in the centre of town. From here, run east through the park and north across Yan'an Lu to connect to People's Square proper. In a different era, this was the Shanghai horseracing track, so it's an appropriate

place to open up and go for a gallop. Now, it's up to you; do a circuit of the park, explore the many little winding paths, or join the masses for an early morning spot of tai chi. When you've had enough, head to the northwest corner of the park, near the Art Museum, for a revivifying cappuccino at Shanghai's nicest Starbucks.

■ Dubai

For half of the year in the Pearl of the Gulf, you'd be well advised to hang up your running shoes in favour of indoor pursuits with very strong air-conditioning. But when the heat abates towards the end of the year, Dubai's seaside location makes for some lovely coastal runs.

Best run Whether you're staying in the atmospheric Old City or in the newer and infinitely more glamorous Jumeirah beachside strip, the coastal run is the one you should be aiming for. Mile after mile of white sands, posh villas, beachside cafes and an international cast of fellow joggers will keep your eyes occupied while the miles on your iPod sport kit tick over. Landmarks to look out for include the Jumeirah Beach Club, the Wild Wadi and the Burj Al-Arab hotel constantly shimmering in the distance; as well as several appealingly upmarket shopping strips which you'll no doubt be returning to later after you've showered, changed and armed yourself with your most robust credit cards.

■ Hanoi

If you like a little culture while you pound the pavements, Hanoi is the place for you. Take in Ho Chi Minh's mausoleum, the dreamy West Lake, or the many original lanes with craftsmen existing as they have for centuries. Just be sure to look both ways when you're crossing the roads.

Best run The streets of the old town can get a little congested; you may find yourself unable to build up a decent head of steam. Cut loose and head directly towards the monumental Ho Chi Minh square, where Uncle Ho himself rests in peace, his running days long over. Run the long straight leafy boulevards where the ambassadors make their homes, then hit the trail north towards the West Lake (making sure to give a respectful nod to the Lenin statue on the way). The run around the perimeter of the Lake measures a very respectable 14 km; a few circuits of this body of water and you'll in good shape to complete any trail, Ho Chi Minh or otherwise.

■ Luang Prabang

If you can overcome the feeling of soporific bliss in the ancient capital, Luang Prabang makes for some very fine running indeed. With quiet, traffic-free streets, intriguing back lanes winding past leafy Buddhist temples and French colonial schools, and a compact layout which means you can run in any direction and still find your way back to the hotel in time for croissants and coffee, the Lao cultural gem is a surprisingly attractive athletic proposition too.

Best run Stick to the Unesco-listed old town; the grid layout makes it easy to keep your bearings, and the riverside breezes will keep your body temperature down while your heart rate goes up. Wherever you start, simply run towards the end of the promontory: when you get to the river, turn round again, run back, and repeat as necessary. To remain in the spirit of things, however, try not to run too far or too fast. Exercise is admirable, but exerting yourself too much is simply not the done thing in this most horizontal of countries.