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Walking has become increasingly popular among Singaporeans, with many embracing it as a form of exercise and social activity. The trend is evident on social media platforms such as TikTok, where hashtags like #hotgirlwalk, #NatureWalk, and #WalkingBackwards have gained traction, attracting millions of views. In Singapore, there are numerous walking groups that cater to various interests and ages. These groups provide a sense of community and social interaction, which is particularly important for seniors who may be experiencing loneliness. Dr Lim Boon Leng, a psychiatrist, notes that walking groups meet both the physical activity and social needs of seniors, helping them maintain an active lifestyle and combat loneliness. Ms Olevia Cheong, 55, has been organising walks since November 2020, bringing together friends to explore park connectors and nature trails. The interest in group walks surged during the Covid-19 pandemic, as people sought ways to stay physically and mentally active while stuck at home. For Mr Tan Hock Seng, 65, walking became a lifesaver after he suffered a stroke in 2018 that left him paralysed on one side of his body. He credits walking with improving his health and well-being, saying it has helped him stay active and motivated. Walking groups are not just about physical exercise but also provide an opportunity for social interaction and mental well-being. Dr Rathi Mahendran, a psychiatrist, notes that nature-based walking interventions can mitigate stress and other mental health issues, while Mr Tan Hock Seng says walking with like-minded individuals has contributed to his sense of well-being. Joining walking groups has transformed many seniors' lives in Singapore. Regular walks have improved their cholesterol levels, reduced weight gain, and even alleviated social isolation. Joining a walking group can be a game-changer for mental health, socialising and self-care, say experts. She says, "I use the walk as an analogy for my patients. We are not stuck, things are happening. We are going somewhere, and we are working on it. The body always informs the brain," she says. Me and friends go walking together every weekend now. Socialising is very important. During Covid-19, human connection was missing. Being in nature helps you sort out your emotions and be calmer too. In 2022, I went hiking with friends to South Korea. It was so much fun that when I came back, I looked for similar activities here. Then I found an interest group doing overseas hikes and training locally. On the first day, I met a guy named Alvin Lok. He attracted my attention because he was very outspoken and lively. As we walked together, he told me to follow his pace. We started chatting and it was like instant connection. Both of us are divorced with kids and love outdoor activities. The third time we hung out, we hiked in Malaysia and I got scared on the difficult terrain. He helped me, that's how we became closer. Within a month, we were dating. Now we attend LongwalkSG walks every week. They do 25km to 30km walks, which is a lot. Mr Lok likes that they plan everything. You don't have to worry about the route because it's been mapped out by the organiser, he says. In April last year, my partner and I did an overnight walk from Raffles Marina Lighthouse to Changi Beach Park. It was over 78km in 18 hours with short breaks for meals. My job can get stressful. When I exercise, it's the only time I don't think about work. Now I have a partner to walk with, we enjoy walking as quality time together. With over 380km of paths across Singapore, walkers are spoilt for choice. The Park Connector Network was conceptualised in 1990 and there are now about 380km of park connectors islandwide. The National Parks Board aims to increase it to 500km by 2030. Ms Suchi Param looks up walking groups online because she was bored and frustrated during the pandemic. She has always loved walking with her mother, who is in her late 80s. Mr Ethan Lee organises group walks on Meetup.com every week. Each walk explores nature and urban trails around Singapore. Ms Param found a group that she really connects with - I Walk I Hike I Eat I Travel. They explore different routes each week. She now attends their walks regularly and has even become a co-host. When we walked from Buona Vista to Jurong East, I thought, "I always pass those places on the train but it's so different," she says. What excited me was that there was so much to explore, like being a tourist in your own country. She has gained satisfaction and knowledge by exploring her backyard. Travelling abroad is now less of a priority. I get the same kind of dopamine and satisfaction every weekend with my walk as I used to from travelling, she says. There are many opportunities to meet new people and expand social circles, adds Ms Param who ends each walk with a shared meal. Cities have different walking cultures. Compare the Market Australia ranked Munich, Milan and Warsaw as the most walkable cities in 2024. They were judged on factors like trails, rainfall and car-free areas. ## #Walkable cities are being reimagined as a key component of urban development, with Arup releasing a report highlighting the numerous benefits they provide. Dr Kristian Steele, leader for climate and sustainability services at Arup Singapore, notes that many Asian cities, including Singapore, often prioritize road users, placing pedestrians at the bottom of the hierarchy. In contrast, European countries have shown a greater commitment to walkability and cycling, setting aside space for these modes of transport and prioritizing their safety. According to Arup's report, walkable cities offer numerous social and environmental advantages, including improved population health, well-being, and reduced noise and air pollution. Furthermore, designing walkable cities can provide economic benefits, with investments in better streets and spaces for walking yielding a competitive return compared to other transport projects. The study estimates that cycling and walking can generate up to \$11.80 in value for every \$1 invested. Dr Steele suggests that park connectors, currently used for leisure, could potentially be repurposed as modes of transportation to get to school or work. Singapore's scale makes it an ideal environment for testing and developing new ideas. The Land Transport Authority has set out a plan to create "Friendly Streets," an initiative aimed at improving walkability and pedestrian safety.

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