

6 TIPS FOR LEADING A JANE'S WALK

A Walking Conversation

Jane's Walks are less like the regular heritage walking tours and more like a walking conversation about neighbourhoods and how people use cities. Provide interesting information and press people for their opinions and stories - use the space around you for illustrations and inspiration. Sharing the hosting duties with some co-guides is often a good idea and lightens the load.

It is very important to act as a friendly host and 'border collie' for your group. If there aren't too many people, start off by having people introduce themselves. Establish a friendly vibe. Emphasize the need to gather in close while you're talking and not block the sidewalks for other pedestrians. Make sure they can hear you.

Plan a route

Photocopy a map of your proposed neighbourhood, low tech options like road maps, google earth and mapquest are just fine. Think through the stories, places and people you want to talk about, then plot it out. Six to ten stops on a tour that lasts 1.5 hours is all you really need. Here's some questions to brainstorm that should help you figure out your route and highlights.

1. What are some important meeting spaces in your neighbourhood?
2. What spaces are you most proud of in your neighbourhood?
3. What are some important green-spaces?
4. What are some interesting short-cuts you take?
5. Are shops and amenities accessible?
6. Is it easy or possible to walk, bike, use transit or drive a car?
7. Do any buildings have unusual marks or features?
8. Are there any old buildings that have been reconfigured into different uses?
9. Where do you feel most comfortable?
10. Are there any important historical spaces in your neighbourhood?
11. Where do you not feel safe? Why?
12. What is a space that you really dislike?
13. Are there any places that mix retail, business and residential? (mixed use)
14. How do the buildings 'interact' with pedestrians at the street level?
15. Are there spaces you would like to see change?
16. Is there an important question or issue that people should talk about?

Go for depth over breadth

Jane's Walks celebrate and investigate the walkability and potential of cities and neighbourhoods. That said, they don't have to cover a wide territory, it's best if they focus in and draw out details and stories. They are a way to get out and discover something new about a community people know or want to know better. It's not a tourism initiative, so pitch the content to locals who want to go deeper - and ask them where they live and even what made them curious about this neighbourhood.

Consider involving some local residents or business people on the stroll. Talk to a hot-dog vendor who is thoroughly familiar with the characters, habitués, the patterns and rhythms of the street (Jane Jacobs idea of the sidewalk ballet). You might want to drop into a store, feature an older neighbour with interesting stories, or even meet up with a local politician to get their perspective on the neighbourhood. Shortcuts and hidden details are always popular. It's what makes people feel like a local, knowing the insider routes, secret vistas and back alleys. Try to strike the balance between talking and moving. It is much harder to stand on pavement for two hours, than to walk on it. People will also drop off naturally if they need to take a break or get somewhere else - don't be offended.

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Have fun

Props and performances can add a novel and creative touch to a tour. Ask your participants to read an excerpt of writing by a local writer or a newspaper clipping of the day. Some tour guides have been known to get very theatrical and arranged to have people in costumes en route to 'animate' the site. Historical photographs or printed material (often easy to find online) are always popular. Try to start and end your tour near a coffee shop or pub so people can connect or continue their conversations afterwards. Ask people if they have been to these places, what it was like when they were there, what they wore, who they saw, the things they did - personal anecdotes are always fun to hear and you'd be surprised how many people have fascinating stories to tell.

Get to know Jane Jacobs

You don't have to be familiar with Jane Jacobs' work to lead a tour, but we have made it easier to learn about her with some online resources and bibliographies. By now many of her ideas are common knowledge. In books such as "The Death and Life of Great American Cities" (1961) she championed the interests of local residents and pedestrians over a car-centered approach to planning, made the case for refurbishing old buildings instead of tearing them down and building new ones, and demonstrated the desirability of increasing the density of cities over sprawling endlessly outward. We encourage you to learn more about Jane Jacobs ideas and incorporate them in any number of ways: bring along one of her books, have people read from it, observe a 'sidewalk ballet', discuss what 'mixed use' means in the local context, and so on.

We have posted 5 Jane Jacobs Primers on our website (Who is Jane Jacobs) that go over some of her basic concepts, and discuss them in the context of current theory and examples. We also have bibliographic resources posted there. And we have provided engaging exercises that you can do with your participants to explore the uses of public space, sidewalks, the shape of the city and getting around.

Learn how to speak loudly or use a microphone

We cannot provide microphones or megaphones for tour guides, but encourage you to beg, borrow or buy your own equipment. For groups bigger than 20 or so people, some form of amplification can be preferable. If you want to buy something basic for this purpose, we've had success with a small mic/amplifier unit that costs around \$50. It's called the Sky Model WAP-50. They run on batteries and the unit doubles as a battery charger if you buy rechargeable batteries. In the past we have found them at electronics stores like Future Shop, The Source or on-line.

If you don't have a microphone, you must face people when you speak by corralling your walkers in tightly where there's as little street noise as possible and face them when you speak. You can get them to stand on stairs or a rise, and speak to them 'amphitheatre' style. You could also climb on top of something a bit higher, and project over the group. You've really got to belt it out, especially if you're on busy streets. Do not be shy - you are the host and the more you get them talking, the better.