

Why Jakarta needs more well planned city parks

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Easy day: Park visitors enjoy their picnic at Suropati Park, one of the city's parks in Menteng, Central Jakarta. In spite of encroachment from the growing number of shopping malls, some Jakartans still prefer to visit city parks during their leisure time. JP/Wendra Ajistyatama

In spite of tough competition from shopping malls, which take away much of their visitors and land on which more could be built, Jakartans continue to flock to the city's parks.

After all, city parks offer what malls cannot provide: Greenery, open air and the chirping of birds, which are added bonuses when out with date or when jogging, and help when simply killing time, all at no extra cost.

"I have a 10 a.m. meeting around here, and as it's only 9:30, I'm just waiting it out here," said an engineer who was reading a newspaper on a bench in Suropati Park in Central Jakarta.

Suropati Park, which is surrounded by premium office buildings, foreign embassies, private residences of ambassadors and the official residence of the Jakarta governor, is considered one of the city's best parks.

While gardeners were preoccupied with tending to the plants, a number of senior citizens were seen jogging around the track.

A dog trainer, Dede, 32, uses Suropati Park as a training ground for his canine charges.

“I’ve been coming here three times a week for the past three years to train these dogs, Romeo and Harry Potter. The park is spacious and the dogs can run freely,” Dede said.

For others, the city’s parks offer an outdoor area where activities can be conducted on the cheap.

In nearby Situ Lembang Park, visitors can fish in a lake in the center of the park.

“I come here every day to fish. It’s just because the park is near my office. I get bored so I come here during my lunch break,” Jefri, 28, said.

But in spite of the many benefits that parks offer, no one seems to want to keep them tidy.

Littering has always been a problem. “There is a lot of plastic and paper, especially when there are too many visitors, like Saturday night,” a Suropati Park gardener, Mansyur, 30, complained.

Besides littering, another problem besetting city parks is the unpleasant sight of graffiti, like that plastered all over Situ Lembang Park.

An interior designer, who gave his first name only as Budi, whom The Jakarta Post met in the park said that almost all parks in the city were in need of improvement.

“Look, if there is a downpour, the water mixes with dirt and overflows onto the pathways, discouraging people from coming to the park. In some parts of this park, the grass can’t grow because big trees block out the sunlight,” Budi said.

“Yes, we can grow big trees in this park to make the air cooler. But the small vegetation below then suffers from a lack of sunshine,” he said.

Budi said it appeared that designers of the park did not think much about function and the habits of Jakartans.

Such a shortcoming is also apparent in Puring Park in Kebayoran Baru, South Jakarta.

The Post visited the park recently soon after a downpour and found the grass in the park covered with mud here and there.

“When it rains, visitors instantly vanish because they can find no shelter. When the rain stops, no one comes here because it is muddy,” a gardener of the park, Joni, 30, said.

Joni feels quite happy, however, when the rain keeps visitors away. No visitors means he does not need to pick up too many used newspapers left by visitors who use them as mats.

“Here, no benches are available for people to sit on, so they use newspapers as mats and just leave them when they leave. There is no trash bins either. Puring Park used to have trash bins but scavengers stole them,” Joni said. (rcf)