Six European walking tours that celebrate women

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A bouquet of white roses hangs from the bronze wrist of Emmeline Pankhurst. But her rallying stance – hand outstretched towards Manchester's former Free Trade Hall where she organised the first suffragette meetings that would change the course of British history – remains defiantly unchanged. Further bunches of white flowers, symbolising the purity of the women's suffrage movement and its fight for female political equality, have been tucked at her feet, wilting gently in the spring sunlight that filters through the city's skyscrapers. They are a reminder of the immense progress made in British women's rights since Pankhurst's early 20th-Century campaigns – and, perhaps, of how far there is left to go.

Manchester has long touted its association with the historic struggle for gender parity, yet the city's civic championing of the women who helped shape its progress is muted at best. When Pankhurst's bronze likeness (titled "Rise Up, Women") was unveiled in 2018, it became the first statue of a woman to be erected in a public space in the city since a monument of Queen Victoria was installed in Piccadilly Gardens in 1905. Even now, it is one of only four city-centre statues of named women, compared to 18 of men.

But a counter-revolution is quietly brewing. I'm visiting the Pankhurst statue as part of a new self-guided walking route, the Feminist Tour of Manchester, which explores little-known stories of its impactful women and historically marginalised LGBTQ+ figures.Though the suffragettes naturally feature, it emphasises those who never became household names: for example, Mary Fildes, a trailblazing 19th-Century birth control activist; and Enriqueta Rylands, who founded the Neo-Gothic masterpiece that is the John Rylands Library, becoming the first woman to receive honorary Freedom of the City of Manchester. There's a thought-provoking stop at the Peterloo Massacre Memorial (commemorating those who lost their lives in a peaceful working-class protest for parliamentary representation and universal suffrage that turned violent); while the neon jumble of Chinatown's alleyways provides the backdrop to the story of the author and campaigner Alicia Little, whose work highlighted – and eventually helped change – the poor statusre-incorporating female legacies into the popular tourist narrative.

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19th-Century birth control activist; and Enriqueta Rylands, who founded the Neo-Gothic masterpiece that is the John Rylands Library, becoming the first woman to receive honorary Freedom of the City of Manchester. There's a thought-provoking stop at the Peterloo Massacre Memorial (commemorating those who lost their lives in a peaceful working-class protest for parliamentary representation and universal suffrage that turned violent); while the neon jumble of Chinatown's alleyways provides the backdrop to the story of the author and campaigner Alicia Little, whose work highlighted – and eventually helped change – the poor status experience as a woman in contemporary Icelandic society. The scenic walk begins in the neighbourhood of Mæðragarður before moving downtown through the capital's manicured squares, concluding at the historic school Kvennskólinn (Reykjavík Women's Gymnasium). Participants learn about Finnbogadóttir – who happened to be Eik Rakelardóttir's neighbour growing up – alongside lesser-known women and marginalised groups whose influence on gender progress she feels should be more publicly visible. After all, she concludes: "We should know what methods they used and let those stories inspire

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