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YOUR LIMITS

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Off Track



YANA BEY

If you have the will, you'll find the time

What is the eligibility criteria for the two seats for civilians in the Directorate of Air Force Adventure skydiving course that you mentioned in your column last time? What is the scenario for adventure racing in India? I want to get into adventure sports full time as a professional, or start my own club. But I can't get leave to go get training from an institute.

HARISH PANJWANI

You must be physically fit for skydiving. You should not have heart problems or hypertension. There is no fee requirement. Since most people don't know about these two seats, often only relatives of defence personnel apply.

Pure adventure racing does not use mechanised transport and there is no such event in India as yet.

There are many people who have juggled office jobs or family businesses and managed to do adventure sport courses. Some have then quit their jobs and made a living as instructors or opened their own adventure tour outfits.

PHOTO: REUTERS



As for starting a club, what's stopping you? Get together with some other enthusiasts and do it informally. To do it formally, get it registered with the Registrar of Societies according to the guidelines.

I love travelling, mostly to natural spots, and want to make a career of it. What can I do that will be more exciting than being a tour organiser? I am also interested in backpacking.

HITESH K YADAV

Being a tour organiser is as exciting as you make it. You can open a company that organises nature hiking, treks, bird watching, fishing and wildlife safaris. Forests, streams, hills and beaches will be your playground. You can do your programmes with children, families, couples and corporate groups.

Then there's the soft adventure segment. Treks in hill forests can include cliff jumping or abseiling from a bridge. A beach trip can include parasailing. To stay ahead of competition, you would need to scout regularly for new spots and itineraries. Much of this would have to be done personally. Wouldn't you enjoy it?

Another option is to be a travel writer or photographer. Create a website with previews of your photos and articles. To download and use them, people will have to pay. It will showcase your work and bring you assignments. If you can photograph but not write, team up with someone who has writing skills.

TALK TO US

Write to our adventure expert Yana with your queries on rush@hindustantimes.com

HIGH flier

HERE'S A whole new spin on flying a kite. Ever tried surfing with one? Read on for a taste of this radical high

Dhamini Ratnam

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Adventure sport junkies swear by activities like parasailing and surfboarding. Now you can combine the two and throw away the tether into the wind. You've just landed in kite surfing zone. There are few ways as good as this to lord it over the elements and let both wave and wind combine to take you on a wild ride.

SOUNDS INCREDIBLE

It is. Kite surfing combines elements of kiting and surfing, letting the wind pull you along the waves. There's a board with straps for your feet and a kite with either two or four lines connected to a bar that you will grip. You are required to wear a waist or seat harness and a personal flotation device for safety.

Wade in to shallow water, strap on the board, wiggle into the harness, and then wait for the wind to fill your kite and do the rest.

DON'T KNOW HOW TO SURF?

Don't worry, you don't need to. But you must know how to swim. If you're in good physical health, with no major knee or back injury, you're good to go. Although, as Philippe Dartnell, who teaches kite surfing in Goa, points out, that last requirement didn't stop a boy with a prosthesis from completing a four-day beginner's course with him last summer in Goa.

According to Dartnell, all you need to learn kite surfing is four to five hours a day and a total of 12 to 14 hours. After that, it's all about practice.

"Ninety per cent of this sport is learning how to fly the kite — how to find the wind pockets, control the lines, tilt the kite to the right angles to use the wind well," says 29-year-old Adam Bedi.

A veteran adventure junkie, who'd had his fill of snowboarding, skiing, and mountain biking, Bedi first encountered kite surfing when he went to Goa's beaches in search of a new high. He signed on with Dartnell, learning the sport harnessed to his tutor's kite, and was soon addicted.

He discovered what you will, if you gave it a shot: It's easy to learn, a great rush, and also makes you feel like a dude, for doing something that very few others are.

IS IT DANGEROUS?

Kite surfing is the ideal blend of adventure with minimal risk, especially if you're learning from a trained instructor. The kite generates an immense amount of power and speed while mov-

ing through the water and the more extreme the conditions (wind and water) the higher the danger quotient. There's always the inherent danger of being dragged or lofted while hooked to the kite, says Dartnell, but in Goa, conditions are usually sedate.

Staying alert is key. "It's the lines you should take care of as they get taut in the wind and can cut sharply if you're not careful," warns Bedi.

The thing to remember, as you set off to fly over the sea, is to "go out only as far as you are willing to swim back," Dartnell points out. "A distance covered in 10 minutes with the kite is an hour's swim back to shore."

THE MAGIC INGREDIENT

So, if you must have a prayer on your lips, let it be for a mild to strong wind of at least 8 to 12 knots. And then just explore the coastline, letting the wind and waves do the hard work.

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

For kite surfing lessons in Goa, call Philippe Dartnell at 9860452162 or email him at philippe954@gmail.com.

Classes start by mid-September. You can also get kite landboarding lessons (a kite attached to a skating board) in Delhi (Richard Dartnell at 9810310509).

If you decide to teach yourself, visit <http://kitesurfschool.org/safety.htm>.

To buy yourself some gear, you can call Rajiv Bhatia at 9920088873 or email him at rajiv@raesport.in. Or go to Selections Store in Mumbai, Ozone in Bangalore, or Champ Sports in Goa. A board will put you down by about Rs 20,000 and a kite can cost between Rs 4,000 to 55,000.

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OFF-ROAD WAYFARING

Get a mountain bike to have a closer encounter with the pavements, dips and jumps that dot your neighbourhood. If you have time to head to the hills, so much the better. Go ahead, hop on to a bike that'll hold together no matter what you throw it at. Your nerve, of course, is a different matter altogether. We give you the basics

Gears

A wide range of gears are helpful on particularly knotty trails. Gears may go up to as many as 35 depending on the climb and the terrain you want the bike for.

Pedals

Professionals use something called clipless pedals, on which you engage a specially-equipped shoe meant for mountain biking. They allow easy ejection during an emergency.



Frames

Frames are made from aluminium, steel or aluminium alloy. Good mountain bikes have smaller frames and wider tyres mounted on to really strong rims.

Handlebars

Handlebars are different from those in sports bikes in that they are fully upright, flat and wide.

Suspension

These bikes have both front suspension systems (hard tail) and full suspension systems (soft tail). The latter works best. Gas shock absorbers are preferable over spring-loaded ones.

Brakes

While road bicycles have rim brakes, you can choose for your mountain bike to have disc brakes (for the front tyre and back) or even better, hydraulic ones.

NUTS & BOLTS

Mountain bikes face the danger of cracked parts, from the frames, grilles, gear derailleurs and tyre rims to sprocket wheels and worn brake pads. To avert mishaps, scrutinise and fix the bike before use.

STAY GREASED

Make sure the chain is adequately lubricated with oil and the tubes aren't punctured. Always carry spare tubes and ensure the wheel bearings are in good shape.

MONEY MATTERS

Rs 10,000

For an MTB with at least front suspension, 6 gears, a strong frame and good traction tyres.

Rs 15-40,000

For MTBs with mechanical disc brakes or the more expensive hydraulic brakes.

Rs 1 lakh+

For Free Riders with carbon frames, a light chassis and dual suspension.

Go get a bike

Mumbai: Firefox Bike Station, 9833040647; Gear Bike Shop, 022-26409139. Delhi: Firefox Bikes, 9910952220. Kolkata: Calcutta Traders: 033-2248829

STAY SAFE

Apart from knowing how to ride a bicycle, you must also know how to avoid obstacles and make timely jumps. Steer clear of wet rocks and puddles of mud while tilting the bike during a turn. Always ride with proper gear (a helmet, knee and elbow pads etc) as bike accidents can be serious. Know your limits before you set out on a difficult ride and get the right kit.

Helmets

Open face Indian helmets start at Rs 350. Imported ones by Sixixone sell for about Rs 1,850-2,500.

MTB shorts

You get them for Rs 1,500 onwards.

Knee and elbow pads

SixSixOne knee and elbow pads sell for about Rs 1,500 a pair.

TEXT: AALAP DEBOOR

GRAPHIC: SEBASTIAN