

# INDIA BOATING

India's First Luxury Boating Magazine

Volume 1 • Issue 4 • September - October 2008 • Rs 100

That's**the**Life

Vittorio Codecasa  
Kaya Kalp Spa

Faceto**Face**  
Tom Perkins

Sailing**Destination**  
Maldives

Photo**Feature**  
Sea Divas

Volume 1 • Issue 3 • July - August 2008 • Rs 100

## Profile



# RAJIV BHATIA

From being an agent for Reliance Polymers to setting up an adventure sports company Rajiv Bhatia has followed his passion. For him nothing beats the thrill of being out in the sea on a kayak, watching shoals of fish swimming by and enjoying the sweeping panoramic view of the Mumbai skyline. India Boating spoke with Rajiv about his passion for kayaking and his plans for his company Rae Sports as the agency for Feelfree Kayaks.

**Words: Priyanka Tilve**

### How did it all start?

I have always been involved in sports and I love water. While on a vacation in the US my wife and I discovered kayaking and what struck me was the simplicity and the fun involved. Even my daughter enjoyed it immensely...so it turned out to be a fun family activity. It doesn't require too much of physical strength as

well... even my 8 year old daughter can manage it! Plus the fact that it was clean, eco-friendly and zero pollution. So when I came back to Mumbai I thought why not get a kayak here and that's how it really started.

I live in Cuffe Parade which is blessed with a wonderfully protected bay where the tide is never

harsh and the depth is at best 6 feet that makes it safe for kayaking. I go out kayaking with my daughter every weekend, we kayak our way up to Governor's house from Cuff Parade. And I have had many people come up to me out of curiosity. They want to try it out once and most of them end up buying it. Basically the whole idea is to get people to enjoy and have fun on water. And you can learn kayaking in couple of hours....I mean you may take a day or two to get the right technique, but the basic move you may learn in an hour. Besides it doesn't require any licensing and is absolutely easy to maintain and store a kayak.

### **What made you choose Feelfree Kayak for distribution?**

When we entered the market, we participated at the boat show (Mumbai) and went to various places and saw how people responded. We realized that people here are apprehensive about the sit-in kayak as they were scared that if they over turn they would drown. So I got these sit-on-top kayaks where you always have the option of jumping off into the water if you feel you were to over turn. We also got newer design kayaks made specifically for India and Feelfree was the only brand who was willing to customize. They modified the structure for stability, added seats, thigh straps and paddle, plus it gives an eight year warranty. Besides, the shipment is quick so it's possible for me to get kayaks in around two weeks.

Also the price is not the daunting factor as you can get kayak starting from Rs. 16,000/- up to Rs. 80,000/-. It weighs around 15-50 kgs and is easy to transport it once you load it onto your car. Moreover, some of these kayaks come with wheels for easy transportation. These are very sturdy kayaks and won't damage easily unless you physically try to do so.

### **How has the response been?**

The response has been good. The biggest boon for us has been the boat show and it has also acted as an ideal platform for us to showcase our product. Basically the idea was to create awareness and change the mindset of the people as we Indians are not really known to explore the sea. The boat show has helped change that and now people are open to the idea of being on water. We get enquiries from all over India, even from people who own farmhouses in Delhi. Tour operators like Nature Trails have our Kayaks in all their resorts and even the tourism development corporation of Tamil Nadu has encouraged us a lot who use our kayaks at their resorts.

### **What do you foresee as its future?**

We have appointed dealers in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and in Bangalore and we are getting a good response as there is definitely a market out there. And what's important is that the cost is standard everywhere so whether you buy from Mumbai or Bangalore won't make a difference. And now all the people who have purchased yachts want to have kayaks so that they can just get onto kayak from their yacht and explore. We are also trying to reach out to people by tying up with local events. It's a typical new market ...it's just the matter of hanging in there.

### **What are your future plans?**

We are getting in new products like kite-surfing. It is something that requires lot of skill and can be done out on the sea or even on the beach. We are getting somebody down in October to teach a few people in Mumbai and in Goa...we will get them professionally trained. Besides, we are planning to take a stake in a company which deals in a number of prominent yacht brands...it's a natural progression from doing non motorized to motorized but that's what we are trying to do. The whole idea is to promote easy access to water. **IB**