



Teamwork is paramount in an adventure race.

into the wild!

A fast growing sport, adventure racing is taking the world, including Malaysia, by storm.

by Wan Ker-hsin

What makes a man, or a woman, want to go through the rigors of an adventure race? For Jacky Boisset of Team Sport2000-Vibram-Lafuma from France, it's a love for the outdoors, a chance to compete against teams from around the world and being pushed to the physical and mental limit. Closer to home, Lea Elisabeth Yeo of Team Eco Wizard from Malaysia, first started racing 10 years ago to lose weight after the birth of her fourth child. "It never ceases to amaze me how much I can do if I try," says Lea. "Pain is only temporary, but the glory of overcoming the odds lasts forever!"

What is adventure racing?

Adventure racing is a multi-sport event, where teams, usually comprising 4 members each, race through the course as a single unit. It is a highly competitive and demanding sport, and teams are challenged physically and mentally throughout the race. Most races require teams to navigate rugged and wild regions, though disciplines can vary from race to race. Chan Yuen-Li, Director of Nomad Adventure Sdn Bhd adds that common events include trail running, kayaking, mountain biking and rope work. "Each race is tailored to suit the environment and terrain of the event, therefore a race may include caving, sailing or diving." It is a popular crossover sport for runners, cyclists, swimmers and hikers, but the emphasis is on teamwork, rather than individual brilliance, and completing a race is often a win in itself.

How to be an adventure racer

You don't need to be an endurance athlete to compete. Training for an adventure race need not be daunting and definitely not as tough as you may think.

- **Volunteer at a race.** If you want a feel of adventure racing, be a volunteer at a race. You'd be able to experience being part of the event for an inside look at the sport.
- **Choose your race.** Choose the type of race depending on your endurance level and skills. Sprint races are a good introduction to the sport—they are short but no less challenging—while 24-hour races often involve navigation and basic rope work. Expedition-style races are best left to the experienced racer; the route is often set in the wilderness and takes days to complete.
- **Set your goal.** Finishing an adventure race is often a victory in itself. So be realistic and don't aim for too high a goal.
- **Training.** No matter the activity you choose (running, swimming or biking), try to train for an hour each

time, at least 3 times a week. Do train for specific disciplines (rappelling, paddling or orienteering) a few months prior to the race. Says Jacky, “We train regularly all year long. And before a race, we train more on the main disciplines.” Don’t forget to train together with your teammates and practice team strategy. Most races also require racing through the night, so put in some nocturnal training to get the feel of things.

➤ **Learn and practice skills.**

Navigational skills are crucial and could mean the difference between finishing the race and giving up half way. Brush up on your map-reading skills and make the compass your best friend.

➤ **Nutrition requirement.**

Adventure racing burns huge amounts of calories. Besides dehydration, racing also depletes electrolytes so make sure you eat



Teams are required to navigate through wild and rugged terrain.

while you race. “Learn to recognize when your body needs water or food before you’re depleted,” says Yuen-Li. There are plenty of energy bars, gels and sports drinks to keep you at your peak throughout the race.

➤ **Pack right.** Take only the gear, food and water that you need. Here’s a tip from Yuen-Li: “Racing gear must be light and tough. Even a kilo of extra weight can make a huge difference.” Lugging around 20

pounds of equipment on your back for the duration of the race is no small feat. But make sure you have everything you require. “And don’t forget your camera to bring back some awesome memories!” says Jacky.

➤ **Choose the right teammates.** Find people who have the same goals, fitness and basic skills, even if levels of expertise are different. If some team members are aiming for the top spot, while others just want to complete the

race, you may have a tough time. You can also team up with friends and relatives, as long as the relationship can survive the stress of competition. Jacky prefers teammates who are good in multiple outdoor sports but stresses that compatibility amongst all team members is the most important. “Knowing we can get along is crucial,” echoes Lea, “and teamwork means racing together, even if some team members are fitter and faster.”

DISPELLING THE MYTHS

Think you know what adventure racing is all about? Don’t let preconceived notions stop you from enjoying one of the most exciting sporting events.

1) Only an endurance athlete can compete in an adventure race.

Anybody can participate in an adventure race. You just need to train effectively and consistently. During the race, pace yourself: You can slow down to a walk or even take a rest and check your coordinates. You will reach the finish line if you move from one checkpoint to another steadily.

2) You need a lot of time to train for an adventure race.

A couple of one-hour training sessions a week is all you need. Put in a few hours of training on the weekends and you’re ready to go! And you can also spend quality time with your family by

including them in your training. It’s not only fun, but also lets you get healthy and fit together.

3) It’s a sport for young people.

Experience counts as much as, if not more, than speed and strength. Compared to the challenges of life, the obstacles in adventure racing don’t seem insurmountable. And maturity is also an added plus to see you through to the end of the race.

4) It’s difficult to find teammates.

Ask friends and family to join you on a race and you could be pleasantly surprised how many are interested to try it. Or join an outdoor activity club and get to know others with similar interests.

5) Equipment and entry fees will cost a bomb.

You can prepare for an adventure race on a limited budget. Shop around in sporting goods stores that offer used equipment (just make sure they are in good condition). Compare entry fees and find out which race provides necessary gear such as boat and paddle.

6) It’s difficult to navigate through an adventure race.

Practice often enough with maps, compass and plotting your coordinates will make you an expert on navigation in no time. There are also plenty of posts on navigation in websites dedicated to adventure racing.