

Some Pro Tips to Trail Running in UAE

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I am an avid trail runner and a fixture on the UAE ultra running scene. My wife, Olya, is a road marathoner who enjoys running the trails with me on weekends for fun.

Trail running in UAE is a great adventure, but not for the inexperienced and unprepared. Less than a two hour drive from the concrete landscape of Dubai, most people know about sand dunes, but few people know about some of the toughest rocky and hilly trails around. Before you dig out the GPS coordinates of some unexplored trails run, there are some points to consider: where to go, how to prepare, what to bring, and what to wear. Olya and I tried some of the new Columbia trail running apparel and Montrail footwear gear at Wadi Showka for a recent summer trail adventure.

Where to Run

The beauty of running is that you can run just about anywhere, anytime. However, if you have never ventured beyond the confines of the smooth, padded 6.8km track at Kite Beach with its creature comforts, that doesn't mean you should try running the Hajar 100 or the 32km route at Wadi Showka this weekend. Look for one of the local trail running groups or find somebody who knows the routes, and never go by yourself (Pro Tip!). Mobile phone coverage is scant, and when you are running in remote mountains, there is no kiosk selling water –Pro Tip: if you don't carry water, you don't drink water!

How to Prepare

Ok, you've found a running buddy and chosen a trail, now what? Before starting trail running, do a realistic self-assessment. Start small. Stay close. Don't overestimate your fitness and never underestimate the seriousness of the trails. If you run the Dubai



Marathon in four hours, how long do you think it'll take you to complete the first 52km of the Hajar 100? Even though the distance is "only" 10km farther, there is a reason the Checkpoint 5 cutoff is twelve hours. Trail running is running up and down mountains, on rocks, over sand dunes – you should expect the unexpected. While some people think they don't need much equipment for trail running, running the trails in UAE requires hydration, nutrition, and good running clothes. Pro Tip: UAE trails require a high degree of self-sufficiency. You should carry 2-3 litres of water and nutrition before setting out, as well as a basic first aid kit and charged mobile.

What to Wear: the Shoes

The most important pieces of equipment for trail running are your running shoes. Trail running is often a misnomer, as some of the best trail running is off-piste, which can mean running on big rocks, sharp rocks, through a camel farm. This is where the Columbia Sportswear Montrail's Caldorado II I tried come in to play. It provides me with the ideal balance of support, traction and cushioning with an amazing fit, lightweight feel and design. Pro Tip: you should know that last year Montrail – one of the leading manufacturers of trail running shoes and clothes – was rebranded last year as Columbia Montrail (which means you can high-end ultra running gear in the UAE now). When you are out running on trails, you need to have quality gear, because equipment failure can lead to disaster. Some of the factors to consider in your trail running shoe selection: bottom surface for traction, heel-toe drop, breath ability of the material and lightweight. One of my tips in buying a running shoe: if it isn't comfortable in the store, you won't be comfortable on the trails. The Caldorado II shoes are great for the "unbox and run" crowd, so you can just lace them up and go run the trails.

The Columbia Sportswear Montrail Trans Apls F.K.T. – I love that abbreviation, because it's not what you think: it stands for "Fastest Known Time" – is more of a protective shoe than the Caldorado II. Olga doesn't run the rocky trails as often, so the extra protection is good for the feet, without



adding unnecessary weight. These shoes have great traction needed for the trails, and the tread protects the feet from the rocks. **Shirts and Shorts** Running shirts are really an afterthought for me. It's probably a guy thing. I usually wear the SWAG –freebies I get from local races. But there are two main problems with random shirts: they are typically poor quality and as a result don't wear well. In UAE, your running shirt needs to be lightweight and ultra-cool-wearing, as they can help you feel cool when you are sweating, like the Columbia Montrail Ultra Titan shirt. The Ultra Titan's details also help, like the longer back which makes wearing your waist belt or pack for carrying water more comfortable. This leads to the second problem with most freebie shirts: they usually lack the technical detailing that can (Pro Tip) actually make you feel more comfortable, which can help you run better.



Running shorts must be light and comfortable, but the most important part for me is a zippered pocket! I don't understand why so many trail running shorts don't have a zippered pocket. Where are you supposed to put your car key and emergency 50 AED – in your socks? Columbia Montrail Ultra Titan shorts look good, feel good and most importantly have that zippered pocket for a gel and my car key. **Finally – the Easy Part of Trail Running!** So now what? Just grab your hydration and nutrition, find a running buddy, and check your gear and drive out to Wadi Showka at sunrise for an easy 2-3 hour run! Remember, trail running is really easy ... until it gets really, really hard! ■

