

MIDDLE EAST'S OUTDOOR, ADVENTURE, TRAVEL & LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE

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LADIES ON THE TRACK

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Social media icons to follow

GEAR FOR THE GIRLS



Mothers, Legends, Icons, Enthusiasts

Here's to the Girls!

SPECIAL WOMEN'S ISSUE

March 2016

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EDITORIAL

Being a Woman

Feminism, one of the most famous words I've heard from 2015. After that, there have been talks, posts on social media, news and movements to empower women.

As an outdoor enthusiast myself, I can do a lot of things that guys can: In my home country, I can drive a manual car, a motorcycle, I can swim well, I can surf on the big waves, play football and I even engage extreme activities like cliff diving.

Being with OutdoorUAE made me realize that I can do a lot of things here in UAE. And I

must say, it really surprised me but I definitely love it.

I even posted something on social media about my UAE adventure and got a comment saying "My friend you have to be very careful you are a lady and you're not supposed to be doing things like the guys do". I didn't give him a reply instead, I posted more outdoor adventures to show everyone that the UAE is a free country and everyone can be adventurous as much as they want.

Yes, you got it right. Outdoor adventure and extreme sports are not just for men. Being a woman is not just about raising our kids, waiting for our husbands to come home and



Margo Ciruelos
Sales and Marketing
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doing household chores all day long. We can also be adventurous, we can definitely engage in outdoor activities, be actively healthy and most especially, be the best versions of ourselves.

We, women, can raise our flags and show the world what it really means to be a woman in a whole different way. Cheers!

Margo

BEHIND THE SCENES!



Lining up the perfect shot



Helle and Roisin laughing out the sun!



Some downtime for the ladies

Here's to the Girls!

We at OutdoorUAE believe that women should also get out and explore, and since March 8 is International Women's Day, the Special Women's Issue is dedicated to all women in the UAE and elsewhere to inspire and break barriers about what a woman can do. Here's to all the girls in the outdoors!

THE MARVELLOUS ADVENTURES of the Bucket List Girl

Words By: Keith Perena

Photos Supplied By: Amani Stevens

Bubbly — that was what would define Amani as she sips on her warm cup of chocolate while we talk about her life outdoors.

On a rain-drenched Wednesday afternoon, this sort of liveliness emanating from her personality shone some light on a day filled with dreary weather. She goes on... "The whole idea of the bucket list is that why would I wait to know when I'm going to die to start a bucket list when I could start living life from now?" That one rhetorical question set the tone for the conversation that ensued...

The Girl and the Bucket

Amani is no stranger to the outdoors. Having moved around the globe a couple of times, she can easily be seen as a globe-trotter. She's lived in the UAE for 14 years and before that a string of past addresses such as three years in Malaysia, six years in Kuwait, and stateside for two years. Having to meet new people came naturally for her and this in turn led to her exposure to various cultures – something she really enjoys up to this very day.

Asking about her Youtube channel, Amani states that "I've always wanted to have a Youtube channel but I never knew what I wanted to talk about, but then I decided I'm just going to be me." Another proponent that led her to her own space in the Internet is her belief that



"...there are people that share and feel good about it and those that share and don't feel so good about it." Being a part of the former group, Amani wanted to share her experiences with people and hope that they would follow and potentially have experiences of their own.

The List

The List is a never-ending one for this lady. The List continues to be updated as she meets more people and they have something to offer to her for her to experience. She learns a lot from the people she meets and they all serve as her inspiration. It was wise to note that as our conversation trailed on, she already had something in mind for her next big adventure that she didn't wish to disclose. But seeing the excitement in her eyes is hint enough to know that what's coming is really good.

So far, she has crossed out several things such as scaling Kilimanjaro, trying indoor and outdoor skydiving, trampolining and of course travelling to picturesque outdoor locations such as Iceland and Goa - locations both teeming with adventures



Everyone is Awesome!

When it comes to tricks when it comes to travelling, she shared that getting shared accommodations where she is at is a must. This is because "...you get to meet people and they can give you a different perspective on what you want to see..."

Another thing that she has learned from this is that people are generally friendly. She says: "Everyone's super friendly – everyone wants to help, everyone wants to chit-chat and talk. There are friendly people in every single country, anywhere you go to. People are awesome you know, when you're in one country people might warn you like 'Oh watch out for this' but once you go there everyone's fine." Suffice to say, the unknown is something that is null and void for her.

A Little Bit of Everything

The rain came to a close about the same time as the conversation did. Slowly but gently as the last question came to mind: "What is your favourite adventure?" This question was followed by a pause. Right after this pause was a surge in her eyes and voice as she first talked about her lack of "favourites". No favourite food, colour, country – nothing. She reasons that "...because there is beauty in absolutely everything. Every country has its pluses no matter what." And in fact that is true based on what I've learned from the 20 or so minutes that we have been speaking with each other. There is beauty everywhere. Thus she kindly responds that there is no favourite adventure because so far — everything has been awesome.



Check out Amani's next adventure at youtube.com/amanikins

Music and the Undying Passion for the Outdoors

Photos Supplied By: Ghida Arnaout

All-around outdoor lover and music enthusiast Ghida Arnaout is pretty much what would fit the description of a "social media icon".

Being out and about in a couple of outdoor adventures and related events in the region, she doesn't waste any time being inactive and can be found preparing for her next adventure or challenge whenever people see her. Of course all while listening to tasteful music and writing, photographing her journeys. There's a reason why her blog is called MonkySeeMonkyDo. Because while she may not be a monkey, she does what she sees and this adds up to her life experiences.

Where does your interest in the outdoors stem from?

The outdoors has been a central part of my life for as long as I can remember. As a kid, I was always happiest outside and never missed an opportunity to monkey around wherever I found an open space. My need to be

outdoors grew ever stronger as I transitioned from school to a job. Whenever I felt unhappy I would pack up my tent and find a place on the beach or on a mountain somewhere near Dubai and just spend my weekend there.

With so many outdoor activities you can do. What are you planning to try out next?

I love trying new things and learning new sports. I recently started shooting an adventure show called "Pulse of Adventure" for the channel Quest Arabiya and it includes experiencing sports that I already do such as deep water soloing and mountaineering and ones that I have never tried such as learning how to skydive and abseiling into sinkholes! The next thing on the list is kitesurfing.

We read that you're quite a climber; can you tell us about your most memorable climb?

My most memorable climb was definitely the time I attempted to lead climb a 5c grade route that I had never even top roped before! Before the climb, I was anxious about the prospect of such a daunting and new experience.

If the outdoors was your muse, what song would you dedicate to him/her and why?

Explosions in the Sky' "Your Hand in Mine". This song is from a very special album to me called "The Earth is Not a

Cold Dead Place". It's just full of emotions.

As an adventure and music blogger, how are you inspiring women to be more active?

Being raised in the Arab world and regardless of how much women are aspiring and achieving, I still feel there is this misconception that women are not capable of taking care of themselves in the wilderness or travelling alone. By doing exactly that, whether it's planning a girls' camping trip or travelling solo, I prove not only to myself but also to my society that women are not only capable of having those experiences, but must have them.

Lastly, what is your motivation to do more outdoor activities?

Inspiring other people to do them as well. I believe we are put on this Earth to explore it. And as cliché as "life is too short" might sound, it is actually very true. Life's responsibilities might take us and we become lazy and keep saying one day we will do this and one day we will do that. I think the outdoors brings us back to our true essence. Make that day today.

Want some adventure on your feed? Check out Ghida's spaces on the wide Internet at www.monkyseemonkydo.com or on her Instagram/Twitter handle @monkyseemonkydo



HIGH FLYIN' IT!

Interview By: Keith Perena
Photos Supplied By: Anke Brandt

Awe, complete awe — that was what defined our meeting with 32-year old, German kitesurfer Anke Brandt. Marketing and project manager by trade and an athlete by passion, Anke is set to conquer the world stage as the first woman to travel from Bahrain to the UAE using a kiteboard (a 24h, 550km non-stop ride!). And if we knew one thing from her that day it's that the fastest and most beautiful way is on the waters and in the skies.

Hello! Tell us a little bit about yourself...

Hi! I am Anke a kitesurfer from Germany with a Marketing and Project Management background. I have lived in Bahrain for the past five years after spending some time in New Zealand.

When did kitesurfing become a part of you?

It was in 2008 when I took my first kite lesson in New Zealand. I instantly liked it but it took me another year to fully get into it. This was when I moved to Bahrain. It's a lot easier to learn in warmer

waters as you do spend some time swimming around before you are able to ride.

What else can Anke Brandt do other than kitesurf?

I am all about water, outdoor sports and activities! Since I was little, I spend many holidays on sailboats or going camping with my family. I also love hiking and camping. Last year I got my paraglider license and I am wakeboarding when there is no wind. Recently, I also tried to get into surfing. So there is always something to do for me and there many things I would like to try, such as climbing.

Can you tell us more about your mission?

The GET Kite Mission - Kitesurf Arabia was inspired by a sailing tour and a guy call Sami Al Kooheji who sailed the distance in 2007. I thought then that "...if you can go with a sailboat, it must be possible by kite."

This will be a 550km long journey that could take me up to 24h. This means a 24h nonstop ride on the board in wind and weather from Bahrain to the UAE. With this trip I have the chance to break my own World Record of the Longest Distance Kitesurfed by a Female. The main aim however is to raise awareness and funds for a charity organisation called Wings for Life.



Their mission is to find a cure for spinal cord injury.

What motivated you to take this challenge on?

The first time I went around Bahrain I just wanted to organize a charity event for Wings for Life. It was just a fun event we planned and only as we went along, it turned out that this could be a World Record.

With this trip I now want to challenge myself and support Wings for Life again.

I love going the distance on a kite and with this trip I can also really push my limits while hoping to inspire others to follow their own dreams. You can archive the things you dream about if you believe in yourself and never be shy to ask for help as well.

How are you training for the big day?

My training is a combination of weight lifting, cardio, yoga and kitesurfing. This is all balanced out on a weekly schedule with a one day break a week, if there is no wind.



It is also important to follow a food plan to have enough energy for the workouts.

In addition I go on extended kite sessions exceeding two to three hours on the water alone to get used to the feeling and I will also attend a few boat rides from Bahrain to the UAE to get to know the waters a little and to have an idea of what to expect.

How are you encouraging more ladies to participate in kitesurfing or other outdoor activities?

Currently I am a kite instructor and try to take as many women on board as possible. I participate in female only events and am always happy to have a chat with whoever has questions. I try to live by example and hope I can inspire other girls to pick up a sport or activity they have been dreaming about doing.

Your advice for those who are getting started?

My main advice is to find a group, a club or a friend to get started with. This will help you to stay motivated. Don't

get discouraged if it takes you a while to get the hang of things. Enjoy the way of getting to know a new sport and celebrate the small steps you take. The main thing is that you have fun with what you do!

Last question: Do you have a mantra you tell yourself before going off in the wind? Would you like to tell us?

I don't really have a mantra

but what I do is listen to myself before getting ready and I always ask myself "Am I ready to go with the wind?"

You can't go against the wind and you can't control it, so you must be prepared to go with the wind and enjoy it. You must be alert at all times as the wind is never constant. If I don't feel good, I choose not to go out at times as lack of concentration can easily lead to incidents and injuries.



THE LADIES OF YAS CYCLES



Words By: Amy Carter

The Yas Cycles Ladies Race Team was born out of a passion for cycling and a want to encourage other women to get out and enjoy riding a bike.

As a team, we started off just riding together each week on the organized weekend rides from the Yas Cycles shop, and the occasional rides at the Yas Marina Circuit during the week. When you ride with others, you tend to push yourself a lot more, and this in turn makes you stronger as a rider. The more we trained together, the more we improved as a group and that's how the race team was formed.

Since forming the team back in October last year, we have taken part in races all across the region and have had some amazing results. At the Al Wathba APR Series held at the Al Wathba Cycle Track, Abu Dhabi, the GMS Yas Ladies have made regular appearances on the podium during the first series, which started back in October. The team also took third place for their first Emirates Team Time Trial at the Al Qudra Track back in January. Shortly after that three of our girls took top ten finishes in the Mini Dubai Tour on the 30th Jan. Some really amazing results, in such a short space of time, and this is something that we all find very motivating.

Aside from the team, as women cyclists we wanted to encourage other women to get onto a bike and enjoy cycling too. This is why we created our GMS Yas Ladies Group Ride at the Yas Marina Circuit every Sunday night. The group is open to all ages and abilities, and is there to encourage women to ride safely and confidently with others. There are many women who you see on the track cycling alone, whether through choice or simply because they don't know anyone who they can ride with, so it's great to be able to offer a group ride where ladies can ride with others and gain confidence in their cycling together. I think as women we unfortunately tend to have the mentality that we may not be good enough, or strong enough, yet when you see some of these ladies on the bike, they are amazing cyclists! Those who are just starting out as riders get stronger and more confident each week, and this is truly inspiring. You can see from the rate that the group is growing that this is something that women cyclists are hopefully benefiting from. When I started cycling back in June last year, there wasn't an option for



me to join an organized women's only ride in Abu Dhabi so I think that this is a great concept.

Back to racing, with the season in full swing and a busy race calendar a head, the Yas Cycles ladies hope to keep up the momentum as a team, and continue doing well in what we enjoy best. Cycling is a great way to bring like-minded individuals together, making it accessible for everyone to take part. We hope to see a big rise in the amount of female cyclists out there in Abu Dhabi this year. We are sure that with the right support and encouragement, this will definitely happen.

A relatively new team, the Yas Cycles Ladies Team is comprised of Claire Myers, Amy Carter, Helen Martin, Amber Harding, Vicky Howat, and LJ Usher. A very active group inside the field of cycling, the ladies' goal is to bring more women into cycling and they have group rides every week. Get to know them more at facebook.com/yasmenaladies or visit facebook.com/yascyclesuae



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THE LUCKY NUMBER 8

Interview By: Keith Perena

Photos By: Keith Perena and Usman Oluwaseyi

According to a lot of cultures, eight is a lucky number. It symbolizes growth and that seems to be the case for the BeSport Ladies Cycling Team – an eight-woman group of cyclists.

What is interesting of note is that this is the first time the team is coming together. With the women's league already in full swing since its foundation last summer, the BeSport ladies are doubling up their efforts in order to make the most out of the first season. OutdoorUAE caught up with some of the ladies while they were practicing near Skydive Dubai and it was the perfect opportunity to check if the lucky number eight is working for them.

Halfway through the season, what are some aspects that you are working on?

Helle Bachofen von Echt, Team Leader: Every single cyclist in the team has their own strength and weakness. Right now we're be focusing on getting to know each other's strength and weaknesses and how we work together as a team — it's all



about actually getting a team to work together.

Bianca Bea: We definitely have to train together more often as we haven't trained that much as a team.

What riding conditions would be a dream come true for each of you?

Sarah Butler: Definitely a downhill tailwind, flying away [laughing] like a breakaway situation!

Roisin Thomas: Perfect conditions for me would be a super fast, flat 40k with lots of attacks to make it more exciting.

Lisa Hancox: Nice temperature and little wind!

HBvE: If we could have races every single weekend, we have the opportunity to test different tactics. Another thing that would be a dream come true for me is one big UAE team raced to UCI level that races locally and internationally.

BB: I love climbing mountains so anything related to that because I'm more of a long distance climber

How has cycling improved you as a woman?

HBvE: Competitive cycling is continuously making me stronger at life – stronger in mind, body. It has changed me as a person and has given me drive and dedication and

also impacted the way I structure things in my life.

RT: Routine, discipline, eating better, optimism! I think if I didn't cycle for three days I would be sad [soft chuckle] and being able to know that I am able to compete with men in a peloton? It's a very empowering feeling.

BB: Most of what have been said resonates with me but also for me, it helps me be more organized with my time because I am a teacher by trade. Also cycling has given me time to reflect on my life, my sport and in my day job.

SB: It's another challenge for me and my life. I now have set goals for every race and I feel accomplished whenever I achieve them at the end of the day. I'm also learning a lot from Helle and Roisin's experience so I could grow as a rider for the next season.

LH: Given a sport with low impact to build strength and competition, the sport transfers perspective and skills into many other aspects of my life and work.

How does your team contribute to the spread of female cycling in the region?

RT: I think what separates BeSport from all the other teams in the league is their commitment to the training, and their support. Seeing the BeSport van at 5:30 in the morning at a race sets my mind at ease.

LH: It enables individuals to join at various levels to gain experience in cycling - we help each other and learn from each other to develop in the sport.

Lastly, what is the most important lesson you have learned from each other?

HBvE: As the team leader I have learned that every individual is



different and it's really important that we know, understand and we accept each person is there for a different reason and make sure we cater for everybody's motivational drive to make the team work well.

RT: Two days in, I've learned about team tactics, talk about what we're going to do in the race and don't show up and have no idea what you're doing.

BB: I think for me I've learned to get out of my comfort level. I realized that I can be competitive and that I can push myself to a higher level and that's proved to be rewarding.

SB: I agree with Bianca, pushing out of the comfort zone. I wasn't very comfortable before but the team was very encouraging and kept me going

and it was that constant challenge and then telling myself just to get on with it. I'm glad that I kept going because it's definitely adding benefits to me.

LH: Commitment and working as a team

Well into the second half of the season, the BeSport Ladies are leading both the team and individual points table. Helle is thrilled with this result and indicates that this is due to having committed team members. Other than this she thanks BeSport for their unwavering support right from the beginning of the league until this very moment.

Other members of the team include Jane Ostman, Najla Al-Jeraiwi and Jelena Vasiljevic.



SOCIAL MEDIA TO SOCIAL FITNESS

Words By: Alice Pargiter

Photos By: Prakash Pancholi

Waiting for a take-away or stuck in in traffic, I'd pass the time flicking through social media, scrolling through an array of strong and inspirational images posted by the running club I only ran with once, and that gym whose membership I "forgot" to renew. "Oooh, a six-pack in six weeks! Gasp, look at that vegan chocolate cake! OMG, if only my legs looked that good in those shorts!"

I liked and followed these fitness and health accounts but the intended inspiration was wasted on me because the truth was that my biweekly kale salads and once-a-week home boot camp wasn't going to get me that six-pack or those legs. The fundamental factor that kept me from achieving any significant fitness and health goals was that I failed to realize that these perfect looking, active individuals are a product of a very different and focused lifestyle; for many of them fitness is their profession.

Without discrediting the positive influence these incredible individuals have in creating a healthier society, completely changing my work and social lifestyle just wasn't going to happen. But why should that stop me from achieving my fitness goals? Surely there is a tweak to my current lifestyle that can still help me achieve them. It was this thought that led me to discover an exciting fit life without compromising my lifestyle.

It was four years ago when, once realizing that physical activity doesn't require me to be an athlete, competitive or completely dedicated, that I first started exercising on a regular basis. I defined fitness for myself and not as I had previously perceived it from the social media. I now believe it's important to be fit and healthy so that I am physically and mentally able to take on life's adventures, but it's also important to me that it's not at the cost of my work and social life.

Like many people, I don't take sport too seriously. A good understanding of the fundamentals definitely makes a sport or activity more enjoyable but



anything more just sucks the fun out of it for me. Over the years I've tried Zumba, swimming, CrossFit, running, spinning, as well as short stints of Les Mills, boot camps, exercise classes and sports. The one constant has been yoga — I love yoga and I'll always make time for it at least once a week.

I've found that not being tied to a gym membership gives me the freedom to try a wide variety of activities. Thanks to my short attention span I'm continually discovering the many fun, and sometimes unusual sports Dubai has to offer. They're mostly after work hours and have no obligations so are a perfect alternative to traditional fitness commitments. My favourites are the various adventure and obstacle races hosted around the UAE during the winter months. Having participated in over 20 races it's fair to say that I'm a seasoned contender. I do every race I can, but can't say I do them particularly well!

With no six-pack in sight, it's fair to say I'm no challenger to the super-fit ladies I follow on social media. Luckily that's not my goal. I live a healthy and full life, fitting physical activity into my lifestyle and not the other way around, and this is what I want to share with others.

I joined up with Abdul R Khatib, a friend of mine and part-time personal trainer, to create a blog about health and fitness. ANAfit Dubai (www.anafitdubai.com), available on Instagram & Facebook, focuses on sharing alternative fitness and events in Dubai.



Through ANAfit Dubai, Abdul and I challenge the perception that "fitness & health is gym and diets" by showing people how fun and inexpensive fitness can be in Dubai. We don't post inspirational "I can" quotes like many other accounts (which I still follow!). We post daily updates on what is happening in and around Dubai. With multiple activities available every day it gives everyone the opportunity to fit something active into their daily schedules.

Run with a club on Sunday, hula-hoop for charity on Monday, Tuesday's sunset yoga, trampolining on Wednesday and dance it off on Thursday. Finish it off with rock climbing or boot camp on Friday and what about a cycle on Saturday? Once you know what's going on in Dubai it's hard to find an excuse not to participate. More surprising is the number of activities that are free or available at a nominal rate for a worthy cause. And for myself, these types of activities provide sufficient training for the more strenuous events I attend.

With a genuine interest in activities and fitness events it's easy for me to stay up-to-date on what's going on in the region, which I then share through ANAfit Dubai. We've even created an event calendar to cover the official health and fitness related events in Dubai

in hopes of making them more accessible.

I blog through ANAfit Dubai too, everything from alternative recipes for my favorite treats using local ingredients to insider information health and wellbeing products available in Dubai. I share local knowledge that will help others achieve a healthier life without major changes to their current lifestyle – hopefully I'm a relatable and realistic inspiration.

I still follow those social media accounts but I recognise that they represent a lifestyle of someone who trains for a living. In accepting that, I have managed to define fitness for myself and found a way to incorporate it into my lifestyle. I can have cake and eat it, as long as it's vegan!



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PRODUCTS

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History Made

Photos Supplied By: Maria Conceicao

It is a beautiful sight to see history being made right before your very eyes. It has a very touchy-feely vibe about it knowing that this one event will become a part of – not only a person's own history but also a history of a group of people. That is what Portuguese expat Maria Conceicao achieved – gaining several World Records all within a span of a single year! If that isn't history, we don't know what is.

Raised in Portugal and based in Dubai, humanitarian Maria Conceicao has conquered the 777 Challenge in a world-record finish in her relentless dedication to raise awareness and funds for underprivileged children living in the slums.

The 777 challenge was the first endurance adventure of its kind that required running seven official marathons over seven continents in seven consecutive days. The event kicked off on February 8 in Australia, followed by consecutive legs that took place in the UAE, France, Tunisia, the United States and Chile. The race hit a snag on its last stage as several attempts to fly to Antarctica were aborted due to bad weather and low visibility. After being stranded in Chile, for 4 days, the team finally got the clearance to fly to Antarctica on February 18th to complete the race.

It was an epic finish nonetheless for Maria, who created history by officially becoming the fastest woman to complete an official marathon in each continent. The previous Guinness World Record was 48 days as opposed to the mere 11 days it took her. The previous record for the fastest woman to complete a marathon and an ultra marathon on each continent was one year and 180 days. Maria completed her marathons and ultra marathons within a year.

These latest achievements take



Maria's record-breaking tally to a total of six, all achieved within 11 months.

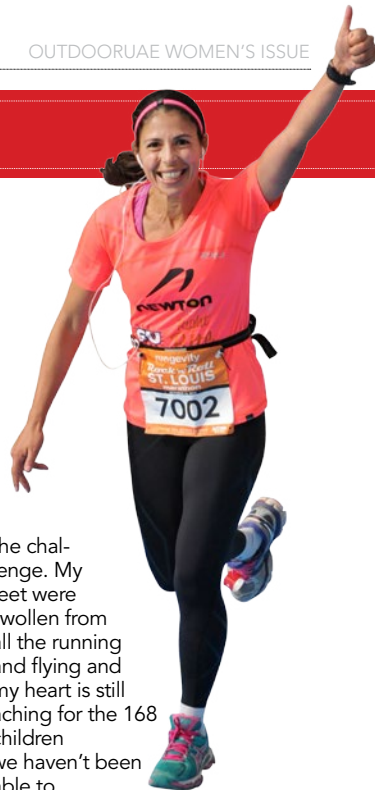
The founder of the Maria Cristina Foundation, the iron-willed Maria pushes her own physical limits to raise awareness and funds for underprivileged children living in the slums of Dhaka, Bangladesh. Exhaustion, body pain, and jet lag aside, Maria said, "I am still finding it hard to believe that I have completed the challenge in 11 days. I am not a fast runner, but I was so determined that nothing would have stopped me from finishing this challenge. Although I trained hard for months to complete the challenge, I do feel very lucky even to just get through. Maybe it is destiny? All I know is that my commitment to help others gives me power to see the challenges through. I ran to secure the future of my 200 children. Our foundation is consistently strong with purpose and vision, but we struggle financially. This will always be the toughest challenge. I hope that my adoptive mother Maria Cristina Matos da Cunha would be proud."

Maria was joined by two other Dubai-based expats – Rosa Areosa and Saul Keens, and Lorena Puica from the UK – all supporters of the foundation. Altogether, the group endeavoured to promote the foundation's cause - to help children in the slums of Dhaka, Bangladesh get a quality education that would lay the foundation for a rewarding career path and help them and their families break the cycle of poverty.

"I have to be honest; there were many tears and difficulties during

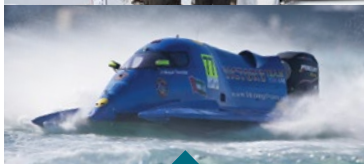
the challenge. My feet were swollen from all the running and flying and my heart is still aching for the 168 children we haven't been able to re-register in the new academic year of 2016. I was hoping to create a media buzz with a success story of fundraising by completing the 777 Challenge. Me alone finishing this challenge will not make it successful; it is only when people come forward and donate that will ultimately make this gruelling challenge worthwhile. I am so thankful to Nabil Dalle for sponsoring me to take part in this event, Imran Ahmed, and Full Potential UK for sponsoring parts of my training. Thank you to Sport in Life Dubai, who provided all my running kit and sports nutrition during the training and the challenge, and thank you to Right Bite for supplying my meals during 777 training."

Maria, a woman with an incredible life-story herself, has recently published her biography, which also tells the story of Maria Cristina Foundation. All proceeds from the book go towards the education of the children living in the slums of Dhaka, Bangladesh. Copies can be purchased by making a donation on the charity's website and informing the administration of your address to send the book to.



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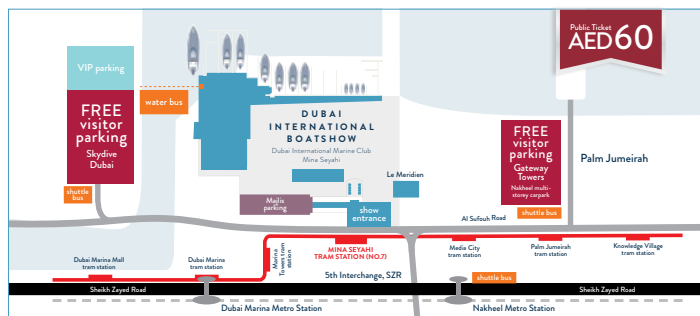
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Show open from 3:00pm ~ 9:30pm daily

Meeting the Empress of Sailing

Words By: Keith Perena

Photos By: Lloyd Images

It is simply... amazing, the way she speaks – soft spoken yet with so much conviction. That is the first thing I saw about Sarah Ayton, OBE.

She has this very interesting way of getting her message across and it is as if when she speaks, people would definitely listen. As the coach of the Oman Air sailing team for the 2016 leg of the Extreme Sailing Series, Sarah is welcoming her new position – after being the tactician of The Wave sailing team. She explains: "I'm a great believer that if you're good enough in my environment, you'll be on the boat. For me I teamed with Oman Air and this year I'll be coaching the team." I quite remember some of her staff referring to her as "The Lady" and it is very... apt so to speak; being the only lady in the Extreme Sailing Series, a name such as The Lady really sticks.

Unnaturally Natural

Sailing didn't come naturally for The Lady. She was raised from a non-sailing background but that didn't stop her father from encouraging her and her brother to take up an interest. She fondly remembers of her first thoughts about sailing: "We tried lots of different sports and then randomly fell upon sailing and it was one of

those things that you know you just had a go at and just really loved." I can see in her eyes, the reflection of the sea as we continued to speak.

She earned worldwide recognition as one the Three Blondes in a Boat alongside Sarah Webb and Pippa Wilson when they bagged a gold medal for sailing in the Yngling class in the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Shortly thereafter, the ladies went their own ways and have become important individuals in the sailing world. For their contributions to the sport, they have received the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire with Sarah attaining the rank of Officer in 2009.

Of Dubai and Other Things

As our conversation went on, I had to ask if she had some time to do other outdoor activities while she was here in Dubai. In a light-hearted manner she quickly responded that "I wouldn't do it, definitely wouldn't do it!" followed by a warm laugh as I asked if she would like to try skydiving in the nearby Skydive Dubai. She then proceeds to remember their arrival in the emirate

while sailing when the rest of the team lifted her up the mast but she asked to be put down after some time.

Despite not being a big fan of heights, what I immediately knew was she was a big fan of watersports and some land-based sports as well. Outside of sailing she does windsurfing, mountain biking, road biking and running. Other than this, she also takes her children out for a day outdoors whether it be rugby, tennis or golf.

Master and Commander

On the field, Sarah takes a very straightforward approach: "I like to keep things simple" summarizes her style in issuing tactics to the team. As the tactician for The Wave last year, this was also the belief that led the team to their overall victory for the 2015 season. She elaborates in her simplistic style: "We just think that we're trying to get this boat around the course as fast as we can." She's also a firm believer in consistency and that you have to be consistent in order to get results,

Adding to this, she says







that it's all about giving a good picture and delivering the information to the rest of team when they need it the most. She adds as well that a running commentary must be avoided so that the important information gets delivered when it's needed the most.

As the coach for Oman Air this year, they are pretty busy with of course the new GC32 as well as the introduction of new formats entering the series. About this, she says: "...it's the first time we had the GC32s so there's lots to learn, lots of boat work. I've got a lot of photos of us all working in the dark with torches on trying to get the boat done." Other than preparing their GC32, they also give sessions with young and aspiring sailors in each of their destinations where she encourages women especially, to have a go at sailing.

A Portrait of the Sailor as a Mother... and Woman

In the final minutes of my time with Sarah, we delved into a more personal aspect of things – her motherhood. She admits that being a sailor and a mother is a real balancing act – one that requires organization and discipline. The mother of two lovely children, Sarah glows with fondness as she is reminded of her children back in the United Kingdom. "They actually enjoy what I am doing, they're following me online when I'm away and it's not a problem" – referring to the times when she is out

.....
"I'm a great believer that if you're good enough in my environment, you'll be on the boat."

at the sea or in foreign lands. She says that the key to their parental relationship has always been good communication and she is quite an expert in that aspect.

Despite being the only woman in the Extreme Sailing Series and being one of the few female coaches in the field of sailing at large, Sarah says that she does not let her gender become a factor. Her opinion can be summarized in her very short statement: "The boys respect me, I respect the boys. We're all five athletes trying to do the best that we can at what we do".

In closing, my last question was about the achievement that she is most proud of. It actually went without saying as she mentioned that it had to be the 2008 Olympic Games. She brings Three Blondes again to mind as they bagged their Olympic gold as a team and everything else followed suit – Double World Champions, European Champions. She also remembers her first gold back in 2004, also in the Yngling class. But she ends her response saying that "...Beijing was probably my best one but the others are very special to me".

As the recorder stops, a silence ensued and this was when it hit me, that Sarah is quite a person to meet; a multi-faceted human with exceptional skills both as a mother and as a sailor and that in her gentle and simplistic ways, she gets the world watching and listening as she coaches the Oman Air team with prowess. At the end of it all, we left the room and she went the other way, probably being called by the seas to take her throne as its empress.



GIRL POWER ON THE WATER

Water sports are adventurous, fun-filled, action-packed and exciting. Both, physical exertion and mental stimulation can be attained in water sports. They offer a visual treat, motivation and an elated feeling. Water sports can be played in, on, or under water.

UAE is one best places for water rides and fun. Beaches and winds are in favour of marine sports lovers. UAE government, RTA, the police and marine authority also encourage and invite all water sports lovers to fulfill their dream in their own way.

When it comes to any sports, women are major part of it. In the UAE, you will find many passionate female athletes and sports enthusiast. Women have turned water sports into their routine exercise in where some water activities really reflect incredible impact on bodies. Let's share some exercising techniques which you can do while you're on the water.

PADDLE BOARDING

Paddle boarding is a true total body workout. It requires you to engage your legs, bottom and core for balance and stability, while you work your arms, back and core to power yourself through the water. And the all over muscle toning isn't the only perk. "The biggest benefit of paddle boarding is that it trains your balance and focus. There is very little room for error if you don't want to keep falling into the water." Pro tip: start with a long, wide board that provides stability, and gradually switch onto shorter, narrower boards for a bigger challenge.

How to train:

Balance is the key to paddle boarding, and it's also the key to training for the sport. Single-leg lunges and single-leg squats are great ways to strengthen your lower body while honing your balance, she says.

Recommended paddle brand:
Jobe Sports New Bamboo SUP



KAYAKING

If you've ever sweated it out on your gym's rowing machine, you know a good stroke is the key to rocking a strapless dress all summer long. And while you wouldn't necessarily think that a seated workout would tone your lower body, better bottom and thighs are among the biggest benefits of kayaking. By squeezing your glutes for turning, balancing and as a source of power, you tone your lower body in constant isometric exercises. For the best workout while paddling, keep your back straight and rotate your torso with each stroke.

How to Train:

The row machine is the perfect full-body workout to prepare for faster and stronger strides in the water. If you're more concerned about cramps than speed, isometric exercises like a plank or a wall sit can strengthen your glutes and minor stabilising muscles in your legs and bottom.



Recommended kayak brand:
Kayaks which have been designed for UAE's weather like Feel Free

WAKEBOARDING/SURFING

Wakeboarder babes are glamorous and for good reason. Riding waves build strong core and legs, while swimming the board back out to water is a nonstop cardio workout. Most importantly, hanging 10 requires intense bursts of efforts. It's like high-intensity interval training class – just with a better view.

How to train:

Make sure to log plenty of cardio workouts to up your endurance and workouts that mimic the pop-up move of surfing. Think planks, pushups, burpees and jumps.

Recommended wakeboarding brand:
Jobe Sports New Grace Wakeboard for women



It is always recommended that you should choose quality safety items through the authorised dealers such as Al Yousuf Motors where not only quality is good but also you can find their price very competitive, above all, you can find Al Yousuf Showrooms throughout UAE. From training to provision of complete water sports with world renowned safety items, Al Yousuf Motors is always there to assist you in your adventurous endeavours by only following one rule and that is "customer satisfaction."

Please contact us any time for any water sports assistance. It will be our pleasure to assist you.

Email: saferide@alyousuf.com

Contact No: 050 3790737

OVERLANDING THROUGH A MOTHER'S EYES



Words + Photos By: Kirsty Larmour

I think most parents would say that travelling with their kids opens up their eyes to people and places in a whole, new, incredible way. People extend the hand of kindness to kids so readily. Our girls could have eaten their way through Iran for free, they got given so much food – including lots of fruit which was very refreshing as one of the challenges on the road is staying healthy.

People want to show kids the best of their country so you get unique insights and shown hidden gems. It also forces you to slow down and soak the experiences up. Kids can be overwhelmed easily by new experiences so travelling at a more leisurely pace is a great way to see the world – no one wants to visit a museum every day or in every city so you become a little choosier about how you spend your precious travel time. Free time needs to be taken advantage of – be that running up and down mountains, taking regular



driving breaks so little legs can be stretched or finding a park somewhere.

Taking a big overland journey with your kids definitely presents some challenges that are different to throwing a backpack over your shoulder and setting off by yourself! Firstly, you need to be a lot more prepared and organised – often when you need something, you need it NOW! And you don't have time to wait till you can find a shop. You

need to think seriously about any health risks, how you'll handle them and prepare accordingly. Schooling is another challenge and parents need to decide if they will want their kids to go back into the school system after their travels, and if so how they get through that - if an unschooling approach works for them, or maybe more formalised homeschooling following a set curriculum.

Travelling without a large



amount of toys and gadgets means children's minds are free to make things up as they go along. Children can become so much more creative with unstructured time - a stick on a beach creates an art project, flowers are arranged and the car decorated. Constantly moving can be unsettling, or used as an opportunity to learn to embrace change and accept new challenges, and we all learn important life skills like compromise and team work when living in such a confined space. Hopefully this adaptability will hold them in good stead as they progress through life.



Kirsty Larmour is a wife and mum based out of Abu Dhabi. In 2014 she and her family packed up their home and set off on a one year, 60,000km overland adventure that took them from their UAE home through Iran, across Europe, down to Morocco and eventually back to Abu Dhabi via Russia and Central Asia. They drove in an old Nissan Patrol, so old it still had a tape deck! She and her husband travelled with their two daughters who were 8 and 6 years old at the start of their journey. Kirsty talks to us about the unique perspectives taking this kind of trip with your kids.

You can follow the travels of the Larmour family on Facebook ([facebook.com/Letters-fromtheLarmours](https://www.facebook.com/Letters-fromtheLarmours)) and their blog (www.lettersfromthelarmours.com), and their more recent adventures on their Instagram handle @kirstylarmour



MOTHERHOOD MEETS MOVEMENT

2XU Launches Active
Maternity Compression Range
with pre- and post-natal
pregnancy compression

Words + Photos Supplied By: Sport in Life

Combining the best of its world-leading compression technology, 2XU have launched a new Active Maternity range designed to provide support, flexibility and protection to help women remain active, strong and comfortable during and post pregnancy.

Specially designed to provide extra support to areas subject to strain - including the lower back and pelvic floor muscles - the range of shorts, full length and three-quarter tights assist to reduce swelling during pregnancy, help to boost energy and reduce discomfort overall. The range will help women stay active to best prepare their body for labour, birth and recovery.

"Giving birth is like running a marathon," says Claire Ryan, 2XU's resident physiotherapist and specialist in pre- and post-natal exercise. "It requires stamina, determination and focus, and staying active and healthy will help prepare you for the hard work that lies ahead."

2XU saw a gap in the market for reliable, comfortable and effective compression garments for pregnant and postnatal women looking for some support to help alleviate the varied musculoskeletal issues that occur during this period.



"While there are other maternity braces, hosiery and tights on the market, we wanted to combine practicality with comfort and style," Claire added.

Specially designed for the changing needs of the body, 2XU have launched both a pre-natal and post-natal range.

Pre-natal

Designed for focused support and all day comfort, 2XU's pre-natal tights feature a tummy panel made from highly breathable and seam free material which grows with you during pregnancy.

The powerful PWX graduated compression fabric targets the lower back to support the upper body, while enhancing posture and breathing. The leg compression assists with circulation which reduces swelling in the ankles and feet, and the tights also support the pelvic floor with a double-layer 70D compression fabric.

Post-natal

With a high, wide waistband and single front panel to improve comfort and help support caesarian scars, a double layer of PWX fabric also supports and promotes recovery of the abdominal wall.

PWX and Powermesh fabrics target the lower back to in turn support the upper body, the pelvic floor is again supported, and the graduated leg compression aids in reducing swelling in the ankles and feet.



Pre-Natal Tights cost 675 AED from GO Sport stores. The full range of pre- and post-natal compression tights, including 3/4 tights and short options, are available from Beyond Fitness at City Centre Me'aisem, starting from 575 AED.

TRI'd It, Loved It

Interview By: Keith Perena
Photos Supplied By: Sarah Maina

Hailing from Denmark, 29-year old Sarah Maina has always been a lady with one foot in the outdoors. Coming from an extremely active family, she has done everything from hiking, to running and eventually triathlon. In this one-on-one interview, we sit down with Sarah to find out how she became who she is now – one of the UAE's premier lady triathletes.

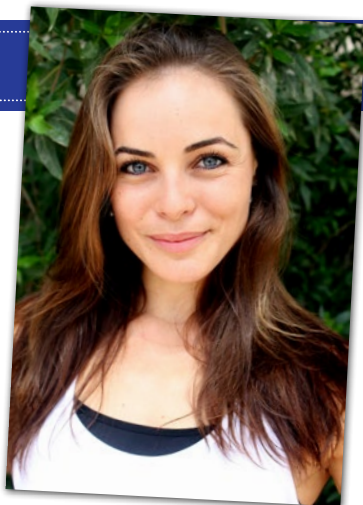
Were you always into the outdoors growing up?

Yeah I was! I come from a very active family and my vacations has always included a certain outdoor activity. For example in the summers we would go to Greece where we'll go hiking all day long – me, my sisters and my parents. In the winter's we'll go skiing and my mum and dad are also runners so I remember running with them whenever they went for a couple of rounds in the forest. My parents are doctors by trade and my dad is a triathlete and I kind of take from them. I'm also the most active kid in school back then, climbing trees and jumping around!

When did triathlon enter the picture in Sarah's life?

A bit over a year ago, there was the Dubai International Triathlon and a friend of mine asked if I wanted to join it as a relay which meant that we had to do one part each. I remember that I was quick in saying: "Oh I want to do the swim" because I've never done triathlon before, and the swim seemed like the most doable part. So we signed up and for two months I started swimming training and enjoyed that with my friend. We did the DIT relay and it was such a blast. It was such an easy entrance for me to





triathlon because my part was only 36 minutes. Despite not being a full triathlon, I got a taste of the experience that day which made me realize that "Hey, this is something I might actually be good at." From that day on I started training for triathlon – I started running, and went to Al Qudra on Fridays to rent a bike and do one loop with my friends as sort of a social ride.

My first real triathlon however was in Abu Dhabi, a sprint distance race and it was a really cool experience. I didn't know what I was doing [chuckle] but I got through it and finished third in my age category. That first race made me hungry for more.

Did you have some doubts early on that maybe this wasn't for you?

Of course! Whenever you do something you don't know. Triathlon isn't just anything. Triathlon takes so much vocation if you want to do it well. It's very time consuming and expensive. So I entered not having any expectations about how long I would do it. One thing I just knew for sure is this is a sport that can challenge me and teach me certain things no matter how long it's going last for me. My mind was pretty open about it when I entered it.

What inspires you to push forward?

The knowledge that my body



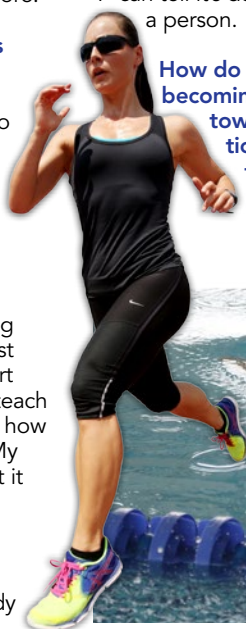
and mind is constantly getting tougher through triathlon — that is a huge motivator for me. Triathlon makes me see my strength and weaknesses, which I didn't see clearly before. For me it's also when I'm getting results and noticing how my body gets stronger physically and my results improve gradually, that's a very motivating factor. That's why I'm so passionate about it - because of the way I can tell it's developing me as a person.

How do you see triathlon becoming more open towards women participants especially the UAE?

I think some people, when

they think about triathlon; they perceive it to be a very masculine sport. But that is not the case especially in the UAE because there are relay races where girls who haven't tried before can partake in whichever leg they feel comfortable doing. Also there's something called the Super Sprint distance nowadays which is a 400m swim, 10km bike ride and 2.5km run and I think that's manageable for most ladies.

Then there's also the community which of course has a competitive nature to it but what they are overflowing with is support and acceptance of any kind of level as long as you have the will to train. It's not really a tough community but rather a very warm and



welcoming community that helps each other out.

As an individual, how do you believe are you encouraging more ladies to take part in outdoor activities?

Well I've been doing triathlon for over a year now so I hope that I'm inspiring ladies to do triathlon and showing them how far they can get with consistency and hard work.

Do you receive some feedback from other women on the field?

I've gotten a couple of responses. People saying I'm an inspiration to them which I'm elated about. It's an amazing feeling to do what you really like and then in the process, actually make other people want to work harder on their own training.

The most memorable moment in your tri career?

It would have to be that very first triathlon relay I did over a year ago. Although I only did a small part, what is precious about that experience were the feelings going through my body and mind leading up to the race and during the race. The feeling where you're both ecstatic and nervous then the action starts and finishes, and then there's this satisfaction and happiness from doing something outside your comfort zone. That memory keeps me going when things are not very fun.

Are there any big event's your preparing yourself for?

I usually participate in Sprint distance events (750m swim, 20km bike, 5km run) as I'm very much into short and intense races, so I don't really need



a long downtime. I do Sprint distances regularly – around one to two, even three races a month. There's a lot of races to join in before the season closes so a lot of action to be had. As of late however, I'm currently working on my running as I'm not a very good runner despite growing up running. There's this certain pace I'm working towards which will take some time to master so I'm focused on that aspect.

So how are you working on your running?

I'm currently working with my running coach, Neil Flanagan for half a year now and with my swimming coach Rory Buck to improve my run. Right now I have to train five days a week with two sessions per day. We do three full runs a week one of which is an aerobic run which focuses on heart rate; and then twice we do a "brick" run after cycling where I'll do a full bike session and the immediately jump off the bike and do a 10-15 minute run to work on my transition – getting my legs adjusted from the bicycle to the running. Majority of my training for the run is about intervals and pace.

What would be your advice for the ladies who would like to give it a "tri"?

First would be to get a coach as it makes a world of difference when you have someone there to answer all of your questions and make you feel safe in what you're doing. Other than that, getting into the sport is all about confidence and a coach will make

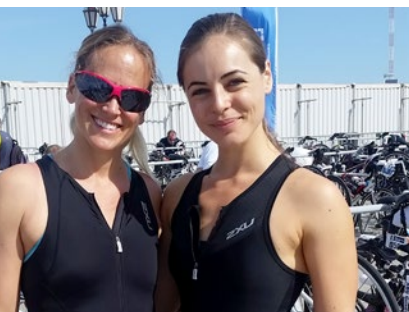
sure that you're starting exactly at your level thus building up your confidence in the process. Second would be to join in on the community so you have some fun too. Lastly be patient, start humbly – don't aim for a half ironman on your first go, but rather, take on the shorter distances first.

What is the most challenging episode in a triathlete's life?

When you hit a plateau – for me and other people as well that is very dreadful. Because when you're doing everything right, eating right, sleeping right, following your training schedule but nothing happens it is very disconcerting and can go on for months - which is very frustrating especially if you're very passionate about it. That for me is one of the biggest challenges a triathlete could face.

Thank you for your time Sarah! So how can people get to know more about what you do?

They can definitely check out my Instagram handle, @sarahmaina where I share my training days and some info on my supporters such as The Cycle Hub, Enduro Sport, FitRepublik, and Fitness Fuel.



YOGAFIRST MIDDLE EAST

Training Yoga Teachers in Dubai Since 2010

Recently yoga has made headlines in Dubai and is increasingly popular with both expats and local residents alike. More and more people nowadays are discovering and appreciating the many health benefits of practicing yoga. They have discovered how yoga is both a cure for the modern stresses of life and a preventative measure for disease and poor health.

If you are one of these people and you feel passionate about sharing yoga with friends, family and possibly earning income from it whether it is through teaching others directly or opening a studio, one of the first things to consider is enrolling in a Yoga Teacher Training Course to deepen your knowledge, gain some experience of how life changing yoga can be and improve your skills as a practitioner and teacher.

Finding a good Yoga Teaching Training School can be tricky. It is easy to be drawn in by yoga masters in flashy poses or bikini – clad beautiful bodies on the posters. But the question remains: will this school actually make me a good yoga teacher?



Will this school help me in my future endeavours in the yoga industry? Will I find the answers I have been looking for both personally and professionally?

Of all the yoga schools in Dubai the oldest and most reputable is Yogafirst Middle East. Since 2010, this Yoga Alliance Accredited Teacher Training School has trained more teachers in the GCC countries than any other establishment.

"When I first started running the course back in 2010 I had only six students. Now we run our Yoga Alliance 200 hour Certificate Course thrice a year in Dubai alone and once in Abu Dhabi. We also run courses in Kuwait and Jordan. But more popular I think is the Swing Yoga courses which we run throughout the Middle East as well as in Asia Pacific countries as well. Several of our graduates have opened their own studios, manage other studios, or have grown into very

popular teachers in the yoga scene here. Because of this we are very well connected with the yoga community when you are looking for work after graduation." says Peewee Sanchez, training director of Yogafirst.

When asked what the requirements are to apply for a yoga teacher training course, she had this to say: "The only requirements are to have the diligence to do the work and have an open mind: be like a sponge. You don't have to be super bendy to be a good yoga teacher. Sometimes it is great to start from a challenging place so you know how people feel when they first start practicing. What will make you a good yoga teacher is your journey and how yoga has helped you personally. All the rest can be learned and trained during the course."



For more information, like Yogafirst Middle East on Facebook or log onto their website at www.yogafirst-me.com

THE BLUECOAT LADIES OF CYCLE HUB

Words + Photos By: The Cycle Hub Ladies



According to several American and European surveys, the colour blue is most commonly associated with a couple of things including distance, confidence and infinity to name a few. While the colour also lends itself to a couple more interpretations, the aforementioned three are the ones that resonate most with the ladies comprising the Cycle Hub Ladies Team.

All kitted in colour blue, they are confident, they can definitely go the distance and what distance would that be? Infinity and beyond. Let's meet the entire ladies' team!



Aimee Wright
Team Leader

I have been racing since I was 13, everything from criteriums, cyclocross,

MTB, track, road, triathlon and duathlons. Growing up in Holland, I raced as a junior on the track and road. While living in the UK, I raced for a women's team, competing in the National Road Series. I have been involved with cycling my whole life, due to it being a family business – my parents own a cycling holiday company in the French Pyrenees – so I spend my summers training and guiding guests around the mountains. The next event I am focusing on is the ADNOC Challenge; last year I won this event, so looking to retain my title.

Emma Dickie

I started riding a mountain bike when I decided I didn't like catching buses to university and had no interest in getting a drivers' license. Road cycling started when I moved to Dubai in 2008 and I joined the Cycle Hub Racing Team in 2015. Cycling for me isn't just about riding a bike, racing and competing (although that is fun). I ride because I have the largest amount of passion for bikes and because cycling makes me feel ecstatic, it clears my mind, and it also gives me energy and it makes me feel fearless. I have met some of my best friends on bikes. Plus it is the most incredible way to travel and see the world. The greatest adventures I have had on my bike have been on a ride from China to Istanbul and another one across the Himalayas. The road from Hatta mountains to Kalba is one of my favourite routes to ride anywhere in the world - and it is right at our doorstep!



at the Autodrome on Wednesdays as I got more serious with my triathlon training.

I have joined races quite frequently during this past year as I love the thrill of racing and it keeps me working hard to progress for my next coming race; a great motivator! Also, every race brings new experience and knowledge about the sport and how I manage to push my body to the sweet spot of max performance without experiencing an energy crash, or finishing with energy left in the tank which is a bit of a challenge.

I focus on sprint triathlons but have started to join more bike races recently. So far I have joined two Team Time Trial races with the Cycle Hub Ladies Team placing 1st and 2nd, and completed the bike leg of the Ironman 70.3 Dubai in a relay team where we placed 1st.

As a triathlete, biking is my strongest discipline so being part of the Cycle Hub Ladies Team was a great opportunity for me to join another kind of racing: with girls only, in a team and going all out in one discipline. We have a great team spirit on the team and manage to mix tough biking with a lot of fun.

Aimee Davidson

I started mountain biking back in the UK in 2007 and regularly rode in the manmade trail centres of



North Wales and the rugged terrain of the Peak District. The sole purpose of taking up mountain biking was to change my lifestyle and shift some weight that I had gained in my university days. There was rarely a weekend when my husband and I wouldn't be on our bikes somewhere in the country come rain or shine!

I moved to Dubai in 2011. I quickly realised that it was much easier to jump on a road bike



Sarah Maina

I started biking as part of my entry to triathlon one and a half years ago and bought my first bike a few months later. I started out doing easy rides around the Al Qudra track with friends on Friday mornings but added rides

than to drive out of town on an early morning to beat the heat mountain biking. I found various cycling groups online and tested them out, I was regularly dropped or finding myself hiding in the peloton just to keep up! It was time to up my game!

The Cycle Hub Ladies Team came around at just the right time. I had been a coached rider for six months and was starting to see improvement in my riding around the time I was asked to join the team. Being part of The Cycle Hub team is great socially, the satisfaction of promoting the brands and the support and encouragement from the rest of the team — male and female sides. Being part of The Cycle Hub team has given me the opportunity, confidence and encouragement to want to do well in races.

Mariana Marx



Growing up in South Africa, it is the perfect place for outdoor sports. I started with road cycling while in high school, representing my province.

Moving to Dubai, I started doing triathlons, including a full Ironman and a few 70.3 events. I also enjoy a bit of mountain biking, here in the UAE and I like to explore the Showka and Oman trails. I was fortunate to participate in The Trans-Hajar Event and Cape Epic 2013. Working full time as the Director of Operations in Wild Wadi Water Park, I try to get out on the bike at least three times a week.

Lucy Woollacott

I was a competitive swimmer in my childhood and only turned to triathlon last year when I purchased my first ever bike



from the Cycle Hub. I was totally clueless and didn't know the first thing about cycling. My first triathlon season was a great success (helped enormously by my super fast bike!) and I really enjoyed developing new skills on the bike. I am now looking forward to racing with the Cycle Hub Women's Team and continuing that development. I have two young daughters, and am an accountant by profession.



Liset Burguera

Hello. My name is Liset Burguera. A 30 year old hybrid from Venezuela and The Netherlands, which means born and raised in Venezuela to a Dutch mother and luckily passport as well.

Since I was a kid, I've loved sports - any kind! I would try a different one every two months (ask my mom, she wasn't very amused). In Venezuela we don't have very good sports facilities or trainers, so I was just climbing trees, rollerblading, doing aerobics.

It wasn't until I moved to Holland that I discovered what "real sports" is about. I wanted to learn to ice skate and lucky me... during one of my rollerblade afternoons, I met the most crazy and dedicated short track trainer in the world, who taught me all I know today about training. I was training twice a day, filling training and nutrition logs, doing heavy weights (specifically legs), BUT... I was very bad at it. I truly believe that you can only be good at short track if you were born with blades on.



However, the story doesn't end here. Short trackers bike a lot during the summer season! Good for me! I learned not to be dropped and got a new passion; cycling!

When I came to Dubai (almost three years ago) to work as Cabin Crew for Emirates Airlines, the first thing I searched for was cycling groups. I remember going to the Autodrome for a test ride and since that day I haven't been off my bike.

Here's some of the team's achievements in the UAE...

The Cycle Hub Ladies Results

1st	Ramadan NAS road race (Dubai)
1st	ADNOC championships (Dubai)
1st	Mirfa road race (Dubai)
3rd	Dubai horse triathlon
2nd	Hatta Endurance 6 hour MTB race (Hot 6)
1st	Dubai Pulse ride MTB
1st	BeSport Individual TT
1st	Team - Emirates TTT
1st	Spinneys 92 challenge
1st	Elite female LIWA Challenge
1st	Mini Dubai Tour – female race

L'AMOUR DE LA MER

Interview By: Keith Perena

Photos Supplied By: Slava Noor

First times are always memorable – in any aspect, anything at all. There is a profound beauty that can be experienced when it is being experienced for the first time. Such is the case of Slava Noor.

As a child born in the landlocked country of Kazakhstan, the ocean was something of a myth – something that could be found only on the pages of geography or science textbooks. It was not until she was 16 that she has caught her first look at the ocean – The Atlantic to be specific and it was also here where she has also experienced a whiff of ocean breeze running through her system. Such is the story of first times. And such is Slava's perennial romance with the oceans.

Where does your love story with the ocean begin?

I wish I could say that I grew up by the ocean but coming from a landlocked country - Kazakhstan, I have not seen the ocean until I was 16. My first encounter was with the Atlantic Ocean during my trip to Florida, USA and I was simply mesmerized both by the power and the beauty of it. But the real love for the blue started when I came to Dubai nearly ten years ago. This was where I learned to swim and to feel comfortable in the water. About four years ago, I picked up scuba diving and got completely hooked on it. Recently I started freediving and although I am still a beginner, I can see how much it has enhanced my life.

We read that you are quite an ocean advocate. Do you have any causes you support?

I try to stay active when I am in the UAE by joining clean up events or attending seminars

related to diving or marine life. I started a project called "Art 4 Ocean" at

a local school in Maldives that later took place in a summer camp in Dubai. Its goal is to educate children on the importance of a healthy ocean, create ocean art and raise awareness by sharing it with local communities. I plan to team up with a marine biologist and organise more regular ocean art sessions as they proved to be both very fun and effective.

What else does Slava do outdoors?

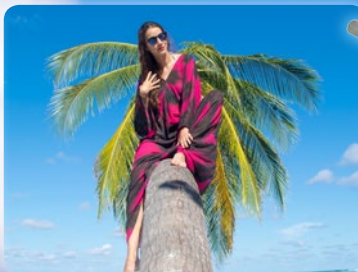
I am definitely a water baby so everything else happens around that. I developed a special

love for kayaking, whether in the mangroves of Abu Dhabi or in the crystal clear waters of Maldives overlooking coral reefs. When it is warmer, I swim at night quite often on Jumeirah Open Beach, it is pretty much my "after party" spot whatever I am doing. Now that it is a bit chilly, I prefer to focus on my freediving training in the pool until it gets a bit warmer for diving in the sea.

Do you have any favourite diving locations in the UAE?

Like many other divers I really enjoy diving in Fujairah for its visibility and good sites where sharks and rays are often spotted. Lately I also frequented the





western coast and Sir Bani Yas island became a favourite spot thanks to its natural beauty and some interesting sites. Dubai also has a few good wrecks that are fun to explore.

What other outdoor activities are you interested in trying out?

The only way to know if you like something or not is to try it so I choose to give a shot to all the fun sports available around me. I tried windsurfing during my trip to Maldives and it did look like a sport I could enjoy. I would like to give it some more time once I travel. The next cool thing in the UAE seems to be hydro watersports and I am planning to try it out ASAP, I already met a guy who offers five different ways to do it so you can see the update on my blog (www.thepinkfins.com) soon.

As a sport, how accessible is diving for women?

I strongly believe that diving is for everyone. Although there are more male divers than female divers here, the sport itself holds no barriers for women. We are just as capable as men and although it does help to be fit, the sport does not require you to be an athlete.

The psychological aspect of

diving should not be diminished and naturally women long for feeling safe and comfortable at all times. I think the key to enjoy exploring the underwater world is finding a good instructor who is both professional and trustworthy. As a woman, I personally want to feel safe and secure and know I can count on my instructor in every way.

Any advice for ladies that want to try diving out?

Do not wait for a perfect time to start living fully; do not delay until you are married or until you are richer and so on. Life is short, so go have fun! Once you decide to start diving, do your research: find a good dive centre and an instructor you are comfortable with. Be open about your needs and ask questions. Be brave, you can do it!

Trivia: What is the weirdest thing you have seen underwater?

This is an interesting question! On my last trip to Maldives I encountered a school of almost twenty beautiful eagle rays and it was simply mind blowing. I have always adored rays for their royal grace and seeing them so close was a dream come true!

Lastly, what do you feel when you getting into your gear, ready to take the plunge into the deep blue?

It is a cocktail of feelings actually. On one hand, I get very excited and ready to explore the blue with the "let's do this" attitude. On another hand, I have a feeling of openness to another adventure, whatever it will bring. And lastly, there is a feeling of coming home, because once my pink fins are on, I think of myself as a fish, a mermaid, one out of the many colourful creatures of the ocean...



The Truth Behind Beauty Products and Cosmetics

Why you should care about what you put on your skin

Words + Photos By: Ivana Chiles

Dear readers, this month's issue is devoted to us, women. We all want to be healthy, fit and beautiful with glowing, radiant skin.

Perhaps you are one of many who still believe, that expensive cosmetics and make up will make you look younger and prettier. Let's reveal the truth behind the beauty and cosmetics industry to make you aware, what is a quality product, why stay away from most of those glamorous looking packages and what are your best options when it comes to skincare.

At the time of writing this article I picked up 7DAYS newspaper at our front door and read the main title: "The Ugly Truth of Beauty Industry". It claims, that Abu Dhabi Municipality inspectors have visited 2,875 beauty salons across Abu Dhabi in the last year and seized 5,542 packets of dodgy, expired and unlicensed products including cosmetics, herbal remedies and henna. I am pleasantly surprised, that the UAE government has been taking some action to protect their citizens, however, remember, that you have to do most of the job yourself, looking for the healthiest and pure products for yourself and your family.

According to Environmental Working Group (EWG) an average woman puts about 168 chemicals on her body daily. Out of 13,000 chemicals used in cosmetics, only about 10 percent have been evaluated for safety. Clearly, such chemical exposures are not insignificant, especially when they occur virtually daily for a lifetime. Their use has been directly linked to cancer or they are known to cause damage to your brain, reproductive system and other organs.



Zuzana, Alex and Monika are making their own body scrub and body butter during Ivana's Cosmetics Workshops



Making your cuticle cream at home is simple and easy



Make your own lip balm from only 4 ingredients during on of Ivana's workshops

How did all these chemicals get into your blood and organs?

The skin is our largest organ. What you put on your body topically is not processed and monitored through your liver. Instead, the product goes directly to your bloodstream. If you are not choosing your cosmetics wisely, it is very likely that you have accumulated a huge amount of toxins in your body, which means disease. Just as you create your health, you create your sickness. Have you ever considered cosmetics being a part of a disease making scheme you are responsible for? If you use conventional make-up on a daily basis, you can absorb almost five pounds of chemicals into your body each year, and that's without adding in body lotions, deodorants, shampoos, conditioners and other personal care products!

This should make you think twice about simple pleasures we

take for granted, e.g. having our nails done or simply going for an occasional massage. For instance, in 2000 the EWG released a study showing that 37 nail polishes from 22 companies contained dibutyl phthalate (DBP). DBP is known to cause lifelong reproductive impairments in male rats. DBT is used in nail polish because it increases flexibility and shine. This chemical, which is linked to birth defects in animals, was found at the highest levels in women of childbearing age. Do me a favour and try not using nail polish for the next three months to see the difference in your nails appearance. Instead, after your manicure and pedicure ask your nail technician to simply make your nails shine with polishing board and apply apricot or almond oil on your nails and to your cuticles.

How about bringing your own pure organic massaging oil, next time you go for a massage? Ask

your therapist to use it. That way you know, what is applied on your skin and you will get the full benefits of its quality ingredients. This is obviously considering, that you are not in one of the fantastic UAE spa centres which already use pure organic essential oils. (I love Balance Spa!)

Some of the Most Toxic Chemicals You Should Stay Away From

Parabens, chemicals found in deodorants, lotions, hair products, and cosmetics, have been shown to mimic the action of the female hormone estrogen, which can drive the growth of human breast tumors. A study published in 2012 suggested that parabens from antiperspirants and other cosmetics indeed appear to increase your risk of breast cancer.

Phthalates are plasticizing ingredients that have been linked to birth defects in the reproductive system of boys and lower sperm-motility in adult men, among other problems.

Sodium lauryl sulfate, a surfactant, detergent, and emulsifier used in thousands of cosmetic products, as well as in industrial cleaners. It's present in nearly all shampoos, scalp treatments, hair colours, bleaching agents, tooth-pastes, body washes, cleansers, make-up foundations, liquid hand soaps, laundry detergents, and bath oils/salts.

Methylisothiazolinone (MIT), a chemical used in shampoo to prevent bacteria from developing, which may have detrimental effects on your nervous system.

Toluene, made from petroleum or coal tar, and found in most synthetic fragrances and nail polish. Chronic exposure is linked to anaemia, lowered blood cell count, liver or kidney damage, and may affect a developing foetus.

How many chemicals does your beauty routine expose you to?

The Environmental Defence group tested 49 different makeup items, including foundations, concealers, powders, blushes,

mascaras, eye liners, eye shadows, lipsticks, and lip glosses. Their testing revealed serious heavy metal contamination in virtually all of the products. 96 percent contained lead, 90 percent contained beryllium, 20 percent contained arsenic and the list goes on. What does this mean for a health-conscious person like yourself? When you use body lotion, deodorant, shampoo, or nail polish, you're taking a chance that you're applying harmful chemicals to your body, even if the product claims to be non-toxic and safe.

Tips:

- Become smart about your skin-care choices.
- Always opt for products made out of preferably organic ingredients.
- The fewer ingredients, the better.
- Avoid products with any of the listed ingredients.
- Only put on your skin what you would put in your mouth.
- Instead of face creams have a selection of pure plant oils (like almond, rose hip, argan) and use few drops rubbed in between your palms. Apply on your face and neck just as you would your face cream.
- Only use products from reputable sources, care about how they have been made and whether they have been tested on animals.
- Make your own



Your beauty product should only contain pure organic ingredients from reputable sources

What are the best skin care products?

The ones you have made yourself! While I understand that making your own make up can be a real challenge (although it is not impossible), there are still excellent toxic free products from e.g. Dr. Haushka, Sante, Tarte or Lavera.

Consider making your own products or attending one of my cosmetics making workshops! If you have ever cooked a meal, I can guarantee you, that this is no different. It is lots of fun, your body will say thank you and you can share your gifts with family and loved ones. I bet you already have at least 50 percent of all ingredients in your pantry and the rest can be easily bought in one of the health stores, (even supermarkets) or ordered on-line. You will be surprised how easy it is to make your own lip balm, scrub, foot cream, even deodorant!



Here is a recipe for **My Favourite Body Butter** (can be used as a face cream)

Ingredients:

- 1/4 cup raw virgin coconut oil
- 1/4 cup raw shea butter (mango butter)
- 1/4 raw cup cocoa butter
- 1/4 cup any base oil (apricot, calendula, argan oil)
- Few drops of vitamin E and rosehip oil (optional)
- 15 drops of your favourite essential oil (to be added later)

Melt all ingredients (except essential oil) together in the double boiler, let cool down in the fridge for about 30 minutes. Whip up with an electrical blender for about 5-7 minutes and return back to the fridge for another 10 minutes. Add 15 drops of any essential oil and whip again for another 10 minutes until the mixture resembles a smooth cream. Transfer in clean glass jars and place in the fridge. You can keep one jar in your bathroom. Good for up to 6 months.

For more recipes you can visit my website www.ivanahph.com or attend one of my cosmetics making workshops. Send your queries on Health Powerhouse by emailing me at info@ivanahph.com. I am looking forward to have you!

THE MERMAIDS OF SANTOSHA SOCIETY: LADIES ON THE WORLDWIDE SURF

Words By: Kori Hahn

Photos Supplied By: Vera Nording
and Chrystal Dawn Fitzgerald

Out in the sea, Vera and Chrystal are the coolest and most beautiful figures one can catch a glimpse of as they go and travel with Santosha Society to be with ladies also wanting to have their surfing fix. Both commanding stellar careers in the field, they are both renowned in the world of surfing as living mermaids. If you ever thought mermaids didn't exist, well they do now...



Vera Nording

There's something about Vera Nording... Swedish surfer/musician/mermaid. She rides for Monster Surfboards, models for Billabong Sweden, and most recently worked with Rip Curl School of Surf in Bali. She is stunningly beautiful, but so much more than just a beautiful face. She is a ripping surfer, motivated traveller, animal activist and experienced surf coach. She is optimistic, inspiring, funny and full of charisma.

I met Vera in Sri Lanka a year ago, where we tied our longboards on top of a tuk-tuk and went exploring. What we found was a country full of empty waves



and a friendship that will last a lifetime. We said goodbye in Sri Lanka, only to say hello a few weeks later in Bali. In Bali, I spent countless hours in the water with this graceful nose-riding mermaid. She was my longboarding mentor, guiding me in the challenging waves surrounding the tropical island. She has a very sweet and gentle way of teaching that motivates you to paddle back out there and do it again, but this time better.

Vera is from Sweden, where spine-tingling waters and windy waves led her on a magical journey to become a girl of the sea. When talking to The Mermaid Society about surfing in Sweden, Vera explains "As long as the water doesn't freeze, we surf. Last year I was out the week before Christmas the air temperature was about 10 degrees Celcius, the sun was shining the water was about zero degrees." She might be stylish and fashionable, but that by no means makes her too girly to get out there and do super rad things.

She rides for Monster Surfboards, a Spanish board shaping company. With two new boards that are both 9'2 classic singlefin, log-style nose riders. Watching her surf a longboard is truly mesmerizing. The girl has style.

She is not only an inspiration in the water, but in her drive to help others as well. She is on the board of UDDA, a youth depression organisation that provides

.....
"She's a young girl with strength, optimism and a driving passion for surfing"
.....

- Mermaid Society

mentoring for young people that have been through or are experiencing difficult times. The organization's aim is to remove the taboo of depression and mental illness for youth in Sweden. They are a support group for those in need. While living in Bali we talked about her own depression and ways of fighting it. One way for her to combat her own depression is to help others fight it through this organization. She has dreams to start a retreat centre to support people in their fight against this widespread epidemic in the future.

Vera travels over the world surfing. She will be joining Santosha Society, who run boutique surf trips around the world for a couple of upcoming trips. If you get the opportunity to spend time in the water with this lady sliding legend, I suggest you take it. Not only will you surf better, but you will laugh louder and your heart will shine brighter because of it. Get to know more about this living mermaid on her Instagram handle @veranording.



Chrystal Dawn Fitzgerald

Some people are really inspiring. They motivate you to go out into the world leaving behind all your fears and doubts and actually live your dreams. They make you look at your own life and want to be a better person. I know a person like this. Her name is Chrystal Dawn Fitzgerald.

Chrystal is a soul surfer, inspirational writer, engaging filmmaker, motivated conservationist, talented photographer, adventurous traveller, nature lover and all around amazing human. She is all these things and more. She dreams and then she does.

She has an incredible gift to tell a story. Her stories are often inspired by her adventures. Her adventures are influenced by her love for surf and her love for the ocean has led her to promote conservation. She shares her spectacular photos and engaging stories of travels, surf, and healthy living through inspirational films, writings, a personal blog, and posts on her social media channels.

Her childhood consisted of natural forts, flower leis, free diving and adventuring in Ka'u, the lava



I enjoy the beauty of simplicity and believe in Kismet.

desert of Hawaii Island. She relocated to Australia and it's easy to see why the whole country fell in love with her. She is the ultimate sea gypsy. She credits the sea as being one of her greatest teachers. If that is the case, then she is certainly one of the sea's most elegant students. It is no wonder why she is one of my favourite surfers. Her graceful style and cheerful smile make a sunny day in Australia even brighter. She is a true ambassador of free surfing culture and constantly shows the world how one lady sliding mermaid can have a massive influence for positive change in the world.

She is an ambassador for Toms Footwear, Conner Hats and Seaa Swimwear. Her writing and photography have been published

in Foam Symmetry, Destinations Magazine, Surfing Magazine, and on the websites of Tourism Queensland & Deus Ex Machina. She has selflessly given an impressive amount of time and energy supporting organizations such as Save the Kimberley, Sea Shepherd, Living Ocean, Misfit Aid and Assist a Sista.

Besides her professional accomplishments, Chrystal laughs loud, smiles often and fills the room with a glowing energy. She has made an enormous impact on my life. She is sure to influence yours as well.

For the past eight months Chrystal has been on a journey of self-exploration. She has studied permaculture in Spain, flew to Sri Lanka to inspire the surfer girls that joined the Santosha Sri Lanka retreat and spent time at lady sliding legend, Ishita Malaviya's surf camp in Karnataka, India. She really embodies all that I believe in: travel, surf and a healthy yogini lifestyle.

After the surf and yoga retreat in Sri Lanka, she flew to India and completed an intensive yoga teacher training. Like I said before, she dreams and then she does it.

She chronicles her life through photographs and you can take a look at her ever popular photographic journal through stunning images on her Instagram handle: @thedawnchronicles and read her stories on her website: The Dawn Chronicles.





The Ladies' Very Own

Urban-Ultra Women's Cycle League Sponsored by Trek and High 5

Interview by: Pascale De Jong

Photos supplied by: Louise Adamson,
PHISHFOTOZ

As cycling enthusiasts for many years, we believe that the time has come for women to be better represented in the world of cycling. To ensure that all women endeavouring to embark upon, continue or improve their cycling skills, it is necessary to create a race league dedicated to representing and highlighting their efforts, making them more visible in the public eye.

Enter, the Urban-Ultra Women's Cycle League, sponsored by TREK and High5

October 31, 2015 marked the start of the season for the Urban-Ultra Women's Cycle League. With 12 teams as of now we have certainly created a stir on the local cycle scene.

Our mission is simple, to connect and inspire all levels of female cyclists and our vision is to increase numbers and elevate the competitive level of female riders

How the League Works

- The UAE Cycling Federation (UAE CF) will dedicate a specific category for a female-specific race within their annual events.
- Teams should consist of a maximum seven team training ladies, five max to race per event (min. three riders for Team Time Trial. No minimum for standard races). Training teams may consist of more riders – however, splitting larger teams to form individual



teams would be preferable to spread the talent

- Teams may be sponsored by a company who will pay for team-negotiated items. Teams may also be formed without a sponsor – the only thing you need is matching kit, and of course your local UCI licence to race

So far our teams have participated in the following races:

The Al Qudra Season Opener – an 85km loop with beautifully low temperatures for the 6:00 a.m. start which didn't change much over the course of the next 3hrs where 30 women, for some their first, raced the 84km distance around the Al Qudra Cycle Path.

UAE CF Ain Al Ghamour Kalba 70k

The second UUCWL race and first UAE CF race of the season

took place on the 13th November 2015 in beautiful Kalba. 25 women rolled out along the Corniche at Kalba – a fantastic race and a show of the strength from the UAE's female cyclists. From the head-turning sight of 25 liveried women cycling along the Kalba Corniche, the experienced cyclists enthusiastically supporting and advising newer cyclists, many of whom were competing in their first race.

EKRCC TTT Nov 15 – 50k

A chilly yet damp morning saw 35 women from nine league teams out of 11 gather at the start line of the EKRCC Team Time Trial to pit their four-woman teams against each other over a rolling 50km loop at Al Qudra Cycle Track.

At one-minute intervals the teams clipped in across the start line to form their disciplined pace lines and headed out into

the light mist blanketing the dunes, to finish as fast as they can as a group.

Spinneys Dubai 92 Cycle Challenge 2015

This usual challenge marked our first race within the elite category with the objective to try out some team tactics, keep a high-steady speed and get a break-away where possible to avoid a sprint finish. "It was a very strong ride from all the girls. BeSport and Cycle Hub had it well marked out and the teams that did the work got the points at the end.

ADCO Liwa Cycling Challenge 2016

It was fantastic to see so many female riders participating in such a challenging event. I believe that the Urban-Ultra Women's Cycle League sponsored by TREK and High5 has been a major contributing factor to this. Many women have been inspired to train harder, reach further and feel more involved in the women's cycling community. We saw some amazing performances from many women at the weekend.



Al Ain to Jebel Hafeet Cycle Race

On Friday February 5th we participated in the race up the steep jebel hafeet mountain. The race started just outside of the Green Mubazzarah, a beautiful area at the bottom of Jebel Hafeet. With "only" 11 brave ladies appearing at the start line. The first 15km were flat and winding around the wide roads and roundabouts to then start the real climb to race up the steep mountain for the finish.

Clare Mullenger from the Urban-Ultra Team had this to say about the league. "As a new cyclist I love the camaraderie of cycling with other women. I feel much safer cycling with women – generally women cycle to their ability, while sometimes men use their power to keep up with a group above their ability but then when they get tired, begin to weave which becomes dangerous."

Amber Mirza of the TREK

Tigress Team had this to add:

"The league has taken me places I would never have imagined, physically and mentally. I am fitter, tougher and continuing to grow stronger each day. Every race is a learning experience. We must take everything we can get and apply it forward."

Women's cycling is getting more and more publicity on a global scale and we are no different here in the UAE. The league has done amazing things to get the sport in the public eye, heads are turned, questions are asked and moments are created.

We are here to help improve the sport for females and to eventually see a Dubai Tour with a full International Female pro team roster with a possibility of our stronger league teams joining in to compete. For more information on the league log on to: www.urbanultracycleleague.com or email events@urbanultra.com.



AMY SUBAEY

Interview by: Bandana Jain
Photos supplied by: Amy Subaey

As founder and directress of the UAE Trekkers, Amy Subaey has been trekking and trail running for quite a while, we ask about the story behind her trekking career...

For how many years have you been trekking? What inspired you to start trekking?

I grew up in Minnesota and ran cross country in high school. Trail running is essentially the same as hiking, you just go faster! Inspiration, however, comes from

nature and a love for the great outdoors and it all inspires me: the ocean, the mountains, the desert. Whatever environment I am living in, I adapt to whatever outdoor activity I can find. While I was living in Egypt, I didn't trek or even run at all, but went diving in the Red Sea at every opportunity. I've been really enjoying the mountains in the region since I moved here in 2003.

Which treks have you undertaken in the UAE and Oman?

There are some popular treks here in the UAE and Oman, and I've done most of them, but also have done many trails that we have named ourselves. We've named two treks in Hatta and one in Jebel Yibir. There are so many trails to follow, even on the same mountain, so even if we go to Wadi Shah, for example, we will take a different route each time. This is also part of the fun, there is always a new and amazing view to discover.



How is trekking different in this part of the world as compared to your treks elsewhere?

Trekking in the UAE and Oman is quite different than in other parts of the world. In the United States, we have miles of well-marked hiking trails, accessible and easy to follow maps, and the security and confidence inspired by a system of professional park rangers and mountain rescue services. The definition of hiking is where there is a predefined path, and you generally go out for a few hours on a weekend. But there is no culture of hiking in the UAE or Oman yet so everything we do here is really considered "trekking", meaning it requires self-navigation, longer, steeper climbs for much longer periods of time on "trails" which don't actually have a start or end point and criss-cross for miles in many directions. These trails are also very rocky, slippery and steep, requiring sure footing and confidence. Though most people





would say the obvious difference of trekking here is the extreme heat, there are other weather issues that are less obvious. Storms move in very quickly at all times of the year and cause flooding. At night, it also gets pretty cold and that catches people off guard.

What level of difficulties have you worked on in trekking?

This is really the difference between hiking and trekking; hiking is relatively easier and usually means a shorter trail. Trekking describes harder, longer and steeper paths or journeys in more challenging environs. One of our goals in the UAE Trekkers is actually to find more accessible "hiking" trails so that we can entice more people and families to get outside and enjoy the sport and work up to "trekking". But it is really tough to find easy hiking trails here. We will happily continue our search though.

Which has been your favourite trek to date?

In the UAE, my favorite trek has been Wadi Shah in Ras al Khaimah. Wadi Shah is in front of Jebel Jais; the highest point in the UAE has a stunning landscape. The trail is actually pretty easy to follow, and has a variety of different terrains; the first part is scrambling over big boulders for about an hour, then a steep incline with lots of old terraced farms between rewarding views. In Oman, my favorite hike is the short and sweet Jebel Qatar, which is just over the border in Buraimi. It's easy to reach and also has lots of variety in the terrain.

How does it feel to lead a group like UAE Trekkers?

Leading the UAE trekkers is exciting and very rewarding, and a good match for my teaching background and love of the outdoors and trekking and mountaineering. I hope that I inspire people to escape the weekend lure of shopping malls and brunches to challenge themselves, so they can go back to work on Sunday having had a real adventure. It's exciting because I get to watch people that are new to the country, who thought they were just coming to a desert, be blown away with surprise when they see this playground of beautiful, rugged mountains at their doorstep. Adventures together create lasting friendships, after all!

What kind of physical training do you undergo for your treks?

I run a stairs stadium training session every Tuesday at the TrainYas as well as some Friday morning interval sessions at Ski Dubai (going up the hill). I'm also a runner, but the last few months I've done primal workouts and have really enjoyed that.



Do you think there are any specific skills required for trekking? If yes, what are these?

The most important "skill" I suppose is outdoor common sense. The first rule in mountaineering is that getting down safe is the true summit. You have to know where you are going, what you are going to need to be safe and how you are going to communicate with each other and what you are going to do in an emergency.

Any tips for fellow trekkers?

Don't just rely on GPS coordinates and waypoints. Go in the company of an experienced trekker. Don't skimp on your water consumption. If you can't carry your water, you're not fit enough for the trek. Get to Adventure HQ and buy some proper hiking shoes and get yourself some first aid training.

Any treks on your wish list?

We are very interested to explore new treks in UAE and Oman that nobody has done before. Scouting a new route is really exciting, so I am looking forward to that. Trekking in UAE and Oman is the first step into the world of mountaineering, so once you fall in love with trekking and everything that comes with it, you have a natural desire to climb something higher and push yourself even further. I would like to continue to explore higher altitude peaks and plan to get to Aconcagua and Denali next year, with the ultimate goal to complete all the seven highest summits on all seven continents.



Ride Along with Oryx4x4's First Lady

Photos supplied by: Audrey Alexandra Ritter and Oryx4x4

If popular male chauvinism is to be believed, cars are something that is totally male. But here at OutdoorUAE, we throw that sort of thoughts out of the window because the outdoors is for everyone to have fun and enjoy.

This was how we met Audrey Alexandra Ritter, the 31 year old co-founder of Oryx4x4; one of the many off-road groups in the region that come together frequently for their regular dose of dunes and off-road tyres. She conducts herself in a very relaxed way as we talk about her life as one of the notable ladies taking the deserts of the UAE on.

How did you get into off-roading?

In the beginning of the second year I was here, I bought a Jeep. I was thinking that it would be a bit more fun and in the end save some money from renting a Yaris because I'd get some resale on the Jeep when I left the UAE — guess I never thought I'm staying here this long! One time just after I bought the Jeep I took it into the dealer to get some maintenance and one of the service guys there was a marshal in an off-road club. He brought me along to their next trip for beginners, and it was immediate love at first sight! I've done a lot of off-roading with my buddies back in the United

States, but I'm from New England so its mountains, rocks, swamps - totally different vibe. I prefer off-roading in the sand.

Other than driving a 4x4 what else does Audrey do?

I like to spend a lot of time with my two dogs, going to the beach with them or taking them to the desert for camping. This year I started running and I just completed the RAK Half Marathon which I'm pretty stoked about! I hope to get a bike soon and add that to the list. On my home turf in the US, I live for snowboarding! I kept my gear here over the years for the occasional trip to Lebanon to catch some good snow up there.

Could you tell us about your group? What's the story behind it?

The first few years I was off-roading here I was with one off-road club where I learned a lot. I got to be a leader "marshal" with them and it was a great start. Eventually some friends and I - Tajkeh, Eyad, and Malte - wanted to start a new club with a new vibe. So in November 2014 we started Oryx4x4. We've had a blast setting up our club and building our community. Now we have over 600 members, though there is a core group that is more active about planning stuff and getting out in the sand. We organise all levels of off-road trips from trips for first timers up to advanced level drives using our website: www.oryx4x4.com.

What is the most thrilling part of off-roading for you?

Driving in advanced level drives is awesome because you get this rush of adrenaline and it's just move, move, move. But leading beginner level trips is also really fun because you are teaching people and have to take care of the different issues that might come up... Problem solving is part of the fun!

How are you encouraging more ladies to go off-road?

We definitely are encouraging women to get out with us. I have brought a number of friends to buy 4x4s and introduced them to off-roading. Others I bring along as my passenger and try to get them to fall in love with the desert! If someone is bringing their wife along as a passenger, I'll usually try to encourage her to give the driver's seat a try. Also, when there is an event like the Dubai Off-road and Adventure Show, I try to go to represent the ladies and get a few new ones to join us.

What are some of the pros of being a female off-roader?

It can be funny to surprise people! Like that old guy who comes along and second guesses you and doesn't think you know what you're doing... But eventually he figures it out!





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