

Summer Running in Dubai

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Summer is upon us.

Embrace it. Enjoy it. Summers in Dubai present many opportunities to improve your fitness and prepare for your next challenge.

Set Goals and Create a Plan

What is your next fitness goal? At the beginning of the training season, set a goal. For example, last year I wanted to develop my endurance and become an ultramarathoner. Last summer I trained with that specific goal in mind, getting fit enough to run as many marathons and ultramarathons as possible. Now that the marathon season ended with the Paris Marathon in April—giving me five marathons and four ultramarathons since January—I need a new goal. My new goal is to complete an epic ultramarathon event this fall, with the short-term goal of increasing my running fitness. My plan is to increase the intensity of my running and work on my core. Be strong and fit. For endurance, I will do long runs, but vary the speed, which increases the intensity over three hours. For core exercises, I must do basic exercises every day—sit-ups, push-ups, jump rope, squats, burpees, lunges, stretches and plank.

Read

Summer is the time to read. "Born to Run" is a classic that inspired me to start running. My current fav book is "The Tao of Running". There are many good running theory books which are a bit dry, but can be helpful for more experienced runners: Jason Koop's "Training Essentials for Ultrarunning", Jordan Metzler's "Running Strong", and anything written by Matt Fitzgerald or Hal Higdon. Trolling www.dcrainmaker.com is the best source for info on all technical gear like GPS and heart rate watches for runners.

Research

Find your next adventure! Do you dream of Marathon des Sables? Can you complete a

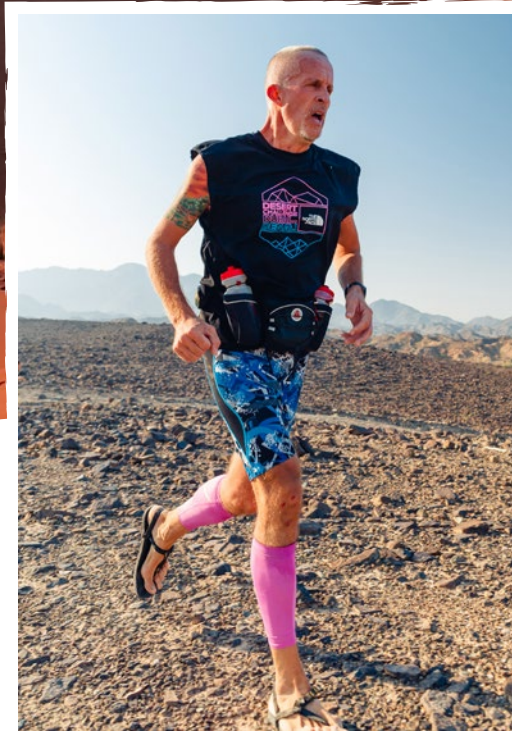
Fun Run at Barkley? Do you want to run the uphill ultra at Comrades? What's your BQ and can you do it? When is the entry window for Tor des Geants? Is it time to learn how to do an open water swim so you can finish the Dubai Half Ironman with dignity? Nahhh—no swimming or cycling for me! Maybe expand your horizons to a bigger adventure, like testing your fitness at altitude with a trek or non-technical climb in Nepal. Most of these events require some serious training and preparation, so use the summer to get ready.

Logistics

You've set your goal. You've created a training plan. You've identified your target event. Make the commitment early and arrange the logistics. Most major events require registration months in advance and some even have lotteries because there are so many more wannabe entrants than slots. Get your plane tickets, book your lodging or buy a sleeping bag, and start testing your gear. For example, running in the salt flats in Liwa Desert requires must different equipment to running an ultra in the Everest region in Nepal. Making the commitment early should help you focus your training.

Summer Training in Dubai

Be sensible and patient. Build up your heat tolerance. Push yourself, but monitor how you feel. Get used to carrying water and drink it. Don't be stupid or overconfident when you run outside in the heat. Some people run at night and sleep more during the day. Hit the gym! Regular exercising is an essential component to getting your core in shape. Run with a group. Find a group that interests you and see if it works. Most runners in the running groups in Dubai are experienced in these conditions and take



care of each other, especially people unaccustomed to the heat.

Change your Routine

My office in Dubai is in a 50-storey building. My running buddy Ramzi joins me at lunchtime and we climb and descend the stairs, sometimes twice on a good day. If that doesn't work, we can run up and down the ramp in the nine-storey parking garage. Ramzi and I have a rule: whenever the temperature is over 45C, we go for a 5km run at lunch. Even in humid Dubai, you may not sweat much when you run in that heat—although when you get back to the office, the waterworks begin to flow.

Run!

If you want to run in Dubai, you'll find a way. Desert Trail Runners (DTRs) inspired me last year to achieve my goal of becoming an ultramarathoner. Most Fridays last summer we met under the blue water tower in Showka and ran. The Saturday runs at Fossil Rock were completely different for fitness and provided excellent back-to-back training sessions. The North Face sponsored some weekly training sessions where we bumped up the running to include some core training—plus I got a cool TNF t-shirt! Some people were faster than me. Some were slower. Some ran farther. Some struggled early. The only thing that mattered was effort: as long



as you're trying, all is good. I learned from others how to push myself and endure the distance, regardless of the heat or that hill in front of me.

Take Camel Selfies!

Camels are weird. They walk funny. They smell. They look goofy. I smile whenever I run past a camel, because I know when the camel must be thinking: "Wow, that sweaty runner really stinks!" Camels are great to take selfies with. You can never have too many camel selfies. Take your selfie and keep running. Camels don't use the summer heat as an excuse. Find a way to make it happen and do it. You may need to build your summer running up gradually, but at least try. When you go on summer holiday, bring your running kit and take advantage of the milder weather—you may be pleasantly surprised with how much easier it is, comparatively speaking.

Experimenting

On the weekly runs last summer I tested equipment and nutrition. I thrive on the

challenge of being told I can't do something, like the first time I wore my Luna sandals on the rocks! Now running in sandals is (almost) normal. Some DTRs may recall the wildly unsuccessful (and bloody!) experiment with the Camelbak vest—but somebody needed to see if it worked. The long training runs are perfect for testing your running nutrition plans: when you run you expend energy and need to monitor your caloric intake. Most new runners enjoy the multitude of Gu flavours, until they take 20 gels at Hajar 100. Two of my personal favourite foods for ultrarunning are boiled potatoes and pickles—don't knock them until you try them!

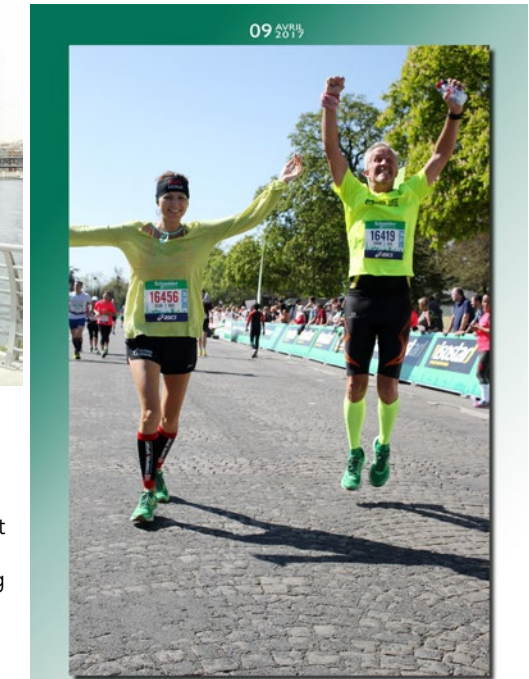
Core Exercises

Go to the gym and work your ass off. Simple. Don't waste your time by half-heartedly hitting the gym. I love faffing about—but only at the Urban Ultra checkpoints, and not at the gym! You don't even need to go to the gym: sit-ups, leg lifts, crunches, squats, lunges, burpees, and the best exercise of all, the plank can all be done at home or in a hotel room. No equipment needed, only desire.

No Excuse, Sir!

Everybody can make up an excuse to not run. Although I'm embarrassed to admit, here are my top ten excuses from a few years ago, before I started running:

1. I've never run before.
2. I don't know how to start running.
3. I don't have the time.
4. I'm too slow.
5. I'm fat.



6. I'm old.
7. I had seven knee operations.
8. Isn't running boring?
9. It's too hot/cold, rainy/sunny/snowy, dark/bright, early/late outside.
10. I'd rather do something else, like watch TV or have impacted wisdom teeth removed without painkillers.

Running is not easy...

Almost everybody can run, if they want to. The thrill of knocking out a solid run at a comfortably hard pace is indescribable. The camaraderie among my fellow ultrarunners harks back to college days. The sense of accomplishment always brings a smile to my face. The adrenaline rush of facing the unknown and uncertainty—can I do this?—is something most people don't get to experience. Set your goals. Make your plan. Figure out how you can train in the Dubai summer. Do some research and read. Commit to your goal event. Go run! Work hard on your core. Enjoy and have fun: I love running. I'm not saying running is easy, but it can be so much fun. ■

