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The chronicles of a traveller

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Adventure Trekker, cyclist and adventurer Depi Chaudhary's digital journals serve as guides to adventure lovers



Coming full cycle Depi Chaudhary is in Kerala for a bicycle journey through the tourist spots in the State Photo: By the author

Follow your heart on the bicycle is the mantra of 44-year-old Depi Chaudhary, who quit a high-profile corporate job and switched over to his outdoor love of trekking and now cycling. The bicycle brings him to Kerala this time. Earlier, his wife, Janaki, a Malayali from Thiruvananthapuram was the reason.

Trekking was a hobby, says Depi, before it became a career option. He started an adventure company, after quitting a career in IT, but “failed miserably”.

He did not get a good response then, “as the bulk of Indians are not trekkers”, he reasons. But Depi was not disillusioned. On his solitary treks he began collecting every little detail of the walk. Being tech savvy, Depi invested in the best software required to format the data that he was collating. Armed with a ‘Mac’ and supporting technical equipment, he learnt to make maps that would be a challenge to experienced cartographers. Later, he documented his journeys and it serves as vital information to trekkers and adventurers.

He brought out a book, ‘Trekking Guide to the Western Himalayas’ in 2010 published by Collins. “My idea was to give maximum information,” he says. The book has satellite images, corresponding maps, rivers and peaks, even related information like photographs, the equipment required and where to source it from, arranging for ponies and horses, day-to-day descriptions and elevation profiles.

The information will enable any trekker or cyclist to undertake the journey on his own.

Though the book continues to do fairly well and Depi receives a lot of fan mail, it did not generate a handsome profit. As each trek costs roughly Rs. 70,000, he came up with the idea of taking people along as it would subsidise his travel. “I am careful in choosing whom I take along,” he says. Depi continued with his treks and did a trans-Himalayan walk from Kashmir to Nepal. It was at this time that he began his cycling trips.

A Canadian, Danny Shay, wished to cycle in Rajasthan. Depi bought two cycles and met up with him. Danny expressed a desire for long cycling trips and not the short round-the-city tours. Depi was apprehensive as he was not into cycling, nevertheless gave it a shot. The first day they did 60 km, followed by 70 and continued to increase the distance. By the end of four days, they were cycling 120 km a day, comfortably. “I figured out that it was not difficult and was very enjoyable.”

Once into cycling, Depi continued to collect all related data on his trips. It was then that he came up with the idea of going digital with the specialised and rare content that he possessed. He has now brought out a quarterly magazine called *Depi's Outdoor Adventure Guide*. In India it is available on Magzter at \$1.99.

In his magazine, Depi has added value to the information by grading the trips as ‘Easy’, ‘Strenuous’ or ‘Hard’.

But the basic difference is that he now gives exact GPS elevation profiles, “so that you can plan your walk better”. One can access information like ‘landslide area’, ‘our pick’, ‘where to stay’, ‘area to discover’, and ‘do-able distance’.

Even details like the number of hair pin bends after a certain landmark are given.

During his outdoor adventures, Depi has had to deal with trying situations. On the Warwan valley trek, from Inshan to Panikar, Depi says that the Bakravals saw a trekker on the route after 15 years! This isolated trek will be in the magazine soon, he adds.

Trying situations

On this trek he was taken into captivity by the Indian Army for possessing a satellite phone. Being a terrorist-infested valley, Depi faced detention and thorough inquiry. He was released after signing many documents because “human rights activists are very strong in the area”. He was stranded after the Ladakh floods as his trek route went underwater and a five-hour journey took two days to complete.

Depi is compiling cycle guide books which will be part of Magzter. The first issue is available on his website: depichaudhary.com. The bicycle wheels seem to have come a full circle for him because he's in Kerala with buddy Danny with whom his cycling saga began. He is taking a group of 15 senior citizens, above the age of 60, who wish to cycle 100 km a day, through the tourist spots of Thattekad, Munnar, Thekkady, Kumarakom, Marari and back to Kochi.

Depi's outfit is called 'Thikanas on cycles' and he can be reached at depi@me.com.

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