

A THIRST FOR TREKKING

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When Peter Van Geit started it, Chennai Trekking Club (or CTC, as it's fondly called) was a group of a mere 100 passionate trekkers going out each weekend exploring virgin mountains and jungles. Now, seven years later, the group is 30 thousand members strong with 100+

organizers engaging in 20 different type of outdoor, sports, environmental and social activities and organizes hundreds of events through all weekdays and weekends in the year. In conversation with this Belgium-born engineer, who came to India on a project but stayed on indefinitely!

Can you share with us, what made you decide to stay back in India and guide CTC to become a full fledged organisation?

I fell in love with India - its cheer natural beauty, the warm people,

the tangy food, the vibrant colors, the positive energy. I am passionate about adventure, sports and outdoors. One decade ago Chennai used to be a laid back and languid city. I really wanted to connect with other like-minded souls to go out trekking and explore beautiful natural places.

Your website says that CTC promotes "Activities includ(ing) trekking, cycling, running, open water swimming, biking, photography, educational workshops, ladies & family treks." Does this mean that you employ a

dedicated team that works 24/7?

Yes, on the dedicated team and round the clock working, but not on the employment! CTC is a non-profit volunteer based organization. All our members have full-time jobs during the week, and transform as passionate and selfless volunteers during weekends and weekday mornings to organize hundreds of outdoor and sports events throughout the year. Our goal is to have an active and healthy community of citizens. This is the reason why, over the years, CTC has diversified in many non-trekking activities driven by a common passion for nature and sports.

Do you also go on all your treks? If not, how do you decide which one to go along?

Since the organization has

grown big, I have delegated responsibilities to volunteers. CTC has quite a few organizers who plan treks on most weekends of the year. Personally I organize one challenging 2-day trek every 5-6 weeks. I do not join other treks as I love doing many other activities like hill running, swimming, mountain biking, social initiatives, cleanup drives, organizing sports events and environmental awareness drives which keep me busy for most weekends throughout the year.

How is a typical day for you? A typical weekend?

A typical weekday starts at 5am with a cleanup (we have done 50 cleanups since the Chennai floods), a swim in the sea or a trail run (in lush green surroundings). Otherwise, my work day is the normal 10am-6pm

timings. I am a project manager in CISCO systems. After 6pm, we might leave for weekday overnight camp or meet up with organizers to plan the next marathon or triathlon event. In between I respond to hundreds of messages, emails and calls.

A weekend starts either on Friday evening or Saturday early morning and is more peaceful as I typically travel outside the city and go for a 2 day wilderness trek or hill run in remote location where endurance and meditation among virgin nature refreshes body and mind returning back only by Sunday midnight.

Do you miss your native country?

Well, I miss Belgian chocolates, Belgian food and my Mom (I am the only son and left home 2 decades



During Chennai Floods



Cleaning up Kotturpuram slums

ago). I email photos of my adventures in India to Mom who follows me closely. Aside from this, I have little connections still with Belgium and I consider every weekend in Belgium a beautiful outdoor weekend lost in Chennai. Yes, I can confidently say I belong in Chennai!

Right now, women's empowerment seems like a big question mark in our country. Are a lot of women coming forward and taking part in your programs? What kind of

tips and security measures do you give them?

We take every measure to make CTC a self disciplinary group (no alcohol, no smoking, no anti-social behavior) that is very safe for women. A larger female participation are enthusiastically involved in events which are one day, closer to the city like weekday night camps, weekday morning treks, open water swimming, social treks with less privileged kids, tree plantations, cleanup drives, organic farming.

A smaller female population joins the more challenging 2-day treks or endurance events like hill runs.

We hear that CRC is organising Chennai Trail Marathon on Sep 11. Commendable, but is it advisable to run in a hot city like ours?

The main objective of CTC's sports events (such as marathons, triathlons) are to sensitize people on a more active and healthy lifestyle. We organize all our events in the beautiful natural outskirts of the city to reconnect

Chennai Trail Marathon is a non-profit event to create awareness on hill / trail / ultra running. Its aim is to support CTC urban rehab programs near Pulicat, such as building schools and developing poor hamlets.

Date: September 11th, 2016

Venue: Cholavaram Lake near Red Hills, Chennai

Categories: 21.1Kms/42.2Kms/50Kms.

Registration: INR 550 optional

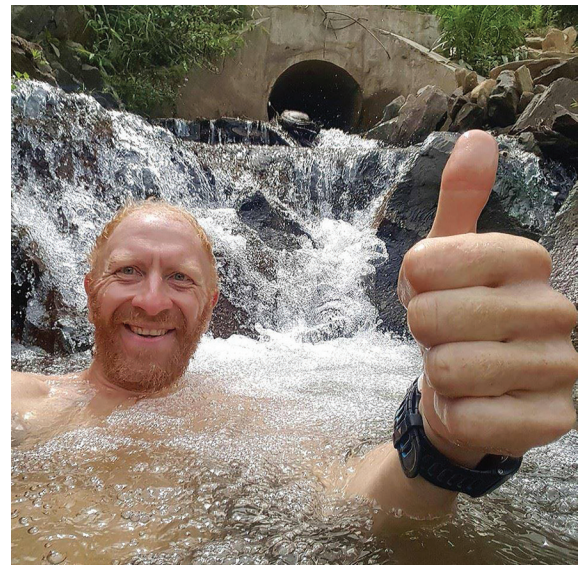
Limit: Restricted to 1200 runners

More details at <http://www.chennaitrekkers.org/2016/06/chennai-trail-marathon-sep-11th.html>

For queries, please contact info@chennaitrekkers.org

On top of open water swimming quarry

Peter with Arya



Peter in Kashmir

people with the outdoors. Natural surroundings and early morning hours ensure that the climate remains enjoyable for the runners.

Is CTC only for people who are 100% fit?

Definitely not. We have many events which do not require 100% fitness level like tree plantations, easy 1 day treks, weekday camps, swimming, family/kids camping events. We also organize a 2-3 weekly fitness checkup in which

we let participants scale a small hill inside the city to self assess their fitness level and suggest where they stand in terms of fitness and stamina and which events they can participate in. For those who'd like to be know about our future events, we suggest they like our FB page or subscribe to updates at www.chennaitrekkers.org

What other exciting plans do you have for CTC in the future?

CTC has always evolved naturally

over time - nothing was really planned - it all happened by itself driven by passion and thousands of like minded volunteers. I expect that it will continue the same way over many years to come - more diversification, more activities, connecting more people to outdoors and nature, building a more active and healthier society, a more sustainable future through ongoing awareness drives, getting people more socially engaged, etc. Excited where the future will take us!