

When life is an adventure trip

OUTDOOR PEOPLE Bangalore-based Basecamp is an adventure operation with a difference. Women rule the roost here

After spending a number of years in corporate roles, Kavitha Reddy got bored of AC cabins, Sony laptops and designer suites. She yearned to do something different and more challenging. Adventure had been her passion for long, and that, she decided, was the only avenue she wanted to be in. Could she now convert a hobby into a business venture? She didn't have to think long and hard. What could be more exciting than combining passion with business opportunity?

She met a few friends and sold the idea to them. Much brainstorming later, a vision emerged. "Evolve adventure as the most effective learning tool, to revive the spirit of adventure among people from all walks of life, and be environment cognizant". Thus was born Bangalore-based Basecamp, the only women-dominated adventure operation in the country. Basecamp's core team consists of Kavitha herself, Jigna Modh, Sithara Medappa, and the lone male, Krishnamurthy. Their entire team

consists of 12 full-time members and six freelancers.

Today, Basecamp offers adventure activities across land, mountains, water and skies. Their programmes include trekking, hiking, eco-travel, rock climbing, biking, mountaineering, skiing, rafting, scuba diving, parasailing, bird watching, to name a few.

When they started out in 2009, recession fears loomed large. It certainly wasn't a great time to start, but the period helped them build their network, branding, technology platform, presence and database. Since business was not coming easy they explored various avenues to market their service and make their presence felt in the adventure space. As the economy started showing signs of recovery, they realised they had been sitting on a rocket. Once it took off, there was no looking back.

The economy notwithstanding, they had other challenges to tackle. Changing perceptions was one of them. They realised



LEADING FROM THE FRONT Kavitha Reddy, during a Mt Nanda Khat expedition

that spreading awareness on safety was no easy matter. Adventure enthusiasts, they found, did not spend enough time to understand the importance of safety and ended up focusing only on cost.

Moreover, it was important to get people to understand that adventure trips (mainly to the Himalayas) had to be planned keeping weather conditions in mind, and not the individual's holiday plan or leave. "Mountain weather can be very dangerous and one has to look at taking a trip respecting weather conditions and not based on time. We once refused to take a corporate group on a trek to Leh as it was not the best of seasons. They opted for an alternate adventure operator without giving much thought to our suggestion and ended up in a heavy snowfall zone", says Kavitha.

Another challenge was preparing participants for the Himalayan trip. "This is the most neglected aspect. If one wants to go for bigger treks, preparation in advance is extremely important. No adventure trip should be planned in the last minute. As Himalayan trips last for 6-15 days, at higher altitudes and lower temperatures, planning in advance and getting physically and mentally fit should be a priority. But many times participants overlook it," says Kavitha.

How do these women share responsibility? "Adventure is a complete team activity, one has to be there for the other as a

back-up at all times. We plan our adventure calendar for the whole year based on weather and season at least 6-8 months in advance. This gives us an opportunity to plan our role and responsibility clearly. We take turns to lead the group and re-train ourselves consistently to ensure the safety of the group at all times," says Kavitha. "One of our strengths is that we never plan trips in haste. We don't mind losing business if it comes at the cost of quality and safety," she adds.

Has being women made any difference in their programmes or to their clients? "Yes", says Kavitha. "A significant point is that many women are enrolling for adventure trips with us. They feel more comfortable and confident to go on adventure trips led by women. Many of our trips have more women than men. We are very proud of the fact that we have been able to provide that opportunity for women adventure enthusiasts. Second, both our individual and institutional clients feel that we are a more methodical and well-trained team and gender is never an issue. In fact, we organised an adventure camp for an all-men Indian Air Force team and they were so delighted by the programme that we were referred to other units of the IAF."

It is this focus on quality and safety that has seen Basecamp take off in full gear. **Veena Pradeep**



MOUNTAIN GIRL Sithara, leading a group of trekkers to Kudremukh Peak