Make adventure your career in incredible India

CAREER With the country growing younger, adventure tourism stands to gain momentum over the next three to five years writes Kavitha Reddy

If you believed climbing walls, scaling mountains, trekking across the forests, gliding in the skies or rafting down the rivers age for fun and just hobbies, you could be wrong; it can be a serious career option too.

Today adventure tourism in India offers many challenging career options. With increased number of global and Indian travellers seeking adventure in the harsh terrains of Himalayas or the rough rock faces of Hampi or the cool beaches of Goa; the demand for qualified adventure professionals has only increased. Infrastructure and accessibility over the last decade has enabled the adventure travel industry, which has been largely unorganised to move into professional and organised set-ups. Global competition and the need to have a competitive edge, has brought in well-trained professionals, making it interesting, fun and less risky.

ADRENALINE RUSH: With increased number of global and Indian travellers, the demand for qualified adventure professionals has only increased. DH FILE PHOTO

Indian Market

India's biggest opportunity is its demography. It would not be wrong to say that India is the only place in the world with mountains, rocks, forests, beaches, desert and rivers making it more exciting for an adventure seeker. India can offer adventure activities all 365 days of a year, given the geographic spread.

Indian tourism over the last few years with its 'Incredible India' campaign has seen a tremendous increase both in revenue and foreign exchange. The adventure travel industry accounts to around Rs 500 crore with a 20 per cent increase in the last two years.

Foreign travellers mainly back-packers and mountaineering enthusiasts contribute largely to the revenue and foreign exchange, given the longer duration of their stay. Majority of Indian travellers are pilgrims and holidayers, but there has been a 25 per cent increase in adventure travellers. With the country growing younger and with a much strong Indian economy the adventure space will stand to gain over the next three to five years.

Career options

Adventure space offers a wide range of career options, like any other profession, even in adventure space there are entry-level and specialist options based on the level of education and experience.

Some of the career options are:

Trekking & Mountain Guide: A well-trained guide has an earning potential of Rs 12,000 to 70,000 per month. Basic degree, guide course/advance mountaineering course from any of the mountaineering institutes is what it takes to become a guide. If one has the understanding of the terrain, has a wilderness medicine course or has done a search and rescue course, understands GPS tracking and map reading, then it will be an added advantage.

Outbound Training Facilitators & Trainers: Outbound training is one of the most preferred training option among the HR fraternity, it is also an effective employee engagement model. There has been a substantial demand for highly trained and qualified adventure professional to facilitate outbound training programmes. One can take the journey of being a facilitator to a trainer based on the skills and additional qualifications acquired, and would be able to earn Rs 15,000 to Rs 1.2 lakh a month.

Water & Aero sports specialists: Rafting and paragliding are the most challenging adventure activities and one has to be a highly trained rafter or glider before venturing into the waters or the skies. A sizable coastline and several rivers across the country, enables water ski and scuba diving in being a career option, if one can go through the rigorous training to be qualified.

Gear Designer: If you love adventure but want a career as a designer, then there is no looking back. Many Indian brands that are competing with global brands are always on a look-out for the best talent. Designing adventure gear and accessories can be fun and equally lucrative.

Naturalist: A life science degree, knowledge of flora on fauna and love for adventure can get you a job as Naturalist. The role could involve survey, documentation of eco-tourism opportunities and also facilitate travelers to understand and enjoy the natural surrounding better.

Where to start?

Like any other career, aspiring adventure professionals too can get trained and certified by national and international institutes. Mountaineering institutes like Nehru Institute of Mountaineering (NIM), Himalaya Mountaineering Institute (HMI), DAMAS and NOLS, an international outdoor school, offers training programmes for adventure enthusiasts and career aspirants.

Maj Vishal Thapa, Vice Principal and Training Head of NIM says: "We are rated as one of the best training institute in Asia; we train over 900 people both Indian and Foreign Nationals every year. In the last few years, we have see a drastic change in the objectives of the trainees. Today, majority of them join our courses to hone themselves professionally."

Successful stories

- Ashok, unlike others choose the 'untrodden path'. A career in adventure 20 years ago would have sent shivers down the spine, but he braved it out to set up Ozone. Ozone has evolved as an excellent brand in adventure gear market and today has the most popular multi-brand outlets called 'Adventure One'. As Ashok says: "It's a lifestyle choice, it's that simple."
- Lack of quality in affordable adventure gear in India till the late 80s posed a challenge to many adventure enthusiasts including Dinesh. He stood-up to the challenge to create India's most popular adventure gear brand 'Wildcraft'. With over 15 stores and 300 employees the brand is synonymous with adventure gear in India.
- Anita connected to the blue skies and flying high was just what she wanted to do, she did that by creating the coolest brand 'Temple Pilots' in the Adventure and Tourism industry in the country.
- Balaji (Bala) runs a campsite called 'Shristi' that focuses on experiential learning, facilitating learning, creative thinking and self-development through nature, he says: "It was initially very hard, but love for adventure and determination to make it a success kept me going, today there is a sense of achievement."
- Finally, I, as an adventure enthusiast, was keen in an 'adventure' career; I saw a huge potential in this space and the possibility of creating a successful company. I gave up my corporate role to start BASECAMP Adventures. Today we manage Outbound Training and Adventure programmes for over 2,600 corporate clients and adventure travelers.

Opportunities are immense for those who travel the newer terrains. A board at NIM reads 'Success lies in Courage'. A career in adventure space is definitely challenging, if one has the courage and is adventurous enough then success is sure to follow.

(The author is with BASECAMP Adventures)