

INDIA BOATING

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That's**the**Life

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Kaya Kalp Spa

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Sailing**Destination**
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Sea Divas

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BHAVIK GANDHI

Bhavik Gandhi shot into limelight when he successfully rowed across the Atlantic in 106 days becoming the 23rd person in the world and the first Asian to do so.

Words: Priyanka Tilve

Bhavik was introduced to sailing in Sri Lanka where he did his schooling and the sport caught his fancy. Apart from sailing, Bhavik is also a keen adventure sports enthusiast and actively participates in marathons, mountaineering and trekking. Originally from Mumbai, Bhavik is based in Sweden and is currently participating in a number of regattas in Europe.

India Boating caught up with Bhavik on his recent visit to Mumbai and spoke to him about his epic rowing expedition.

Rowing the Atlantic presents not only a physical but a psychological challenge as well, what kind of training did you undergo?

I trained a lot in Sweden where I live. Rowing is unlike other sports it is more about your personal ability to cope with the pressure and that's where I think a lot of people fail. I have always been doing endurance sports like distance running, mountaineering, sailing, trekking through Lake Baikal in Siberia in winter and am also among the few people to have cycled through nine countries in Europe. Each of these challenges involved pushing the limits and that sort of builds your confidence and prepares you mentally. And yes it's a physical challenge as well, you have to be alert at all times and keep rowing. It also involves a lot of physical

discomfort for one your movement is restricted as the boat is really small and then you are wet always because of the waves that lash against the boat. At the same time you have to be mentally alert as there are other boats you have to watch out for and amidst all this keep a track of your course!

What is that kept you going when you were out at the sea?

Most importantly you have to stay focused on the goal, you have to be self aware of what you are doing as to not to crack mentally. I wrote a lot, I kept a diary and updated the website every single day...so the trick is to keep yourself busy at all times. I had this one task that I had to do every single day like one day I assigned for cleaning the deck, other day checking the keel, or looking at the machinery to keep everything going. So this way I kept myself busy and focused on my goal of navigating to Antigua.

I chose Antigua as destination for my rowing expedition and I knew the chances of hitting Antigua were not easy. As it is a very small island around 30 miles wide and to hit that in the rowing boat across the 5000 miles ocean was not easy. But the thought of achieving that goal helped me stay focused. So it was like, you know, developing a routine to keep yourself occupied.

Can you describe the feeling when you reached Antigua?

Oh it was amazing...unforgettable... I can't describe it. It's actually the whole journey of reaching to it and not just hitting the shore. When I was approaching Antigua the sea water turned from blue to green because of all the underwater growth...even though Antigua was like two to three days away. I saw sea weed and it was for the first time I saw plant life since I started rowing.

The first time I saw Antigua was three o'clock in the morning, I saw sky ahead and as I kept rowing it turned a little yellow and you could see Antigua like a haze and it was still two days away. I thought it was a ship at first but as I got closer I saw the lighthouse and then I radioed the coast guard. It was a bit stressful as well because there are lot of rocks and reefs in Antigua but nonetheless it was a fantastic experience.

Which were the high and low points of your expedition?

I woke up one day, opened the hatch and there was 3 ft of water in the boat I didn't know where it was coming from. That was the worst moment of my life. So there I was in the middle of the ocean with water in my boat without a life raft trying to fix it and throw the water out. One option was to call the rescue and at that time I was like two weeks away so if I had called for rescue I would have had to wait for the rescue ship to reach me as I was out of the helicopter range. So the question was whether to call the rescue or not. I then decided to fix it myself it took a while but I managed to fix it.

Profile



What was amazing while I was out there was the wildlife. All the fishes that used to swim alongside the boat, they were basically attracted towards the boat because of the shade around it. I used to dive with the dolphins and I also spotted a shark. It was an incredible experience. I had Doradas following me for about 500 miles. They were just swimming alongside and keeping me company. It was just incredible; you don't get the chance otherwise to be so up-close with the wildlife.

How has the experience changed you as a person?

I think it makes you more conscious about your conditions and how you deal with all the stress and pressures. It makes you stronger, competitive and prepares you for everything else in the life. The whole thing was an amazing experience even when I was caught in a storm or when my boat capsized... it was scary but at the same time there is a sense of wonder... the wind, the waves you are like awed by it. It was an experience of a lifetime and only few people get a chance to do something of this sort. **IB**

A REFLECTION

"Out at sea, you have to deal with exhaustion from rowing 10-12 hrs a day, the physical discomfort of living in a 6ft cabin, muscle fatigue, salt sores, sleep deprivation, constantly being soaked by waves, navigating, fixing equipment - the list is endless.

Yet, every one of my 106 days at sea have been a privileged experience. The full arch of a rainbow, the magnificent electrical storms and huge rolling sea are just magical. Shoals of fish swimming round the boat, whales, sharks, dolphins, storms, flying fish, incredible sunsets. On some nights the moon would be so bright that it would be daylight on deck. The mood of the ocean often changes by the hour and you never know quite what to expect next."

- Bhavik Gandhi

