



WEEKEND ADVENTURER

 Courtesy of IGO Adventures

Real Life getting in the way of your dreams of pushing yourself to the extreme and seeing nature's wonders? Charley Larcombe looks to a company offering life-changing vacations from the norm.







I've known Bobby Melville of adventure company, IGO, for years. A great friend, he is the sort of person who given five minutes in a crowded room will be holding court with jokes and good nature, and a host of new mates added to his iPhone contacts. Four years ago he told me that having met an equally charismatic person, he was inspired to row the Atlantic. He'd never picked up an oar or sailed around an island – let alone considered taking up a challenge to row across open sea with nothing but three companions and a glorified canoe to tackle the crashing waves of one of the world's greatest oceans.

The Talisker Atlantic Challenge is a race of over 3,000 nautical miles, from La Gomera in the Canary Islands to Nelson's Dockyard in Antigua. Unsupported, competitors face 40-feet waves, ocean storms where all they can do is deploy a sea anchor, concertina themselves into the minuscule cabin with a teammate and

ride out the sea sickness. They cope with continuous two hour on, two hour off rows and sustenance from the freeze-dried limited packs they can carry within their 21-foot boat. More people have travelled into space than successfully crossed the Atlantic this way.

Despite the fears and concerns, Bobby, his teammates and the trusty 'Tiny Dancer' cast off and headed off into the blue. Incredibly, 48 days later, he and his crew rowed into Antigua to great cheers; several pounds lighter, with a beard to rival any old sea dog – and with elation like he'd never felt before. "I thought if I could bottle that emotion and share it with everyone, it would be fantastic."

That moment had taken nearly two years of preparation, training and funding before even dipping a toe into the water. He saw that this experience of pushing yourself to the brink and earning that sense of achievement wasn't possible for the average person with responsibilities

and jobs and families at home. They couldn't go off the grid like that. They needed something else. And so the idea of IGO was born...

Essentially, the company organise multi-discipline challenges in the world's most spectacular wildernesses with a real focus on the importance of camaraderie. The push is that life-affirming moments such as these don't have to be for the Ernest Shackletons of history, but that those with an adventurous spirit can still undertake extraordinary things.

"We created IGO Adventures in order to offer a new level of accessibility to life-changing experiences," explains Bobby. "We have experts creating customised training plans specific to each person and terrain, and set up the logistics to make this sort of adventure possible within a week."

The events – so far having taken place in Norway, Montana and Morocco – are a host of challenges suitable to the



terrain of each location. For the Norway expedition, the competitors face four days of ski-touring, fat-biking, cross country skiing and a 26-mile marathon to round it all off. Covering the Hardangervidda Plateau – where the British Special Forces carry out their cold weather training - the route takes you around mountain passes, over glittering frozen lakes, and through icy dunes of powdery snow. Days are spent under a vast blue sky, whilst at night, exhausted from the exertion, you sleep under canvas Norwegian Lavvu tents. That's if you can sleep at all, as the added adventure on this particular trip is witnessing the Northern Lights.

The team have also recently completed their first expedition in the trails of the Flathead National Forest, Montana.

Another type of 'big sky' country, if you undertake this expedition, expect a tetrathlon of swimming across glass-like lakes, five-hour mountain bike treks, a day of kayaking and a several-hour mountain trek on the homeward stretch, all under the watchful eyes of elk and bison which outnumber humans in that part of the world.

There's a strong focus on the trips being an adventure challenge - but the IGO team will be welcoming you with a hug and a beer as you complete the various phases; it is supposed to be a holiday after all.

However, the IGO trips aren't for the feint-hearted or those looking to be coddled across the finish line (although the IGO team will very nearly carry you,

so dedicated are they that you finish the challenge together!). You set the pace – which is why it is possible for the amateur as well as the regular triathlete to compete – and the IGO guides are there to show you the stripped back wilderness, help you navigate the man versus nature sensations, but as Bobby says; "it's you and you alone who is responsible for making the journey."

It is the race that appeases your competitive edge, it's the endurance test that tests your dedication, it's the once-in-a-lifetime experience that is life-changing. And yet the actual event itself can be taken within your annual holiday time.

These expeditions are designed by adventurers, for adventurers so isn't it about time you packed your bags?

THE PREPARATION

Normal holiday prep' may involve a trip to the waxing parlour a couple of days pre-flight, but for this vacation you'll need to get match-fit a little earlier on. IGO offers a full assessment – that can also be done via the powers of technology and Skype – meaning you can prepare from anywhere in the world.

MEDICAL ASSESSMENT

You get a complete medical and ECG as well as a review of your training and nutritional history, plus an injury prevention screening involving a detailed musculoskeletal assessment.

GAIT ANALYSIS

A gait session and slow motion video analysis means the specialists can then translate the biomechanics and implement changes to your technique to reduce injury.

PERFORMANCE COACH

An online assessment carried out to look at the competitor's judgement and decision making, their resilience, hardiness and grit; and what their aims are for the challenge.

MEDICAL REVIEW

By combining all the various assessments, competitors have all the info on the best training and mental prep' ahead of them.

