



## adventure sports

When you want to get moving, what's your go-to activity? If you crave something a little more adrenaline-fuelled than a game of golf or football, maybe it's time to join the UAE's growing band of extreme-sport enthusiasts. **Cheryl Parsons** has the low-down on some of the region's top thrill-seeking pastimes



# Extreme thrills

Left, downhill longboarders on Ras Al Khaimah's Jebel Jais.

Emirati Saeed Al Dharif kitesurfs in Mirfa, a coastal town in the Western Region of Abu Dhabi.



## LONGBOARDING

At first glance, longboarding might look a lot like skateboarding, but, as the name suggests, it involves a much bigger, longer and wider board. "It also has larger, softer wheels, which makes it smoother and more stable on the road, so it's great for cruising and going long distances," says Gerbet Garcia, who first hopped on a longboard four years ago. "I'm hooked - I'll ride until I'm old or no longer able to. I find it very stress-relieving and also love the adrenaline rush." The pace is certainly a factor, with the world-record longboard speed currently clocking in at a hair-raising 130kph.

"Road rash and broken bones from falling off at high speed are just some of dangers," says Garcia. "That's why protective gear - elbow, knee pads and a helmet - are vital." Many competitive longboarders also chose to wear a full-leather bodysuit.

**WHERE:** Dubai's Mushrif Park is a popular longboarding spot thanks to its small hills and bike lanes, which provide a much safer terrain than the road for practising turning, carving and cruising. Daredevil, experienced longboarders often head to the steep descents of Jebel Jais in Ras Al Khaimah or Jebel Hafeet in Al Ain. For more information, check out Dubai Longboarding Community or Longboard UAE on Facebook for regular updates and sessions.

## KITESURFING

"Kitesurfing combines several sports [paragliding, wakeboarding, windsurfing and surfing]," says Osama Shihab of Kitesurf Dubai, who first tried the sport in 2008. "It's freedom on the water, simply using the wind to glide and explore the coast - I find it very meditative."

The best way to begin is with a trainer kite on land. Once you are comfortable with controlling that, you can progress, with the help of an instructor, to using a board and kite on the water. "The biggest risks are not understanding the rules and equipment. Knowledge of how to handle weather conditions is also vital to avoid putting yourself in danger. While kitesurfing equipment has evolved to the point where it is now safe and easy to use, kitesurfers must be familiar with their own equipment and know what to do in the event of an emergency."

**WHERE:** On the weekend, Dubai's Kite Beach, located behind Sunset Mall on Jumeirah Beach Road, is packed with kitesurfers, while Abu Dhabi's hotspots include the sandy stretches of Yas Island and Al Dabiya. Ras Al Khaimah's Al Hamra beach is also a popular hangout. To find out more, check out [www.kitesurfdubai.ae](http://www.kitesurfdubai.ae), or for classes and updates on kitesurfing in Abu Dhabi, visit [www.kitepro.ae](http://www.kitepro.ae).

A group of local parkour enthusiasts use walls and ramps to practise their jumping, climbing and rolling skills.



adventure sports 

## 🕒 PARKOUR

"In its purest form, parkour is the art of getting from A to B and avoiding obstacles in the fastest and most efficient way possible, using just the human body and basic human movements such as running, jumping, climbing, swinging, vaulting or rolling," says Mohamed Zeeshan Shaikh, a member of Parkour Dubai, who has been training since 2010. Derived from the French word "parcours", which literally means, "the way through", or "the path", parkour has boomed in popularity in the past few years. A person practising parkour is called a traceur (or traceuse for a woman). "Once you put on your running shoes, everything around you becomes like a giant playground and the opportunity to hop, skip and jump around it is endless," says Shaikh.

However, before you start leaping around like Spider-Man, Shaikh warns, there are many things to consider. "There are a handful of so called 'parkour athletes' who are doing illegal and dare-devilish stunts such as climbing and posing on the edge of high and under-construction towers just for media attention. This is absolutely not what parkour is about. These people are trespassing and above all, their irresponsibility can encourage other youngsters to attempt these dangerous stunts.

"Contrary to how it looks, parkour, when practised properly, is very safe," he says. "Our training emphasises things such as landing on the balls of your feet so that you don't hurt your joints. To judge if the environment is safe or not, we also look out for things such as loose bricks, protruding nails or slippery surfaces. The biggest risks come from a lack of patience, experience and conditioning. It can take months, even years, to build the strength behind a jump."

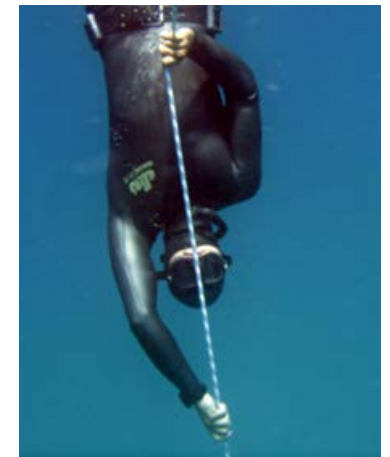
**WHERE:** Abu Dhabi's Khalifa Park is a regular hangout for traceurs. Adrenagy training club runs weekly classes in the area for 7- to 14-year-olds and another one for those 15 and above. In Dubai, Zabeel Park is a hotspot for enthusiasts, while FitRepublik in Dubai Sports City also runs regular parkour classes. To get started, contact an experienced traceur through the Facebook group Parkour Dubai or visit [www.uaeparkour.com](http://www.uaeparkour.com).

## 🕒 FREEDIVING

"I prefer to call it a 'serene' sport rather than extreme," says Dubai instructor Alex Boulting, who has been freediving since 2008. "When you're holding your breath underwater there is nothing but silence. You are at complete peace." Freediving is done without the use of any breathing apparatus and can take various forms; for example, static apnea involves holding your face and breath underwater for as long as possible – Dane Stig Severinsen holds the world record with a staggering, lung-burning 22 minutes. "No limit" freediving is the most extreme type, which uses a weighted sled to plunge a freediver rapidly to great depths before their ascent is made using an inflatable lift bag or balloon. Austrian Herbert Nitsch, dubbed the Deepest Man on Earth, has set the no limit dive record at 253.2 metres.

"Unlike other extreme sports, the aim is actually to keep your heart rate down and be as still and efficient as possible," says Boulting. "This creates a euphoric feeling that comes from simply being focused on the moment." He says that the sport's biggest risks, such as blacking out or drowning, are caused by diving alone or being inexperienced. "Freediving is best and most safely practised with friends you can buddy up with on every dive."

**WHERE:** Freediving UAE runs AIDA-accredited (the Worldwide Federation for breath-hold diving) courses for beginners through to advanced level in Abu Dhabi and Dubai. It also organises regular trips across some of the UAE's diving hotspots. For more information, visit [www.freedivinguae.com](http://www.freedivinguae.com).



A GREAT WAY TO GET STARTED IS ON AN INDOOR CLIMBING WALL, WHICH WILL HELP YOU HONE YOUR SKILLS BEFORE VENTURING TO THE GREAT OUTDOORS. THERE ARE MANY FACILITIES ACROSS DUBAI AND ABU DHABI



## ← ROCK CLIMBING → SKYDIVING

If clinging to a rock face and scaling heights on your time off sound like your cup of tea, then you might want to consider taking up rock climbing. A great way to get started is on an indoor climbing wall, which will help you hone your skills before venturing to the great outdoors. There are many facilities across Dubai and Abu Dhabi, including Talise Fitness, Madinat Jumeirah; Pharaohs' Club at Wafi and Rock Republic in Dubai Investments Park; or at The Club in Abu Dhabi.

**WHERE:** The UAE has a number of outdoor rock climbing hotspots such as Dibba, which features two main crags or rock faces that have been voted the region's favourite by UAE climbers. Other popular areas include the rocky mountains of Hatta in Dubai, Jebel Hafeet in Al Ain and various locations in Ras Al Khaimah. Get in touch with the UAE Rock Climbing community on Facebook. Dorrell Sports ([www.dorellsports.com](http://www.dorellsports.com)) also organises rock climbing trips to Hatta, Oman and Ras Al Khaimah under the guidance of an experienced instructor.

There is perhaps nothing more exhilarating than jumping out of an airplane – attached to a parachute, of course. The wind rushing past at the rate of more than 200kph, seeing the Earth race towards you and the feeling of free-falling – not unlike the sensation of flying – all combine to make skydiving one of the most adrenaline-charged sports.

The very act of “falling” is what defines a skydive. In an average jump, from about 3,650 metres, you can expect to experience around a minute of free fall before your parachute opens to glide you safely down to the ground. While for some, it's a once-in-a-lifetime activity, for others, it's a hobby. The best way to get started is by booking a tandem jump, which lets beginners experience the thrill of the dive while being safely strapped to an experienced instructor (see next page for more information).

**WHERE:** Skydive Dubai offers an accelerated free fall training programme. And, once you have completed more than 500 solo jumps, you can choose to complete a PRO course to learn how to become an instructor. For more information, visit [www.skydivedubai.ae](http://www.skydivedubai.ae)

## In the region

Adventure races have been all the rage for the past few years. Here are a few favourites.

**DESERT WARRIOR CHALLENGE**  
The next obstacle race is on October 23, so dress your team in your best themed outfit and head to Dubai Police Training Facility, Al Rawia. Registration is on the day of the event. There are categories for all fitness levels and a race for juniors; [www.desertwarriorchallenge.com](http://www.desertwarriorchallenge.com)

**WADI ADVENTURE RACE**  
The 10th instalment of this popular obstacle challenge will be held at Wadi Adventure in Al Ain on October 31. Choose from 5km, 10km or 15km courses and prepare to swim, climb, crawl and run your way to the finish line. Register at [www.premieronline.com](http://www.premieronline.com), more information at [www.facebook.com/wadiadventureace](http://www.facebook.com/wadiadventureace)

**DUBAI FITNESS FESTIVAL**  
This three-day outdoor event, from November 5 to 7 at the Dubai Autodrome, features a number of challenges, including cycling, fitness, running and “against gravity”. Plus, the search is on to find the UAE's fastest and strongest men and women; [www.dubaifitnessfest.com](http://www.dubaifitnessfest.com)

**THE SAND PIT**  
The 10-kilometre obstacle run at Al Barari in Dubai is on November 20. The obstacles will challenge physical and mental strength and include climbing up cargo nets, crawling through pipes and under barbed wire, jumping over walls and swinging. Register at [www.thesandpitrun.com](http://www.thesandpitrun.com)

**WADI BIH RUN**  
Not for the faint-hearted, next year's Salomon Wadi Bih adventure race along the Khasab Road in Dibba, Oman, will be split over two days – February 5 and 6. Solo participants can choose from 30km, 50km or 72km; teams can choose from 50km to 72km. Runners battle heat, dust and an altitude of 1,000 metres. Register at [www.premieronline.com](http://www.premieronline.com)