

Running Shorts

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Ram Sethu: Chasing the wind back home in India



Above: From the Windchasers' Facebook page, "Day 2 of the Sandakphu 70-Mile Himalayan Race will have participants arrive exactly here, camp the night and watch the most surreal sunrise of the magnificent Kanchenjunga, the third-highest mountain in the world (28,169 feet), before taking off for even more stunning views of Mount Everest, Lhotse and Makalu." (photo by Nitesh Square Photography).

(Sunday morning update from [The Windchasers' Facebook page](#): "They're Running! Yes! They already are! The race started at dot 9 a.m., just like planned, and the runners are doing what they do so well: inspire us all! Later in the day, all of them would reach Tumling - a feat that we cannot wait to celebrate with them!")

A passion for his native country and a passion for running have landed Greensboro's Ram Sethu back in India this weekend.

Sethu and a friend, Priya Darshini, set up a company called [The Windchasers](#). They're directing a four-stage event, the Sandakphu 70-Mile Himalayan Race, that includes 17 competitors who will run in northeast India, along the Nepal border, from Maneybhanjang to Rimbik.

The first stage, covering 14.4 miles, is scheduled for Sunday. The next stages of 13.1, 28.8 and 13.8 miles will continue through Wednesday.

Runners will make ascents, including one on a 65-degree incline, and descents totaling 3,636 feet. They'll do it on gravel and packed earth. And they'll see the Himalayan peaks of Makalu (27,825 feet), Lhotse (27,940 feet) and Everest (29,029 feet).

Runners will reach a lodge each night, where they'll relax, socialize and enjoy a meal prepared by Nepali hosts.

"A lot of people in India right now, the younger community and even the middle-aged group, they're really



into health and fitness and specifically running," Sethu said. "They are really very much into marathons these days. So it's kind of like the appropriate time to provide that opportunity for runners."

Sethu had been a casual runner for about 20 years before he ran his first endurance race, 160 miles, in 2007 in the Gobi Desert, which covers parts of northern China and southern Mongolia. The experience hooked him. He later competed with Darshini in a 100-mile race in the Himalayas -- but he thought he could do a better job organizing a race, whether it was there or in the Thar Desert in northwest India.

"We wanted to make this available, to help Indian runners," said Sethu, a software entrepreneur who lived in his native Chennai, India, for 25 years. "To offer this as an opportunity to experience the Himalayas and also the running, but also to help them train for that and bring the awareness for the young runners in India. People from the outside are exposed to the beauty of the Himalayas and the desert, but more through the activity and not just as a tourist."

Sethu said the races also help promote the Sherpa and help them create job opportunities. For a pilot race last September, he said, Windchasers established a good relationship with a Sherpa group and found a course director who knew the terrain.

The experience isn't inexpensive. The race fees are \$1,500 for international runners and about \$950 for Indian residents. Among the entries are an Israeli-born New Jersey resident, Hanna Ben Shoan, who is a four-time Ironman finisher; a Tennessee couple, Michael and Kimberly Baymiller; and several natives of India who lists themselves as adventure enthusiasts, marathon runners or, in one case, a long-distance rookie.

Just in the last five years, Sethu has become a veteran of marathons and endurance races worldwide. That race in the Himalayas, five years ago, was his first visit to that part of his country, and it's an experience he hopes to help re-create for the runners starting this weekend.

"A lot of people have not even been there," he said, describing his own absence until 2007. "Not even me, and I grew up in India."



[The Windchasers site.](#)

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Below: Ram Sethu on the trail during a Windchasers pilot race in September in the Himalayas (photo by Nitesh Square Photography).



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Posted by [Eddie Wooten](#) on Sunday, April 29, 2012 at 9:34 am

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