



Not plain sailing:
Sea adventures helped
Abigail beat the blues



Take a brake: Cycling holidays
are attracting more thrillseekers
PICTURE: REX

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Peaks raised me from dark depths

GINGERLY, I edge my way sideways down a couloir – a narrow rock corridor at the top of a mountain – one ski at a time, my heart banging in my chest. As I grasp for a foothold I dislodge a couple of ice balls that hurtle down the almost vertical drop beneath me. My heart beats a little faster – one false move and I could be dead.

As I ski out of the valley I realise I've thought of nothing other than the task in hand since beginning the ascent two hours before. For someone with a constantly chattering mind, this is quite some achievement.

I've never particularly been one for beach holidays and my desire to push myself to physical extremes when I travel – cycling up ridiculous mountains in Colorado to sailing the Atlantic – is growing.

I first used adventure travel to get over a bout of depression and restore my appetite for life five years ago. It very quickly succeeded where pills had failed.

Depression sufferer **Abigail Butcher** found sunny breaks left her cold but extreme holidays shifted the gloom

As I navigated around the Whitsundays in Australia on a yacht to gain my RYA Day Skipper licence, I suddenly realised I was actually living my life instead of watching it churn by with the mundane daily grind.

I'm not alone. Adventure travel specialist Explore reports a massive increase in demand for adventurous destinations and active holidays in recent years. Cycling holidays have increased by 40 per cent, particularly in Cuba and Vietnam, with walking and trekking holidays also on the rise.

And even more extreme trips are selling like hotcakes, too. Gone are the days when the Marathon des Sables was the only option. The Adventurists has been running stunts like 1,000km horse races across Mongolia and 3,500km

rickshaw races across India since 2004, and says appetite is increasing – the crazier the better. The number of starters in its Mongol Derby – billed the toughest horse race on earth – has tripled from 2010 to 2014 and founder Dan Wedgwood plans to add two new adventures this year and two more in 2016.

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While there has been an exponential rise in spiritual travel, with meditation, detox and stress-relieving retreats to help us all with burnout, they just don't work for me. I need to do yoga for about two weeks straight, at the top of the Himalayas, to reach anywhere near the same level of brain stillness I have when steering a sailing boat through crashing waves in 40 knots of wind, or pushing my poor, tired body up yet another mountain.

I know I'll continue to push these boundaries until my body physically surrenders – and I'm already thinking about what to do then.



Ups and downs:
Abigail on the slopes