

WHITE WATER KAYAKING
Dane Jackson

WHITE WATER KAYAKING

What was once a mode of transportation, became a gutsy leisure pursuit in the early 20th century. When fibreglass and plastics took over wooden structures, it revolutionised kayaking making descents down turbulent waters lighter, safer and more popular.

Facing powerful rapids requires physical and mental strength and endurance—a robust workout for sure. The skills needed are varied: from reading the river in milliseconds, to manoeuvring and stabilising the kayak in extreme waters. The world's top and fearless kayakers such as Noura Newman from France, Dane Jackson from the USA and Aniol Serrasolses from Spain, seek out unexplored rivers and 'first descents' down stretches of river or waterfalls that have never been kayaked before.

Rivers like the Soca in Slovenia and the Inn in Switzerland offer some of the best white water kayaking in Europe. While the Ottawa River in Canada is famous for its big waves and freestyle kayaking, Norway's Sjøa and Rauma rivers are hotspots for extreme kayaking, with even riskier rapids but stunning scenery.

SKYDIVING

In 2012, the legendary Austrian skydiver Felix Baumgartner set a record for the highest altitude skydive, jumping from the stratosphere, 128,000 feet (24 miles/39 km) from earth, and landing in New Mexico. For context, most skydives go from an aeroplane or helicopter at around 10,000 to 15,000 feet (3,000 to 4,500 metres).

This daredevil sport requires a strong body to maintain stable positions during freefall and mental fortitude and focus to monitor air altitude and make decisions around when to deploy the parachute. There's technical knowledge too, around equipment, emergency procedures and weather conditions.

Beginners typically start with tandem jumps and progress to accelerated freefall solo skydiving. Landscapes such as Interlaken and Lauterbrunnen in the Alps offer unparalleled mountain scenes and Empuriabrava and Seville in Spain are home to some of the highest skydiving spots in Europe. Dubai is popular for its jumps over Palm Jumeirah.



SKYDIVING
Felix Baumgartner

"A ROBUST WORKOUT FOR SURE"



BASE JUMPING
Cedric Dumont

BASE JUMPING

Meet the most extreme of extreme sports: BASE jumping, an acronym for Buildings, Antennas, Spans (bridges) and Earth (cliffs). Only after accumulating hundreds of skydives can you advance to jump from fixed objects at lower altitudes with just a single parachute and no reserve.

In the 1990s, a few pros elevated this further by developing wingsuit flying. These aerodynamically designed suits allowed athletes to glide away from their jump point, increasing time in the air moving horizontally. Innovations aim to increase the 'glide ratio'. A 3:1 glide ratio means for every 3feet/3metres you move forward, you'll descend 1foot/1metre. The suit is also the tool for turning, diving, and climbing through the air, paving the way for proximity flying, where jumpers fly close to terrain for extra thrill.

Athletes to watch out for almost-incredible, breath-taking BASE and wingsuit jumping include Italy's Roberta Mancino, Norway's Espen Fadnes and Jocke Sommer and Belgium's Cedric Dumont. The pros will head to dramatic Norwegian fjord views and high cliffs, Spain, Italy and Switzerland, as well as South Africa's Table Mountain.



RALLY RAID
Dania Akeel

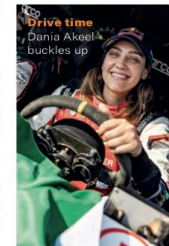
RALLY RAID

Imagine a long-distance race in motorcycles, cars, trucks, and buggies across deserts and mountains, covering hundreds of kilometres daily over multiple stages. The vehicles are designed for durability and speed and competitors train for physical fitness, navigation skills, vehicle handling and mechanical knowledge.

The Dakar Rally is one of the most famous races, testing competitors' resilience, strategy and teamwork in some of the harshest terrains and conditions on land. Born in 1978, this race originally went from Paris, France to Dakar, Senegal but since 2020 it's been held in Saudi Arabia, and open to amateur and pro athletes.

French rally driver Stephane Peterhansel and Qatar's Nasser Al-Attiyah have multiple Dakar wins under their belts. Not just a man's sport, Spain's Laia Sanz is one of the world's top female competitors and Saudi Arabia's Dania Akeel is one to watch.

If you want to try your hand at this fast and furious game, Baja Aragón in Spain is a popular location for rally training, while Sonora desert in Mexico offers varied desert terrain and challenging conditions.



Drive time
Dania Akeel
buckles up



MOUNTAINEERING
Nirmal Purja

MOUNTAINEERING

More than just a hike up the mountains, advanced mountaineering involves rock and ice climbing, glacier travel and high-altitude acclimatisation on some of the world's highest and most demanding peaks. Alpinists (as they're often known) use ropes, harnesses, crampons, ice axes, and protective clothing to tackle the terrain. Understanding weather patterns, navigation and survival skills in harsh conditions is essential. Physical fitness, endurance and mental resilience are paramount.

Mountaineers strive for first ascents, speed records, solo ascents and routes that push the boundaries of technical proficiency. Switzerland is home to advanced climbs on Eiger and Matterhorn, France has the classic Mont Blanc massif, which contains 11 main summits, and Italy's Dolomites is famous for its vertical rock faces. Expeditions in Pakistan, Nepal, Tibet, China and Patagonia are also sought after for their vast, remote and technical mountain ranges.

The world's record breakers include Nepalese British Nirmal Purja, whose mind-blowing feats include summiting all 14 of the highest peaks in the world over 8,000 metres in record time (six months and six days).

CANYONING

Canyoning is a versatile and multidisciplinary sport. Traversing through rivers, rocky canyons and gorges, descending cliffs, sliding down waterfalls, hiking, climbing and scrambling, swimming through deep pools and rappelling/abseiling (descending using ropes and harnesses) are some of its varied experiences.

Beginners can start with a training course to learn the basics with low-risk easy routes even suitable for families. More experienced canyoneers can enjoy exploration of higher rappels—like 100m high waterfalls—deeper canyons and stronger water flows. Mastery of rope work, hydrodynamics for safe water navigation and jumaring (ascending a fixed rope) are crucial at advanced levels. Some adventurers like Laurent Poublan are involved in ice-canyoning in below-freezing temperatures and snowy conditions, while others like Warren Verboom are known for freestyle canyoning, which is even more extreme.

Spain, renowned for its deep gorges and challenging descents, is a mecca for advanced canyoneers. The Blue Mountains in Australia offer some of the toughest and scenic canyons. →



CANYONING
Bonifatius Shilima

CANYONING IS A VERSATILE SPORT!

HIGH LIFE

Yanar Alkayat chats to Swiss alpinist Nicolas Hojac about the zen of mountain climbing

I had never planned to become a professional alpinist. I grew up near Bern in Switzerland, two hours from the mountains and I didn't come from a mountain family. After 10 years of ice hockey, I discovered mountaineering in my mid-teens. A fire started burning in me so I joined a Swiss alpine club and my passion was born. After studying mechanical engineering, I set myself a goal of going full-time pro by 30, transitioning from climbing existing routes to designing 'projects' and 'stories' so I could make a living.

Since I started competitive mountaineering aged 22, I have climbed Eiger maybe five times. However breaking the speed record in 2017 crossing Eiger, Mönch, and Jungfrau and descending each peak with the paraglider stands out as something special. In 2015, with mountaineer Ueli Steck, we claimed a team ascent speed record of the Eiger North Face in three hours, 46 minutes.

I plan for three expeditions a year—one in places like the Himalayas or Patagonia—seeking new routes and unclimbed peaks. It's exciting to be the first to climb a face; sometimes I just have a photo of the mountain and a possible line where I want to climb. You don't know how hard it is or what's coming next, like reading a good book. This autumn, I will go to Nepal to the Langtang Valley, climb new routes and fly down from the summit with a paraglider. The other two projects will be in the Alps. Here, every peak, ridge and face has been climbed, so my focus is on speed mountaineering. I like moving fast and being creative by combining peaks and traverses.

As a pro, I'm a one-man show but for a project, there'll be two, three or four of us. When we are on the mountain, which could be for up to eight weeks, teamwork is crucial. With the right partner, you motivate each other and push together, though you still need to have the same level of risk tolerance. There is no stronger metaphor than the rope team. We are always connected to the rope, helping each other—a good symbol for teamwork and collaboration.

In 2021, on the Mount Shivering expedition, one team member got altitude sickness, and we had to descend. I experienced altitude sickness in China in 2016, so I understand. The first rule is always to come down safely.

Heights don't frighten me, but the potential of a fall does. Each step on a mountain takes you further from safety. That's why I usually stay in my technical comfort zone. If I'm afraid, then something has gone wrong. The mountains are stronger than me, so if conditions aren't good, there is no reason to push too hard. Focus on what you can change instead. There is no sense in risking your life for a peak. Fear is a normal security mechanism, so the more you expose yourself, the more you learn to control it without it limiting you.

The best thing about my work is the beauty, adventure, and aesthetic of the mountains. The downside is losing friends. I climbed a lot with Ueli Steck, one of the most famous alpinists who died in 2017 on an easy mountain. It brings up questions like, how can it happen to the best? Is this the right path I'm following? It's not every day that someone dies but over the years, you see how dangerous this sport can be. Being a pro alpinist is a kind of type II fun; in the moment I might be suffering, thinking, what the hell am I doing here? Then, back at base camp or home, I think, oh, that was a good day. The process pushes you to become a better person.

My training has three pillars: endurance, climbing, and strength training. Endurance involves trail running, steep hill hiking with a heavy backpack and paragliding—so I can fly down peaks and have some fun. Climbing, inside or on rock, trains my physics. Strength training includes core workouts and leg strength. My training prepares me for any eventuality. I train myself but also have access to the Red Bull performance centre near Salzburg. There are physiotherapists, doctors and sports therapists. Once a year I go there for a full mind and body checkup.

Passion is really important in what I do. The mountains teach you a lot about that.



'PASSION IS REALLY IMPORTANT IN WHAT I DO'

Photographs: Red Bull Content Pool, Angelika Reiner

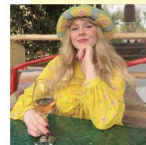


Ganni Copenhagen



Sweaty Betty London

Retail therapy



Megan Murray investigates how community and collaboration rather than competition are now at the heart of our hippest high streets

We don't need stats and forecasts to tell you what you already know. Take a walk into your local town and you'll see that high streets are changing. While the scene varies depending on where in the world you are—we know that ecommerce platforms hold huge sway and nowadays, you're more likely to click next day delivery for a last-minute festive gift, than embark on a hectic dash the week of Christmas.

But change doesn't have to be a bad thing. Once, the high street was ruled by sprawling chains and if soulless shopping experiences are out, what's in? Retail therapy led by connection and community, that's what. Just as the Internet has transformed how we shop, social media has also encouraged us to engage with both big brands and small businesses →

LEADING THE WAY

ICE CLIMBING
Nicolas Hojac

Health and fitness journalist Yanar Alkayat reflects on the popularity of extreme sports and how you too can embrace the extraordinary

The allure of extreme sports has undoubtedly captivated me. Over the years I've tried my hand at downhill mountain biking, coastering and scrambling to name a few, but I've come to realise the heights, complexities and inherent risks that come with more daring activities are not for me. From freezing with fright at the top of a beginner's canyon jump to shedding tears at the end of just a grade one scramble, my alter ego has sadly had to settle for more grounded pursuits.

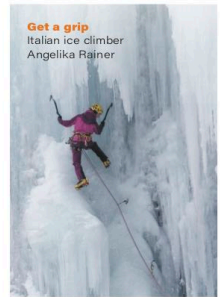
So how athletes have the gall to push fears aside and take unfiltered leaps feels mind-blowing. These seemingly superhumans thrive on pushing boundaries and they're no longer a niche group. Over the last few decades the world of extreme sports has surged in popularity.

Here, we look at the most thrilling of risk-taking sports and share how they deliver an adrenaline rush, who their pioneering athletes are, and how you too can embrace the extraordinary. However, if you are not cut out for the high or fast life, then sit back and enjoy reading about them from the comfort of your room.

ICE CLIMBING
When mountaineering meets vertical ice formations—think ice-covered rock faces, frozen waterfalls and icy slopes—it becomes an uber technical sport of its own. Specialised gear such as ice axes and crampons (traction device attached to the base of your boot) has advanced in line with the sport's popularity and international competitions since the 1980s.

Ice climbing evolved from mountaineering post World War II. While Switzerland, France, Norway and Italy are home to many of the best ice-climbing routes in Europe, Ouray in Colorado, USA is dubbed the 'Switzerland of America' and hosts the sport's largest annual festival. For more extreme cold and altitude challenges, there are jaw-dropping peaks in Alaska and the Himalayas.

Today, pro alpinists and record-breakers such as Ines Papert from Germany or Italy's Angelika Rainer excel in ice and mixed (rock and ice) climbing as the skills, such as finger strength and precision footwork, from one discipline often complement and enhance abilities in the other. →



Get a grip
Italian ice climber
Angelika Rainer