

To say that Gregory Warjri is an adrenaline junkie is an understatement. Mountain biking, river riding, trekking, cliff jumping, kayaking, deep-diving-Gregory does it all and more. He is also one of the very few who are fortunate and spirited enough to combine his passion with his livelihood in that he is a touring guide of NOMADS Shillong, an adventure touring company which he founded. Gregory is also an adjunct faculty of the Department of Tourism and Travel Management, Martin Luther Christian University. Read more about Gregory, his passion and his work in the interview that our correspondent had with him.

Q: Can you please tell me a little about what you do?

Gregory: I basically do a lot of outdoor adventure activities and extreme sports. I developed a love for the outdoors during my school days. It all started 12 or 13 years back with trekking and mountain biking expeditions that I used to go on with a group of friends. Gradually, people came to know that I love the outdoors and started requesting me to take them on tours here and there. That was how I became a guide, something that I do till now. Actually, I studied BCA in MLCU but I have always had an interest and a passion in this field. I also see that many tourists come to Meghalaya but all they could find in the Internet was Cherrapunjee and Mawlynnong and they do not know that there actually is so much more that is unexplored and undiscovered. This encouraged me as a guide to take tourists to off-beat destinations like Mawphanlur and Mawlyngbna. Eventually, this led me to form my own tour company, NOMADS Shillong, because I see that in Shillong we have very few professional guides and we lack a lot in this area. Our company provides quality service to the clients and we offer everything from cultural tours, eco-tours to adventure tours and more. Besides this, we also do workshops and training programmes. For the past 3 years our company has been training interns from Bangalore, ICFAI, NEHU and even from MLCU.

Q: What are the steps that you took to develop your skills in this area?

Gregory: Like I always tell the students, when you are doing all this, in time, you tend to self-develop. As a guide, nobody taught me but I underwent self teaching and I also look up and do some research on the Internet. Also, in my line of work, I meet professionals from all over the world. Whenever I meet them, I ask a lot of questions and I learn a lot from them. I also received training from Bangalore Adventure School from where I am a certified canyoneering expert. I also meet international cavers who teach me techniques like SRT and others. So I try to learn as much as possible from these experts.

Q: In all these years of you doing all this, what has been your most harrowing experience and how did you handle it?

Gregory: I always love pushing myself to the limits. When I started cliff jumping, I found it extremely thrilling and felt an extreme adrenaline rush. This made me want to attempt higher and higher jumps. I did it in Krangsuri and then in the bridge in Dawki. When attempting all these, accidents have occurred and I have broken bones and sustained various injuries but the scariest incident would have to be the one when I was in a paracraft and I went off a drop and was sucked into a whirlpool. At that moment my whole life flashed before me and I thought I was going to die but by the grace of God, I somehow got out of it. In this line of work, even

professionals meet accidents so even if one is a well trained expert, caution has to be taken and safety should always be prioritised. This is even more so for people like us who take clients; safety is always ensured because if I personally do anything crazy, I only put myself at risk, but when I take clients, I have to be responsible for their safety.

Q: If we look at our North East region, how far has this sector of outdoor adventure sports come?

Gregory: In just 3 years, tourism has come a long way in our state. Earlier, when I did mountain biking, there were not too many mountain bikers in Shillong. But now, the number has grown rapidly and many competitions are held all across the state. Earlier, such competitions were held only outside the state but now they are held in Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur every now and then. The geographical layout in Meghalaya is also of a great advantage because, here, we can do everything from caving, kayaking, rafting to even paragliding in some areas. If other young people develop a passion in this area, we can see a lot more development in just a few years.

Q: What challenges do you and other people in this line of work face?

Gregory: The major challenge is in sponsorship. We need sponsors for going outside for competitions or for further training and we try to approach the Sports Department or the Tourism Department for this but to no avail. I personally have tried a lot to get sponsorship for organising events, awareness programmes or workshops in the rural areas but it is extremely difficult to get sponsors. But I hope that this will change for the better and the government will put this as a priority.

Q: What advice would you give to someone who has a passion for adventure sports?

Gregory: Like I always say, I neither encourage nor discourage people who are interested in this area. If I encourage people but they make no progress and get nowhere, I would not feel good. Being in this line, I have come across people who are pioneers in their fields and have done so much for the state and yet they struggle so much in what they do. I once met this guy who I look up to a lot and he said to me- It is no use here in our state, here no one respects what you do. That is the reality that we face in our state. However, for those who have a genuine passion, I would encourage them to keep on doing what they love to do. At times it is very difficult to do what one loves to do and make a living out of it. Even in my case, I do not get much but it is okay because I love what I am doing. I would also advice people to not stop doing what they love even if they have a job because that will fill the gap in your life, whether you are a guitar player, singer or an artist, just keep doing it. I basically do this because of my passion in this field and I never expected to come this far. I have been invited to various parts of the country to conduct workshops and have also been sponsored by various outdoor brands, so it has been an amazing journey for me.

Q: What are the things in your bucket list right now?

Gregory: Travelling is the foremost thing in my bucket list. Right now with the amount of work that I have I hardly find time to travel so I would like to travel whenever I have time to

spare. Besides this, there are two spots that I want to jump off from; one is the Dawki bridge and another is an edge from Mawsynram that goes to a very deep river. Those are what I want to do at the moment. Maybe in the next 5 or 6 years, I would like to open a school which would be modelled as a recreation park where I can teach young kids about outdoor activities. Nowadays, young kids spend a lot of time with their electronic gadgets, on the Internet or in social media. They learn about the environment and nature in their schools but that just ends there, practically they do not know anything about their natural surroundings. This school can teach them about the outdoors, adventure and safety and help develop in them a love for the outdoors.