

AMIR YUSOF
amiryusof@mediacorp.com.sg

SWIM, CYCLE AND RUN

RACING AWAY

More S'poreans competing in triathlons abroad

SINGAPORE – There was more than the usual holiday clothes in Jessica Lee's suitcase when she left for her week-long trip to Australia earlier this month.

Apart from a wetsuit and running shoes, she also needed to pack a triathlon-specific bicycle.

One of 85 Singaporeans who signed up for the Ironman Cairns, Lee successfully completed a 3.8km swim around Sailfish Quay, a 180km bike course towards Captain Hook Highway and a 42.2km run that finished at Cairns esplanade.

To take on her toughest triathlon challenge yet, Lee happily forked out US\$5,000 (S\$6,330) that covered accommodation, airfare, car rental and recreational activities. The race registration alone cost her US\$850, but as far as she was concerned, it was money well spent.

"The experience of racing overseas is special, especially in Cairns at this time of the year," said the 36-year-old sales executive.

"The climate is much cooler than Singapore. Moreover, after the race, I had the opportunity to snorkel at the Great Barrier Reef and visit Port Douglas."

According to Lim Mui Khim, International Director for Tourism and Events Queensland, this year's Ironman Cairns saw a sizeable increase in the number of Singaporean participants from the 12 who competed in the 2011 edition.

"Races like Ironman Cairns offer Singaporeans a refreshing change in climate, landscape and overall experience," she said.

"Many have claimed that, while they do participate in local triathlons, the prospect of combining an endurance race with an adventurous vacation thrill many fitness enthusiasts."

REGIONAL EVENTS

Australia is but one of the growing number of countries that Singaporeans are heading to for sporting activities. While the Triathlon Association of Singapore (TAS) were unable to provide figures for Singaporeans heading to overseas events, Adrian Mok, who is Director of Athlete's Circle and organiser of the Sundown Marathon, told TODAY events in Malaysia and Indonesia already attract many from here.

"Events such the Desaru International Triathlon and the Metaman Bintan are picking up in terms of popularity because of their (lower) cost and convenience," he said.

"Not having to pay for airfare is a



huge factor in choosing these events over those in Australia or Europe."

The growing trend to head overseas has much to do with the boom in interest in endurance races here over the past decade.

For example, three local triathlon events, the Mega Tri Singapore, the Cold Storage Singapore Triathlon and the Tri-Factor Series, have all seen sharp rises in participant numbers over the years.

"The triathlon is one of the fastest developing and emerging social sports, and it appeals to a broad demographic," said TAS General Manager Eugene Ong.

"The (Singapore Triathlon) started with a humble 500 participants and grew up to more than 3,900 participants in 2011 for a two-day event. Last year, we had about 2,500 participants for a one-day race."

For Singaporeans Jessica Lee (left) and Ewin Teo, racing overseas offers a refreshing change in climate, landscape and overall experience.

PHOTOS: JESSICA LEE AND EWIN TEO

LOCAL LIMITATIONS

While demand from participants remains strong, that has not prevented some events from leaving the scene, with the Aviva 70.3 and the Singapore Biathlon the two biggest casualties.

The Aviva 70.3, which gained prestige with world champions Chris McCormack and Craig Alexander among its past participants, was scrapped last year after a three-year sponsorship deal ended and organisers Hi-Tri Singapore were unable to secure a licence from the World Triathlon Corporation.

Separately, this year's Singapore Biathlon was cancelled by organisers SAFRA and the Singapore navy after the later pulled out of the organising committee due to "increased operational commitments".

Said David Tay, 54, a life and con-

ditioning coach and endurance race enthusiast: "For a country where triathlon is picking up in popularity, the number of events is poor."

"Only the Mega Tri, Singapore Triathlon and Tri-Factor have Olympic distances, and the others are shorter races. A lot of people are travelling to Port Dickson, Bintan and Phuket as there are not many events at home."

Tay added that he has stopped taking part in local races due to the repetitive race experience that he describes as "the same old thing".

"As the roads are congested in the city area, the LTA (Land Transport Authority) has urged organisers to hold races in Tuas," he lamented. "Can you imagine racing in the midst of the industrial warehouses and trucks?"

Many have claimed that, while they do participate in local triathlons, the prospect of combining an endurance race with an adventurous vacation thrill many fitness enthusiasts.

Lim Mui Khim
INTERNATIONAL DIRECTOR FOR
TOURISM AND EVENTS QUEENSLAND

UP FOR THE CHALLENGE

For Nabil Samhudi, a 23-year-old undergraduate who has signed up for the Metaman Bintan in August, longer distances are his preference.

"You won't find the half and full ironman distance (events) in Singapore any more. I crave such long distances and will gladly compete overseas to satisfy this challenge," he said.

Triathlete Ewin Teo, 32, chooses to head beyond Asia, and has completed the Western Ironman Australia, Ironman Roth (Germany) as well as a half-ironman race held in Sri Lanka.

A Singapore Armed Forces commando, Teo also completed his maiden Ironman Cairns this month, and he told TODAY these events build his competitiveness and help him improve. "I hope to qualify for the Ironman World Championships in Kona, Hawaii, one day and the most efficient way for me to do so will be to pit myself against the best triathletes around the globe."

While the TAS acknowledged there are limitations facing local events, they feel the increasing trend to head overseas is not a bad thing.

Said TAS marketing executive Ng Siew Yew: "We do encourage Singaporeans to race overseas as this allows them to experience different routes and terrains and become better triathletes overall. That is definitely not a bad thing for the local triathlon scene."