

## Fitness Destinations- Looking for Meaning, in All the Right Places

December 13, 2012 by [Lisa Kingston](#)

**Written by Volunteer: Rita Gore**

Travel destinations that combine health and fitness and let people collect cultural experiences, are popping up everywhere.

*"Adventure, adrenalin and accomplishment"* is the focus on these aptly named *"fitness destinations,"* claims Monika Zuroski in a recent Calgary Herald article.

She says they *"take priority over scenery, sightseeing and fruity drinks served in coconut shells."* But is there a destination where runners can have a run and a rum punch, too she wonders?

Apparently there is. It can be found in the Cook Islands in the form of the Round Rarotonga Road Race. Rarotonga is the largest of the Cook Islands.



Zuroski points out in her November 30 article titled, "Running Around Rarotonga" that while participating in the run, athletes are treated to views of picture perfect beaches, lovely lagoons and gentle hills covered in a carpet of lush vegetation."

Having just completed his first Round Rarotonga Road Race in September 2012, Jason Webb owner of Downunder Travel, in Calgary, can support these claims.

*"The race itself is also pretty special,"* says Webb, noting the course takes runners around the perimeter of the entire island of Rarotonga. He also says he's noticed the popularity of destination runs growing over the years.

*"It's becoming bigger and bigger,"* says Webb. *"People are looking for more in their vacation experience, more than just going somewhere. It <a vacation> is not just to say, 'I've been there, but ... I've been there and done something meaningful."*

Based on a my research, some of these meaningful experience can range from completing a destination run, to taking a class in a foreign country, hiking the Camino or International dragon boat racing.

And it is not just elite athletes or the young and the restless who are signing on. You might be surprised just whose participating.

Margaret Crighton a sixty-something Calgarian, departed last week with her daughter on a trip to south-east Asia. She's given permission to share a bit of her Christmas email:

*"The Asia plan is a bit vague but I am very hopeful it will be good... we are playing it by ear but have a number of ideas of amusing bits- a bit of easy trekking with teahouses in Nepal, batik and cooking classes in Java, boating down the Mekong in Vietnam, hiking in Taiwan and a pilgrimage trail in Japan."*

Well then Margaret! Keep Calm and Carry on. Apparently you're part of a wave.

*"These are huge trends within the travel industry,"* reports Webb. *"It's the way many people are thinking about vacations."*

Canadian author, Jane Christmas has not only thought about such a vacation, she's done it and written a book about the experience.

Christmas, opted to join fourteen other women, only 2 of whom she knew well, to hike the Camino, a centuries-old pilgrimage route stretching 800 kilometers from southwestern France across the Pyrenees almost to the northwestern shore of Spain.

In the introduction to her book titled, "What the Psychic Told the Pilgrim—A Midlife Misadventure on Spain's Camino de Santiago de Compostela", she notes that:

*"The Camino is an ancient Spanish pilgrim route that has become immensely popular in the last decade with those who like their vacations with a side order of adventure and exercise. What could be better than walking with like-minded women?"*

What indeed?

Described as a wickedly funny account of a woman's pilgrimage of self-discovery on the infamous "Camino", it looks like it might be required reading for Cochrane resident, Vanessa Fishbuch who also plans to mark her 50<sup>th</sup> birthday by doing the route next year.

She will meet up with 2 of her sisters in Spain next September; together they'll spend the several weeks it takes to hike the Camino de Santiago de Compostela. When asked why they have picked this way of celebrating her milestone, Fishbuch grins:

*"My sisters and I don't get together very often (they live in New Zealand) so the chance to share an "adventure" with them is exciting. I like the idea of exploring a country by walking, seeing new places and being active at the same time."*

Still, she might do well to pick up a copy of Jane Christmas's book first.

Those searching for another kind of opportunity that combines competition and adventure with teamwork and a travel option, might want to consider dragonboat racing.

Take Calgary's [Sistership Dragonboat Team](#) for example. It's a team who happens to be made up of women (but also open to men) who have had breast cancer.

Vancouver sports medicine physician, Dr. Don McKenzie first tested out the theory that participating in strenuous upper body workout required for dragonboat racing, was a good thing for women who had breast cancer. Established in 1999, Calgary's Sistership became one of the first Canadian teams and it's been going strong ever since.

Sistership's dry land training takes place at YMCA's throughout Calgary during the winter months. As soon as the ice melts on Glenmore Dam they're back on the water. Each year Sistership not only competes in the local Calgary Dragonboat festival but journeys to at least 3 other venues annually.

Sometimes its local weekend jaunts to Lethbridge or Edmonton; but the team has competed in Cape Breton, Montreal, Ottawa, Vancouver, and Victoria too.



Some Sistership members journeyed even further when they joined up with the Canadian National Dragonboat team, Canadian's Abreast. Together with breast cancer survivors from across all Canada this national team has competed in international races as far away as Israel, Singapore, and Australia and New Zealand. It's after the racings done that team members spend a few weeks exploring the host country.

YMCA Calgary promotes Sistership Calgary's health and wellness goals by providing fitness membership to every fulltime active Sistership paddler. In return, team members pay it forward by raising funds every year for [YMCA Strong Kids](#). Talk about a winning combination!

So as 2012 comes to a close, instead of grinding out the usual list of goals and New Year's work-out resolutions; take a tip from the people featured here. Figure out what motivates you or would be a meaningful experience and then get to work training for it.

Do some research; recruit a few friends, even better, talk to someone who's been there. Use the excitement that's generated, to kick-start your 2013 fitness program. Combine it with a fitness destination, be it far or close to home that appeals and is affordable for you. We'd love to hear your ideas.

*References/Resources:*

- "Running around in Rarotonga-Destination runs a fresh trend in travel" by Monica Zurowski , Calgary Herald, November 30, 2012.
- Jane Christmas "What the Psychic Told the Pilgrim"-A Midlife Misadventure on Spain's Camino de Santiago de Compostela"
- [Calgary Dragonboat Association](#)
- [Calgary Sistership Dragonboat](#)
- [Japan's Kumano Kodo pilgrimage trail – Telegraph](#)
- [Marathon Training Program | Active Living | University of Calgary](#)

Applications are being accepted now for Sistership Calgary for the 2013 year. An information session will be held January 12, 2013 @ Parkdale United Church. Email: [info@sistershipcalgary.com](mailto:info@sistershipcalgary.com).

For men or women interested in checking out other local dragonboat teams the contact is Shane Martin at the Calgary Dragon Boat Society at [dragonboat@chinatowncalgary.com](mailto:dragonboat@chinatowncalgary.com)