

My First Mountain Race



I remember the very first time I went hiking. I was a 20 year old London girl living the island experience. Reunion was **a real eye opener** and falling in love with the island took no time: I learned to like beer while watching the sunset with friends who have since been part of my life, I discovered the sounds of Maloya which I love so much, I started appreciating a more **laid-back attitude** to life and even went on my first strike (which I **actually** enjoyed at that point). Everything was truly perfect.

And then I went on my first hike, to Mafate. Now, **don't get me wrong**, it was a great experience. But it was also a very confusing one for me. I was young and **fit**, and expected to march down to Mafate without any trouble, with spare time to have a chicken samosa and Dodo beer break every now and then. The first 15 minutes were ok, and then I just didn't understand what was happening. I was out of breath, and felt like a one-year old taking her first steps on unknown territory. I actually remember watching my American friend, Bridget, who'd obviously been on hikes before, **skip** downhill and manoeuvre her New Balance trainers from rock to rock like it was child's play.

As for me, I could completely understand why they laughed at Christopher Columbus for suggesting the world was round – it's just so much easier when we're on a flat surface! But I **soldiered on**, made it to Mafate, pretended it had been easy so my new boyfriend wouldn't laugh at me, and drank as much Dodo as I could to forget the fact that I had to go uphill the next day.

So when last week I took part in my very first mountain race, the Cilaos Women Trail, which was 22km long, I couldn't help but **grin** at the thought of that very first hike. My friend Cobie, who had had a similarly disastrous first hike and who was also doing the race, and I were both very touched at the thought of how far we had come.

The trail itself was amazing. There was such a good atmosphere, and hearing all these people cheer you on really does keep you going when it gets **tough**. I twisted my ankle somewhere in between the first and second **checkpoints**, but still managed to make it to the end, in 3h39. I felt so proud of myself!

I remember, only two years ago, thinking that all these people **signing up** to the Grand Raid and similar races were mad. I just couldn't understand why they would put themselves through the physical and psychological **strain**.

But now I do understand: Reunion does that to you. This little island has the strange capacity to draw you into the most unlikely situations that bring the best out of you. Situations where you see yourself transitioning into someone you never thought you could be. Some say it has something to do with it being a volcanic island, I don't know. All I know is that I'm **glad** to have experienced that transition from almost dying of a heart attack on my first hike, to doing the Cilaos Women Trail, and who knows what will come next...

Vocabulary

a real eye opener - un véritable revelation

laid-back attitude - attitude décontractée

actually - en fait

don't get me wrong - Ne vous méprenez pas

fit - en bonne santé

skip - sauter

soldiered on - persévéré

grin - sourire

tough - difficile

checkpoint - point de contrôle

signing up - enregistrer

strain - tension

glad - heureux

