



THE FLYING TRAPEZE OF KOH TAO

CATCHING AN ANGEL

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I'm sure we have all done it, had a few glasses of wine during an evening of fun, and agreed to something that in the cold light of day doesn't seem like such a good idea.

This is how, a few weeks later, I found myself standing on a tiny platform, no bigger than a doorstep, 10m up in the air about to attempt to fly on Koh Tao's new trapeze rig.

Climbing the ladder up to the pedestal certainly gave my steadily developing vertigo a work out, and my palms were sweaty as I clung to the riser at the top. "Keep holding on with both hands and don't move until I ask you to," were my instructions as I arrived up top. No kidding, holding tightly was the only way I could stop my hands from shaking! From here I can see over rooftops and have a very different perspective of the island that I call home.

Feeling slightly sick and keeping my eyes averted from the catch net stretched below me I'm trying to recall the instructions that I've just been given. Arms straight, hips forward and when my torturer says "Hep" I bunny hop off, or something like that. Safety lines have been securely clipped to my tightly cinched belt and I'm now perched at the edge. With one hand on the bar and one hand still on the riser, I know my first flight is only moments away. I'm instructed to move my left hand to the bar as well; I'm now hanging facing down, flat, with only my flying instructor counter balancing my weight.

Huston we have a problem, I can't breathe! I hear, "Hep," but the instruction does not get to my

feet immediately. Giving myself a quick talking to, I make a small hop and gravity takes care of the rest. The rush and exhilaration is immediate and as I sail to the top of the swing I'm remembering that I'm supposed to try to hook my legs over the bar, and thus return to the top of the swing dangling from my knees. I do try, but it's not to be, and I'm just pleased that I actually managed to get this far. Now all I have to do is let go and drop to the catch net below. The bar that only a few minutes ago was my nemesis has somehow become my best friend, and I'm having some difficulty letting go. Shutting my eyes tightly and screaming, hopefully silently, I plummet to the net and bounce around harmlessly. I now have a stupid grin plastered on my face and cannot wait to do it all over again.

FLYING TRAPEZE IS AN ACTIVITY THAT ORIGINATED FROM THE CIRCUS. IT HAS NOW DEVELOPED WORLDWIDE AS A SPORT AND LEISURE ACTIVITY.

A typical lesson lasts an hour with practice bar instruction and a maximum of 3 flies. Flyers who consistently manage to hook their legs around the bar, getting into the desired knee hang position will then be offered the ultimate rush – being caught! Another trapeze hangs on the rig and an artist known as a catcher will swing from his knees there. Swings are timed so that the catcher and



flyer link arms mid air, allowing the flyer to sail away from their trapeze and join the catcher in swinging to the far end of the rig. So this is my goal too.

Trapeze schools are popular the world over and most American summer camps and many large scale resorts have them amongst the program

of their activities. The idea for the one on Koh Tao is the creation of brain child, British born, ex commercial real estate agent, Gemma Semple. Gemma had worked at Club Getaway years before and learned trapeze and Spanish web skills there. She worked with the best, both running a school and performing. Deciding to make Koh Tao her home, she was struck with the idea that a rig could really work on Koh Tao. Many people come here to dive, so the adventurous spirit is certainly inherent within the visitors that come to the island, and flying is a perfect diversion from their underwater adventures. For long termers, the rig is an excellent alternative to a gym work out, as it builds strength and muscle tone. It makes a great alternative holiday activity and is a certain stress reliever from the daily grind.

Waiting for my second flight I notice that my nervousness seems to have reduced, replaced somewhat by excitement. I have been given pointers on how to improve my technique and instructed on a back flip dismount. I eagerly climb the ladder this time. Leaning out over the pedestal is still a nerve-racking few seconds, but once in flight it's quickly forgotten. Again I just miss hooking my legs over the bar, but the back-flip dismount was a lot of fun and took me back to my short course of trampoline lessons as a child. Forward rolling off the net, it struck me that maybe reverting to childhood is part of the appeal of trapeze. Not many times in our adult life are we permitted to release and simply have fun in the carefree way only kids can. Trapeze certainly offers that release and its good, clean fun too!

Looking around at my fellow flyers in the class, everyone is smiling, happy and upbeat; maybe it's the adrenalin or simply the glow of achievement. Without a doubt it gets the heart racing! At this point, flyers have been selected on their ability for the opportunity of being caught. Unfortunately I am not among them, but a good half of the class are.

The catcher's arrival to his perch is nothing short of spectacular; launching himself from the pedestal and gaining speed and height, he leaves the trapeze and uses the bounce off the catch net to reach the height of his own trapeze. Each time one of the lucky few ascends for takeoff the spectators fall quiet.

I defy anyone to watch a catch for the first time with their mouth shut and the thrill of actually achieving this must be electric.

I'm a little disappointed with myself but never-the-less addicted. I will be back for more lessons, if only to have the opportunity to say, "Catch you later," literally!

www.flyingtrapezeadventures.com

