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When the going gets tough

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By TRAVELLING LIGHT AND LIVING ROUGH CAN BEAT STRESS. SWAGATA SEN MEETS A BELIEVER

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It's not everyone's cup of herbal tea. But Murli Menon's view of eco-tourism might just be one way of looking at life itself. The self-styled stress-management guru has quite a novel take on how a tour in the hills ought to be conducted. And for the super-adventurous, it's worth a try.

Murli Menon, also an author of a couple of self-improvement books, is back from a trek-with-a-



Ain't no mountain
high enough:
Climbers scale the
peaks and (above)
Murli Menon

brought out by Sage — is all about that), which translates into training the mind to think positively.

But there is nothing like getting away from it all to recharge your batteries, insists Menon. So it was one fine morning that Menon decided to prove his eco-tourism theory by trying it on himself. Armed with keds, a *khadi* jacket and a windcheater, and very few rations, he set out on a trek to Mansarovar. Unlike most people who embark on the adventure, he did not let ponies or mules carry his bags, because he is against cruelty to animals. He had booked PWD rest houses on the way for his night halts and kept his luggage light. On the way he kept repeating a word. “I chanted ‘Om’, but it could be anything. It helps you concentrate,” he says.

difference to Mansarovar, and is convinced that this kind of trip is exactly what the doctor orders for tired city-dwellers with stressful jobs. “A particular level of stress is necessary for us to function well. Trouble starts when you let it cross a threshold,” Menon explains.

Which is why companies hire him to de-stress their employees. His workshops and spiritual quotient (SQ) development programmes are designed to alleviate some of the strain of living. He uses such diverse modes as tribal trance music, and a combination of Zen meditation and neuro-linguistic programming (his latest book *ZeNLP* —

He also resolved not to pollute the environment. “Usually, people carry canned food and mineral water in plastic bottles and leave them along the way. They carry things like mosquito repellents, several pairs of shoes and throw them away. As a result, they pollute the hills, and the damage is seldom reversible.” To counter that, Menon carried only bio-degradable food. Bananas and other fruits and tea bags filled with herbal leaves. Any non-degradable trash that he created, he carried back. He drank local spring water and claims it is pure enough. He also ate whatever was locally available in the villages along the way: *bhuna pahari alu*, *rai ki sabzi*, *pudina* chutney and a curry made out of a delicious grass called *bichhu ghaas*.

But then, he claims that the secret to his being able to brave all these hardships was the meditation. He says that meditation in the open air and breathing through his nose and not through his mouth while he walked, had ensured that he did not have any acclimatisation problems.

The mantra for a successful trek, he stresses, is a spartan life — based on a vegan diet devoid of any meat, fish or milk products. For some, it can prove a little too hard to swallow. But Menon’s company, Phenomenon Consultants Limited, is in the process of chalking short natural treks for executives with his principles in mind.

Menon also plans to sell the idea of natural eco-tourism at the Travel Agents’ Association of India convention in Calcutta in September. “It is

cost-effective, and does a lot for your body and mind,” he says. Any takers?

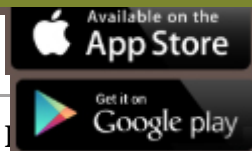
Menon says

Keep Walking: The moment you stop to wonder how tired you are, you will feel the strain. It is a state of mind.

Don't Litter: Avoid carrying canned foodstuff and mineral water in plastic bottles. Don't litter the way with non-degradable trash. Take it away with you.

Stay Calm: The secret to braving hardship is meditation. Chant a mantra. Breathe through your nose and not your mouth.

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