Little cycling experience but pedalling to Himalayas

BY SOH WEE LING

LEE Li Jen and her friends have avoided alcohol and carbonated drinks since early March. They were gearing up for a cycling expedition — The Himalayan Bicycle Diaries 2005 — which started yesterday.

Covering more than 1,000km in 22 days, the university students will cycle across the fabled mountain ranges of Tibet and Nepal. They will also attempt the world’s longest and steepest descent — a non-stop, 4,600m downhill rush on a track that begins on the Tibetan Plateau and winds 150km down to the rice fields of Nepal.

En route, the team will have the chance to explore the historic city of Lhasa, other Tibetan towns and the famous Sera and Drepung monasteries. The highlight of the trip will be a visit to the Mount Everest Base Camp, which lies at a height of 5,220m.

The team of five men and three women — most of whom have little or no cycling experience — will be the first from a Singapore university to cycle across the mountain range.

“It is extremely appealing to take up this challenge and see how far I can go,” said accounting undergraduate Li Jen.

Although the trip is a student initiative, it is a project under the Singapore Management University’s Zero Limits Xpeditions series, which aims to promote participation in extreme sports.

The team members have funded the expedition from their savings and by taking up temporary jobs and internships.

To prepare for the event, they have been training three times a week, including circuit cycling, off-the-road biking and physical conditioning in the gym.

Recently, the team also completed an eight-day endurance cycling trip from Singapore to Kuantan.

SMU business student Danny Ng decided to forgo a backpacking trip and signed up for the expedition instead.

“I’ve enjoyed cycling since my national service days. The perils of high altitude coupled with endurance cycling are definitely an adrenaline rush for me,” he said.

The team is already considering setting up a cycling club at SMU after the expedition.

Said business student Ong Fang Kai: “Perhaps others will be similarly inspired to step out of societal boundaries and challenge themselves.”


The writer is a recent accounting graduate from the Singapore Management University.