

AMAZON XTREME



I first heard of the Jungle Marathon during my desert experience in the Gobi, I overheard a competitor telling his tent mate how a few years back he had nearly died during the Jungle Marathon. This sounded interesting and I started to do some research on the race...

I asked a few of the multi day stage racing veterans (some very crusty looking people, who look like they have just crawled out of a cave) if they had run the JM. The common answer I seemed to get was that it was a great race, but they would never go back again... None of them gave me much of a reason for not wanting to go back there, and they all suggested that I should go and see for myself!



JUNGLE MARATHON

I thought to myself what could be so bad about running through the Amazon (Brazil)? There would be hot chicks, we would sleep on the beach in hammocks at night and we would see some amazing wild life while running. This sounded like fun and I filled in the online entry form and paid the deposit.

Within about 10 minutes of entering I got my first Jungle Marathon newsletter and the first thought that went through me head was..... "\$#@*" what have I done now?!

Their list of dangerous creatures had me worried... I am terrified of snakes (I start hyperventilating when I see one) and very quickly fired a mail off to the race organizer to ask if anyone had been bitten by snakes. Shirley informed me that no one had been bitten by a snake last year but.... The last sentence of her mail went something like this...But if any of you are rodent phobic (which I am) the jungle rats out there are the size of a Labrador.....!!

The plants in the jungle are also not too friendly towards your skin, and can leave a massive rash/burn.

Temperatures in the jungle range from the high twenties, to forty plus degrees Celsius... but a major factor the humidity levels, which reach 98%. This is a huge problem for competitors, as the high humidity levels stop the body's natural cooling systems from functioning. Human bodies cool down from the evaporation of sweat, but when humidity levels are high our sweat does not evaporate. This causes our bodies to overheat and seize up like an old car stuck in a traffic jam. Every year at least 20% of the field drop out from heat exhaustion, severe dehydration etc. (Next time you are at the gym spend a few minutes in the steam room, now imagine running 200km in those conditions!)

The race terrain varies a lot. Some runs along existing wood cutters foot paths, which are everything but flat. The coarse profile looks like a never ending row of pyramids, all about 150m high. Then comes the river and swamp crossings, where competitors are expected to swim up to 300m with all their gear on. The foot paths consist of mud and leaves... covered with roots, dead tree stumps and branches. This makes footing incredibly slippery and competitors have to constantly avoid falling over roots etc. The stop start conditions make it impossible to get into any sort of running rhythm and the hills sap every drop of energy out of your legs. To add to the joys, competitors have to follow course markers which are placed every 100m, and in the dense jungle it is not uncommon to get lost.

With the large number of river and swamp crossings, competitors can expect to be wet for the entire race, which causes severe chaffing and blistering of the feet.

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