

JOURNEYING NORTH

VIVA chatted with UAE native Elham Al-Qasimi about her upcoming trek to the North Pole



Elham Al-Qasimi

Have you ever thought about travelling to the North Pole? Elham Al-Qasimi has. Better yet, she's planning on making the three-week-long, 100-nautical-mile journey entirely on cross-country skis or dogsled, carrying all the equipment and supplies she might need for the entire trip. Impressed? You should be, because in mid-April she'll be the first Arab woman to ever attempt such a feat.

"I want to showcase this trek as an example of drive and ambition that inspires women to aim higher and reach further. I strongly believe that this accomplishment is one for the entire nation of the UAE, rather than just a personal accomplishment," she said.

VIVA had the chance to chat with the 27-year-old soon-to-be record breaker about her upcoming adventure. Check out what she had to say...

WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO JOURNEY TO THE NORTH POLE?

I believe the best challenge is when you look inward and challenge yourself. I have made a lot of progress in my career and wanted to focus on a similar type of drive and energy in pushing my physical limits by facing a challenge totally outside my comfort zone.

YOU ARE THE FIRST ARAB FEMALE TO MAKE SUCH A JOURNEY. ARE YOU PROUD OF SETTING THIS RECORD?

I'm more than proud. When I take each step in my training, I feel inside me the elements my mother and ancestors gave me, which made it possible to fathom such a journey. This one is for all of us. All those women who evolved in small and huge ways!

YOU ARE ALSO THE FIRST UAE CITIZEN TO MAKE THE JOURNEY UNSUPPORTED AND UNASSISTED. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

It means when I depart I will have to take all the equipment and supplies I will require with me from the start. There will be no air drops or resupplies after that. This means if we mismanage our supplies and run out of food or fuel for the stove, we will have to end the

journey. It also means I will use natural means of propulsion to get me there rather than riding on motorised equipment.

ARE YOU EXCITED? SCARED?

Why scared? This is an opportunity to grow as a person, improve physically and spiritually, see a part of the world I will never see again and less than 1% of the population will ever see, and learn lessons that I could not learn by staying in my cosy home.

TELL US ABOUT THE JOURNEY. HOW WILL YOU GET THERE AND WHO ARE YOU GOING WITH?

I will have two guides with me. One of the guides also led the first Arab man to reach the North Pole in a much longer expedition. We will primarily cross country ski every day for about eight hours. That may sound like a lot, but out there, moving generates body heat and keeps you warm. Therefore, it is a welcome thing! We may take huskies with us, which would help with pulling the equipment as opposed to pulling it ourselves.

HAVE YOU HAD MUCH SUPPORT FROM YOUR FAMILY, FRIENDS AND COMMUNITY?

Yes, it has been a beautiful journey. If anything, I found that this journey has drawn me a lot closer to them.

YOU ARE CURRENTLY TRAINING FOR THE TRIP. WHAT IS INVOLVED? HAVE YOU ALWAYS BEEN PASSIONATE ABOUT PHYSICAL FITNESS?

Yes, I have always been extremely passionate about physical fitness. Training for this expedition has pushed that passion to another level, so I have really enjoyed it! I train at least five times a week and do a mixture of cardiovascular work and strength training. I also practise yoga to improve flexibility and help with the tightness that intense training can cause.

DO YOU HOPE TO BE A ROLE MODEL FOR OTHER ARAB WOMEN? WHAT MESSAGE WOULD YOU GIVE THEM?

If I am in any small way seen as a role model, then sharing this trip with the public will have been worthwhile. I would tell other young women a message I received from my aunt, which reflects my own views: "The greatest competition is the competition with your inner 'self'. It is necessary in order to progress and be a better person than the day before. The improvement of the individual is a treasure for the whole. That is how we progress as a people."

WHAT'S NEXT, AFTER THE NORTH POLE? THE SOUTH POLE?

Not necessarily! I think I will always have a drive for exploring, however I would like to stay focused on my current target and leave the planning of the next expedition until after I return (smiles).

HOW CAN PEOPLE LEARN MORE ABOUT YOUR EXPEDITION?

For more information, please visit my website www.elhamalqasimi.com

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