





Gary Cunningham - Leaping Off Buildings In a Single Bound

While some of us may get our kicks from a shopping marathon or a roller coaster ride, Gary Cunningham gets his from jumping off buildings – with a chute of course. Sydney-sider Cunningham is the Kuala Lumpur Tower International Jump (KLTIJ) Merdeka Circuit Technical Director and was recently in Kota Kinabalu, the first stop for the circuit. Fourteen BASE jumpers from around the world made a pit stop to Sabah and kicked off the circuit by jumping off the 106-metre Menara Tun Mustapha during the Merdeka Month last August. Cunningham expresses his enthusiasm in being part of this feat. "The Menara Tun Mustapha is a very special challenge. It's different from the KL Tower. Here, you don't jump as long and there is little time to land so it's definitely more challenging. Another unique aspect is that you can actually catch your reflection in the glass windows as you jump!" BASE is an acronym for Building, Antenna, Span and Earth, which are the four categories of fixed objects which one can jump. 34-year-old Cunningham began his love for extreme sports when he first began skydiving at the age of 16 and has been BASE jumping for the last 13 years. As Technical Director for the Merdeka Circuit this year, Cunningham explains that the selection process for jumpers started a year before the event and only the best make the cut. "We send invitations to various clubs and associations around the world. The jumpers are selected based on their long-term experience and skills," he says. This year's participants hail from as far as the United States, Australia, Norway, Germany, New Zealand, Switzerland, Finland, Singapore and England, while Malaysia is represented by 6 jumpers. "We picked Sabah to kick off the circuit as it is such a nice place. I was here two years ago to do trial jumps and could not wait to come back," he says. An electrical engineer, Cunningham is perhaps best known for being the World Record holder for making 133 jumps from Menara Kuala Lumpur within 24 hours on New Year's Eve 2005. "But jumping from the Tun Mustapha tower poses more of a challenge as there are plenty of obstacles to look out for," he says, citing buildings and the crosswind as examples. The sport is truly a test of nerves and skills. Unlike skydiving or parachuting, BASE jumping requires high grounds with a minimum of 50 metres, which provides just enough time to open the chutes and prepare for landing. "The sport itself is not expensive but it costs quite a bit to purchase the gear and travel to certain locations," he adds. The Menara Tun Mustapha jump was made more meaningful with the presentation of a cheque worth RM2,000 to the Bukit Harapan charity home. Charity components were also included at the other circuit venues, namely the Menara Pelita in Sarawak, Menara Alor Setar, Kedah, Menara KOMTAR, Penang and Menara Kuala Lumpur. "I really love the Malaysian hospitality and with Sabah, I've been truly impressed with the beautiful landscapes. It's been great," he concludes.