



By Eugene Doberer

DEEP water soloing is a pure form of climbing practiced on seaside cliffs at high tide. It relies solely upon water at the base of the climb to protect climbers from injury when free falling from the generally high, difficult routes.

This exciting sport has been popular since the mid to late 1990s, but actually originated in the late 1980s on the traditional rock climbing routes on the coasts

Go jump off a cliff

Tonsai Beach, in Krabi, is one the five main destinations for deep water solo mountain climbing in Southern Thailand, the others being Ko Phi Phi, Ko Yao Noi, Ko Hong, Ko Lao Liang.

of Dorset and Devon, UK. Trips are now offered in France, parts of Ireland, Sardinia, Majorca, Spain, and Greece.

Here in Southern Thailand, there are five main deep water solo destinations: Ko Phi Phi, Ko Yao Noi, Ko Hong, Ko Lao Liang, and Tonsai Beach.

Basecamp Tonsai, next to Railey in Krabi province, is the pioneer company for deep water soloing trips in southern Thailand. They try rock climbing problems from as low as Grade 5 up to Grade 8a.

You don't have to be a rock climbing pro to make a deep water solo splash: "Apart from climbers of all ages who come from all over the world, we also run deep water solo trips with school groups from Singapore, so anyone who knows how to swim and is reasonably fit can try," said Elke Schmitz, proprietor of Basecamp Tonsai.

When asked if it hurts when you fall, Elke explained: "It depends on how high you are and the position of your body when it hits the water surface. From under 10 meters, a human body can pretty much fall into the water in any position without harm. Nevertheless, you should always try to hit the water upright, press your legs together (especially if you're a guy) and keep your arms close to your

body." In case there are any problems, Basecamp Tonsai is equipped with a first aid kit and rescue-trained boat driver.

All deep water soloing trips include an English-speaking guide, kayak transportation between the climbing rock and the boat, old climbing shoes, chalk, liquid chalk and chalk bags, lunch in reusable boxes, and drinking water. You need to bring swim wear, sun lotion, and dry clothes for the ride back. The trips are environment-friendly, so please don't take any plastic bottles, chip bags, candy wrappers, or any other non-biodegradable products with you.

Basecamp Tonsai also runs sunset trips at half moon twice each month. The boat leaves at around 2pm and they spend 4 to 5 hours deep water soloing before giving climbers time to relax on the deserted beach of Chicken Island with food and a sunset drink. There's also a great fire show after dark. Contact the shops for exact dates of these excursions.

Basecamp Tonsai grew out of Wee's Climbing School and has been offering professional climbing instructions on the famous limestone cliffs over the Andaman sea since 1996. For more information go to W: basecamptonsai.com, E: elke@BasecampTonsai.com or T: 08 7107 8367.

AIR TIME: A guide takes a leap of faith (left); bouldering (right). Photo: Artem

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Climbers are ferried to the climbing rock by longtail. Photo: Artem