

## My First Vibram HK100

My second 100km after TMBT last year and first on in this event, I was very nervous as the days getting closer. Been told that it is going to be cold and there will be lots of steps. I flew to Hong Kong via Kuala Lumpur on 17 Jan, and stayed at Hyatt Regency, Sha Tin. Nothing much around this area so it was good to just stay in and get as much rest before the suffer fest the next day. I had a good night sleep.

As we were very excited, Teddy and I woke up at 4am getting all ready only to realise we were way too early. We left the hotel at 6:30am and arrived at the starting point before 7am just in time to drop our drop bag. There we met the Malaysian contingent about 80 of us total.



Figure 1: the Malaysian Contingent

Sharp at 8am we all let off but as we approach the trail, it was too crowded and created a bottle neck and had to slow down. After more than 20 minutes it began to ease up and we could finally continue to run although at slower speed. Since we had to go slow, I had a good look along the route. The view was simply breath taking. The cold sunny weather was just perfect and I truly enjoyed running the first leg of the run.

The first support station was at the end of High Island Reservoir dam. Chocolates and fruits were handed out by Volunteers. Water and Isotonic provided here. I only stopped to pee here before continuing.



Figure 2: Reservoir

Going towards CP1, we had to cross two beaches, Sai Wan and Ham Tin. Two beautiful untouched beaches and I would have jumped into the water if I was not in a race. Leaving San Wan beach, a lady marshal saw my bib and yelled 'Malaysia Boleh' literally means Malaysia can!

Reaching CP2 at Ham Tin, was amazed with the varieties of food provided. I had some sandwiches and cut fruits, filled up my water bottle and off to CP3 at Hoi Ha. More ups and downs but not too bad. Again, at Hoi Ha, there were plenty of food provided and the cheering team was amazing. I spent a few moments here to catch my breath and fill up my tummy and water bottle as well.

On my way to CP4 - Yung Shue O, I finally bumped into few Malaysians and together we run and it was at this stretch that I began to feel cramps creeping up my thighs and calves. At this point I met a Singaporean, and we thought we were lost as we did not see the markers for quite some time. Some runners behind confirmed it's the right way and eventually we found the markers. I finally made it to CP4 in 7:45hrs. Rested for a while

and then continued with the journey. I was hoping to get to CP5 in less than 8 hours but that seems impossible now knowing very well the elevation starts from here onwards.



Figure 3: arriving at CP4

It was at this stretch that I experienced cramps on my right calf that I actually stopped and shouted for help. Most runners just pass me by without stopping until I shouted in mandarin. Thank god I could speak mandarin and a lady actually stopped but she did not know what to do. Luckily, a fellow Malaysian and friend of mine saw me and rendered some assistance. He offered just wait for me there but I asked him to proceed as I know he could at least get a silver trophy. From this point onwards everything went slower especially going downhill. I stopped a few times before reaching CP5 and it was almost 6pm.

I felt dejected as I arrived at CP5 and even contemplating to quit. I was met by few Malaysians when I crossed the timing mat and all of them kept encouraging and motivating me. Vivien Tay and Suzie, whose husbands are running as well, ensure that Malaysian teams are well taken care of. Their words of encouragement kept me going. I had my first instant noodles here and as I am a muslim, I asked for a vegetarian noodle and too bad at the time they only had one left. The volunteers were very concerned that they actually let me have it although another runner was waiting in line but of coz with the runner's approval. I am so thankful to them.





Figure 4: Arriving at CP5, Leo and Chris were leaving

I left CP5 at about 6:30pm. It's beginning to get darker and colder. I put on my headlight and windbreaker and continue my run. I have issues with darkness, I am afraid of being alone in the dark. So the real challenge for me is just beginning. I just have to ensure I could see people near me. Trying not to aggravate the cramp I had earlier, I went on moderate speed but making sure there are people in front and behind of me. It was also this at this stretch that I lost my way but just for a slight moment. I made the mistake of not looking for the markers when it was actually right in front of me. I was walking alone in the dark for a few minutes but couldn't see anybody lights when I know very well they were not far ahead or behind me, so I turned back. This stretch is the longest of all at 13km. I reached Gilwell Camp way past 10pm.

Rested at Gilwell Camp for a few minutes, I continued with the run. It will be another 8km before the next CP at Beacon Hill. It was here that I realised we were running beside some Chinese tombs. Luckily, there were few runners with me. It was here also, I could see the skyline of Kowloon and with the shimmering lights, it was just beautiful. It took me almost 2 hours to reach Beacon Hill and I was greeted loud music and a young volunteer handing me a blanket. I politely declined and soon found out that it was actually very cold here.

Thank god they have bon fire and I asked for a blanket. I am touched by the volunteers' enthusiasm in helping the runners here. Some brought food to the runners, filled up their empty hydration bag or bottles, some just ask if you are doing alright or need any help at all. I had another helping of instant noodles here although I felt the urge to poo but I didn't like the idea of using the mobile toilet. So, off I went to CP8 at Shing Mun Dam.

Another long walk and I guess it was already way pass my bed time, I was just running without looking around much. And I think I really needed to get to the toilet. Luckily, there was a public toilet on the way to Shing Mun Dam right across this pedestrian bridge. I felt relieved but just like other public toilets in Hong Kong, it was a squatting toilet. After running for more that 80km, I couldn't squat anymore so I had to hold on to the handrail and make a half squat, well, as long as I could finish my 'business'. I felt much better after that. I walk most of the distance getting to Shing Mun Dam. Arriving at Shing Mun Dam, I had more instant noodles.

Right after Shing Mun Dam it was all uphill. The trail towards Needle Hill was the most difficult for me. I switch off my headlamp as the moon was bright and there were other runners as well. It was steep going up and down. Have to be extra careful here, one wrong footing and you will tumble down the slope. I finally arrived at CP 9 at Lead Mine Pass after almost 2:30 hours. 10km more to go but this will be another dreadful stretch with Tai Mo Shan standing at 957meters. I fill up my water bottle and took some more oral rehydration salt before the final assault.

More stairs going up and we came across steep tarmac road that seems like endless. And not long after, went into the trail again with lots of big boulders. Have to be careful as no clear marking of the way around here. I kept looking out for the headlamps of runners in front of me. I wasn't that scared now as the moon was bright and I could see the lights from runners in front and behind me. After the trail, we came across another tarmac road just like the one earlier but steeper and endless. When it finally descent, I knew I am not far from the finish line. The only thing I remembered clearly from the 'course description' was once the road goes down, it's the final 4km before home run. I started to run a bit but the knees and toes are hurting. Soon, I could hear the music from the finish line and I know I'm almost there. I could hear marshal and supporters congratulate us. Finally, I crossed the finish line in 23:11:36 hours and managed to bag a bronze trophy.

It was 7:11 am on Sunday morning. As I crossed the finish line, I told myself I will never again do this. And contemplating to ditch those I have signed up for this year. That aside, I must say this has been a well organised event thus far at least for me. I appreciate the enthusiasm and effort put in by the volunteers and it certainly is the most memorable experience for me.



Figure 5: at finish line

Went back to the hotel at about 9am, I cleansed myself and went to sleep. Woke up 3 hours later to catch the flight back to Singapore, only to be informed it will be delayed.

Finally, arrived in Singapore (current base), I had a good night sleep at home and woke up the next day.... ready for Vibram HK100 2015.

Yes! I will definitely come back.

Azman Sulaiman

Bib Number: 1174

Malaysia