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WHAT'S SUP IN ZURICH

Feeling bored with your gym routine, desperate to tone up before the summer bikini season hits or simply wanting to enjoy the Swiss outdoors? Danielle Satya Parla visits Lake Zurich to find out more about Sophie Evans' road to Pilates paddle boarding.

Without a doubt, the Swiss are fit and nature-loving people, and at first you could be fooled into believing that Sophie Evans has anything other than the pulse of Switzerland in her blood. A passionate skier, Sophie arrived in Switzerland over 12 years ago after taking a year's sabbatical from her work in London's financial sector to spend a full season in the Swiss Alps. Her joy for skiing evolved into a passion to teach others, and soon one season quickly turned into another as she dedicated herself to becoming a fully qualified ski instructor.

Competitive, athletic and sociable by nature, it was only a matter of time before she started racing in one of the major ski clubs and eventually became the women's race captain. To complement ski teaching, Sophie studied personal training, sports massage and Pilates in the UK. She credits Pilates as an excellent practice to build core strength — a key to advanced skiing, as well as many other sports and activities.

While sailing in the Caribbean with her husband, Sophie would get fresh bread every morning with a stand up paddleboard (SUP). She was already enjoying the natural challenge that the sway of the yacht brought to her Pilates training, when one morning she took it one step further and decided to move her workout on the paddleboard.

"It was amazing!" she exclaims, "By balancing on the board I got a better level of training without thinking about it, and it was so much fun!"

In this 'aha' moment Sophie knew that the paddleboard would be a perfect extension for many of her Pilates clients.

"Switzerland is full of lakes which are lovely and warm all summer long, and doing Pilates on a paddleboard while the sun sets over the Alps is a totally magical experience," she shares.

After a bit of research, she discovered that yoga SUP was already offered, however there didn't seem to be

anyone else doing Pilates and so she launched her own company, Aqualetica, to pioneer this new activity.

Kicking off her second season, Sophie is sharing Pilate's SUP with those looking for serious fun and a challenge. She has discovered that Pilates is a key part of many of her clients' lives, and the opportunity to do what they love while floating on a lake provides a wonderful extra dimension. Some of her clients are completely new to Pilates, but immediately see the fun of getting out on the water for a workout. Many clients who work during the day prefer early morning sunrise sessions while others with more flexible schedules are equally happy to get out on the lake before or after lunch.

Aqualetica currently operates from the shores of Lake Zurich, however she has a larger vision to expand and deliver Aqualetica across the many lakes of Switzerland, and ultimately to where warm waters and paddleboard meet around the world.

BUSINESS SENSE

Sophie says that her experience opening her fitness business in Switzerland was relatively straightforward. Information is readily available and she found the authorities were highly supportive. One main difference from her native UK was that you need CHF 20,000 in capital before launching a limited liability company in Switzerland.

"The other key thing to get right is the social security," she explains.

With her husband planning to take an extended sabbatical from his profession, Sophie is clear that the business must work both financially and personally.

Another consideration when starting an outdoor fitness company is that by its very nature, paddleboard Pilates is seasonal — from May to September. With a complementary skill set for the mountains,



Sophie can take the Pilates indoors during the off season or when the weather is bad, and also teach skiing in Verbier during the winter.

She is candid in sharing what it is like when you start a business that is a natural extension of what you already enjoy doing in your personal time. Like when she became a

ski instructor, any hobby that turns into a profession will throw you days where you need to remind yourself why you combined your work and passion. Sophie has found that one key to this is to continue learning and mixing things up — take what you love and try it in different styles. Last season she was reminded that some skiing is still just for her when she went heliskiing in Alaska.

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And of course, every company needs online presence. Without wanting to deplete her funds by hiring someone to set up her website, Sophie invested time and did her research to find a good website template provider so she could set up Aqualetica's website herself. In the process, she learned a valuable new skill and is really happy with the result.

Sophie also discovered the importance of knowing your market and clientele, and not assuming that the fitness industry is the same in Switzerland as it is back home. She acknowledges that it has been essential to embrace the locals and the fitness industry itself because the gym concept in Switzerland is far behind that in the US and UK — although these opportunities are being exploited as well. The Swiss naturally gravitate towards the many opportunities available for outdoor sports — cycling, hiking, running, CrossFit, skiing, swimming — the list is endless. For this reason, she feels it is good to offer fitness that supports other sports activities in order to encourage people to try your offerings.

As a final tip, Sophie suggests taking as many classes as you can in your canton — not only to figure out the competition, but also the needs of potential clients. This networking has proven useful in developing allies in the personal training industry for when she needs someone to step in and take over classes if the need arises. ●

READY TO TRY SUP PILATES?

You can learn more about Sophie's classes and Aqualetica at aqualetica.com