

## JESS THOMPSON, 43

Founder of Water Babies  
(waterbabies.co.uk)



### MY MOTIVATION

“Three years after my second child was born, I was stuck in a post-pregnancy phase, feeling old and overweight. I hadn’t done any meaningful exercise in years and was pretty unfit. I was working full-time, and so heading out to the gym instead of spending time with my husband and children wasn’t an appealing option. When my friend turned 40, however, she did a cycle ride in Vietnam for charity and I was completely inspired. I was 39, and decided to mark my own milestone birthday with a similar challenge for Unicef. I contacted Charity

Challenge, a tour operator helping people organise adventurous challenges who helped me organise a cycle ride across India in aid of Unicef. I didn’t set out to get a fabulous body; my motivation was marking my 40th birthday by doing something positive. Helping others gave me a good reason to use some of my limited spare time to train.”

### REACHING MY GOAL

“Training was difficult, with work and my children to think about. But I was nervous of how hard the cycling would be, so I made time to fit in three hours of cycling every week, using any

free evening or weekend. I also took the fundraising seriously, preparing an information pack to show sponsors where their money would be spent. Feeling my stamina increase and my body tone up was a huge bonus.”

### MY REWARD

“That first cycle across India was so wonderful that two years later I signed up to ride from the Andes to the Amazon in Peru, and in November 2009, I cycled across Vietnam. I’ve slept in old Raj palaces, bathed in an Amazonian stream and been clubbing until 4am in Saigon – experiences I wouldn’t swap for the world. From the first →

challenge, a determination never to get off my bike and ride on the ‘back-up bus’ kicked in, and it’s amazing how much residual fitness the trips give me for the rest of the year. In Vietnam, I hadn’t sat on a bike for a year, but was still at the front during most of the journey and came home super-fit. My life is lived at a frenetic pace anyway, but the challenges are helping me maintain a high level of fitness and every expedition knocks ten years off me.”

### YOU CAN DO IT TOO

Jess began her mission by contacting fundraising expedition specialist charitychallenge.com, which has helped participants raise in excess of £23million for over 1,000 UK and Irish charities. To find out more about Unicef, visit [unicef.org.uk](http://unicef.org.uk).



From an unfit mother of two to a super-fit fundraising cyclist – charity expeditions, such as this one in Peru, have completely changed Jess’s life