



Skydive right in

At 2,400m above Massachusetts, US, **SHOBA NARAYAN** has second thoughts about her desire to go skydiving.

My skydiving instructor Hal chats cheerfully as we climb aboard a small plane, which has – to my horror – no door. “Don’t worry,” says Hal, “We’re going to fall out of the sky anyway.”

As a first-time skydiver, I’m doing a tandem jump, which means the harness I am wearing is strapped to his, and we’ll jump out of the plane together. It’s the perfect plan: he’ll do all of the work, opening the parachute and guiding it to the ground, while I intend to merely scream my lungs out. I’m excited.

All of that changes as we reach 2,400m. The world below seems like the proverbial patchwork quilt. What am I

doing? I sit on the floor of the plane; Hal sits behind me.

As I look down from the open door, I realise that jumping down to the ground is a highly unnatural state for a human being. Yet here I am, 2,400m above Northampton in Massachusetts. I consider backing out but Hal is already checking the metal clips that bind me to him. “I don’t want to do this,” I scream. In response, Hal pushes me out of the plane.

The free fall lasts for approximately 10 seconds, and they’re the scariest of my life. As we fall, the roaring wind pulls my contact lenses from my eyes. Then my hair clip flies off after them. I’m screaming, of course, howling with fear. Before

jumping, I chose the package that allowed for photography mid-air. Ahead of me, the photographer seems to hover surreally in the sky. He gives me a thumbs up and clicks merrily away. Later, I see my crazed fearful eyes and wide grin – it’s actually a scream – in my keepsake souvenir.

The parachute opens with a sudden tug and it no longer feels like we’re falling headlong towards the earth. Suddenly, all is calm. For the next 15 minutes, Hal guides the parachute towards the open field below us. My fear now gone, I appreciate the view of the countryside. As we come in to land, I’ve been warned to lift my feet to reduce the impact, so I do. Even so, the sensation of my feet thudding on the ground takes my breath away as the red parachute crumples over the two of us.

It’s over. Skydiving was a bucket list item that must be ticked off. And now that it has been, I doubt I’ll ever do it again. ■

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