SURFING ON THE THAMES

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Who knew? London has 60,000 surfers, according to the British Surfing Association, a fraction of the roughly half million enthusiasts throughout the UK. Up till now British surfers basically had two options: don wet suits and brave the crowds at Cornwall and other close-to-home spots or hop a flight to catch the waves abroad. But a GBP 20m outdoor wave machine along the Thames set to open in 2011 could create an urban surfers' paradise in East London. The attraction is part of a huge planned sports complex called Venture Xtreme that will also include rock and ice climbing walls, mountain bike and skateboard courses, what's touted as the world's longest artificial cave system and a vertical wind tunnel that simulates a skydiver's freefall. Venture Xtreme's backers hope it will give active Londoners an exciting alternative to an after-work health club visit, the Guardian noted. An hour's session in the surf reportedly will cost GBP 30, higher than rates charged by Adrenalina, the smaller wave-machine-in-a-mall-sporting-goods store we profiled earlier this month, but cheaper and more convenient than a day trip to the English coast. And in fact, Venture Xtreme is the latest among several new and extravagant sports complexes located within major urban areas. Like Dubai's famed indoor downhill snow-ski slope and a similar attraction called Xanadu now under construction in the New Jersey Meadowlands near New York City, Venture Xtreme will give city dwellers easy access to experiences they would otherwise need to travel for. While putting together a major development such as Venture Xtreme requires considerable access to capital, managerial acumen, not to mention political savvy, these new sports mega-facilities should offer plenty of other opportunities for retailers and service providers, which makes them worth watching. Spotted by: Bjarke Svendsen

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