

# BETTER SHAPE UP

Whether you need to kick-start a healthy lifestyle or just freshen up an existing exercise regime, a healthy holiday off the beaten track will help you ring in the changes – with a smile on your face

*By Dominique le Roux*







I'm Cape Town; she's Joburg. I'm in jeans and a T-shirt; she's in a structured designer frock and pretty shoes. I just know we're going to the same place: we're the only two people travelling solo on the bus to the plane. And it's a very small plane.

**T**hat place is a health and fitness retreat near Vilanculos, Mozambique, and I'm feeling pretty smug: I'm training for Ironman and am already the fittest and slimmest I've ever been. The woman I'm ogling is probably 10 years younger than me and I estimate about 10kg over a healthy weight, but she wears her voluptuousness most becomingly.

Less becoming is the way she grips the seat in front of her as soon as the plane takes off. White, whiter, whitest... And then she starts looking green. And terrified. Which is when I lean over and ask this stranger whether she'd like me to open the bottle of whisky I bought in duty free. She looks at me with gratitude. I open, swig and pass the bottle across. It's 10am on a weekday morning and we're off to health camp. >



## PRIME TIME

**These Primal Pattern Movements were central to early humans' lives and our bodies respond well to them, so incorporate them into your workout**

**SQUATTING** Our ancestors did this when they lifted heavy rocks and trees to build shelter.

**BENDING** Also needed for lifting heavy objects. Do it wrong and you can easily injure yourself.

**LUNGING** was used for moving through rough terrain and for throwing a spear to get food.

**PUSHING** Whether moving heavy objects or building shelter, this was an everyday movement. And it still is.

**PULLING** an animal along after it had been hunted and killed would be the ancestral gory version.

**GAIT** Our ancestors would walk kilometres to find food and shelter, possibly jog for hours after an animal and then sprint to catch it.

**If you do all of the above movements, you will be moving your body the way it is designed to move. So incorporate them into a circuit:**

**> SQUAT** Stand with feet shoulder-width apart, arms straight in front of you at shoulder level. Brace your core and lower your body as far as you can by pushing your hips back and bending your knees. Pause, then slowly return to start.

**> STABILITY-BALL HIP EXTENSIONS** Place your head and shoulders on a stability ball, feet flat on the ground. Lift your hips so they're in line with your shoulders. Lower and repeat.

**> PUSH-UPS** Get down on all fours, placing your hands on the floor so they're slightly wider than and in line with your shoulders. Lower your body until your chest nearly touches the floor. Pause, then push back to start.

**> PULL-UPS** Grab a pull-up bar with a shoulder-width, overhand grip. Hang at arm's length (dead hang), then pull your chest to the bar. Once the top of your chest touches the bar, pause, then lower back to a dead hang.

**> WOODCHOPPER** Grab a three- to five-kilo dumbbell with both hands, standing with feet shoulder-width apart. Let the dumbbell hang naturally in front of your thighs. Squat until your knees are at 90 degrees. Keeping elbows slightly bent, brace your abs and press up to standing, swinging the dumbbell until it's directly overhead. Lower back towards the floor.

**> SHUTTLE RUNS** Set two markers 20m apart. Starting at one end, run or jog to the other end. That's one rep.

Go back to your (fitness) roots.

Purescapes fitness holidays are held at a number of venues around the world – the team takes over an existing lodge for the duration of the course, and ensures all activities and foods are in line with their “primal” philosophy of eating and moving in the fashion of our (theoretically more healthy) ancestors. Their programme suits anybody who wants to focus on their wellbeing in a holiday setting. Sarah\* and I seem to represent the two ends of their client spectrum: I’m already fit and have a training programme; I just want fresh surroundings. She’s in need of a serious health-and-exercise kick-start.

“Our programmes are inspired by childhood summers: endless days outside, living carefree, followed by nights of unbroken sleep. You might find yourself thrashed by waves in Portugal, scaling volcanoes in Lanzarote, using logs as weights on a Mozambican beach or saluting the sun in a Tuscan field. You’ll leave realising fitness is not rocket science: it is within you,” says Reza Niam, the Canadian founder and director of Purescapes.

Sarah and I are off to Rio Azul, a lodge usually aimed more at fishing types. Now all booze and sinful foods have been banished (and coffee not encouraged) by the ever-vigilant Reza, who is the image of all that he preaches. He writes for *Men’s Health*; I wouldn’t be surprised to see him

on the cover. Which is the dream of trainer Ben Coomber, who inspires us with his story of moving from teenage obesity to twentysomething model material by following the diet of his ancestors. Fellow trainer Kacie Baxter Henriques certainly looks like a cover model. A high performance exercise specialist, she does a personal assessment with me on day one, pointing out areas of weakness and imbalance in my body and suggesting exercises I should do to overcome these, such as left-side lunges and cross-body steps that will compensate for the old mountain-biking injury I didn’t even know was still lingering.

Reza, Ben and Kacie are with us morning, noon and night, available at any time to field questions, point out errors in our thinking or doing, and inspiring us by example.

**R**io Azul sits on a narrow, sandy peninsula between sea and river mouth. Which means dawn will see us being led in “primal movement” (see “Prime Time”, right) exercises on the beach, while sunsets will have us all on the river-facing deck doing yoga or stretching sessions. In between we’ll walk or run the miles of deserted coastline, paddle (or in my case swim) kilometres down the river, or head out to





From left to right: The beautiful Rio Azul resort in Mozambique; pulling a "hunted animal" across the beach; carrying wood for an imaginary fire.

fabulously stereotypical desert islands to snorkel around them. Four sessions like this per day will mean very little down time.

The first full day starts with core strengthening at 6am. My core certainly needs strengthening at that time, primarily with my customary espresso. By day's end, my fitness gloating will have been vanquished by my headache. Despite Sarah boldly setting out to kick her nicotine addiction, I give in to my caffeine cravings and sneak off to the kitchen, breaking Reza's number one rule for good health: change your mind.

"You must choose to be healthy, for that is the foundation of all lasting changes in body shape," he assures us. My ongoing commitment to a cup of joe is a clear sign my mind has not yet shifted gear.

I don't mind his second golden rule: drink plenty of water. Especially considering the tastiness of the jugs of lime-and-mint-infused H<sub>2</sub>O that are available all day. While he recommends adding a pinch

of sea salt for dissolved minerals, I opt for the secret remainder of my Jack Daniels – another clear sign my commitment to change is somewhat lacking.

Dinners are delicious. Simple as that. The lack of wheat and dairy is hardly noticeable when you're scooping ridiculously large portions of crab or crayfish out of their shells. Or when you're having eggs and bacon as a second course for breakfast. What is paramount – another Reza golden rule – is that all is organic. "Your body's cells are constantly regenerating and the material they use to rebuild themselves comes directly from your diet."

Reza believes we should eat the way our ancestors did 150 years ago, as per the Metabolic Typing Diet. "Within as little as two weeks, you will see your body begin to look the way it should according to your natural body plan," he explains. "With your improved energy levels, you'll find your exercise programme much easier to get through. You'll also find that your body

responds to exercise much faster." I find myself wondering idly what my French wine-making ancestors ate and drank.

The retreat turns out to be a place of honesty for all. Few of us might have known each other before, and we might represent a range of continents, age groups and fitness levels, but we share the camaraderie that comes with facing personal challenges. During the retreat I find myself grumpier and less energetic than I would have liked – a sign that it's high time I tackled my coffee and alcohol cravings. Still, I leave Rio Azul and the Purescapes programme feeling healthier and fitter, but shamed by the radical transformation in Sarah. She's given up smoking and committed to an exercise regime – but more incredible to me is that she's kept smiling throughout! ■

*\*Name has been changed.*



From left to right: Dominique enjoying a quick cool-off in the ocean; crabs for dinner anyone?; swimming long-distance in the river during an exercise session.

## WH READER OFFER!

Purescapes hosts programmes at Rio Azul in Mozambique three times a year. The next programme runs from 29 April to 6 May 2012, from R23 000. Purescapes is offering WH readers 10 percent off any of their international operating locations for 2012 for single or group bookings. (To find out where other programmes are hosted, visit [www.purescapes.com](http://www.purescapes.com).) For more information, email [info@purescapes.com](mailto:info@purescapes.com).

Women's Health flew Federal Air ([www.fedair.com](http://www.fedair.com)) from Johannesburg to Vilanculos, and was hosted by Rio Azul ([www.riozul-lodge.com](http://www.riozul-lodge.com)), the venue of the Purescapes programme three times per year.