

# Does this look like a bootcamp to you?

Bootcamp holidays don't have to involve mud and military types – they can include sun, surf... and even cake!



## The re-boot camp



**Anna Melville-James finds inner balance and discovers the power of good food in Portugal**

As the early morning sun creeps over the herb-scented hillside, five people are making the graceful shapes of Qigong, a Chinese martial art, in front of a Portuguese farmhouse. One of them, however, is less than elegant. I'm abiding by the no-caffeine rule on my Purescapes active holiday, with subtle, but firm encouragement from course leader Reza, and I'm not sure which is more shocked, my body or mind.

I've always wanted to go on a 'bootcamp', but not to 'get bikini' buff, or change my life to a macrobiotic Madonna-workout fantasy. I just want a tune-up to my routine that delivers fast and effective results. Luckily, this holistic week-long programme in the Algarve is less about slapping the chocolate out of your hands than discovering how food, exercise and pollutants affect you mentally and physically – including my beloved caffeine. So far so holistic, but if you think that that's another word for the occasional class and some gentle stretching, you would be very wrong.

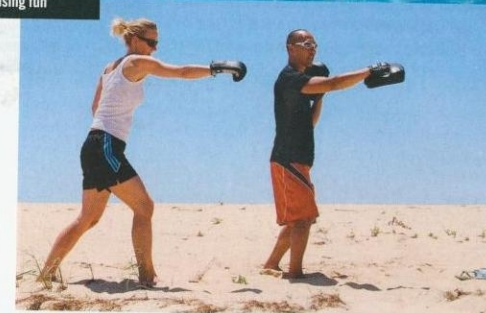
The camp's programme uses the elements – sun, beautiful Portuguese countryside, sea – to make exercise as natural as possible, and positive change, rather than body punishment, is the mantra of our merry group of five women. 'You are on holiday after all,' says instructor Adrian kindly. Perhaps, but my holidays usually involve less kettlebelling, and it's still a non-stop march of early mornings, classes, circuits, yoga, nutritional advice and talks – with just the occasional hour for poolside relaxing. You don't have to join in everything, but in such a small group, slackers stand out a mile. And besides, I can't take the disappointed looks on the instructors' faces when I tentatively suggest sitting out a yoga session.

Every morning, when the schedule is revealed, my first thought is 'I can't do all that'. But after hiking through cork woods, running (including an unexpected sprint, chased by a dog), kettlebelling and daily yoga, I have to concede that actually, yes, I am doing it. I start to go to bed at 8.30pm out of pure physical exhaustion, where I dream about proper squatting technique and resistance bands. We eat well – organic and balanced, in the open air, and always with a raw hunger. Food is a crucial element of the week (thankfully), and there are surprises, such as the emphasis on including 'proper' fats, like butter, and quality meat in your diet. Luckily, balance, not denial, is the goal.

By the fourth day we all notice a real difference. One woman is doing push-ups she could only dream of earlier in the week. For me, the biggest change is apparent in our yoga sessions. At first, as a beginner, I'm as supple as a board and hate it, but as the days pass I find myself following the ever-smiling instructor into most postures, and beam along with him. On the last night we have dinner at a local restaurant where we can order anything we want. As we scan the



Outdoor pursuits – Purescapes uses the surrounding countryside and coast to make exercising fun



menu I fleetingly wonder whether this is a test, and we're all going to come a cropper. Reza assures me it's all about balance. So I choose pasta. And then regret it. The final day dawns with one of the worst headaches I've ever had. The day's activity is surfing, and as we bounce down to the beach in our Jeep I find myself in a blood sugar crash that takes me straight into the beach café where I order coffee and a chocolate bar. Both taste sublime, but my mood immediately alters and the effect on my system is like a dramatic gear crunch. It's the clearest lesson I've ever had on just how powerful an effect what we put into our bodies can have on our wellbeing.

We crash about in the surf before returning, with salty hair and skin, to the farm, where I enjoy a last massage with gifted masseuse Maria. As I lie in the breeze, listening to birds singing while she works my aching muscles, I think I finally know what wellbeing means. As life reboots go, this one is well earned. →

● **THE FACTS** A week at Purescapes Portugal (020 7644 6110, [www.purescapes.com](http://www.purescapes.com)) costs from £1,889, inc all meals, accommodation, activities, unlimited one-on-one fitness/nutrition and transfers, but excl flights. Airlines flying to Faro include British Airways, Monarch and Aer Lingus.