

 **FITNESSBREAK**

FLY TO FARO FROM 29 DESTINATIONS, INCLUDING ✈ BILLUND | ✈ BIRMINGHAM | ✈ BOURNEMOUTH | ✈ BREMEN | ✈ BRISTOL | ✈ DONCASTER | ✈ DUBLIN | ✈ EDINBURGH |

**FEEL**

# HE BURN

Sick of dull diets and generic gyms? Then get fit amid the beautiful surroundings of the Algarve instead, says **Lydia Bell**

**I**t's 7am in the orange grove and the sun is warming the blood-red earth of the Algarve. Some of the overripe fruits have plopped to the ground, casting a sweet aroma. I should be wandering around cradling a double espresso (and perhaps eating one of those *pastéis de nata* Portuguese pastries). But instead I am running. Flattening long grass under my trainers, losing my footing on stones, lurching round corners and sprinting up hills, trying to catch my breath, as red in the face as a vine-ripened tomato. This is not, I should say, what I would normally be doing at 7am on a holiday in the Algarve.

I am not a morning person, and right now I should be in bed, cocooned by eye patches and earplugs as last night's rosé works its way out of my system. Plus, I don't really "do" sport.

Yet here I am being put through my paces by an annoyingly cheerful youth – we'll call him "gym guy" – who peps up the posse of joggers with phrases such as: "Come on! Happy faces!" Finally it's over, thank God, and we are sent back to our villa for the sweet reward of breakfast. Until gym guy shows up again. "Chop chop! Circuits at 9. You've got half an hour for a shower. Make it snappy. Happy faces!" Grrrr...

How did I get myself into this situation? Well, I signed up for a week's torture (I mean break) with Purescapes, a company that specialises in fitness retreats all over the world, from here in the Algarve to Lanzarote, Girona, Tuscany, even Mozambique. I am here so they can teach me how to access my "primal" body using functional training like circuits, and through activities in nature: hiking, cycling, swimming, kayaking, even surfing.



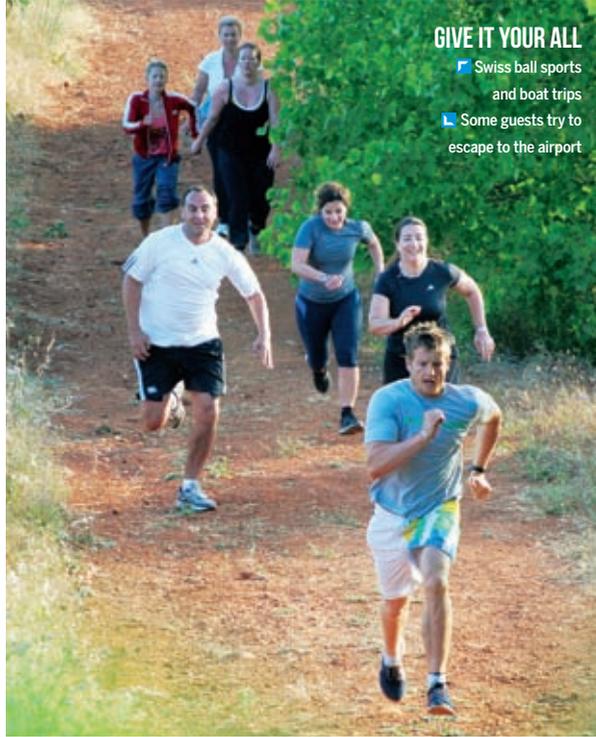
**There is no alcohol, no dairy, no wheat, no sugar, but it's delicious**

And why did I sign up for this? Because I am 34 and sick of being unfit. Some people are born to athleticism, some have athleticism thrust upon them, and some always have an excuse ready. I fall into the latter camp. At school, when one is in the last percentile for team picking, it dampens the enthusiasm. So I developed a deep-seated defensive belief that exercise was for the intellectually challenged. This persisted at university. Why don't you sportswear and jog in the rain when you could be at the pub?

After living in Australia for some years I came back loving yoga and swimming, but I still found women who jog around in Lycra clutching smoothies quite silly. Being here at Purescapes is my attempt to reconfigure my brain when it comes to fitness. It's not a lightning process: the orange grove jog is a case in point. I have always loathed jogging, I tell gym guy.

"Oh yes, so do I," he responds, cheerfully. "I very rarely do it." I look at him suspiciously: he is pectorally over-toned and lean. He laughs at me and tells me that there's basically more than one way to skin a cat. Interesting.

The Purescapes people are really into circuits. I've never done one before (I didn't even know what they were). But we are doing a



**GIVE IT YOUR ALL**

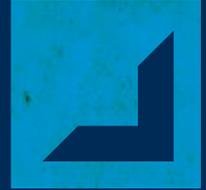
- ✕ Swiss ball sports and boat trips
- ✕ Some guests try to escape to the airport

bewildering array, including a primal circuit that involves roaring like a cavewoman and throwing a log in the air (quite satisfying, actually).

Our routine is to rise at 7am for circuits before breakfast. After breakfast we take off for an activity around nature with a packed lunch. We return for elite athlete-style naps, one-on-one sessions, a final circuit, yoga or Qigong, and optional tennis and massages. Then it's a healthy supper before collapsing into bed at about 9pm, when we sleep the sleep of the dead. I've never been this active before. Fortunately, I am not alone. Although most of the others are fitter than me, I would describe everyone in our group's levels as "normal" rather than "super freak".

There is a Kiwi couple: they feel that living in stressful London has turned them into couch potatoes. An Italian girl who lives in Dublin wants to wake up her body. A Danish woman in her 50s is looking for a new lease of life. By day three, we can barely walk. There is no alcohol, no dairy, no wheat and no sugar, but the food, cooked by a chef, is delicious. We have breakfasts of muesli, scrambled eggs and rye and pumpernickel breads; salads at lunch with black beans, avocado, chicken, homemade coleslaw, hummus and lentils; and in the evening a meat or fish dish with roasted vegetables, sweet potatoes and terrines.

The Algarve we see is stunning. We are in a spacious villa with a championship tennis court nestled in groves of avocado, orange and lemon. The skies are cobalt and the rugged coastline deserted. We go surfing on Cordoama beach, where an instructor who sounds like Borat (he keeps saying "Yessss... is nice") tells me: "You have the patience and logic to be a good surfer." Which tickles me pink considering I fail to get up on my board even once. We visit the town of Monchique and walk high into the hills, climbing to ▶



**More booty-shaping holidays**

**Camp Biche, near Cahors, France**

This is a fitness retreat that encourages clients to embrace good food (all plant-based, mind), drink wine and have fun. Guests go on daily hikes, and to yoga, massage and workout sessions.

[WWW.CAMPBICHE.COM](http://WWW.CAMPBICHE.COM)

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(STANSTED) AND PORTO. [WWW.RYANAIR.COM](http://WWW.RYANAIR.COM)

**Yeotown, Devon, England**

This new yoga boot camp includes a detox diet with produce grown on the surrounding organic farmland. There are meditation classes and body treatments, as well as yoga, workouts, hikes, bikes and more.

[WWW.YEOTOWN.COM](http://WWW.YEOTOWN.COM)

✕ FLY TO BRISTOL FROM 29 DESTINATIONS, INCLUDING

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**No1 Boot Camp, Ibiza, Spain**

Focusing on weight loss above all, this week with military trainers could mean a weight loss of 5-14lb. Set in a luxury villa near Benirras Beach, it also includes yoga and optional hypnotherapy sessions.

[WWW.NO1BOOTCAMP.COM](http://WWW.NO1BOOTCAMP.COM)

✕ FLY TO IBIZA FROM 29 DESTINATIONS, INCLUDING

MALAGA. [WWW.RYANAIR.COM](http://WWW.RYANAIR.COM)

**JUMP TO IT**

-  Sea, sand and sweat
-  A helping hand with technique



## Some people are born to athleticism, some have athleticism thrust upon them, and some always have an excuse ready

a windswept viewpoint. The Algarve spreads out before us like an emerald carpet. We kayak up the Rio Formosa lagoon near Faro to a tiny sand spit (which they make us jog around – slave drivers). And another time, we bike to the town of Silves, an old Moorish centre, and slump in the town square, basking in the sun.

Reza Niam, co-owner of the company, is six-foot-something and built like Arnie. He can be found on the lawn at 5am doing frightening things with dumbbells – living the personal trainer dream. But he's gentle, kind: it must be a Canadian thing. Perhaps because of Reza, the vibe of Purescapes couldn't be further from a boot camp. A lot of the stuff they make you do is exactly that, but somehow you feel like you are choosing it.

One day (day four I think) I wake up and realise that in my mind and body, a switch has flicked. If my body could speak, it would say: "Yeahhhhhh!" This is it. I am ancient woman on the savannah. I can scale any mountain. I do squats before breakfast. And I like it. To be honest, I don't really recognise myself.

Perhaps it's the trainers' enthusiasm: it's infectious. Gym guy turns out to be Ben, whose high spirits become more endearing as the week draws on. He is also a nutritionist (into metabolic typing, which is big in the US). He

tells me he used to be fat and a bit of a lager lout. It's hard to imagine. Lily Rose is the other trainer (my one-on-one trainer), a wisp of a girl with amazing strength and sharp humour. She is also a sports masseuse. Lily teaches me to use a Swiss ball, to train for weight loss, and to carry on exercising at home. They are young, multi-talented and super relaxed. They don't shove things down your throat. They say that you cannot exercise when stressed, it's counterproductive. Your cortisol-filled body will not be in the right state.

They teach us about functional training: how the human body is primed for seven movements. They are: squatting, pushing, pulling, twisting, bending, lunging and walking/running. Apparently, babies use all of these, while adults stick to just a few. However, we are incorporating all of them into our circuits.

I return home excited because I've figured out the "point" of exercise. The most liberating discovery is that I don't need to go to the gym and sweat on a treadmill like a hamster. I can do circuits in the park, I can do core training with a Swiss ball and weights in my own living room. I've lost 4lb (Reza assures me suavely that it's much more in fat when you factor in muscle gain). My husband, the kind of irritant who does bench presses before breakfast, is impressed. Ha, finally.

A month later, I am still working through the bag of headily scented oranges and lemons I brought home. They are my reminder that I went to the Algarve to get fit, but saw its off-the-beaten-track character as well. Not its bars, restaurants, clubs and most popular beaches, but its deserted corners, mountainous national parks, wild beaches, secret islands, coastal paths and bicycle tracks. And this, along with my new ancient-woman-on-the-savannah state, is priceless. ♥

FOR MORE ON PURESCAPES AND THEIR FITNESS HOLIDAYS IN THE ALGARVE, LANZAROTE, GIRONA AND TUSCANY, VISIT [WWW.PURESCAPES.COM](http://WWW.PURESCAPES.COM)

**Fast facts****GETTING THERE**

Faro airport is located about 4km from Faro, and a bus service into town is operated by Aerobus. For more details, visit [www.ana-aeroportos.pt](http://www.ana-aeroportos.pt). Taxis are also available from outside the terminal and a journey into Faro should not cost more than €10. Hertz ([www.hertz.com](http://www.hertz.com)) is Ryanair's exclusive rental partner and offers special rates for passengers when you book your flight.