



# NO PAIN, NO GAIN

Up for a challenge? Jenny Southan pushes herself to the max in a bid to discover the pros and cons of bootcamp fitness

It's sunrise on a chilly spring morning in Portugal, and I am barely halfway through the hardest workout of my life – the Warrior Challenge. Up against the clock, I have to run between four stations spaced about 15 metres apart – at the first I have to lift a 15kg barbell, at the second do push-ups, the third 8kg kettle bell swings, and the fourth, deep squats with a 10kg powerbag slung across my shoulders.

Not only are the muscles in my arms and thighs burning, but I know that the more tired I get, the more reps I have to do – they go up in sets for every circuit – two, four, six, eight, ten, all the way to 20 – and then back down again, 18, 16, 14... It takes 52 minutes and, in total, I complete 200 repetitions for every exercise. No wonder I am shaking by the end of it. Welcome to Marco Baioa's Luxury bootcamp – and this is just the first session of the day.

High-intensity interval training (prolonged bursts of exercise with little time to recover) has become one of the biggest trends in fitness, and, packaged as a bootcamp – be it a seven-day residential programme or a long weekend of hell – it is often marketed as a way to shed fat fast. (Perfect for time-poor business travellers whose lifestyle is getting the better of them.) A few, such as Marco's, and those hosted at Champneys country house hotels around London, are slightly more comfortable set-ups but most are merciless army-style outfits such as Ultimate Bootcamp, Total Bootcamp, GI Jane and No 1 Bootcamp (complete with punishments for being late and abusive language).

Why do people put themselves through it? Ian Scott, director for the UK and Ireland at Dubai's Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing, is a No1 Bootcamp graduate. He says: "Nothing could have prepared me for what I experienced. Standing

in a line in the pouring rain, with no food inside me, being ordered to run, jump, lift and squat, was tough. Add to that the pain shooting through my muscles from the previous days' exercise and it was easy to question why you were there. Some people broke down emotionally. Just as the exercise regime was relentless, the food was incredibly scarce. But, a week later, the average weight loss of the group was perhaps half a stone."

Even if you sign up to a "luxury" bootcamp, it will almost certainly mean a world of unimaginable pain, as days are long and your body will be forced to endure things it is not used to. Erin Heit, founder and chief executive of Beauty Bumps, a US hair-growth supplement, took part in Marco's week-long bootcamp.

She says: "I believe it is crucial to keep a balance between mind

*'People respond to the army-style approach because there is no time to find excuses'*

and body, so the bootcamp seemed like it would challenge my body in a way I never have. I gained huge knowledge of the science behind my body – a very customised fitness assessment was done and this provided great information for me to take home and apply. I feel I now finally have the right tools to keep constructively reaching my fitness and body goals. I also learnt how strong I am. I really pushed my physical state, which then also pushed my mental state."

What do the experts think? Trainer Tai Friedmann, who hosts regular one-hour bootcamp classes, says: "I think [residential bootcamps] have their place as they can encourage people to get motivated and begin training and focus on losing weight. Some people respond to that army-style approach because there is no time to find excuses – you just need to get on with it." Though she adds:

"I'm not sure how many people stay focused once they come home, when they don't have anyone spurring them on. [Plus] it is recommended to lose [no more than] one to two pounds a week if you really want it to be sustainable."

Dan Roberts, fitness instructor and founder of the Dan Roberts Group, a collection of boutique fitness companies, notes that it can be "interesting to see what your body can do", but that prolonged high-intensity interval training can also take its toll. "If you're not physically prepared, you can get injured – tight muscles become niggles, and with no time to really rest, niggles become injuries. It's very dependent on how good the coaches are, what the coach to client ratio is like and the ethos of the bootcamp."

Personal trainer and ex-Royal Marine Philip McDougall launched his own bootcamp concept, Commando Training, last year. After doing two tours of Afghanistan, he left the corps in 2011 and offers both one-on-one and group sessions in parks across London. His approach differs somewhat to the stereotypical military bootcamp.

"The only time I raise my voice is to give a brief command like 'go'," McDougall says. But don't think you'll get off lightly. "I'm a huge fan of abusing my participants on a mental level – playing around with false horizons – so, for example, I tell a group they are going to do one more lap of the park and 100 more spins of the Bulgarian bag, but if I don't see 100 per cent effort, I'll tell them they're not showing the grit and determination required and they will have to keep going until every single participant appears to be giving the right amount of effort."

If you think you've got what it takes, here's our tried and tested selection of residential, outdoor and gym-based bootcamps. Now get on the ground and do 50 press-ups! ▶

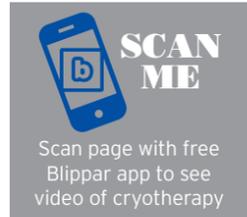
**EXTREME BOOTCAMP, CHAMPNEY'S TRING**

This may only be a three-day bootcamp but don't underestimate how tough it is. Regularly held at four Champney's properties around London, days begin at 7am with a one-hour walk or jog, followed by a meagre breakfast, and five hours of assault courses, indoor circuits, boxing, yoga, spinning and team games. Participants also take part in a bleep test (20-metre shuttle runs to test endurance) and have an advanced body composition analysis.

One of the most extreme elements was two sessions inside a cryotherapy chamber, which uses liquid nitrogen to create a dry "cold sauna" with temperatures as low as minus 135°C. I was told the treatment helped to stimulate circulation, boosted the immune system and accelerated recovery. In preparation, I had to strip to my underwear, put on two pairs of woollen shorts, a crop-top, gloves, headband, surgical mask, clogs and wrap my limbs with bandages. I then had to enter a minus 70°C antechamber and, after 30 seconds, clomp blindly into the main room, stamping my feet and moving my arms to try to keep warm, as ice formed on my eyelashes. I am not sure whether it was beneficial or not, but on the Monday back at work I didn't feel as achy as I thought I might have done.

Thankfully, the countryside setting and luxurious rooms offset some of the discomfort, but because I was training so hard and was only allowed 1,500 calories a day, I had a headache most of the time and, when I got home, was so hungry and relieved it was over that I went straight out for a pizza and a bottle of wine.

■ Next Extreme Bootcamp is June 28-30; £350 all-inclusive. Standard two-, four- and seven-night bootcamps also available. Upcoming dates: July 12-14, August 23-25, September 2-6, October 25-27. [champneys.com](http://champneys.com)



**MARCO BAIOA LUXURY ALGARVE BOOTCAMP**

Launched in 2010, [healthandfitnesstravel.com](http://healthandfitnesstravel.com) provides a user-friendly way of booking bootcamps overseas. I decided to try Marco Baioa's Luxury bootcamp at the 86-room Cascade resort in the Algarve, and was impressed by the science and knowledge behind it, how personalised it was and the ratio of free time to training (about four hours working out a day – two hours intensive). The rooms were stylish, the coastal location beautiful, and the food good quality, healthy and relatively plentiful (Marco's programme does not focus on weight loss as its primary goal).

This might sound cushy, but it wasn't. To begin, there was an in-depth health assessment covering everything from your aerobic capacity (VO2 max) and heart rate zones, to flexibility and strength based on the US army's physical fitness tests. After 30 minutes of stretching by the pool before breakfast, sessions included cliff-top runs interspersed with sets of 50 squat jumps, power lunges and star jumps, then sprints up and down 100 steps from a lighthouse to the sea, plus mountain biking through forests and brutal beach circuits that involved running with a 20kg ball and hitting a giant tractor tire with a heavy mallet.

Other challenges included the muscle-splintering "300", created for the cast of the eponymous movie about Spartan soldiers. The objective is to do 30 reps of ten different exercises – in my case, these included burpees, pull-ups, 20kg barbell dead lifts, Russian twists with a 5kg weight, and 4kg atomic rows. Although I left feeling achy, I really enjoyed it and was inspired to continue working out and eating well on my return.

■ Seven days all-inclusive from £2,395. Next bootcamps are July 22-29, September 2-9 and 16-23, October 12-19. Call +44 (0)845 544 1936 for a 20 per cent reader discount.



**BARRY'S BOOTCAMP**

Launched in the US in 1998, with venues in West Hollywood, San Diego and New York, since January, there is now one in London, and Miami is also coming up. You will either love or hate the concept – ripped instructors that look like models, pounding music, nightclub lighting and a frantic army-style hour of hot hell in which half the class has to pound treadmills, while the other performs hardcore weight and resistance training (you then switch).

I turned up at the UK outpost opposite Euston station after work and joined the scrum of girls in the changing rooms, where I had to fight for a locker. As a result, I missed the first couple of minutes of the class, which was in full swing when I entered the almost pitch-black studio. The svelte trainer was shouting into a pop-star headset and pointed me in the direction of a treadmill facing a mirrored wall.

I could barely see my feet in the darkness while running, or hear what I was supposed to be doing over the pumping soundtrack, and the floor work wasn't much easier either. By the end I felt stressed and exhausted, but was consoled by Barry's promise that participants burn about 1,000 calories. I couldn't bring myself to go back though.

■ £20 per class or packages such as ten classes for £170. [barrysbootcamp.com](http://barrysbootcamp.com)



**BRITISH MILITARY FITNESS**

BMF has been running military-style fitness sessions around UK parks for more than a decade – you may have seen groups in coloured bibs running while a trainer shouts instructions. With more than 400 classes a week across Britain, it is an easy way to try a bootcamp without committing to a residential one.

I tried a one-hour Sunday morning class on Hampstead Heath. Everyone had to remain in two uniform lines during exercises, and maintain a competitive spirit – activities include group relay races (the losers have to perform an exercise of the winning team's choice), and plenty of pair work, one doing sit-ups while the other sprints up a hill, for example. It was fast-paced, fun and challenging.

■ First class free; £25 joining fee; choice of packages with prices depending on location – Hampstead Heath costs £37 for one session per week or £50 for unlimited classes when committing to six months.

[britmilfit.com](http://britmilfit.com)

**CONTACTS**

- [commando-training.com](http://commando-training.com)
- [gijanebootcamp.co.uk](http://gijanebootcamp.co.uk)
- [no1bootcamp.com](http://no1bootcamp.com)
- [taitotalfitness.com](http://taitotalfitness.com)
- [thedanrobertsgroup.com](http://thedanrobertsgroup.com)
- [totalbootcamp.co.uk](http://totalbootcamp.co.uk)
- [ultimatebootcamp.com](http://ultimatebootcamp.com)



**EQUINOX BOOTCAMP**

For those who want a masochistic experience in luxurious surroundings, London's new Equinox gym offers weekly sessions of high-intensity interval training in the form of Bootcamp, Tabata and MetCon3 ("metabolic conditioning") classes. The glamorous facility opened on Kensington High Street last autumn, and there are venues in Boston, New York, Washington DC and Chicago, among others.

While membership is expensive, if you are serious about maintaining your fitness, Equinox gyms are a cut above the rest. Each class comprises a full-body regime of cardio circuits and resistance training, using a mix of body-weight exercises and equipment such as medicine balls, dumbbells, step benches and vipers (a weighted tube with hand holds). You will leave feeling sweaty and punished – but in a good way.

■ Full access to all classes and facilities costs £180 a month (plus a £250 initiation fee). [equinox.com](http://equinox.com)