

TAKE THE plunge

Holidays often involve getting away from it all, yet too often a break entails indulgence and even outright gluttony. Increasingly though, people are using their holidays as an opportunity to kick start their systems and reconnect with their minds and bodies. Robert Carroll reports on the best programmes, which may even help you lead a healthier life at home

1 BIKINI BOOTCAMP, MEXICO

Despite the name, this fitness and rejuvenation programme is designed for men and women. Located in Tulum in Mexico, about two hours south of Cancun, the resort consists of beach-side cabanas with thatched roofs and private bathrooms, which balance luxury with being sympathetic to the beautiful surroundings. The varied routine, which you can dip in and out of at will, includes everything from kick boxing to circuit training, beach walking to yoga. There's also snorkelling, massages and excursions to the nearby Mayan ruins to keep you busy. The menu is based on "moderation not deprivation" with lots of fresh fruit, vegetables and local fish and chicken. Booking is online only, as the telephone lines on the beach are not very clear. There is also bootcamp in Ibiza.

A six-night stay at Bikini Bootcamp (www.bikinibootcamp.com) costs from \$2,294 (Dh8,059) per person in a shared room and from \$3,012 (Dh11,063) per person in a private room including accommodation, meals, two massages and taxes.



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2 RANCHO LA PUERTA, MEXICO

This 3,000-acre ranch in Tecate, Baja California in Mexico sits in the mountains between the sea and desert. It enjoys a pleasant climate with sunshine for most of the year and is only an hour's drive from San Diego. Set up in the 1940s, the residence's "fitness week" revolves around different classes every hour, in which you can choose how many you wish to take. Activities include cardio classes, Pilates, circuit training and hiking in the mountains. The menus champion fresh, seasonal produce, with plenty of seafood from the waterfront market as well as fruit and vegetables from the organic farm which is part of the ranch. The accommodation ranges from cosy rancheras and haciendas to two-bedroom villas. All of them have filtered drinking water and many have wood-burning stoves or fireplaces.

A seven-night package at Rancho la Puerta (www.rancholapuerta.com; 001 858 764 5500) starts at \$2,985 (Dh10,968) per person including accommodation, meals and transfers based on two people sharing.

3 BODY AND SOUL ADVENTURES, BRAZIL

Founded in 2000 by Mike Mitchell, a former partner at the famous Ashram Spa in California, this idyllic Brazilian retreat is a superb place to relax and get fit. Based in the colonial town of Paraty, about 250km from Rio de Janeiro, the setting is the quintessence of tropical paradise: beautiful beaches, tranquil bays, rainforests and lush mountains. The day begins around 7:30am with a yoga class. Hiking, kayaking,

swimming and capoeira create a challenging combination of action and relaxation throughout the day. The emphasis at mealtimes is on healthy choices with plenty of fresh fruit, vegetables and seafood rather than a restricted-calorie menu. Full-body massages are available every night and are a great way to end the day. A six-night Paraty Adventure at Body and Soul Adventures (www.bodysouladventures.com; 001 650 532 7086) costs from \$2,250 (Dh8,265) per person in a shared room including meals, massages, transfers and taxes.

4 THE CAMP, SPAIN

Established in 2007 in Scotland, The Camp was the first fitness programme to cater for women-only in a military-style, boot camp regime. Building on this success, these ex-Special Forces trainers have established another camp in a 500-year old mansion in Andalusia in the south west of Spain. Don't be fooled by the tranquil gardens with lemon trees and the scent of jasmine: this camp is hard work. Days start before 7am with almost an hour of lunging, jumping, jogging and squatting. Then it's off for a three-hour hike through the surrounding hills and valleys followed by circuit training or exercise in the pool. The aim is to "drop a dress size" in a week. Strict diet and rigorous exercise make this desire a distinct possibility.

A seven-day course at The Camp in Spain (www.thecamp.co.uk; 0044 7879 555 041) costs from \$2,431 (Dh8,031) per person in a shared room and from \$2,763 (Dh10,149) per person in a private room including en-suite room, meals and transfers.



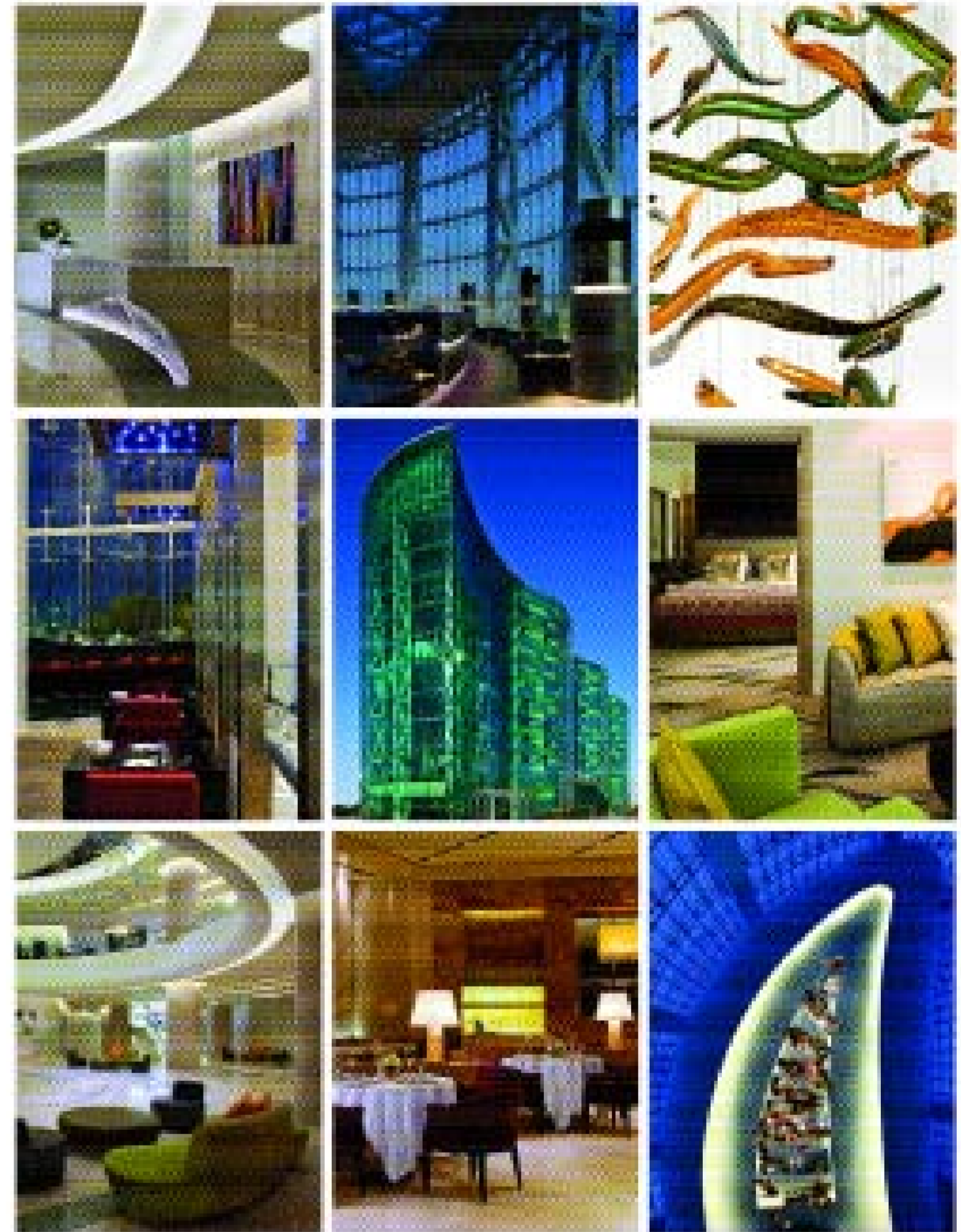
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THE ULTRATRAVEL TOP 10

5 KAMALAYA RESORT, THAILAND

This "wellness sanctuary" has been providing detox, massage and yoga sessions on the beautiful island of Koh Samui since 2005. Its "optimal fitness" programme adds sessions with a personal trainer to this tried and tested blend to create a plan of action which will improve your body and your mind. It begins with a "wellness consultation" where you map out your goals for the week and customise your routine. Then follows daily one-to-one personal training sessions as well as massages and saunas. The setting is spectacular. Built on a steep hillside overlooking the white-sand beach and azure sea, the rooms, suites and villas sit amidst boulders, ponds and coconut palms. At the heart of the resort is a cave, once a dwelling for Buddhist monks, which now gives a spiritual air to this beautiful place. A seven-night stay on the Optimal Fitness Programme (www.kamalaya.com; 0066 77 429 800) costs from \$3,320 (Dh12,195) per person including accommodation, meals, beverages, treatments and transfers.



6 WELLFIT PROGRAMME, ST LUCIA

Run by Daley Thompson, a former decathlete and Olympic gold medal winner, and Kate Staples, a record-breaking athlete and former television Gladiator, this programme aims to improve your strength and energy as well as help you lose weight. Staying in en suite rooms on the small Caribbean island of St Lucia, the focus is on healthy eating and exercise. The programme includes fitness assessments, hour-long morning training sessions and nutritional advice. There are also daily spa treatments, as well as a wide range of activities such as tennis, volleyball, scuba diving and kayaking. Towards the end of the week, the EastCoast Trek is an opportunity to explore the area's beautiful beaches and cliffs. A seven-day course on the WellFit Programme (www.healthandfitnessravel.com; 0044 845 544 1936) costs from \$3,178 (Dh11,674) per person including accommodation, flights, transfers, spa treatments, meals and watersports.

7 KANGAROO ISLAND HEALTH RETREAT, AUSTRALIA

The term unspoilt does not do justice to the isolated and rugged wilderness of Kangaroo Island off the coast of South Australia. Just over 110km

south west of Adelaide, it is the perfect place to chill out and regain rude health. The Dynamic Detox package involves a challenging combination of Pilates, swimming and walking. Over the course of the week, you will clock up between 60 and 80km on the beach and in the bush. Abandoning addictions to nicotine, alcohol, caffeine and junk food and eating a variety of fruits, vegetables, pulses, seeds and nuts is the other key element to this course. This simple combination of a healthy diet and exercise, in conjunction with yoga, meditation and massage often reaps excellent results.

A five-day package at the Kangaroo Island Health Retreat (www.kihealthretreat.com; 0061 8 8553 5374) costs from \$2,758 (Dh10,133) including regional flights, accommodation, meals and two therapies per day.

8 CAMP BICHE, FRANCE

Camp Biche casts aside the spartan, calorie-counting approach to health and fitness. Instead it promotes a tough exercise regime combined with life's pleasures such as wine and desserts - in moderation, of course. The 800-year old mansion is set in the hills of south-west France about an hour and a half from Toulouse. The camp takes full advantage of this beautiful setting with

daily four-hour hikes through the countryside. The day starts with abdominal classes and yoga, but there are also gym classes, swimming and circuit training, as well as six hours of massages included in the price. The meals avoid processed foods and meat, preferring tasty vegetarian fare, such as mushroom pecan burgers and lentil taco salads.

A seven-night stay at Camp Biche (www.campbiche.com; 0044 207 617 7253) costs from \$5,414 (Dh19,889) including accommodation, meals, transfers, tips, taxes and massages.

9 SUNFIT, FUERTEVENTURA

Operated by British Military Fitness, one of the largest providers of outdoor fitness classes in the UK, this program in the Canary Islands provides their brand of rigorous, military-style training beneath cloudless skies. The resort, on a bay near the village of Las Playitas in Fuerteventura, is brimming with facilities, including an Olympic swimming pool, a gym and running tracks, but it's the classes that truly set this programme apart. Days are spent mountain hiking, running, stretching, circuit training and military fitness sessions using body one's own weight and cardiovascular exercises. Breakfast and dinner buffets are provided, including a wide range of sal-

ads and a selection of desserts. There are evening seminars on topics such as nutrition and devising exercise routines. A seven-night stay at Sunfit (www.sunfit.co.uk; 0044 207 751 9742) costs from \$1,184 (Dh4,350) including accommodation, half-board meals and transfers.

10 WILDFITNESS, KENYA AND GREECE

Wildfitness seeks to reclaim the simpler, vigorous lifestyle of our forebears: eating fresh, unprocessed foods free from caffeine or sugar; doing intense bouts, running and walking and taking note of your body's circadian rhythm - the daily pattern of waking and sleeping which your body would adopt without the pressures of work, alarm clocks or electric lights. The day begins early - around 6am. Then there's barefoot boxing on the beach or a run through palm forests and mangroves followed by posture and movement workshops or "primal skills" circuits. Wildfitness is based on the north Kenyan coast, near the fishing village of Watamu, and has other locations in Crete and the Isle of Wight. A nine-day course at Wildfitness (www.wildfitness.com; 0044 20 3286 4886) costs from \$3,552 (Dh13,049) per person including accommodation, meals and transfers.

