



Where better to shift the pounds than among the avocado, lemon and almond orchards of the Sierra de Cázulas, says Sarah Edworthy

ANDALUCIAN BOOT CAMP

WHAT COULD BE A more beautiful hideaway? A 500-year-old *palacete* (mansion) in the hills of Andalucia, with a Moorish garden punctuated by palm trees and explosions of jasmine, glimpses of jewel-like lemons, oranges and pomegranates, an azure swimming pool and a tennis court cut into the cliffside. Here, at the foot of the Sierra de Cázulas, days begin with an early-morning ambush of wild birdsong... and a robust 6.45am knock on the bedroom door.

For this is not lie-in city. This is boot camp. Here, 20 women hurl themselves from bed, pull on training kit and assemble at 6.55am, in formation, in front of a marine commando and a Special Forces military fitness instructor. Then it is down to the tennis court and 50 minutes of lung-busting jogging, front-punching, sprinting on the spot, squats and lunges, running between cones, as the guys in camouflage gear demand 'Maximum effort, girls!'

They get it, too, because, believe it or not, in this landscape there is no more alluring way to start the day than with an hour of invigorating PT. Or a three-hour hike through valleys of avocado, lemon and almond orchards. Or to appreciate a typical Andalucian village when you stop in the square for a water break on a long, slow distance walk.

An adrenalin rush is the effect of this blast on the system so, even if you are not 'a morning person', even if your muscles

ache from the previous day's 11 hours of activity, even if you feel detox-queasy, your metabolism is racing. But the instructors are motivating, patient and humorous.

Along with 19 course mates, who range in age from 24 to 61, I joined The Camp to shift pounds and tone up. Each of us is a different size, body shape and motivated by a private goal (which we all share because of our new-found camaraderie) that we achieve amid hard work, laughter and shrewdly timed diversions. Activities take in boxercise, circuit training, body pump, ball games, gorge walking and swimming, with 'rest' periods on rifle shooting, nutrition and personal security.

The Camp is the brainchild of Sebastian

'We are motivated by a goal achieved amid hard work, laughter and shrewdly timed diversions'

Morley and Sam Costello, whose officer/soldier relationship in the Special Forces evolved into friendship and business partnership. They trained in deserts, jungles and fjords, and went on operations in the Middle East and Afghanistan: 'Basically it's hard to keep weight on,' says Costello. Their unique success in transposing that into an all-female, drop-a-dress-size market has spawned gimmicky imitators, but their unique hybrid of military and civvy elements, designed to spread the load of exertion over arms, core muscles and legs,

achieves astonishing fat-burning results and take-home confidence and knowledge.

Preparation and risk assessment are key. You push yourself because you feel safe. A sports physiotherapist is on hand to stretch muscles and treat injury niggles. So: does it work? Absolutely. Across a group of 20, average weight loss in the week was 7lb, average fat loss 3%, muscle gain 1% and average loss around the waist and hips was about 3in. Is it brutal? Constant activity is tough. On days two and three you can experience nausea, which means your body is drawing on those wobbly stores. What's the food like? Delicious: portions are small, calorie-controlled and nutritionally balanced. The

Camp sees it as medicine/fuel. Food obsession is the prevailing subject of banter. Hallucinations about wine, cheese and large portions are common.

'Let's have some deep breaths,' calls our trainer in the dawn session.

'Did he say let's have Pizza Express?' ♦

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