

## FEELGOOD FACTOR



Rex Features

### Charlotte Ross endures a luxury boot camp in pursuit of a body fit for a bikini

**What is it?** Bikini Boot Camps, run by Free Range Holidays, are luxury five-day fitness holidays based in a mountain lodge set 10 minutes' drive from Lagos on the Algarve coast. Arriving on Thursday, you are treated to lunch before launching straight into a full programme of activities, which amounts to around seven hours of exercise a day. On top of this, there is a detox regime — every meal is additive-free and strictly calorie-controlled. It is forbidden to take in food or drink, mobile phones are banned during the day, and there is no TV.

**Any science to it?** The camp is run by Tanya and Leo Molloy, an inspirational Irish-American couple who relocated to Portugal. Tanya is a certified yoga instructor and teaches daily sessions before breakfast. Leo is a chef with a deep knowledge of nutrition, who carefully balances the vegetarian meals to detoxify the body, promote weight loss and provide the nourishment required after long days of strenuous exercise. Other highly qualified instructors include a hilarious Spanish Pilates teacher called Yolanda and a pair of incredibly fit personal trainers, one of whom doubles as a masseur. The exercise programme is carefully designed to ensure a full-on, full body workout, every day.

**What is it like?** Each day began with hot water and lemon at 6.30am, followed by two hours of dynamic yoga on the terrace, practised as the sun rose. By then I was ready for the hearty breakfast of home made granola with yoghurt followed by a boiled egg. Most days progressed with a lengthy hike — up to 14km along the coast, or in the surrounding hills. One morning involved an 8km “fitness hike” — alternating fast walking with running — along the beach; scenic but challenging.

After a light lunch — often soups or salads — it was time for Pilates or circuit training, all performed outdoors, making gruelling use of the natural slopes and walls around the property. Dinner was the main meal of the day. We soon got used to eating smaller portions and appreciating the flavours of our lovingly prepared food. After that it was muscle-melting massages and bed by 9pm.

**Did it work?** On day one we were all weighed, measured and had our fitness assessed. After five days the process was repeated, with universally positive results. Of 12 women, every single one of us lost weight, mostly fat, and all of us made significant improvements to our fitness levels. My own results were encouraging — 2kgs of fat lighter, and able to perform 25 more press-ups than a few days before, I went home feeling more lithe and physically contented than I have in years.

I won't pretend it was easy — you need to commit to an activity break like this and it certainly isn't for slackers — but the aching muscles and sore feet were mere memories in days. The weight, four weeks later, has stayed off.

●The next Bikini Boot Camp is from 19-24 July, booking now. See [www.freerangeholidays.com](http://www.freerangeholidays.com). Cost £715, sharing.