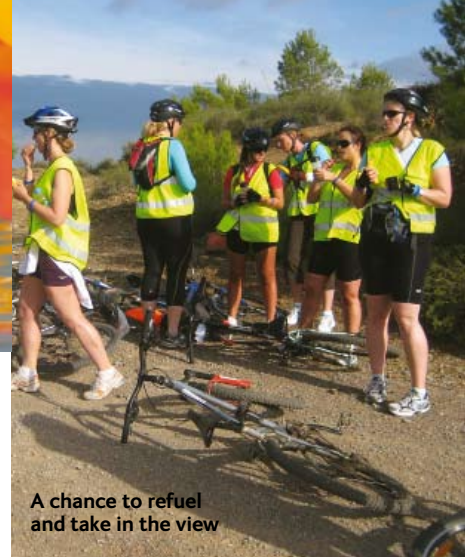




Jo (rear) and Claire power home to victory in a sea-kayaking race



A chance to refuel and take in the view

# Smiles, sweat & tears

Transform your body, fitness and confidence by daring to do a bootcamp this winter

**Y**ou'd think studying to be a personal trainer would help me stay fit and trim but, ironically, any spare time I've had for workouts has been replaced by hours of reading! As a result, my weight has been creeping up. I'd heard about fitness bootcamps and thought, 'that's what I need to get myself back on track'. But they sound challenging enough without the added misery of heavy autumnal downpours, so when I heard about La Manga Club Bootcamp in Spain, set in the centre of the famous 5\* star La Manga golf resort, it made the thought of putting myself through the mill for a week seem ever so slightly more appealing.

A few weeks later, I arrive nervously at La Manga to discover I'm sharing a huge room with Claire Young, a finalist on TV show *The Apprentice 2008*, who has lost an amazing three and a half stone since then and is looking to lose that last stubborn 7lbs to reach her target weight. We excitedly run around the villa like big kids and squeal with delight when we find the outdoor Jacuzzi – maybe things won't be so bad after all.

## Joining up

The following day, once we've all taken our turn being weighed and measured, we're free

to do whatever we like until the welcome meeting at 5pm. While Claire gets a head start on the weight loss and goes for a run, I visit a local café for a last glass of Pinot Grigio and some tapas in the sun as a final bit of indulgence – so far, so good!

At 5pm, myself and 12 other nervous-looking women are put at ease by manager Kim Hurley, who tells us about her own weight-loss battles, experiences of bootcamps and why she created La Manga Club bootcamp. The rest of the group, I discover, ranges from 20 to 50 year-olds; those who don't exercise to super-fit people, with others like me who don't get round to exercising as much as we'd like.

My nerves come back when we're introduced to our personal trainers (PTs) for the week – Royal Marine fitness instructors, Staff Dixie and Staff Reg. They look menacing in their shades and combat gear and start by telling us that they're both 'very happily married' (to avoid any misplaced crushes!) and that they'll be pushing us to our physical and mental limits. Most importantly, they ask us to trust them and their extensive expertise over the next week – there will be tears and tantrums, they say, but the hard work will be worth it when we see the results

in seven days' time. We're then given head torches and high visibility jackets, told to get into our exercise kit and meet outside the front of the villa in 10 minutes. I instantly regret the wine I had earlier!

After lining up, we listen to the rules for the week ahead: if you're told to be somewhere at a certain time, always be at the destination five minutes early; never swear; line up in one long line with full water bottles, mozzie repellent and sun lotion applied, and don't ask questions about what's happening next or later in the day – you'll find out when the PTs decide you need to know, in other words, 30 minutes (or in some cases, seconds) before you carry out an activity. Not much to remember then!

Finally, we're introduced to 'Winston': a six-pound medicine ball the team has to carry wherever we go, plus two large foam dice, which we can only refer to using terms that rhyme with dice such as 'mice'. If we break any of the aforementioned rules we'll have to roll the mice and accept punishment. If, for example, I was a minute late, I'd have to roll the 'mice', add the score together and add 10, then the group would have to do a minimum of 12 or maximum of 22 exercises, such as lunges, squats or press-ups.



Working out  
Rocky-style



An exhausting bleep  
test on the sand

## Uphill struggle

Team talk over, we set off on a very fast-paced 3km uphill power walk, stopping to do seemingly-endless sets of squats, lunges and tricep dips. One sweaty hour later, we return to the villa and are told to be back outside in the same gear tomorrow morning at 7am. We're banned from leaving the villa and are advised to get an early night, which we all do.

The next few days pass in an exhausting blur. We have to give everything 100 per cent effort at all times, and the PTs are adept at knowing our fitness levels. We all struggle with never knowing what we're going to be doing next, but by the end of the week, most of us learn to go with the flow and accept the (unknown) torture coming our way. The reasoning behind this method is simple, explains Staff Dixie. If they were to tell us, 'Right girls, tomorrow we're going to do a 20-mile mountain bike ride and the first gruelling hour is uphill', we'd all either panic, get ridiculously nervous or fake illness. The same theory is applied to all our intense cardio and weight-training circuits, arduous hikes in the baking heat, and tough sprinting sessions on the sand.

In keeping with the spirit of the bootcamp's ethos, I don't want to give too

much away by listing a typical day's activities, but I will reveal that we exercise for around nine to 10 hours a day, from 7am to 7pm with rests between sessions for meals (wheat-free and dairy-free, such as sweet potato with salmon and salad) and snacks, such as fruit or a couple of stem ginger oat biscuits. The variety of activities on offer is huge, from boxing and Pilates to water aerobics and core-stability sessions. The bulk of the exercise consists of walking and hiking an average of 10 miles a day, because you can't perform high-intensity workouts all day. We do, however, clock up an impressive 24 hours of circuit-style training, including a total of 1,400 sit-ups and 1,450 squats!

Aside from the fantastic afternoon playing beach games and having kayaking races in the sea, the most exciting thing is seeing people's bodies morphing and reducing in front of your eyes. Not one day goes by without Claire and I saying, 'Wow, your bum's got smaller!' or 'All your back fat's gone!'. Which is not surprising considering we're eating about 1,200–1,500 calories a day and burning off three times that amount through exercise.

## The verdict

Most of the women on the camp cry and feel like giving up at some point. My tears come on the last two days – once when I feel absolutely exhausted and can't make myself do any more exercise, and then several times during

the long hike up Lion Mountain on the final day. Fifteen minutes from the top, I have a huge panic attack and am adamant I can't carry on. But Staff Reg reveals a softer side, sits with me until I calm down and, once I'm ready to carry on, supports me and holds my hand the whole way up. The relief I feel once we reach the peak reduces me to a hysterical wailing banshee. But after photos, a few squares of dark chocolate and a chance to reflect on my achievements over the past week, I bounce down the other side of the mountain feeling like a new woman.

At weighing-in time the next day, I didn't need a tape measure or pair of scales to tell me I'd lost weight, although I was ecstatic to discover I'd lost 10lbs and 13¾ inches, including four from my waist, three from my hips and 2½ off each thigh!

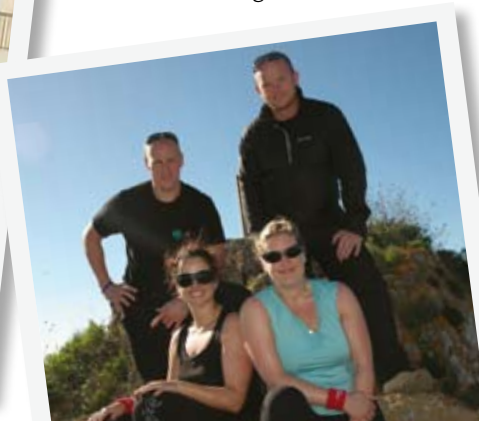
So after all the hard graft and blubbing, would I go back? Yes, in a second – because, although it was by far the toughest thing I've ever done, it was also the most rewarding.

I can't speak highly enough of the staff, from Kim, who found no request too troublesome, to world-renowned nutritionist and hypnotherapist Marisa Peer ([www.marisapeer.com](http://www.marisapeer.com)), who gave us inspiring nutritional talks and answered our questions about diet, to Staff Dixie and Staff Reg, who I'd trust with my life. I've learnt so much about my mental and physical limits and made some great friends and, because the whole thing was so challenging, I'm determined not to put a single pound back on. If you want to lose weight this winter, I can't think of a better place to go. ■

■ La Manga Club Bootcamp costs from £1,500, including accommodation, transfers, meals and training. Bootcamps run once a month from September to May. La Manga Club boasts high-quality villas with amenities such as Jacuzzi, swimming pool, utility rooms with free washing powder so you can wash your kit. Stay on your own or pair up in a twin bedroom with en-suite bathroom. See [www.lamangaclubbootcamp.com](http://www.lamangaclubbootcamp.com).



The girls enjoy a break  
from hiking with a core  
stability class at the villa



Staff Reg (left) and Staff  
Dixie (right) with Claire and Jo  
at the top of Lion Mountain