



Treat yourself to some
tough
love

Sam Harrington Lowe thinks she is in for a treat as she heads to Champney's luxury retreat in Forest Mere, Hampshire. But has she bitten off more than she can chew?

Spend the weekend at Champney's reviewing their bootcamp? Oh yes, I thought, that sounds great, and an ideal way to cover that 'get ready for your bikini' angle I was thinking of for this issue.

For who wouldn't fancy a weekend at a plush health farm eating their amazing food, doing a bit of exercise and getting lots of R&R? It'll be a bit of a rest.

How wrong I was...

Anyone who knows Champney's will no doubt be familiar with the resorts.

Lovely venues tucked away in beautiful countryside, with hot and cold treatments and the relaxed feeling of wearing a dressing gown all day and it being allowed.

Not that I normally spend whole days in my dressing gown or anything. But I digress...

I arrived with high hopes and was met by Sean, the man in charge of bootcampers.

The first thing we did was to stick electrodes all over my body to measure what I'm made of literally. The speed at which the currents pass through you determine how much water, lean weight, fat etc you contain.

Unsurprisingly I'm carrying too much fat, not enough lean weight, and not enough water. May have had something to do with last night's cocktails, I mutter.

Sean looks at me over his glasses and says nothing and I feel the first twinge of fear.

There are 16 of us by the time we assemble in the conference room and pick up our packs.

A little backpack, water bottle and a book all about food. Sean starts talking and it starts to dawn on me – actually, this is going to be quite hard work. What have I done!!

We're to be rationed 1,500 calories per day, and we're not allowed in the restaurant. The Champney's staff know who we are and are under strict instructions not to let us buy cake or wine or anything nice.

We are not having tea or coffee, and certainly no alcohol. We are told people who are caught with contraband will be in trouble, that we are going to be pushed pretty hard, but we will be amazed at what we can achieve.

I stare at Sean and wonder if he'd notice if I backed out of the room quietly.

Day one isn't too bad – the day of our arrival. We pitch up and have lunch (a baked sweet potato with cottage cheese and diced beetroot) before settling into rooms and meeting up a while later for circuits.

Circuits gives us a chance to get to know each other a bit, as Sean mixes us up and splits up groups of friends.

It's a real mixed bag of people on the course – some who have come with a group of mates, some trying to kick start a new regime, a couple of proper fitness fanatics.

But the bulk of the group are like me – do a bit of exercise, want to make some changes, would like to lose some weight fast before summer.



It's fast paced and lively and we all laugh a lot.

After a quick change we're off for a long walk – 90 minutes hacking through the forest in the spitting rain and wind.

By the time that's finished we're all pink, rather pleased with ourselves and looking forward to dinner.

We have our inclusive thalassotherapy treatment – salty water in various jet forms which massage our achey legs and backs – and sit down to eat feeling rather chuffed.

Dinner turns out to be Thai chicken curry, although not the sort I'm used to. Brown rice rather than sticky and very little sauce, but it's lovely and surprisingly filling.

We're all drinking water like our life depends on it but when he hands out the schedule for day two I rather wish I had some brandy.

A 7am aerobics class is the start of a day filled with seven different exercise options.

I take a photo on my iPhone and send it to The Boyfriend, who finds the whole thing enormously amusing. My friends helpfully post photos of cakes on my Facebook wall.

Day two is, predictably, horrifically hard. The 7am wake-up class is lovely, not too taxing and enjoyably dance-based, but 'kettlercise', served up after omelette breakfast, is an aerobics class with kettle bells, and is truly ghastly.

Arms screaming in protest, knees buckling from a million squats, I hate every minute and want to kill the cheerful instructor.

Straight into pilates after that and I'm absurdly grateful for the chance to have a bit of a lie down and work on those core muscles.

I'm also keenly aware that we have a break and a 'snack' coming after.

'Snack' sadly turns out to be three Brazil nuts and a really tart green apple. I can't even eat the apple, it turns my head inside out.



“It’s fast paced and lively and we all laugh a lot”

Then we're off again, another 90 minute hike through brambles and mud followed by lunch, another hour of circuits and then water polo.

Circuits makes me want to lie on the floor sobbing but water polo is fun and it's lovely to be in the pool.

Finally it's zumba – yes, at the end of all that – and then we can rest and prepare for a massage, which is also part of the course.

I eat every morsel of my lamb kebab and Greek salad and I sleep like the dead.

Getting out of bed on day three is interesting as nothing seems to bend any more, but I somehow manage to get my clothes on – by lying sideways on the floor – and get to the 7am warm-up class.

I'm amazed that my body can do anything frankly, let alone dance about, but it does.

Today's schedule isn't nearly so heavy – after a heavenly smoked salmon and cream cheese bagel breakfast we do a classic aerobics class followed by another endless hike (then 'snack') and finally aqua aerobics.

As we all cheer each other on in the watery team games I'm aware a real sense of camaraderie has developed.

The final whistle goes and we know it's all over; a huge cheer goes up and we all hug each other. It really feels like we've been on a journey together.

Our final lunch is spicy chicken wraps – the wraps being large lettuce leaves rather than tortillas – but it's amazing how quickly one gets used to eating less.

I make a mental note to self to stop overloading the plate.

I've actually enjoyed the experience,

although day two really was extraordinary and not for the fainthearted.

We lost a few soldiers halfway through day two and I think it's worth mentioning this really might not be for anyone who never exercises.

As for weight loss – well that showed up a couple of days later; I dropped something like 4lbs the week I went.

But mostly it was a great experience, separated from the outside world for 48 hours, pushing my body really hard.

I'd do it again like a shot... once I can walk again anyway.

Champneys 48 hour residential bootcamp from £349.95 per person. Details at champneys.com

Exercise and eat right when working for that bikini body, but don't forget your skin. Here's three of our favourite skin boosters:

Thalgo Collagen Booster Youth & Beauty Elixir shots £29.50

Unique collagen drinks that include PETAN (a marine collagen) and hyaluronic acid that works from the inside to ensure youthful skin. This ten day treatment taken once a day after breakfast will make your skin look plump, smooth and glowing. Available from thalgo.com



MAC Strobe Cream 100ml £22.50

The ultimate quick fix for the skin. Super-powered with potent botanicals it de-snoozes, de-stresses, moistens, freshens and boosts the look of dull, flat or tired-looking skin with a fully loaded vitamin zap and a mega dose of green tea.

Available from MACcosmetics.co.uk

MitoQ £115

This new wonder cream contains a new ingredient that rejuvenates skin cells, restoring collagen and elastin production and giving you firmer, brighter, younger looking skin. Fine lines disappear, blemishes fade and your skin will feel healthier too.

Available from mitoq.com

