



How long:
Usually 7 days



How much:
£2,555



How intense:
It's up to you

You say...

'I'm horribly out of shape'

We say... Try a fitness break. Workout-phobic **Alicia Miller** eases herself into an active lifestyle under the balmy rays of the St Lucian sun



It's a cloudless morning on the palm-lined northern shores of St Lucia. Beach boys fan out towels on loungers. Azure waves lick the sun-

warmed sand. Hummingbirds flit between blooms. And here I am, sprawled out among it all – not working on my tan, but flat out with exhaustion.

'You call that a push-up?' barks my instructor Donna, as I writhe weakly against the sand, willing my jellified biceps to push me upwards. This flat-out, hour-long intense beach workout – running, hopping and jumping with only brief seconds of respite in between – has left me utterly spent. And it's only day one.

Exercise and I have never been the best of friends. Growing up, PE classes were a grin-and-bear-it trial, mainly spent trying not to get hit by the football. At a recent 5km charity run, I was outstripped by a 75-year-old pushing a baby carriage. Fitness has never been my thing – and up 'til now, I've been OK with that.

But now, in my 30s, I've found it increasingly difficult to justify my inert lifestyle. The last holiday I took, I came back 3kg heavier and I was huffing and puffing up the stairs to work for weeks afterwards. For months now, I've wanted to feel better and look better. I needed to find a way to get excited about exercise.

I had heard great things about The Body Holiday, an activities resort on lush St Lucia. It seemed the perfect way in to my new, in-shape life: there'd be no chilly, grey mornings to contend with on a jog – just beach, blue sky and palm trees. There'd be no unnecessarily cruel bootcamp instructors – instead encouraging 'body guards', to support me through dozens of activities, from merengue to wakeboarding,

t'ai chi to mountain-biking. And, as it's an all-inclusive, I'd get a free spa treatment every day and a beach to recover on, Piña Colada in hand. Maybe if my holiday just happened to be healthy, I'd get fit without even realising it...

The alarm went off at 6.30am on my first morning. Brimming with bright-eyed enthusiasm, I ripped the tags off my new gym wear and sauntered smugly down to the beach, ready for my workout with Donna on the sands. An hour later, a crumpled heap, I wondered how I'd get through one day of this – never mind four more.

As the sun rose higher, bathing me in 30C rays, I regained my breath, and my mood lifted. I was in St Lucia, baby! I grabbed a banana-date smoothie from the on-site deli and hobbled to a yoga class in the Moroccan-styled wellness centre. It was equally punishing, but knowing I'd survived Beach Fit made me push that bit harder. It helped, too, that next in my schedule was a muscle-melting, alfresco back massage – something to actually look forward to.

By lunchtime, I felt so accomplished that I wouldn't have minded taking the afternoon off to sunbathe – as many guests do. But I stayed strong, attending a personal-training session, where the coach corrected my posture and showed me how to weight-lift. Next were the fun activities I'd been promised: 'tubing', paddleboarding and kayaking, before a sunset spin class in the 'treehouse' – a studio wrapped in foliage. By 7pm, my evening glass of fizz had never felt so guilt-free.

With next morning's early alarm I awoke in agony: aching thighs, blistered heels, stiff shoulders. But I dragged myself on a morning hike up a verdant hilltop, gazing



Empower trips



across to Martinique; twerked through a Caribbean Dance Fit class; and swished in the infinity pool at Aqua Fit. There were so many activities to choose from – every hour from 7am until 7pm – that I never got bored, and the thrill of trying new things helped me forget my physical pain.

Soon, I hit upon a routine that worked for me – high-octane classes in the early morning, followed by strength-building ones, then spa, then watersports. The days flew by. There was even enough time to squeeze in reading a chapter of my book on the beach. And the pattern of early mornings, healthy eating and plenty of exercise made me feel better and sleep better as the days went on.

By the final day, I was still aching, but I'd become used to it. I signed up for a 7am cycle to nearby Pigeon Island – a cannon-dotted former battle point for the English and French. It was everything I don't normally do: biking, on roads, over hills, in the heat. But I still managed to climb the steep incline, rush past palms, bump over sand at the causeway linking the island to the mainland. I was the last of our group to return to home base, sweaty and exhausted. But it didn't matter: if I'd learned one thing on this trip, it's that I don't need to be the fastest, the strongest or the fittest – because I never will be. All I need to do is try.

Book it: Seven nights at The Body Holiday costs from £2,555pp, full-board, including flights, transfers and all activities, with Virgin Holidays (virginholidays.co.uk).

All together now:
kayaking by
the beach; twisting
the day away;
pedal power



Three more fitness breaks

For a hardcore weekend

Whip yourself into shape fast on a weekend at the female-only, army-style GI Jane Boot Camp in Kent. Two nights costs from £399pp, full-board (gijanebootcamp.co.uk).

For short-haul fitness fun

Spend six days on the sunny isle of Menorca with Wildfitness, staying in an 18th-century *casa* with infinity pool, and

enjoying outdoor exercise classes. From £1,155pp, full-board, excluding flights (wildfitness.com).

For water babies

Join an eight-day guided swimming holiday in the Maldives. You'll find yourself exploring a shipwreck and circumnavigating islands. From £2,100pp, full-board, excluding flights (swimtrek.com).