

# Body & Mind

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## To boot

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He's in the army now! *Gareth Clark* throws off the sedate pace of civilian life for Abu Dhabi's new **boot camp**

When a group of strangers are shouting your name and clapping with enthusiasm as you puff your way round a small orange cone, it's a fair sign that you're not as fit as you thought you were. In fact, these words could be the motto of Abu Dhabi's new fitness boot camp, a thrice weekly class aimed at turning the paunchy underbelly of Dhabian society into budding military strongmen (and, of course, women).

Held on Public Beach, the classes are designed to improve your fitness levels, working on the upper and lower parts of your body, and ending the week with a huge cardio session (ie running). Newbies begin with a basic fitness assessment to see how far advanced you are and to chart your development. The sessions are overseen by Corey, an Australian with a peculiarly Antipodean zest for fitness, whose finest hour, he reveals, came last winter when he played in the Rugby World Sevens tournament in Dubai. 'I used to get up at 5am; now I get up at 4am,' he proclaims without any obvious signs of disappointment. Beside him stands the hulking figure

of Marco, 22 and Slovenian, who likes football; he relates very little else; obviously a (power) man of mystery. Should doors suddenly go out of style, the two of them look as if they would have no trouble running through walls, but the atmosphere is kept light as the pair alternate between gentle encouragement and a Sergeant Major's growl.

Surprisingly, the Public Beach is oddly busy pre-6am, although the majority of its denizens seem to have been there since the night before – McDonald's wrappers strewn across the sand are a dead giveaway. Naturally, you would expect the sight of half-a-dozen moaning, sweating expats running, skipping and, in the end, collapsing on the sand to raise the odd questioning eyebrow. It does, but no one said Boot Camp would be easy, or without mild embarrassment. Thankfully, the pain soon kicks in, and you quickly cease to care about anything but your aching limbs, and prying eyes are soon forgotten.

The session starts off with a swift jog, a snaking follow-the-leader type affair, with two columns of joggers

desperately trying to stay in line and keep up as the loose sand saps your strength with each footfall. Then it is breathers all round before the warm-up starts. The blasts of cardio are thankfully interspersed with press-ups and upper body work, giving jelly legs a chance to re-solidify.

Next comes the obstacle course – an ominously large affair, with quick steps following by hurdles, a slalom run, press-ups, sit-ups and, most embarrassing of all, a running crawl. Even when egged on by Corey and co, it's still as gruelling as it looks, and

your energy simply evaporates. By the end of the second run, you are just longing to collapse.

By the time it came to the 'rifle drill', some of the group (myself included) were finding the going tough. In this case, the rifle is a long pipe that you are expected to fill with sand. Alas, the shrewder among you will have reasoned, if you want to lessen the inevitable pain, don't fill it to the top. Sadly, in my sleep-addled fug, I was blindly shovelling in sand like a sugar-fuelled five-year-old at the beach, heedless of the suffering to come. Thus when it came to jogging down to the shore while carrying my 'rifle', not even Marco's gentle Slovenian encouragement could coax my legs into anything more than a leisurely stroll, much less help me bench press the pipe in question.

That would have been me finished, were it not for the cries of group encouragement shaming me into a final bout of hurdles and press-ups. If this was war, one senses that my companions might well have carried me on a stretcher that final yard, or at least buried me somewhere nice. Thankfully, this was never put to the test, but the general feeling at the end was one of satisfaction, and an unfathomable desire to reconvene at a similarly unsociable hour to re-experience every aching second of it. Why? Boot camp is that rarity in the UAE: a chance to do something active outside; to get fit away from the loud, sweaty confines of the fitness studios. And despite the early mornings, you feel great afterwards. In fact, from now on, it's a soldier's life for me.

*One-hour boot camp fitness sessions are held Sun, Tue and Thu at 6am over four-week courses costing Dhs990. A single session costs Dhs95. Call 02 406 9404 or visit [www.originafitness.com](http://www.originafitness.com) for more information*

