



# A luxe bootcamp on the Côte d'Azur takes the pain out of getting in shape

Pampering, pleasure and fitness under the sun? Mais oui, says **Gabriel O'Rourke**

**Y**OU'RE obliged to go 'aaahhhhh', said therapist Sophie Bonjean as she turned the hose from hot to cold. It's Day One on La Réserve Ramatuelle's Luxury Bootcamp and this, apparently, is doing wonders for my circulation.

The morning started gently; yoga by the pool on the comfiest mat you will ever find yourself down-dogging on. "Does everyone speak French?" mumbled the instructor, commencing before anyone had a chance to answer.

"Well, I know my gauche from my droite," said a fellow bootcamper, "but that's about it." Luckily, the French intonation was soothing and

we pulled through with some good old-fashioned copying.

For breakfast it's egg-white omelettes. But this isn't one of those bootcamps of myth and legend where guests are allowed nothing more than three lemongrass shots a day. The focus at La Réserve Ramatuelle is on the mind as well as the body, and the menu is tailored to each guest's needs. On arrival you have a consultation with Doctor Gastinel who finds out what you want from the five-day bootcamp, and tailors your exercise and diet accordingly.

"It's about customized care," explains Sophie. "We don't want guests to feel like they are in a hospi-

tal or clinic, we want them to enjoy it." The same applies to food. "We don't want guests to be hungry, we want them to realize they need to take care of their body through diet and sport."

Okay, so now for the sport. It's all about Nordic Walking (for the non-initiated, that's just walking with poles), renowned for speeding up weight-loss, and practical for navigating your way along the

narrow paths of the Côte d'Azur.

Each morning, specialist Nordic Walking trainers take guests on 10 to 12-mile walks. It doesn't sound too far (and each day varies in length and speed) but it takes three to four hours and requires nimble footwork. The trainers like to big it up too. "Don't eat too much at breakfast or you'll be sick!" said one. Another just stuck with an ominous: "It's very tough".

The latter is Meteo, a tanned

twenty-something trainer with mountain goat pace, who led us up and down the hilly coast.

"Allez! Allez! Then you will have the sherry," he said as we made our way up a particularly steep hill.

"The sherry?" I asked, liking the sound of this bootcamp more and more. "To drink here?"

"Ha ha ha no, the sherry on the cake: the view!" Wild flowers, clear blue inlets and craggy sunspots: these coastal views are enough to inspire the most sluggish guest. You almost expect to see Brigitte Bardot catching a few rays in the secluded spots we march past.

Spending four hours hiking tends to bring on the call of nature, and you won't be surprised to hear there's no powder room in this part of Provence. Take care when finding a suitable spot - all I will say is that others have found themselves trumped while attempting to go to

## LA RESERVE RAMATUELLE | NEED TO KNOW

- The Bootcamp (which will next run from 18th - 23rd September 2011) costs £3,437 per person for five nights accommodation in a Deluxe Double Room on a full board basis as well as the full programme of consultations, personal training, walking guides, and spa treatments.
- La Réserve Ramatuelle Hotel, Spa and Villas, Chemin de la Quessine, 83 350 Ramatuelle France, [www.lareserve.ch](http://www.lareserve.ch),

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- The La Réserve Luxury Bootcamp costs from £3,400 per person including 5-nights accommodation in a Deluxe Room, full board and all activities and treatments.
- Designed by French architect Jean-Michel Wilmotte this spa-hotel has just 24 rooms (plus 12 private villas which are available to rent).
- Awarded Best New Hotel for 2011 by the

Wallpaper\* Design Awards.

- British Airways operates a Heathrow-Nice service seven times daily with an eighth flight on Saturdays and Sundays. Costs start at £135.80 return including taxes/fees/charges.
- La Réserve Ramatuelle is an hour and a half taxi journey from Nice Airport, and just 20 minutes from Saint Tropez. NB: taxis here don't come cheap.

## HEALTHY LIVING | BOOTCAMP WISDOM

- Eat slowly
- Eat pulses two to three times a week
- No food types are forbidden at night
- Ten hours exercise a week is optimal (impossible for most of us but good to know!)
- Try to keep your body quiet after 6pm (again, impossible for many)
- If you want to lose weight do cardio: running or cycling 3 times a week

## THE DAY | LA RESERVE

7am: yoga session  
8am: buffet breakfast  
8.30am: set off Nordic walking  
12.00pm: aqua-gym session  
1pm: 3-course lunch  
3-5.30pm: spa treatments  
6.30pm: stretches  
8pm: 3-course dinner  
10pm: bed



Far left and above left: La Réserve Ramatuelle. Below left: a typical coastal view from one of the bootcamp's daily walks.

# Just like Gosford Park (without the murder)

Luton Hoo is perfect place for a weekend break, says **Maggie Campbell**



Arrival by chopper isn't thrown in for free, unfortunately.

**S**TAYCATIONS are all the rage. Yes, yes, we know. But it is often the case that it takes longer to get to your UK minibreak destination than it would to fly to Spain or get a train to the South of France. Surely the point of staying at home is that you don't have to spend half the weekend travelling?

Luton might not be an obvious destination for a refreshing break from urban life, but it's certainly close to central London (30 minutes by train in fact) and there is a lot more to the area than the airport. Luton Hoo, a grand country house hotel, looking down to the river Lea and surrounded by 1,000 acres of mature parkland, is only a five-minute taxi ride from Luton Parkway station. Despite the odd roar of an Easyjet flight taking off, and distant hum of the motorway, the hotel is ideal staycation material. In just over 24-hours, the knots of city existence had begun to melt away: I felt relaxed, revived, and after two hearty walks around the grounds, even my skin looked clearer (promise).

Before it reopened in 2007 after a multi-million pound refurb, Luton Hoo was a majestic country estate, closed to the public. If parts of it seem familiar - the grand staircase, the imposing pillared Georgian façade - it is because the house has often appeared on the big screen. Scenes from Eyes Wide Shut, Enigma and several Bond films were filmed there. Hard as it is to square the idea of Tom Cruise hanging out in Luton, it is true - he did, along with many other A-listers, although now they come as guests rather than in character.

Huge care has clearly been taken to ensure the hotel's interior stayed keeping with its original décor: the patterned carpets and hanging tapestries throughout are copies of originals that lined and hung in the main rooms and corridors. Even the oil paintings of family members are faithful replicas. Unlike some five-star hotels, the feel is relaxed. Despite its size, Luton Hoo feels more like an aristocrat's country seat, rather than a luxury

hotel: French windows are left open on sunny days and children are free to run around the formal gardens (I even saw one small child leaping through the topiary hedges), and perhaps most importantly, the staff are down-to-earth.

The spa complex is a five-minute walk from the main house across the lawn. The 18-metre pool with sauna and steam room is a draw for burnt-out execs and parents sneaking a night away. For those needing to work off any office aggression, there are also two hard tennis courts, and one grass court that opens for play in summer. If you still have calories to burn after a full fry-up, there are the grounds.

Whether going for a stroll, a jog, or 18 holes of golf, there is enough parkland for you to feel completely alone. Landscaper du jour, Capability Brown, came to Luton Hoo and worked his magic in the grounds. If you don't feel energetic, from the comfort of one of the many sofas in the public rooms, you can look out on to his rolling daffodil-filled vistas undulating down to the river Lea. (The airport tower is happily masked by several mature cedar trees).

At night, the house, dark and candlelit, has a slight air of Gosford Park (without the murder, that is). Dinner is served in the Wernher restaurant, a grand salon which, with its tapestry-flanked walls and thick carpet, is surprisingly cosy. The cuisine is in keeping with the hotel's overall ethos: fine country house fare with a twist - stalwart ingredients such as duck and beef, enlivened by imaginative sauces such as vanilla and café au lait.

The large bedrooms and thick stone walls ensure a great night's sleep - surely a priority for any minibreak. On Sunday afternoon, for once I didn't feel anxious about the prospect of a long drive home. Other guests, enjoying long Sunday lunches and extended cream teas, clearly weren't in a hurry to pack up either. In fact, with only a 45-minute journey home, why not stay for supper?

Packages from £167 per night. [www.lutonhoo.co.uk](http://www.lutonhoo.co.uk)

## TRAVEL NOTES | by Zoe Strimpel



### CHALET'S OPEN IN MALAWI

Malawi, one of Africa's poorest countries, is muscling in on the top tourist dollar and with spectacular, untouched beauty it has lots to offer. Next month is the opening of Mkulumadzi Lodge, eight luxurious chalets set on the banks of the Shire River, each with vegetated roofs home to aloes and grasses. The rare black rino and the first lions to be let loose in the Majete room nearby, along with the other usual suspects. *Bailey Robinson offers a combined Zambia and Malawi package staying 4 nights at Nkwali Camp in the South Luangwa followed by 3 nights at Mkulumadzi from £3,080 per person based on two sharing on a full board basis. Rate also includes all flights, transfers and safari activities. [mkulumadzi.com/en](http://mkulumadzi.com/en).*

### PHEW: A PACKING APP

Does packing cause you stress? Grace Hotels thinks it can help with an app

called "Saving Grace" (pictured). It sports pre-set lists for different trip types - winter, summer, activity holiday, short break and so on. Users can personalise lists by deleting

pre-set items or adding your own items. Once a packing list has been built and saved it can be renamed and used again. The app also features a readymade list of important things to do before you travel - from travel insurance to changing currency to packing the iPad and cancelling the papers. Brilliant, no? [itunes.apple.com/gb/app/saving-grace-travel-packing](http://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/saving-grace-travel-packing).

### GET IN THE GOLFING SPIRIT

Following the success of Rory McIlroy's win at the US Golf Open, golf fans in the mood for a treat should head to the Hastings Hotels in McIlroy's hometown in Northern Ireland for a celebratory package of golf, champagne, spa and delicious food. *Rory Glory Package from £186 per person per night. Available until 31 August 2011.*