

Recharge the batteries

James Sadlier adds sea swimming and yoga to his trail running on a revitalising getaway to south Devon

Like most people, I enjoy a variety of cross training alongside my trail running schedule. It works different muscle groups while our weary legs recover, and makes for a healthier mind. For me, it's a few mornings a week swimming in my local pool to loosen and soothe the limbs and muscles. Yoga is also helpful for flexibility and reducing injury. Working some core strength training into our running week just makes the longer runs more achievable. But I've been getting a little fed up with Zoom yoga classes and lengths of the pool (when it has been open). I run outside, so why can't I do yoga and swim outside, too? Well you can, at a Wild Coast Escapes weekend near Totnes, Devon. The getaway is put together by multiple trail running champion Ceri Rees, who, along with a team of running, yoga and sea swimming experts, provides a brilliant three days enjoying all three disciplines.

I arrive on the Friday at a secluded cottage called The Shippon, close to the River Dart. The first thing I see is the hot tub, I'm in for a good weekend! I'm greeted by Ronnie Masters who co-founded Wild Coast Escapes with Ceri and am quickly introduced to the rest of the team and my fellow holidaymakers. Food is just about to be served and as everyone sits down to eat the other guests are buzzing from the 10k run they've just completed alongside the river. After dinner we scoot upstairs with drinks for a Q&A with GB trail runner Jo Meek and swim instructor Kari Furre, who pass on fantastic advice for both disciplines and give us a quick brief on what to expect over the weekend. An early



MARC LE GALLE PHOTOGRAPHY

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night is recommended, as an 8am swim in the River Dart is planned.

The next morning, wetsuits in hand, we head to the water's edge along with Kari. We dive in two at a time where we are assessed on our swimming techniques and filmed for some improvement tips later in the weekend. The water is clear, clean, and you can stand up! After a quick assessment we swim casually up the river, not really wanting to get out. The promise of breakfast back at the accommodation is enough for most of us to eagerly hop back in the van, though.

On return to base, Sandy from the Dartmoor Larder has prepared an incredible fresh breakfast. With this duly wolfed down, a takeaway lunch is prepared for consumption after our next activity – a 13-mile trail run from Salcombe. Many of us are at differing running levels but with three guides who can run most paces, all runners are catered for. This isn't a race; it is all about enjoying the coastal scenery.

As most of us know, running is a great way of making friends, and this coastal plod is a perfect way to chat to some like-minded people. We run from Salcombe North Sands heading west along the coastal path with the sun glistening on the ocean. Enjoying a variety of woodland on well-trodden paths, we ascend higher along the cliffs. The Devon coast seems so open with so much to take in. We continue along the South West Coast Path from Gara Rock to Tor Cross, taking in all the secret coves along the way, then follow a route inland through luscious fields and walking routes before returning to North Sands where Ronnie awaits with our lunch. We sit on the sandy beach eating and chatting, feeling good about the run we've just completed. Heading back to the accommodation we all head straight to the hot tub, which looks out over the rolling Devon hills. We're quickly offered a glass of wine or beer while we relax and take in the views.

The fields we're staring at will play host to our pre-dinner yoga session in the early evening. Just as the sun is setting, we space out on the grass outside with Donna, our instructor. Mats are provided, and she sets out a class to suit beginners while also demonstrating positions for the more experienced student. A good hour of stretching and breathing and we're all feeling calm and refreshed, half marathon legs restored and ready for the following day's activities. But not before a huge evening meal from The Dartmoor Larder – this time, a delicious five-bean chilli that's easily the finest I've ever tasted.



Later that evening we retire to the big living room at the Shippon where Kari talks us through improvements we can make while accessing our swimming videos. We learn a great deal about using less effort for bigger gains while using the front crawl, for instance. It seems that many of us are expending too much energy and could make the swim far more enjoyable with a few tips from Kari. With a day of swimming, running and yoga behind us, we're all, predictably, very tired and head back to our cosy rooms to sleep. No parties here, we're all done for the day!

First on the agenda the following morning is a 7am yoga session to wake the muscles for the day ahead. The air is fresh, and it feels like a wonderful way to wake yourself up. Most of us are still a little stiff from the previous day but we're soon revitalised with Donna's yoga instruction. After breakfast we head to South Milton Sands for a 1.5km sea swim. Kari joins us and goes through some last-minute swim techniques and some advice for mastering the waves. The ocean is cool, but the wetsuits do their job, and we're warm within seconds. We buddy up so we have someone with us at all times, and we have a safety team who keep their eyes on us from start to finish. The swim

'An hour of stretching and breathing restores our half marathon legs'

is tough, but once we have developed some rhythm we're swimming happily alongside the coast towards Thurlestone Rock, a huge arc of stone which acts as a halfway point for us to swim through. It's not about speed or looking pretty, it's just about enjoying the swim and tasting the ocean (although I try not to taste too much of it). For most runners like myself, swimming isn't as straightforward as bunging on a pair of running shoes and plodding some trails, but the Wild Coast Escapes experts are on hand to ensure you get the best out of the experience. It is completely different to pool swimming, which is of course much calmer and offers a break when you reach either end. But us runners probably wouldn't choose a treadmill over a trail route, and this applies exactly the same theory.

Our Sunday is completed back at base with another meal, satisfied with the achievement of a weekend triathlon, even if we did choose yoga over cycling! Before we set sights on the hot tub, however, we meet Joe Kelly, 'The Barefoot Runner', who, true to his name, doesn't wear shoes or socks. Joe is a running maestro who gives us guidance on how to run more fluidly by practicing more relaxed running techniques. We spend around 45 minutes unlearning some of the bad habits we've acquired over years of running, with methods on how to relax our arms more and how the smallest change can affect our stride.

A good night's sleep is followed by a final, much-welcomed Monday morning yoga session before heading home around noon, completely relaxed and revitalised. I came away feeling recharged from the experience, loving the coastal trail running of course, but also being able to swim and practice yoga in a beautiful outdoor setting made for a perfect weekend. Plus, as with every time you step on the trails, I met some wonderful people in the process. Ceri's next Wild Coast Escape weekend is due to run between May 7-9, 2021 and is available to book now. Be prepared to feel energised!

■ wildcoastescapes.co.uk