

THE FASTING TRACK

Life on 1,500 calories a day is fun. Really. Or am I hallucinating? BY STEPHANIE PEARSON

I'm fresh off the massage table, floating on a schooner under a full moon, being serenaded by a Brazilian classical guitarist while eating a dorado fillet caught so recently that it melts before it hits my esophagus. But the Portuguese lyrics are soon drowned out by my forbidden-dessert fantasy: slurping down a Peanut Buster Parfait from Dairy Queen. If I've learned one thing at Body & Soul Adventures, it's that deprivation doesn't come easily to me.

Given my tequila-sipping, latte-downing, DQ-eating ways, I decided to make my vacation an attempt to purge myself of seven dietary sins: coffee, ice cream, M&Ms, margaritas, chips, guacamole, and chiles rellenos. I also wanted feelings of world peace, inner harmony, empty beaches, and days packed with intense exercise, yoga, and massage. In short, I was on the hunt for an exotic, transformative fit farm.

I found just about everything at Body & Soul Adventures, on Ilha Grande, Brazil. The three-year-old spa was started by two Irish-expat buddies, 47-year-old Michael Mitchell, a former Peace Corps volunteer, and 39-year-old Aidan Boyle, a former chemist. Setting out to create a detox adventure in paradise, Boyle and Mitchell found a spot on 75-square-mile Ilha Grande, a subtropical island in the Atlantic, two hours south of Rio de Janeiro, with 3,000-foot peaks, zero cars, and endless miles of hiking trails. Then they outfitted their Shangri-La with a nutritionist (who plans low, low-calorie meals, with no sugar, alcohol, or caffeine), a chef, ten personal trainers/hiking guides, a rotating staff of yoga instructors, and three massage therapists. On a drizzly day last June, after an hourlong launch ride from the mainland, eight other clients and I arrived at what could have been the set of *Fantasy Island*. Standing under swaying palms, the grinning B&S staff greeted us with a kiss on each cheek.

We stayed at Pousada Manaca, Body & Soul's private beachside inn, just a few minutes' walk



An Ilha Grande beach

from the island's main village of Abraão. Our days started with 7 A.M. yoga, followed by herbal tea, fruit, and granola. Then we'd paddle two hours in sea kayaks, crossing turquoise water to reach a seaside trailhead. We'd hike a few hours to a wild beach and sink in the sand, drained by the sun-and-calorie vortex, before replenishing with veggie couscous and a banana. Then we'd take a swim in the crashing surf before hiking back to our kayaks. The goal: to paddle back to the pousada in time to savor every last second of an hourlong massage. After dinner, we'd try to learn capoeira, the wildly popular Brazilian martial art/dance, or play bongos in impromptu jam sessions, all while under the influence of ... water.

The trip's literal high point was on the last day, when the guides upped the hiking ante by challenging us to climb 3,000-foot Parrot Peak—which involved an intensely steep ten-mile march through rugged jungle terrain. We all reached the top somewhere around couscous time, a few of us shedding tears of joy. In the interest of full disclosure: I bawled. I'm still uncertain whether it was sadness that the week was over or joy that my life of debauchery could resume. And while I felt thinned out, I was also pooped. In fact, upon returning to Rio the next evening, I downed two Brazilian coffees, two caipirinha cocktails, and a bowl of crab stew. OK, fine, so I have a few bad habits—I'll live sin-free 24/7 as soon as we achieve world peace. ○

CONTACT: 866-341-3180 or www.bodysoul-adventures.com. Weekly programs run April through November and cost \$2,500, including all meals, accommodations, and airport transfers. Holdy Tours (800-446-1111) and Value Vacation (415-824-2550) offer wholesale airline tickets to Rio.