

# Bed, breakfast and boot camp

In between indulgent massages, **Sue Williams** faces the enemy in a health program gone high voltage.

A piercing whistle shrieks through the cool morning air, sending every hair on my body into a state of high alert. And it's just as well. "AIR ATTACK! GET DOWN!" bellows the woman in army camouflage gear standing on my right flank. "GET DOWN!" I drop to the ground, suddenly alarmed by the note of terror in her voice. But it's the Hunter Valley, for God's sake—who can be trying to kill us here?

I don't have long to wait for the answer. "While you're down there, 10 push-ups," the woman bawls, "and then back to your stations".

For me, that's the place where I've just been dragging a tyre around a grassy obstacle course, using string tied around my waist. The real enemy, it seems, is within.

When I signed up for a week at the famed Golden Door Health Retreat at Elysia, it hadn't been quite this I had in mind. Hours on various massage tables, perhaps; trying a range of exotic, relaxing and terribly luxurious treatments followed by long, luscious lounges in the spa, the steam room and then by the pool, yes. And maybe short, leisurely wanders through the verdant grounds, among the skipping kangaroos and rabbits.

But no, this is a pilot project Elysia is trying out: a five-day Body Blitz Program designed as a dynamic health and fitness regimen; a "high voltage" version of its regular holistic program. This time, it's about maximising weight loss, starting an exercise program and getting your diet back on track—along with the usual low-fat spa cuisine and the indulgent massages, facials and treatments to keep (some of) the aches and pains away.

In between, it's boot camp, gym circuits, walks, aquarobics, stretching, stability workouts, fitball, indoor cycling, frisbee, water polo... even reading the schedule makes you feel like an early night. Not that the evenings are safe either, with a night hike and the most physical art class you could imagine. Even an afternoon quiz and treasure hunt that sounds

## TRIP NOTES

▶ **WHERE** The Golden Door Health Retreat – Elysia, Thompsons Road, Pokolbin, Hunter Valley, north-west of Sydney or 45 minutes from Newcastle Airport. For further information phone 1800 212 011, see [www.elysia.com.au](http://www.elysia.com.au).

▶ **WHEN** The five-day Body Blitz program will be held every few months; check the website for details.

▶ **HOW MUCH** It's priced at \$1995 a person, based on two people sharing a one-bedroom villa and includes all meals, facilities, seminars, a consultation and three treatments.

vaguely relaxing turns into a frenzied run around the grounds to score the most points to uncover the right answers.

Exercise, it seems, can quickly become addictive and competitive. It's an interesting departure for Elysia, which is much better known as the ultimate haven for relaxation.

"The Golden Door provides people with the essential information and, importantly, the motivation to make sustainable, positive changes in their lives that will solve the weight-loss riddle for them," says the national general manager, Brooke Ramage. "The Body Blitz program takes this one step further by accelerating the intensity of the program for greater and more immediate results."

The traditional elements of a stay are, of course, still there. The accommodation, in light, airy villas in the grounds, is quite stunning, while the package includes a wellness consultation, three spa treatments off a delicious menu bewildering in its diversity and range, full use of all the facilities—including the two pools, spa, steam room and tennis court—and a number of health education seminars.

The difference, however, lies in the number



▶ **BEST THING** The boot camp – fabulous for fat-burning, building strength and stamina and it does happen only once during the five days.

▶ **WORST THING** The boot camp – a tough, physical program of outdoor activity, with people yelling at you.

▶ **INSIDER TIP** Get prepared before you go by gradually cutting down on the amount of coffee and alcohol you drink or nicotine, if you smoke. Otherwise, the caffeine-withdrawal headache, or cravings, could ruin the first few days of your stay.

of scheduled exercise sessions, with guests divided into three teams to give them that rival edge. Each day starts at 6.15am with a meeting and then a walk or some other form of exercise. It's a full agenda of activities until dinner at 6pm – and sometimes afterwards.

Of course, you don't have to join in everything and my wellness consultant actually urged me to make sure I took some time out for myself. But once you get going on this exercise kick, it's sometimes hard to slow down.

Mealtimes, as a result, become hugely anticipated, with three a day included in the tariff. Dishes are all low in fat, well thought out and determinedly meat-free. They're accompanied by a variety of herbal teas, since it's a caffeine and alcohol-free five days, too.

There's plenty of good-natured grumbling about muscle stiffness, tiredness and wine and coffee deprivation, especially as the weekend nears. For this is the time Elysia is again departing from its usual programs, by fashioning itself as a spa hotel for two-night weekend stays.

Guests can exercise, use all the facilities and book spa treatments as well as enjoy all the

flexibility offered by a regular hotel, taking time out to tour the vineyards and, back at base, ordering from a limited wine list and drinking coffee made by a real coffee machine.

For us Body Blitzers, sipping our lemon and ginger tea or gulping our fresh spring water, there's the knowledge that beneath a dustsheet in the corner sits a coffee machine; that bottles of wine are just metres away. There no end to this torture?

Yet an esprit de corps gradually builds, especially during the weigh-in/measurements session at the end of the program.

"I've lost three kilos!" one woman gushes as she leaves the consulting room. Her husband bellows: "And I lost three centimetres around my waist!"

Suddenly, learning I've lost one kilogram and one centimetre makes all that activity so worthwhile. Dragging a tyre around by my waist might have been hard work during boot camp, but for getting rid of the real tyre around one's waist, there's obviously nothing like it.

*The writer was a guest of the Golden Door Health Retreat.*

TRAVEL

SPA



Vision splendid ... the Golden Door Health Retreat at Elysia has sweeping Hunter Valley views.