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MOUNTAIN TREK FITNESS RETREAT & HEALTH SPA

BACK TO BASICS WITH MOTHER NATURE

Perched on a hilltop overlooking 100-kilometre-long Kootenay Lake and the Purcell Mountain Range in British Columbia's interior, Mountain Trek Fitness Retreat & Health Spa's sprawling lodge and health spa is a hub of activity.

From May to November intimate groups of 16 come for one or two weeks; they reset their metabolism, increase their fitness, shed pounds and learn incredible life skills from Mountain Trek's highly qualified team of life coaches, dieticians, kinesiologists, yoga instructors, massage therapists and certified outdoor guides.

With six hours of exercise per day during the retreat, Mountain Trek's program director and lead guide Kirkland Shave says, "This much activity on a calorie-controlled diet of vitality rich, organic and wild food—spread across six meals and snacks per day—reboots a sedentary metabolism."

Mornings start early as participants gather in the dining room for ginger tea and a protein smoothie at 6:00 am. Then, just half an hour later, they get to watch the brilliant sunrise behind the mountains through the fitness studio's wall of windows, while moving through a gentle hatha yoga class.

AT THE FIRST HIKING-FOCUSED LUXURY BOOT CAMP PROGRAM IN CANADA, PARTICIPANTS TRAIN LIKE OLYMPIANS.

WORDS BY CATHERINE ROSCOE BARR

Breakfast is a calorie-reduced, nutrient-dense and utterly delicious meal that's promptly served at 7:30 am. "We're continually trying to be on the cutting edge of science-based formulas for nutrition, metabolism, fitness and sleep health," says Shave of the comprehensive program.

Certainly, after my first slightly crabby 48 hours without sugar, caffeine, alcohol, processed carbohydrates or any other junk, I felt the most vital, vibrant and svelte I'd felt in a long time.

Hiking is the heart of Mountain Trek's fitness retreats, completely transporting participants away from the harried lives they've left back home (which ranged from Toronto to New York to Florida to Seattle during my stay).

"The secret formula of our program and guest success," says Shave, "is that the majority of our six hours of activity are spent in nature. Pristine forest and mountain environments have proven to lower stress hormones and activate our 'feel good' hormones, motivating us to reclaim our natural state of health and vitality."

Depending on the day of the week, a seminar on anything from fitness and detoxification to sleep and stress management either precedes or follows the daily four-hour hike. And an extremely thorough foot care regime is undertaken before guests put on their hiking boots, fill up their hydration system and gather their snacks and lunches.

A fleet of SUVs shuttle guests to a different and spectacular hiking location each day, chosen for its terrain and ability to accommodate a range of physical abilities. Guests are divided into groups of three to five, each with an experienced guide, so every fitness level can be challenged and every hiker can feel that buoyant high of achievement when they join the group stretch at the completion of the hike.

Shave and Cathy Grierson, head guide and fitness director, have worked together for nearly 25 years. Shave hired Grierson in 1990 when they were both park rangers and then, after joining Mountain Trek in its infancy, "I went and stole her from BC Parks,"

he jokes. Their experience and ease on and off the trail are both an inspiration and comfort; they're truly the embodiment of the knowledge they impart to guests.

Hikes are of the too-tough-to-chat variety—a number seven on the 'rate of perceived exertion' scale is the goal and trekking poles are incorporated for balance, safety and a reported 20-percent increase in caloric expenditure—but the summer camp feel to the retreat and the shared struggles and successes are a wonderful breeding ground for camaraderie; with high-fives, cheers of encouragement and heartfelt pats on the back bestowed in droves.

Following a small window of personal time everyone reconvenes in the dining room for dinner. Head chef Laurie Hartland and her team serve gourmet fare, from wasabi-crusting sustainable halibut and marinated free-range steak to luscious tofu and rice bowls packed with fresh, nutritious vegetables.

After dinner it's back to the gym where each night a different staff member teaches anything from CrossFit to aerobics.

Then guests spread out for a well-deserved detoxification circuit which includes therapeutic massage, a good sweat in the infrared sauna, hydrotherapy in the outdoor hot tub and cold plunge pool and access to nearby Ainsworth Hot Springs.

After moving, stretching, challenging, nourishing and pampering my body, the act of climbing into bed at 9:00 pm was met with blissful submission and followed by the deepest and most restful of slumbers.

On the seventh day, as I walked back to my room following my final body composition assessment—outlining the inches and pounds I'd lost—I marvelled at everything I'd ingested (and shed), excited to go home armed with new healthy-living determination and excited to try on all of my pants. ■

"The Reboot" seven-day metabolism reset program starts from \$4,200. For more information, visit mountaintrek.com.