

Humbled in the jungle

Getting trashed in Bali is a longstanding Aussie tradition, but what if you used your annual leave to get fit not plastered? MF's Ashley Gray brushes the bars to tackle a boot camp deep in the holiday island's hinterlands.

Pull your finger out, son!
Trainer Adam Mulvaney
gees up Ash at the Sharing
Bali retreat.



Bugged. Rooted. Stuffed. Seven hours of fitness training in a part of Bali so remote not even souvenir hawkers can hear you scream. I should be sunning my Bintang gut and planning a night with footy mates imbibing nuclear-strength cocktails and random Scandinavian backpackers at a Kuta nightclub. That's what it says on the packet, right?

Instead I'm doubled over, staring blankly at a puddle of my perspiration percolating in the rich, volcanic soil, and wondering how the hell I can haul these dirt-stuffed coconut shells back over my head without incurring the wrath of trainer/tormentor Adam Mulvaney.

This is Sharing Bali – a boot camp-style retreat where the fitness-hungry go to spend a whole week rejuvenating their bodies on a diet of locally-sourced food and push-till-you-(almost) puke training.

Adam 37, runs the Fit Squad gym in Melbourne. A smart guy with an infectious laugh, he is one of several trainers Sharing Bali has recruited to run its fitness camps. His fitness philosophy is simple: use the environment; fancy equipment isn't needed to build a better physique.

Sucking in the big ones, I'm flanked by bamboo climbing bars, logs that can be flipped or curled, those bloody coconuts and heavy dirt sandbags to be heaved about till your arms explode – all in Sharing Bali's ironically named "playground".

Sharing Bali's eight bungalows are built on restored farm land amid rice paddies – they're part of an active farming village and the idea is that retreaters detach themselves from first-world irritations such as work, TV and Facebook and rediscover their yen for physical endeavour.

Surrounded by a leaner, less mechanised culture – it's not uncommon to see old women hauling 30kg hay bales on their heads or young blokes effortlessly scarpering up coconut trees – absorbing the vibe is easy, and it acts as a spur when you're at the point of giving up – after all, a relatively healthy grown man should be able to outdo a grandmother, right?

Brodie Holland certainly thinks so. He's Adam's co-trainer, and to some women on this camp, the star attraction. A handy footballer with Collingwood before injury cruelly ended his career in 2008, Brodie, 33, now coaches and plays for Maribyrnong Park Football Club in the Essendon Football League.

If he gets an inkling things are going too easily he'll make them harder for you. Surely, that's not possible. Since he banged the bejesus out of a huge metal gong to usher in our day at 6am, I've survived a one-and-a-half-hour boot camp session, a two-hour trek through dense jungle and a 90-minute personal trainer session designed to destroy me.

I'm about to attempt to smash 20 log bicep curls, and he's spruiking the benefits of using gear that hasn't got handles. He's dead right – fingers and wrists come into play big time – to the point where at rep No. 20, my quivering digits are like spaghetti.

He also tells me that when he played at AFL level he was strong in his upper arms but weak through his forearms because of an over-reliance on gripping handles. To combat that



Fall guys: Ex-AFL star Brodie Holland (left) and Mulvaney work out Bali-style.

I NEARLY KEEL OVER IN A KNOT OF ANGRY TENDONS, JOINTS AND BITTER TROPICAL SWEAT.

he used to hold 25kg plates in either hand to build stronger guns.

Next I'm down on my haunches shoving the log up the playground's bumpy incline. This is a killer because I have a dodgy lower back that gets severely pissed off when it's forced in to bendy action. When I almost keel over in a knot of angry tendons, joints and bitter tropical sweat, all I can murmur is "sorry" and that scores me 20 burpees from Adam's box of punishment tricks. "Nothing irritates a personal trainer more than 'sorry'," he cackles.

The session includes bamboo raises, jump squats, monkey bar kipping, sandbag squats and the mother of all burpees, the burpee pull-up, which feels like I'm ripping the trapezius muscle off the bone. None of the moves are helped by the uneven terrain, which tests balance and charges up stabiliser muscles.

One of the things you notice about the Balinese farmers nearby, especially the women, is their incredible posture. When I get up after 20 minutes sitting at a desk I

resemble a twisted thong, whereas they squat planting rice for hours and walk away almost bolt upright. Daily yoga classes as the sun sets – with the aim of revitalising terrorised bootcamp muscles and ironing out first-world cricks and humps – are held on the terrace overlooking the playground.

Instructor Gabbie Schultz has distilled her principles into one key word: "moving" – keep your hips open and in motion and you've got the foundations for better flexibility. Makes good sense. But when you've spent probably the most active day of your life ever pushing your recalcitrant limbs to the edge and back, her signature move – a bent leg, stretched glutes and extended arms combo – starts to feel like an IRA kneecapping, and the only way I can sustain it is with visions of food.

Eating well is central to the Sharing Bali ethos. Colourful curries, sambals – vegies in a chili-based sauce – and salads using local produce such as jackfruit, a tree-borne fruit with a pineapple-banana flavour, are served up with barbecued chicken. And like their masters, these birds have led industrious outdoor lives, so they're as lean as the men who cull them.



Feel the heat: Ash fires up in the “playground” and (right) soaking up the Mt Batur hot springs.



STAY RIPPED LIKE BRODIE HOLLAND

A busy dad running his own network marketing business and coaching a football team, Sharing Bali trainer and former Collingwood midfielder Brodie Holland doesn't have much time to hit the gym so he's a big fan of incidental exercise: "Park a bit further from work, go up the stairs instead of the lift; instead of using a wheelbarrow, carry buckets. It might take a little longer but it will keep you fit," he says. To maintain his body in premium shape, he does 3 x 15 chin-ups; 3 x 30 dips and 3 x 50 push-ups twice a week. He also makes sure he uses his surrounds to advantage whether at home or on holiday: "If you have a bed you can do sit-ups. If there are kitchen benches you can do dips. There's no excuse."

The highlight is blackened mujair, a tender white fish, caught in Danau Batur, the nearby crater lake – and washed down with a bracing Bintang.

Sharing Bali is not a de-tox retreat: beer and its life-giving qualities is available at meal times, but only a madman would risk getting shickered and facing Adam and Brodie in the “playground”. Then there's the locally brewed coffee: so strong it'd get a comatose elephant up for the three-minute mile.

The Sharing Bali program is not all grunt and groan in green, palm-fringed fields; there's grunt and groan on the edge of mountains too. Danau Batur backs off Mount Batur, a 1717m active volcano. Starting bleary-eyed at 2am, we clamber up the precarious rocky lava trail to be greeted by gobs of sulphur and magnificently foggy views at the top. It's a testing workout that requires

deep concentration in negotiating the loose stones, but the pay-off is a volcanic-rock-cooked breakfast of boiled eggs and toast as the sun rises.

But the ultimate reward for trudging up belching mountains in the dark is a loll about in the hot spring at the foot of the volcano. Sipping on a cocktail flanked by the picturesque lake and mountains is the perfect way to unwind and let the spring's healing powers seep into your howling muscles.

Nearing week's end I'm fitter than I've been in ages. I've also lost 2kg, limited the grog and pushed myself harder than I thought possible. Adam is talking up my mental strength and Brodie says I've done myself proud.

BINTANG IS AVAILABLE BUT ONLY A MADMAN WOULD RISK GETTING DRUNK HERE.

A veteran of Bali footy trips with Fremantle Dockers and Collingwood – of which the majority of time was spent in the hotel pool bar – Brodie knows the pitfalls of holidays in these parts. “But you can use your time here to get fit,” he says. “Training in the humidity burns more calories. Guys can be time-poor at home and this is good for kickstarting fitness.”

It's a sentiment shared by Adam: “You get away from the airconditioned comfort and explore a part of Bali not many get to. At Sharing Bali you take away something different and find new ways to get your body in shape.”

And even when I'm dangling off the bamboo monkey bar with the strength of half a pensioner, unable to lever myself up even a millimetre, I can't agree more. ■

Ash was a guest of Sharing Bali. For more info go to sharingbali.com.