



Coastal kicks

Need activities to get your adrenaline racing? Ruth Rosselson heads to Pembrokeshire for a weekend of challenges for body and palate

I'M NOT VERY GOOD at sitting around doing nothing, so when I came across the website for Preseli Venture's 'Adrenalin' weekends in Pembrokeshire, close to the coast near the town of Mathry, I was intrigued. I was hooked further when I found out that the activity-based weekend, with three different activities taking half a day each, also includes three doses of 'adrenalin cocktails', tailored to help detox and reduce stress. Just what I needed!

However, the main focus of the weekend is the activities, which make use of Pembrokeshire's rocky coast and hills.

Coasteering, my first activity, involves trying to get round the coastline at sea-level, generally climbing, clambering, swimming and jumping. It's not something I'd heard of before, let alone tried, nor is it a particularly ladylike sport.

There's nothing less graceful than being dressed in a wetsuit, a buoyancy aid (like a lifejacket), wetsuit shorts, a

helmet and finally an old pair of trainers, which is the only piece of equipment you need to provide yourself. We were then driven to a local beach, which was the starting point for our two-and-a-half hour adventure. Our group of 10 was accompanied by four patient and careful local instructors, trained specially for the sport by Preseli Venture.

We started tentatively, walking on small rocks poking up just

above the water. They were covered in barnacles which were, we learned, good for wet trainers to grip onto. The cliffs towered above us while we walked over the rocks or in the sea, knee deep in water.

Whatever dignity I'd tried to hang on to disappeared completely the first time I fell off a boulder into the sea, most undaintily, legs flailing everywhere. The adrenalin really started pumping when our instructors guided the group to swim between two large stacks of rocks. With trainers on our feet, it wasn't easy to manoeuvre and was a great ice-breaker, as we were all at the mercy of the waves. They tended to suck you down and spit you out, usually against a rock. There was much hilarity, and just a few bruises. Although I never felt in real danger, that didn't stop my heart racing!

The pace didn't ease as we climbed up and then jumped off higher and higher rocks. Climbing up them was pretty easy; they were jagged, sometimes even geometric, and

offered plenty of hand grips. Looking down from the highest rock, the water seemed a long way away. I took the bull by the horns, held onto my buoyancy aid and jumped. I surfaced still in one piece, letting out a loud whoop and feeling fantastic.

Saturday afternoon's activity was sea kayaking. It didn't matter that I'd never kayaked, as we were given a lesson before being let loose on the sea. It was fun

and, in fact, rather relaxing pootling around riding the waves and I was surprised at how far you could get with such little effort. As the bay was sheltered, there wasn't much white water and we never ventured too far out to sea, the instructors keeping a close eye on us and the weather. However, we played around in some of the surf close to the cliffs, which added a little bit of excitement to an otherwise leisurely afternoon.

Of the three activities, the hiking at the end of the weekend was the most beautiful and the least strenuous, setting me up perfectly for the week ahead. We were dropped off by Preseli's van at Trefin and walked around seven kilometres along the coastal path, back to the wide pebbly beach at Aber Mawr. The views from the cliffs were spectacular, with large pyramid stacks and huge arches sculptured by the sea, dotted about all the way along. To our left, sheep grazed in flat meadows and in the very distance, you could see the Preseli hills. Pretty wildflowers alongside the paths added a splash of colour.

HERBAL STIMULATION

Along with the activities, you can also choose your own herbal cocktails, designed to help enhance the physiological effects of the activities. The cocktails were devised by owner and founder Nick Hurst, who had decided what effect he wanted them to produce and then asked a local herbalist to mix them up. Although there were a couple of

travel

herbal teas, most of the cocktails are herbal tinctures which are added to apple or orange juice, giving a strange, but not too unpleasant taste.

There are seven different cocktails – three breakfast choices; three others at lunch time and two for evenings. Each cocktail has specific effects and, combined with the activities, will energise or relax, although there isn't a specific cocktail for each activity. I decided that after a mentally demanding week, a kick to my brain would not go amiss and chose the brain booster, containing rosemary, ginkgo and stacys betonica, for my Saturday morning cocktail. I had a 'deep detox' cocktail after lunch, with herbs such as burdock root and dandelion to help eliminate toxins, and finally a deep chill to round off the day, containing valerian to help me sleep. While the effects were mild, they did help me stay focused during the activities.

The Preseli centre is comfortable and homely; it used to be the home of the owners until they moved to the converted barn next door. Meals are also included in the weekend and cooked in the small kitchen by local resident, Jackie.

Although I'd come with a friend for moral support, the newly-built conservatory with a pool table and the lack of a TV means getting to know the other guests is pretty easy. There's also a small bar where meals are served and you can buy drinks and snacks.

The weekend was certainly a fun diversion from my usual activities. I returned home feeling the benefits of the exercise, the fresh air and the home-cooked food. Physically, I was pretty exhausted; my arms were feeling the effects of kayaking and the rock climbing during the coasteering. I felt healthy for it though, and mentally relaxed and energised with the clearest head I'd had for a while, ready to tackle the week ahead. **H&F**

CONTACTS

■ **Activity weekends start** from £39 for a half day, to £188 for a full weekend, including a day and a half of adrenalin cocktails, all meals and accommodation. You can also go mountain biking or horse riding. The centre can accommodate up to 30 people, and is a 20-minute walk from the local beach. Bedrooms sleep between two and eight people. They offer discounts for large groups, and are used to catering for stag or hen weekends.

■ **Call** 01348 837709.

■ **Visit** www.ukadventure.com.