

Adventure-seekers have a new alfresco fix. It's called coasteering, says **Sam Murphy**

## WET AND WILD

Coasteering is the latest, wettest and wildest way to get a workout and commune with Mother Nature. All you need is a rugged coastline, a sense of adventure and a damn fine wetsuit.

### Coast... what?

Coasteering. Navigating your way along a stretch of rocky coast at sea level, using a mixture of rock climbing, scrambling, sea swimming and cliff jumping. Along the way you might explore caves, swim through tunnels and gorges, or take a spin in a natural whirlpool. Doggedly searching for the next place to put your hand or foot as you scale a cliff wall demands 100% focus — fans say it's the ultimate release from everyday worries.

### What's involved in a typical session?

"There is no typical session, that's the beauty of it," says Claire Carlile, manager of Preseli Venture, which runs coasteering weekends in Pembrokeshire. "The tides, the weather, the exact route and the marine environment all change, so no two trips are ever the same. There's always a new challenge to keep you on your toes."

### Are you up against the clock?

No, coasteering is not simply a matter of getting from A to B as quickly as possible. "It's not officially an extreme sport, because there's no element of competition," says the instructor Matt Lister. Instead, it's all about choosing the best route, reading the conditions correctly and making decisions about whether to swim, climb or jump.

### Do I need to be superfit?

No, but doing it regularly will definitely enhance your fitness. "It will take your swimming fitness to another level," says Lister. "It's not like swimming in a pool, as you have to deal with the current and waves; it can take 5 minutes to swim 15 metres." While the swimming helps to improve endurance and aerobic capacity, the climbing, hauling and traversing



hone balance and co-ordination and boost both upper- and lower-body strength. You'll also be burning calories like there's no tomorrow — not just from the exertion, but also by maintaining body temperature during periods in the water: we're talking anything from 500 to 800 calories per hour.

### If not buns, I'll need nerves of steel, right?

Well, it helps to have a sense of adventure, but there are "coasteers" (coasteering trips) for every level, from an easy scramble with a few jumps off the rocks at varying heights and short swims to complex expeditions that rely heavily on strong climbing skills and an ability to read the conditions.

### Any sexy "extreme" gear?

Not quite. Coasteering kit is an unflattering blend of wetsuit, extra wetsuit-shorts on top (you'll need all the padding you can get), trainers, helmet and buoyancy jacket. "You won't win style awards, but you'll be glad of the gear when a wave unceremoniously dumps you against a rock," says Carlile.

### Not one for the fashionistas, then. So, who goes?

According to Carlile, anyone and everyone. "There's an element of skill that attracts people who want more than just a mad buzz. It's also an environmentally sensitive sport: it doesn't damage the coastline in any way and brings you closer to marine life, which appeals to a lot of people." The bulk of Preseli Venture's clients are young professionals seeking fresh air, physical exertion, a few thrills — and something as far removed as possible from their daily lives.

A two-day Wicked Liquid coasteering break with Preseli Venture in Pembrokeshire costs £175, including food and lodging. For more information, call 01348 837709 or visit [www.preseliventure.com](http://www.preseliventure.com). For Devon and Cornwall, log on to [www.sw-watersports.co.uk](http://www.sw-watersports.co.uk) or call 01392 353219. For coasteering activities in Scotland, visit [www.activity-scotland.co.uk](http://www.activity-scotland.co.uk) and select On Water, or call 01463 713598. Expect to pay £35 for a two- to three-hour guided coasteering session