



THE ANTI-GYM REVOLUTION

From aerial hoop to dodgeball, swap the treadmill for one of south west London's alternative fitness classes

Words: MARY-JANE WILTHER

As the annual tidal wave of #NewYearNewMe content floods our inboxes and social media feeds with shots of rippling abs and perky glutes, it's tempting to hunker down with the cheeseboard leftovers, unfollow the gym bunnies and wait out the storm. Throw in that other hallmark of January, the depleted bank statement, and calls to sign up for a costly gym membership rankle further.

Luckily there's a plethora of fitness classes, collectives and studios out there that pride themselves on offering unpretentious, cost-effective and – whisper it – fun alternatives to that uninspiring half hour on the treadmill. And with south west London's abundance of green space adding more al fresco options to the mix, residents of this portion of the capital are genuinely spoilt for choice.

Whether your motivation is to learn a new skill, get to know your community better, or work out with your kids in tow, odds are your SW postcode has you covered. So, dust off those running shoes, put down the Mont d'Or, and join the anti-gym fitness revolution.

PARK LIFE

If fresh air and grass beneath your feet are on the agenda, try a Rabble session on Clapham Common. These sociable workouts offer what would otherwise be described as a HIIT session disguised as a game of British bulldog or dodgeball – essentially, the trainers want participants to forget they're exercising (how kind). In reality, though, attendees are fine-tuning all sort of skills, from speed and endurance to coordination, and can clock up a whopping 10K in one session. (3-game pack £19.50, unlimited classes £39pm; joinrabble.com).

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For those wanting to get a little more serious, popular military fitness collectives such as BMF offer a host of high-energy, no-fuss workouts combining cardio, strength training and toning in some of SW's prettiest parks and commons. A signature workout is tailored to all ability levels, from newbies to pros, and there's also Active By BMF for



health-conscious older adults, which blends movement with resistance training and is suitable for complete beginners with no exercise experience. (Unlimited sessions £34 per month; bemilitaryfit.com).

Husband and wife team Sam and Jenny Warrington are the brains behind Swift Fitness, a friendly and accessible take on boot camp fitness with a strict no-shouting policy. Available in Fulham and Parson's Green, Clapham Common and Battersea Park, sessions are divided into 7-minute bursts of team games, calorie-busting circuits and core-focused exercises. There are some imaginative twists on the format too, like the Silent Disco Boot Camp. (Single session £15, block of 5 £60; swiftfitnessgroup.co.uk).

Keen to keep things simple? Running community Parkrun host weekly runs at a host of south west locations, including Wimbledon Common, Fulham Palace, Richmond Park, and Clapham Common. Each run is 5K and starts at 9am, with participants pitted against the clock rather than each other. This format offers an easy and rewarding means of charting progress, plus the chance to meet people in the neighbourhood. (Free, parkrun.org.uk).



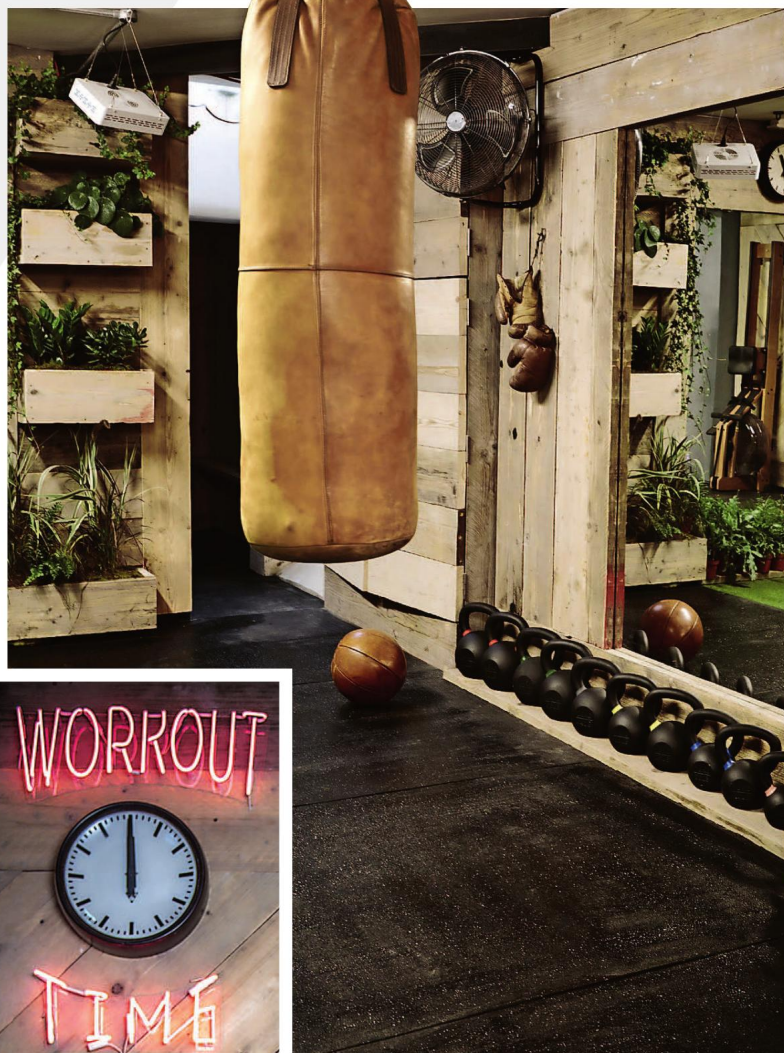
OPEN WATER

Hardy souls willing to wetsuit-up and brave the Thames' waters are treated to some of the best views the city has to offer. Canoe and kayak clubs such as Battersea Bridge Canoe Club (£5 for members, £10 for non-members; Batterseacc.org) and Putney Canoe Club (£5 non-members; Putneybridgecc.co.uk) paddle on the river weekly throughout the year and welcome newcomers once they have attended 2-3 pool sessions, which focus on core skills and safety manoeuvres including basic forward and reverse paddling, emergency stops, low brace support to avoid capsize and sweep strokes.

With its deceptively gentle pace masking what is actually a top-to-toe workout, urban paddle boarding has swiftly amassed a dedicated following in recent years. Board novices can master the sport with Active360, who offer low-tide group lessons. After some land-based training at Kew Bridge, participants head out along the river, drifting downstream with the outgoing tide to paddle past Oliver's Island, Chiswick Bridge and on into Barnes. There's a short tea-break in a cosy pub while the tide turns, before returning to Kew Bridge. Routes to Richmond are available for more established boarders. (2hrs, £57; Active360.co.uk).

IN A DIFFERENT CLASS

Baby, it's cold outside, and sometimes a warm inside space is required. Innovative indoor classes on SW turf include Australian fitness concept F45 training, which brings something new to the mix with its imaginative boxing-inspired combat classes. Available at F45's Fulham and Brixton outposts, the class (dubbed, a little



confusingly, 'Brixton') combines elements of boxing, MMA-style training and self-defence, and will roll out internationally this year. It's a pacey, 45-minute full-body blitz, delivered with a heap of good humour and encouragement (Introductory 2-week experience £59; F45training.co.uk).

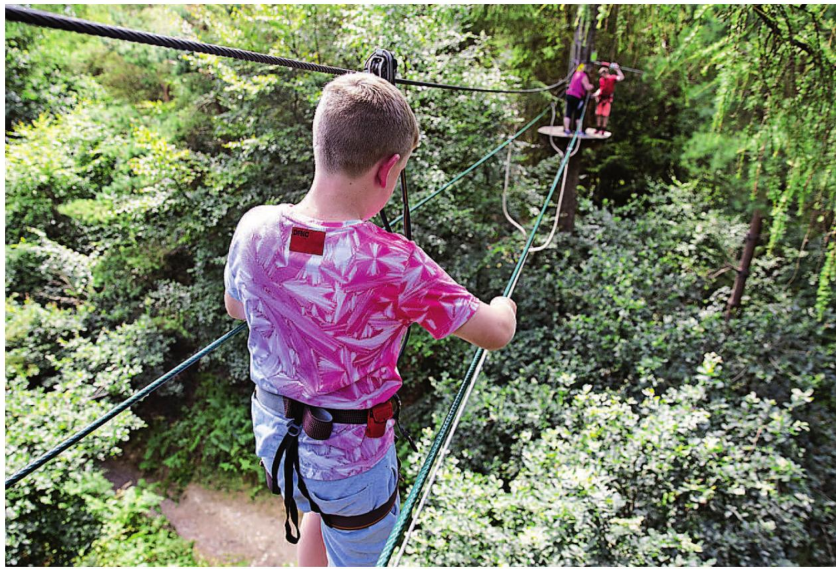
For classes of a calmer variety, fast-growing boutique yoga brand MoreYoga prides itself on offering an accessible style of tuition and, best of all, gives back to the local community. Throughout the year, the team host special yoga classes in aid of local charities, community groups and projects, many of which take place at their Brixton and Clapham locations, where the brand has swiftly amassed a loyal audience (From £32pm, moreyoga.co.uk).

From community helpers, to eco-warriors: Terra Hale bills itself as the capital's first fully eco-friendly fitness destination and its beautifully appointed Fulham

studio offers intimate classes and bespoke personal training with a focus on sustainability. A 50-minute spin class here sees all the human energy converted into utility-grade electricity and put back into the grid, so participants can enjoy a high-octane workout while doing their bit for the environment. (Intro offer, sign up for any 3 classes, £30; for best rates book via RIG app).

For the truly adventurous, there's Flying Fantastic, an aerial fitness school on a mission to get Londoners air-bound. Taught by a team of circus professionals and available in Battersea and Wimbledon, these sessions give attendees the chance to master the art of aerial hoops, aerial silks and static trapeze, among other disciplines, and work the core muscles like nothing else. Timetables are pleasingly flexible to accommodate busy schedules. (3-class pack, £45, flyingfantastic.co.uk). ▶





FAMILY FRIENDLY

Kids will love exercise dressed up as an adventure, so out-of-the-box thinking is required. That might mean shimmying up the walls of The Climbing Hangar in Fulham (adults from £8.50, kids £7; theclimbinghangar.com), or bouncing across the expansive trampolines at Wandsworth's Flip Out, (£8.95 – £12.50, flipout.co.uk).

It might even entail a trip to Battersea Park for a treetop escapade at Go Ape. Once up in the canopies, participants shoot along zip wires, hone their balance on the high bridges and make like Tarzan on the rope swings in an imaginatively plotted obstacle course. With each session taking up to 2-3 hours, this is a leisurely weekend option rather than a practical mid-week workout, but it's a high adrenaline expedition for all ages, and worth the price tag. (Kids from £18, adults £35).

Prefer to stay grounded? Parkrun's little sibling, Junior Parkrun, provides a 2K run for children aged 4-14 weekly on Sunday mornings. All meeting points can be found on the events section of the website. (Free, parkrun.org.uk). May the fitness overlords be with you... **1**

