
Extreme wellness

Up until recently, men's wellness has arguably been centred around athletic pursuits and body sculpting, but now a new type of extreme fitness programme is addressing alternatives to mental and physical betterment. Report by Becky Lyon.



Innerfire BV | Wim Hof Method

In October 2019, non-profit The Global Wellness Institute™ (GWI) revealed the wellness industry is estimated to now be worth \$4.5tn, representing a spectrum of ‘well’ practices from immersive yoga to boutique-class-and-brunch, forest bathing to cryotherapy. These programmes combine fitness with discovery, amplify untypical ‘male’ emotional states and address the ‘whole body’ inside and out. Let’s start with the ‘extreme’ with a capital ‘X’. In a bid for ultimate self-improvement, fitness activities are being combined with ritualistic treatments that push bodies to the limits and minds into near-spiritual states. Poster-boys for this lifestyle include global football superstar Tom Brady whose TB12 Method advocates a strict plant-based, alkaline diet for optimum performance; Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey who purportedly eats one meal a day and practices strict silent meditation and tech CEO Tim Grey whose system allegedly includes using a Human Charger shining light in his ears, fist pumps and sundown Oxygen Therapy.

The ultimate in self-improvement is the Extraordinary Adventure Club which promises to take participants on a life-shaping odyssey, custom-built for your hopes, dreams and fears. Experiences are hyper-curated, kicking off with a four-day retreat in the Scottish Highlands perhaps under the guidance of therapists or ex-military personnel followed by life-altering travel to the icy mountains of Patagonia or jungles of the Amazon. Evidently these types of fastidious body-hacking habits are afforded to the wealthy-and-waited-on but there are signs of this wisdom-led wellness on the up by none other than well-bible Goop. It recently launched The Goop Fellas podcast with a focus on change, healing and reinvention.

Next up for team extreme is man versus the elements. Here’s one for graduates of Iron Man and Tough Mudder; popular strongman-meets-obstacle-course tournaments requiring military-style training. Wim Hof ‘The Iceman’ is the mark from which all benches are pressed, infamously advocating ‘cold therapy’ which purportedly encourages fat loss, reduces inflammation, balances hormones and improves sleep quality. His feats include running a half marathon above the Arctic Circle in bare feet and climbing Mount Kilimanjaro in shorts.

Beginners may be interested in XPT, Extreme Performance Training™ which combines hypothermic training with heat and ice, in-pool weight lifting and strenuous land-based workouts to put the human body through its paces. Where ‘hot yoga’ left off, mainstream gyms are dialing down the thermostat with versions of cold therapy including water-based weights programmes at London-based Workshop Gymnasium and cold exposure incorporated into the New York based The Five Practice as part of a yoga, breathwork and meditation workout.

Digital Detoxes have been a popular trend for disconnecting from the Web and reconnecting with the real world but extreme exercisers are opting for hardcore adventure sports in nature’s radical environments for a different kind of switch off. The Bear Grylls Survival Challenge serves up fitness with a side of peril. Human instincts and resourcefulness are tested and measured as participants battle through five distinctive environments and 18 demanding challenges at the Blue Cloud Movie Ranch in Santa Clarita, California. Tests include the ‘Post-Apocalyptic Highway’ and ‘Cave Complex.’ Tapping into this theme, last year the UK techwear innovation brand Vollebak tasked two former special forces soldiers with concealing an ‘Extreme Discount Card’ made from carved wood in a secret underwater location. The stunt was accompanied by a five minute video hinting at the journey the card would have ‘taken’ via rugged landscapes and harsh weather conditions, and a reward of a lifetime supply of Vollebak gear to the person who finds and returns the card. Positive goals to aspire to or impossibly high standards?

Action-man escapades aside there has also been a general rise in active-led travel or ‘fit-cations.’ Last year travel company Responsible Travel reported a 700 per cent rise in bookings in the past year alone for its swimming with Killer Whales trip in Norway and 200 per cent increase in sign ups for an extreme ski marathon in Switzerland.¹ With the addition of sports climbing, surfing and skateboarding to the approved and imminent 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo, the likelihood is that these ‘X Games’ will catalyse a rise in participation either in ‘pure’ sport form or as part of an integrated travel experience. Health and Fitness

Travel platform reported a 42 per cent interest in men booking wellness holidays between 2010-2019.² Likewise, boutique travel agency Black Tomato teamed up with The Lost Explorer to offer experiences designed to ‘Bring you closer in line with nature’ with wellness trips in desert, mountain, ocean and jungle.

At the entry level, new fitness concepts are combining the style and concierge-style treatment of some of the most popular boutique fitness brands with a hyper-fit programme offering worthy of the aforementioned extreme leaders. GHOST is described as the world’s first members-only, Luxury Fitness Lounge. It features infrared saunas and an in-house machine learning lab which leverages client biometric and musculoskeletal data alongside state of the art training equipment. Recovery has also become a strategy for body optimisation with stylish Shelter in Sydney offering ice baths and saunas as a supplement to improve cardiovascular performance.

The most striking aspect of this trend towards extreme wellness is the move away from the competitive group dynamic and a refocusing on the well-self from body to mind. Echoing women’s trends, there’s a positively broad range of practices for different types of exerciser from the athlete finding calm and focus through yoga to the goals-focused high achiever looking to channel their ambitious streak through impossible outdoor challenges. ●

beargryllssurvivalchallenge.com
extraordinaryadventureclub.com
fivepractice.com
ghost.xyz
goop.com
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xptlife.com

Sources:

¹ Daily Mail, April 2018

² Travel Pulse, June 2019