

Venture Out: Get Fit for 2006

By: Deborah Abrams Kaplan

Shape Magazine, January, 2006

You *could* spend your weekend doing the usual workouts. But why not get away *and* learn something new? Spend a concentrated but fun three to six days surfing, telemark skiing, improving your tennis stroke or learning more exotic sport with others who are devoted to it. Whether you're a novice or accomplished athlete, the intense instruction and festive group atmospheres you'll find at these sports camps* will leave you exhilarated - and maybe even a pound or two lighter.

**Unless specified, camps are priced per person and are co-ed, usually attracting equal numbers of men and women; campers range in age from children to seniors.*

Learn To Mush

Book it: Wintergreen's Dog Sledding Vacations – three to five nights, December to March in Ely, Minn., two hours northeast of Duluth.

Who goes: six to eight campers per session

Program: Not surprisingly, the best things about dog sledding are the playful pooches, which salivate for the opportunity to pull you across snow-covered trails. Averaging 80 pounds, the Canadian Eskimo Dog (now known as the Canadian Inuit, the more politically correct term) falls between the malamute and husky in size. The original sled dog of the high arctic, the Inuit breed has a tough build for back-country travel but can still be comfortably handled by most beginners. You'll receive hands-on instruction and practice handling the sled and harnessing the dogs. When not mushing, you'll burn calories cross-country skiing and snowshoeing alongside the sleds, over frozen lakes and snowy hills in the spectacular Boundary Waters Area Wilderness.

Base camp: The remote yet cozy Wintergreen Dogsled Lodge offers shared and private accommodations, a hot tub and sauna.

Details: From \$750 for a three-night lodge trip, or book a five-night dog-sledding/camping trip (comprising three nights camping, two nights in the lodge), including lodging, meals and equipment. (218-365-6022; dogsledding.com).

Learn To Luge

Book it: Four day March luge fantasy camps in Lake Placid, N.Y., five hours from Manhattan.

Who goes: Six to 10 campers a session

Program: If you have ever dreamed of racing feet first down an icy Olympic track lying on your back, now's your chance. No endurance training here – you'll mostly employ the fast-twitching parts of your muscles for quick bursts of activity, with an emphasis on fun and safety. The best part: the average female luge participant burns up to 460 calories per hour!

Clinics start with lessons in safety, sled design and maintenance, and exercises designed specifically for sliders. You'll share ice time with Olympic athletes and learn one of the *coolest* sports.

Base camp: Camp among the athletes at the United States Olympic Training Center in Lake Placid; the shared dorm rooms all have private bathrooms.

Details: \$2,000 for four days, includes lodging, meals, instruction, gear (800-USA-LUGE; usaluge.org)

Learn To Catch a Wave

Book it: Paskowitz's Surf Camp – six days on San Diego's Pacific Beach from June to September.

Who goes: 25 campers a session, ages 21-65 during the late August "Adult Week."

Program: At the Paskowitz Surf Camp, you'll be riding waves on the first of five days in the water. Patient, certified instructors swim along side you, yelling "paddle, paddle, paddle" while helping you spot smooth, rolling waves. After four to six hours in the water per day, soak your aching limbs in the campground's hot tub. At night, listen to live music, sing karaoke, hang out at the bonfire and watch surf films. If your fellow campers don't crack you up, the fun-loving multigenerational Paskowitz family will keep you in stitches. By week's end, you'll be a surfer with camp awards to prove it.

Base camp: Retreat to a private campground, just a stone's throw from the gorgeous Pacific Ocean. Far from roughing it, hot showers and a hot tub await, though you'll share a tent with three other women.

Details: \$1,250 includes tent, sleeping mat, all meals, instruction, wetsuits and equipment. Attend Adult Week if you can, or you'll be overrun with teen campers. (949-728-1000; paskowitz.com).

Learn To Telemark

Book it: Mammoth Mountain Ski Area's three-day January Telemark (heel-free) Ski Clinic in Mammoth Lakes, Calif.

Who goes: Four to eight skiers per session.

Program: If your thighs just aren't getting enough of a gym workout, sign up for the telemark clinic. Think downhill skiing meets cross-country equipment. With your boots clamped down in front, your heels are free to rise and fall as you lunge down the mountain. While die-hard telemarkers hike straight into the backcountry, your lift ticket serves you well. You'll share Mammoth's slopes with alpine skiers and snowboarders. The five hours of daily lessons give the instructor plenty of time to shoot video, showing your progress. You'll test yourself on different terrain, including bumps, as your instructor and fellow campers cheer you on.

Base camp: For slope-side lodging, stay at the Mammoth Mountain Inn (starting at \$155; 800-Mammoth; mammothmountain.com). Or stay across from the Village at the Alpenhof Lodge, near shopping, bars and restaurants (starting at \$110; 800-828-0371; alpenhof-lodge.com). A free shuttle takes you to your lessons.

Details: From \$250, includes instruction. (760-934-2571 x 3585; mammothmountain.com).

Learn To Serve

Book it: Nike's Amherst Tennis Camp – three or more days from June to August, on the Amherst College campus in Amherst, Mass, about 90 miles west of Boston.

Who goes: 20-40 participants per session.

Program: A tennis clinic to which 45 percent of attendees return must be doing something right, even if you *do* change shirts several times a day from sweating so much on the court. Go midweek for a smaller group and more attention. Most campers are ranked between 3.0 and 3.5 (low to high intermediate); you'll be grouped four to a court based upon ability. Your skills are assessed on arrival; campers grouped four to a court by ability. You'll practice five to six hours a day, with an optional evening doubles game, and you'll receive a 30-minute private lesson during your stay.

Base camp: Most campers stay in an Amherst dorm. Plan B: Get a room at the neighboring spartan but clean University Lodge (from \$70; 413-256-8111)

Details: \$400, includes most meals, shared dorm lodging, four group sessions and a 30-minute private lesson (\$300 if you stay off-site, a few lunches are still included). From \$100 for additional half-day sessions. (800-645-3226; ussportscamps.com).

Learn To River Kayak

Book it: Tarkio's three-day women's river kayaking clinic in July, in Tarkio, Mont, 40 miles northwest of Missoula.

Who goes: 12 women per session.

Program: U.S. and New Zealand Kayak Team members teach you how to paddle in white water. Before you launch into the Class I through III (out of V) churning river, guides will teach you everything from safety and paddle strokes to rolls and wet exits. You'll learn freestyle kayaking tricks and practice moving in and out of eddies. A yoga session each morning limbers and centers you for a day on the river. The cold (averaging 64 degrees through summer months) water feels refreshing as daytime temperatures on land typically reach 95 degrees. Though intense, the guides keep it fun, with plenty of time for socializing.

Base camp: For this lodge-based trip, choose from cots in the rustic barn, or log beds in the cozy bunk room, some 100 feet off the Clark Fork of the Columbia River.

Details: Costs start at \$500, which includes instruction, equipment, meals, lodging and transportation from Missoula. (406-543-4583; teamtarkio.com).

When she's not drooling at the prospect of an adventure-filled weekend, Deborah Abrams Kaplan writes from her Foster City, Calif home.