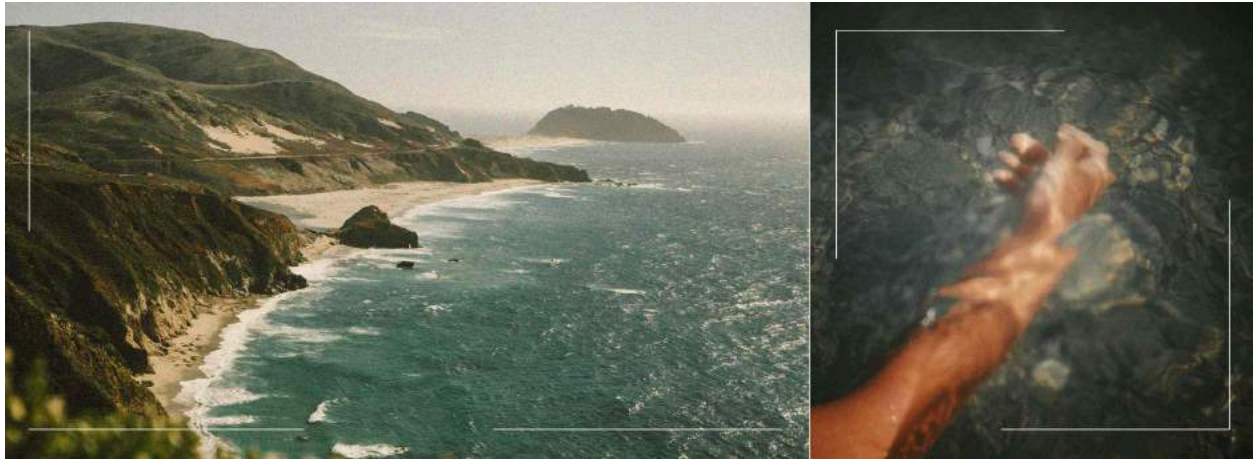


# BYRDIE

## How An Adult Camp Rekindled My Relationship With My Body

Kathryn Vandervalk | February 29, 2024



I hate to admit it, but I'm in the worst shape of my life. As a kid, I was an athlete, a long-distance runner. I was the fastest miler in my high school. Running was both my identity and my self-worth. High school was miserable—I tortured myself about training and grades while also coping with PTSD—but at the same time, I never loved my body more. I was attuned to every muscle. I could do front-handsprings, epic flips off my friend's diving board, and I could even pole vault when the team needed an extra person. In the hardest years of my life, fitness was the way I celebrated being alive.



Then, a stress fracture sidelined me from the track team in college, and I was relieved to discover new hobbies. I acted in plays. I competed in mock trials. I even joined the local circus (I'm not kidding). I loved how these new activities didn't require me to push my body until I vomited. I realized that running hadn't just defined who I was, but it had also consumed it.

Now, I'm happier and more self-confident, but I'm also the kind of person who gets winded from walking up the subway stairs. Exercise feels like a punishment for leaving the old me behind. I've tried to run and I've dabbled in yoga, but I'm inconsistent. I've struggled for years to find fun in fitness again. Recently, I was invited to spend time at [BodyHoliday](#) in Saint Lucia, an all-inclusive resort that promises to balance relaxation, exercise, and healthy eating with joy. The resort's slogan: "Give us your

body for a week and we'll give you back your mind." Too good to be true, I thought, but I was desperate to learn something—anything—that would help me on my wellness journey. So I booked the plane ticket.

The group I traveled with scheduled a physical activity (early!) each morning. The first morning, I chose a beginner's Tai Chi class, which consisted of some repeated movements and deep breathing. I enjoyed the class and learning the Tai Chi basics, but I questioned whether I'd taken the easy way out. What was this doing for my body? Should I have chosen the beach bootcamp? I knew I'd hate it, but at least I'd feel the burn.

When I finished the class, I was energized. I shouldn't have been—I'd skipped my morning coffee and I had a hangover. I expected to want to nap after class, but I was ready for breakfast, socializing, and more activities. It was 8 a.m., and it felt like the whole property was awake and buzzing just like me, including a group I'd spotted doing karaoke late at the piano bar the night before.



Later, I went water-skiing, a favorite activity from my childhood. "I didn't know you could water-ski," one of my friends said, shocked. I explained that my family was very athletic. I did every sport as a kid. Before I specialized as a runner, there was tennis camp, golf lessons from my dad, rec soccer, and even figure skating. One year, I somehow played both lacrosse and softball in the same season. Looking around, I suddenly saw the BodyHoliday grounds in a new light. The tennis court and the driving range—both were favorite spots to go with my parents. The trail around the property with the balance beam and parallel bars took me back to my circus days. The nightly games of beach volleyball reminded me of family vacations. This was a place to play. A second childhood. Adult camp.

Over the course of my visit, I met many guests who felt the same way. About 70% are return visitors, and on average, they each stay for over a week. They meet friends at their activities and sometimes return with those friends years later. One woman waved me over to join her game of pool volleyball, and I thought, Why not? It reminded me of the track camp I attended in high school. I worked out three times a day, played volleyball and gaga in my free time, and somehow still had the energy for trivia night. The woman in the pool told me she comes to BodyHoliday every couple of years to unwind. Give us your body for a week and we'll give you back your mind, I remembered. I was starting to understand.

I was getting less than eight hours of sleep (usually a major issue for me), taking full advantage of the unlimited fresh passion fruit martinis, and yet I never crashed. One day, it rained, and our 7 a.m. hike got canceled. I considered heading back to bed, but I went for a run around the property instead. I stopped to

try the balance beam next to the trail. I snuck a bite of broadleaf thyme from the garden where the on-site restaurants grow much of their food. I let myself have fun.

Before I was a runner, I was just a kid with a garage full of athletic equipment and a very active family. Sports were games, learning experiences, and celebrations. It didn't matter whether it was soccer, rock climbing, or even croquet—I wasn't thinking about my heart rate. I was existing, without the pressure to achieve a certain goal, transform my body, or “reap the benefits”. I realized that's what I've been missing. That's why I've had so much fun at my office intramural sports, even though I don't want to join a basketball league. That's why I love hot yoga once or twice, but I don't want to purchase a 10-class pass. All the fitness I've truly loved has been about experiences—not commitments.



When I got back from the trip, I went ice-skating, bought a pair of Rollerblades, and resolved to take a spin class. Before my “body holiday”, I would've tried these things searching for one I could commit to for the rest of my life or even for the rest of the year. But I've decided it's about the trying itself, and it's time to play again.