

organic spa

MAGAZINE

AT PLAY



Not one to sit still, this fitness instructor finds the fun in movement.

At Play with Cindy Aaker

Who: Cindy Aaker, personal trainer, group fitness instructor, surfer, new mom

Where: Fitness Director at the Sofia Hotel in San Diego, California

Why: Because she believes that you can take the gym with you wherever you go and that exercise should be spontaneous, fun, dynamic, and playful.

Organic Spa: What does play mean to you?

Cindy Aaker: It means anything you can do when you're not sedentary or sitting in front of a TV or computer. Playing is active and natural, spur-of-the-moment pleasure—from splashing in the ocean to renting a kayak, or playing tag with neighborhood kids. Because the Sofia Hotel is on the Pacific Ocean, my job is inherently playful and I try to play paddle ball, ride a bike, and get moving every chance I get. I don't like to sit still. What fun is that?

OS: How do you encourage your clients and hotel guests to be more playful?

CA: That's easy because exercise should never be a drag. As Fitness Director, I incorporate fun into all my workouts, whether it's a few minutes of spontaneous jump roping into a weight workout, adding a balance board for jumping and leaping, or interspersing a punching bag into the workout of someone who's never used one before. I like to introduce new skills to all of my clients. I am a big proponent of incorporating water exercise into your weekly regimen—swimming is the best and most natural form of cardiovascular fitness. And it's fun.

OS: Where do you see the future of fitness?

CA: First, most people are now tuning into the fact that the mind and the body go hand in hand, and the health of your physical body depends on having a sound, open mind. So the future of fitness depends on the philosophies that can link the mind to the body, such as yoga and Pilates. Our gym at the Sofia definitely includes all the fun stuff, the big colorful medicine balls, BOSU balance trainers, yoga blocks, all the props. But the spa and fitness center including the new yoga studio—which I helped design—are also earthy and inviting for every fitness level. The colors and the environment encourage connecting the mind and the body. Another example is using aromatherapy to soothe your senses on a profound level both before, during, and even after exercise. Our spa treatments use a lot of aromatherapy for relaxation.

OS: How can you inspire the masses to exercise, especially since the rates of obesity keep rising?

CA: Walking is the great equalizer—nearly everyone can walk and be inspired to have fun doing it. I realized we needed a general power walk at the Sofia Hotel to entice guests to get moving, so we created a three-mile Walkabout that's offered free every Saturday and Sunday morning at 9 AM. David Tearney, the tour guide, works in the fitness department, and we did background research on the Gaslamp District in San Diego. He takes our guests on a brisk historical tour so they can experience local landmarks while still getting a great fat-burning workout. I also feel strongly that sedentary people, especially folks who have fallen off the fitness wagon for whatever reason, will try a newfangled class or try to master a new skill while on vacation before they try it at home. While you're away on vacation, guests often have more expendable time and feel a little more courageous, so we try to lure them back into exercise however we can.

OS: How important is a sense of play to longevity?

CA: Ah, you can't put a price on that. Fitness that is fun and playful is one of life's greatest necessities. But making exercise a habit for life depends on many other factors, including getting massages for rewards, trying new activities like boxing to shake up your routine, pushing yourself away from the computer to stretch out and lift weights. Human beings are not physiologically built to sit and be sedentary for twelve hours a day; that's a great disservice to your spine, your muscles, your heart, and your brain! I also think the more a person can incorporate the whole family into their playtime, the more it becomes an accessible, ongoing and do-able habit. The Sofia Hotel, to that end, is very child-friendly and even includes a pet-friendly floor so you can bring your dog on your vacation. Children and dogs are inherently playful—have you ever seen them sit still for long? Exactly!

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