

In Good Shape

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Фитнес: fitness, more or less

The other day as I drove around Moscow, I was shocked — in a good way.

Huge swaths of the city have been turned into car-free zones, where people ride bikes, skate and scooter up and under artificial hills and bridges. Parks are once more parks and not outdoor fairs. Restaurants are smoke-free. And fitness centers are nudging out the ubiquitous sushi bars. I hardly recognize the place.

As usual, I also got puzzled. You'll see фитнес and фитнесс (fitness). There are фитнес клуб and центр (fitness club and fitness center); спортивный комплекс, aka спорткомплекс (sports complex); спортивно-оздоровительный комплекс (sports and health complex); спортивно-развлекательный комплекс (sport and recreation complex); and even физкультурно-оздоровительный центр (sports and health center). What is the difference?

As far as I can tell, the name above the door is not always an accurate predictor of what's inside. Anything with the word фитнес in it is likely to be similar to a standard Western fitness club. Anything with the word комплекс in it is likely to be large and have a greater variety of activities and facilities.

Anything with оздоровительный in it probably has some form of physical therapy or massage, or at least a баня (bath house, steam room) or сауна (sauna).

Anything with the word развлекательный in it is likely to be less health-oriented and more fun-oriented. If you want пейнтбол (paint ball), look here.

But you can't judge a center by its name.

Inside, after you put on those annoying blue бахилы (shoe covers) and spend some time in the раздевалка (changing room), you may head to the плавательный бассейн (swimming pool). Or you may head to a smaller pool for аквааэробика (aqua-aerobics), which, according to one fitness club, перестала быть просто способом поддержания здоровья и красоты и стала действительно модным увлечением (has ceased to be simply a way of maintaining health and beauty and is now all the rage).

Or you might hit the кардиозал or зона (cardio room) to get your heart racing — in a healthy way, that is. Here you can choose from беговые дорожки (treadmills), эллиптические тренажёры (elliptical trainers), велотренажёры (stationary bikes) or степперы (stairmasters).

And then on to тренажёрный зал (equipment or weight room), where there might be гантели (bar bells) in addition to all those devices of torture, er, тренажёры (machines).

Or perhaps you might go to зал для групповых занятий (rooms for group classes), where you don't have to know much Russian at all. You'll find classes for йога (yoga), Пилатес (Pilates) and шейпинг (toning). It's helpful to know вдох (inhale) and выдох (exhale). Otherwise, just follow the leader.

Or you can hire персональный тренер (personal trainer), who will often make you do three basic exercises: отжиматься (to do push-ups); подтягиваться (to do pull-ups); and качать пресс (to do sit-ups).

All of this comes under the category of тренироваться (to exercise); заниматься фитнесом (to get in shape) or even заниматься собой (to take care of oneself). You can also use the verb упражняться (to exercise), usually in a specific way: Каждый день я упражняюсь с гантелями (Every day I work out with weights).

Of course, not everyone is a fitness fan. One of my friends says: Тренажёры-хренажёры — кому это надо? (Weight machines-schmeight machines. Who needs it?)

But looking at his beer belly, I'd say: Тренироваться ему бы не помешало ... (Working out wouldn't hurt ...)

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