

7 DAYS 8 OPEN

WATER SWIMS

Keri-anne Payne, Danielle Huskisson and Philippa Shuttleworth



Simon Griffiths took time out of the office to go the third edition of BESTFEST

It is not often that you get the opportunity to line up in a race with Britain's top open water swimmers. At BESTFEST 2015, participants raced the likes of Keri-anne Payne, Daniel Fogg, Tom Allen, Jack Burnell and Danielle Huskisson three times over three different distances.

The Colònia Classic is a series of three ocean races over 5km, 7km and 1.5km all in or around the Mallorcan town of Colònia Sant Jordi. The British open water team was on the island for a week of hard training at the BEST Swim Centre and slotted the races in between their demanding schedule in the pool – shortly after the 7km swim for example they were back in

the water for a two hour training session.

As well as the British swimmers there were elite athletes from Germany, Ireland and Italy. The start-line, with these swimmers in their full-body racing costumes, is a somewhat intimidating sight compared to your typical open water event where the average age is a little higher and the average pace a little slower.

But that doesn't mean there's no place for regular swimmers. On the contrary, swimmers of all ages and abilities are welcome. In the 5km swim for example, the elites finished in under an hour while some swimmers took more than two hours.

In addition, BESTFEST offers a lot more than just racing. In fact, four of events at this week-long swimming festival are billed as "challenges" rather than races and participants are encouraged to enjoy the experience and environment.

And there's plenty to enjoy.

Firstly, the water is amazing – especially for those of us more used to swimming in British gravel pits and rivers. It's brilliantly clear and there are so many fish to see that you forget that you're racing. Secondly, the sea around

Colònia Sant Jordi is dotted with small islands and the beaches are spectacular so there's always something new to look at.

Wetsuits are optional on all swims but to be in contention for a prize in the races you need to swim without. The water temperature was around 19 or 20 degrees which most with a bit of open water experience found quite pleasant. Some people chose to do the races without a wetsuit but to put on the neoprene for the challenge swims to allow them to swim at a slower pace and take their time.

Conditions varied through the week from flat calm to 'lumpy' depending on the strength and direction of the wind. Ironically, the longest swim (the 7km Colònia Classic 2) also had the roughest conditions.

Every swim ended on a sunny sandy beach where the organisers provided recovery drinks, slices of orange and, on one occasion, delicious local pastries.

As well as the races, participants could also take part in coached technique sessions in the BEST Centre's lovely 50m

open air pool. This year we had lessons from British Olympians Ross Davenport and Grant Turner, who both now work for FINIS, one of the event sponsors.

You can do as many or as few of the swims as you like with a separate entry fee payable for each. This makes it easy to combine a week at BESTFEST with a family holiday or other activities – for example, if you wanted to spend a day cycling, hiking or taking a highly recommended boat trip to nearby Cabrera. Families with children who swim have the option of booking the kids in for a few training sessions at the BEST Swim Centre while the parents enjoy the open water, or the adults can take turns doing different swims.

Colònia Sant Jordi itself is a pleasant, relatively quiet town on Mallorca's southern tip. It has a good range of accommodation options and restaurants but avoids the brash nightlife of some other Mediterranean resorts. The town is about a 30 minute drive from the main airport in Palma, which is served by regular budget flights from around Europe.



All images: Photo Quinlance photography.com

THE SWIMS

- Day 1:** Colònia Classic 1 – a 5km point to point race
- Day 2:** Phoenician Trading Point Swim – a 1.5 or 2.5km challenge swim around a nearby island once used as a trading point to Phoenicians
- Day 3:** Colònia Classic 2 – a 7km two-lap race parallel to Es Trenc beach
- Day 4:** Round the Islands challenge – a 4.5km swim along the town's sea front and around some small islands. Swimmers stay in equal speed pods.
- Day 5: Morning:** Colònia Classic 3 – 1.5km sprint to the town's harbour beach
Afternoon: Tell me your time – predict your time for this 2.5km three lap swim for a chance to win a free holiday.
- Day 6:** Es Carbó Italian Volcano – a 3km point to point challenge alongside Mallorca's best beaches
- Day 7:** Fresh water relay – 4x500m; a bit of fun to finish the week

BEST SWIM CENTRE

The Blue Water Elite Swim Training Centre was founded in 2009 by Olympian swimmers James Parrack and Matthew O'Connor. Starting with a patch of land on the edge of Colònia Sant Jordi they have built a modern 10 lane, 50m open air pool and gym where they run training camps for swimmers and triathletes of all abilities. The centre is used by junior, masters and elite swimming clubs from around Europe and is also available for individual and family bookings. The water is kept at a comfortable 26.5 degrees.

Find out more: www.bestswimcentre.com