

This year I promise . . .

All too often those good intentions are short-lived. Dixe Wills finds 10 fun ways to keep your resolve on track



Dixe Wills
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Wheel into 2009 ... learn to ride a bike in the Scottish Borders. Photograph: Alamy

I will write that first novel

Is your house full of half-written first chapters stuffed into drawers? Fret no more. The author-led residential courses at Ty Newydd (the National Writers' Centre for Wales) have an excellent reputation for helping people unleash their inner wordsmith. Set in woods on the edge of Snowdonia and overlooking Cardigan Bay, the centre runs four- and six-day courses for aspiring novelists as well as would-be poets, playwrights and non-fictionaires.

- Ty Newydd (01766 522811, tynewydd.org), Criccieth, from £300 full board.

I will learn to swim/cycle

With sea levels rising and peak oil prices coming, there's never been a better time to learn how to swim and ride a bike. To acquire some aquatic skills, head for Dorset where expert instructor Caroline Swatton will get you afloat in five days using the Alexander Technique. At Innerleithen, in the Scottish Borders, one-to-one learn-to-cycle sessions will soon have you exploring the country roads and trails on two wheels.

- Swalings swimming lessons (0870 710 1012, swimming-lessons.com), Bay View Court Hotel, Bournemouth, £445 half board. Cycling, Millbank B&B (01896 831399, bordercycling.co.uk), doubles from £48, session £25.

I will downshift

Take your first steps towards exiting the rat race with a weekend course in a comfy converted barn in the Cumbrian hills. Tailored to match your particular downshifting aspirations, and suitable for singles, couples or groups, tutors will advise you on simplifying your life, starting up a business, sorting out your work/life balance, and much else, leaving you with your own personal escape plan from the treadmill.

- Stepping Off Weekend course (01931 716638, steppingoff.co.uk), £500 or £825 for two, full board.

I will be good

There's nothing like getting out into the fresh air and doing some volunteering to feel good about life. If you're not sure what sort of outdoorsy volunteering will float your boat, try a Biosphere Expeditions taster weekend. It'll let you experience what it's like to get involved in a conservation project or wildlife research, such as setting up camera traps and recognising animal signs - all under the tutelage of a real live boffin.

- Biosphere Expeditions (0870 446 0801, biosphere-expeditions.org), New Forest 20-21 June, Norfolk 27-28 June, £195 inc hotel (full board).