



MEET THE MARTIAL ARTS INSTRUCTOR

This month's expat earning a crust under the sun is former Lance-Bombardier Gary McMeechan, 25, who lives on the island of Mallorca and juggles his life as a martial arts instructor and nightclub DJ

WORDS AND PICTURES SARAH VAUGHAN

It's always been a burning ambition of mine to run a martial arts school.

I'm fully qualified to teach Thai boxing, kick boxing, karate, Jiu-Jitsu and Krav Maga and there's the added bonus of having been a PTI (physical training instructor) and unarmed combat specialist with the Royal Horse Artillery. As soon as I left the army in 2007, complete with Iraq Medal presented by Princess Anne, I knew that teaching Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) was my next move.

Mallorca was an obvious choice.

My parents already worked on the island as entertainers and Magaluf provides a platform for me to continue my passion for DJ-ing (I even had turntables flown to the Basra Palace base in Iraq to entertain the troops). In the summer I DJ every night, either 10pm till 4am at Lush Bar in Magaluf or the 4am till 6am dawn slot at Tito's on Palma's Paseo Maritimo.

I had to establish my reputation before I could start my MMA school – the Black Fist Dojo. In 2008 I became

Mallorca's Thai Boxing Champion and made a name for myself in the process. People who saw me out and about training asked me for one-to-one lessons and it's gradually evolved over the months to today's three sessions a week for 24 students. We're outgrowing the gym now so on 1st April I'll expand to twice daily classes.

The initial idea was for an all-male dojo, helping lads to either bulk-up or trim down but girls were keen on the self-defence aspects of the class.

Magaluf, like any party resort, can have its idiots and everyone – male and female – wants peace of mind that they can look after themselves on the street. I don't teach fighting – MMA is a sport, but hopefully the lads and lasses I train will be able to get out of a corner or safely remove a knife from an attacker's hands.

The first few classes were an eye-opener; I went home with my head in my hands.

I had underestimated how unfit and unmotivated the young workers of Magaluf could be. But, with a bit of military-style encouragement, the progress over the weeks has been phenomenal. I've seen massive improvements in fitness levels and there are definitely four or five students who could get in the competition ring with a bit more training.

Mallorca is crying out for qualified fitness instructors. It's a small island

and we don't have enough professionals but the public demand is definitely there. I've seen yoga, aerobics and personal training experts come over but end up working in bars or clubs because they can't see the obvious opportunities. All I needed was a bit of rent for gym space, a Facebook group, some posters and word of mouth for the Black Fist Dojo to take off.

People ask me how I relax, how I cope with the late night DJ-ing and the regular training sessions.

The truth is that I really don't get tired. I don't tend to sleep much and exercise is my relaxation. When I DJ I don't drink, so I don't get hangovers and if I do want to clear my head I just take off for a run. I could do seven or ten miles along the beach, round to Santa Ponsa and Andratx – but always alone, I can't run with a partner. And then there's the gym at my apartment... I never really sit still, I'm like a hyperactive child!

I'll never leave Mallorca. I just love it here. I have plans to expand the business, add different types of classes to the programme and train people up for competition if they want. The only downside is the odd drunken idiot who hears that you're an MMA champion and offers you a fight on the beach at 3am. ☀

For more information see Facebook Group "MMA BLACK FIST DOJO" or call Gary direct on 00 34 630 460 961.