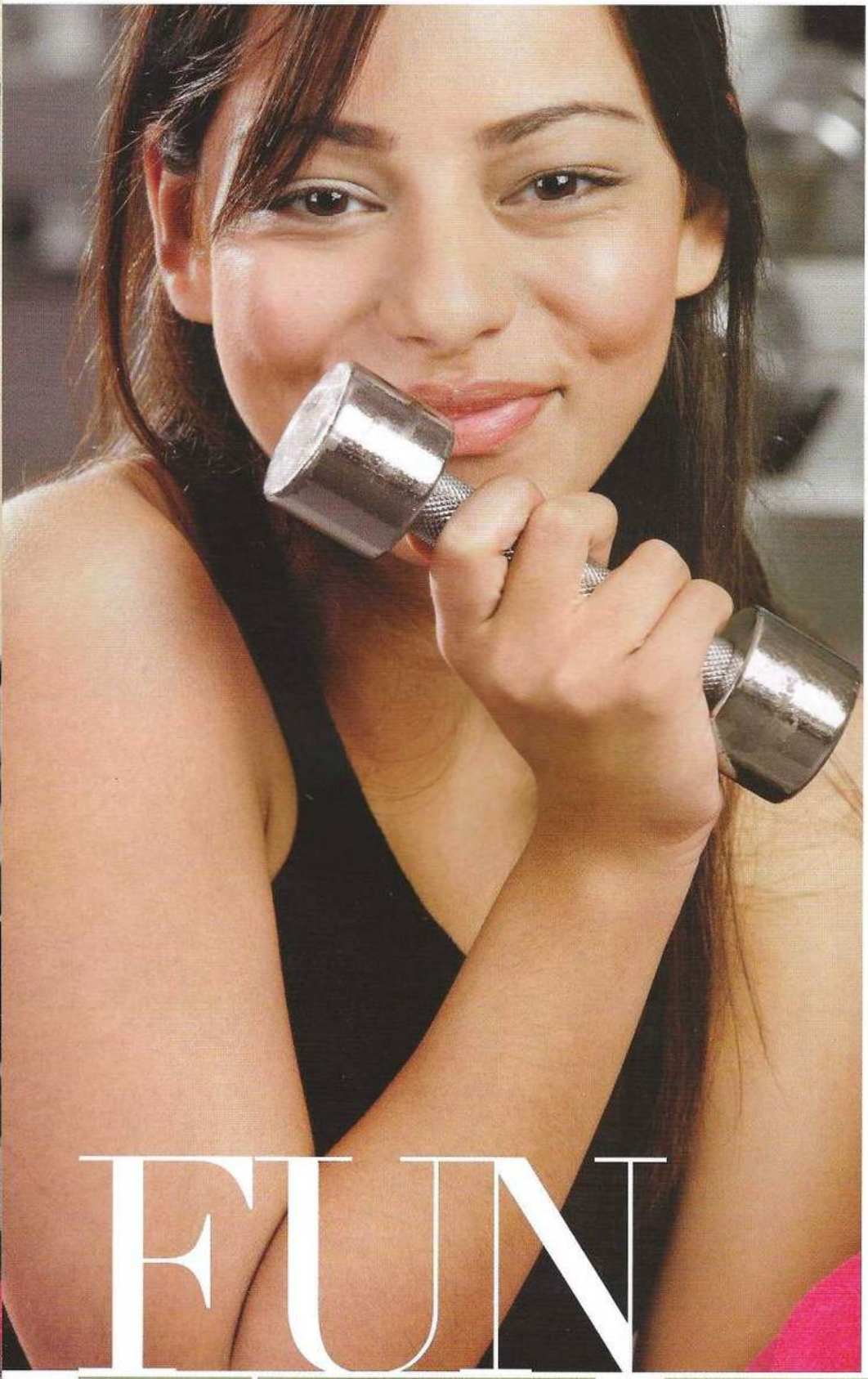
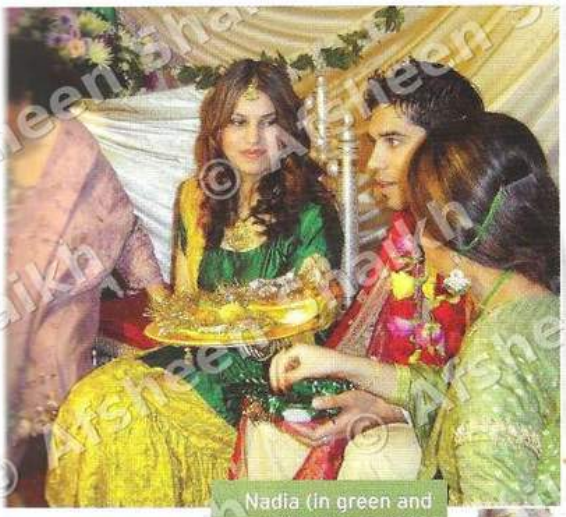


FUN FITNESS

The decadence of Christmas usually results in failed attempts at getting fit. **Afsheen Shaikh** tells you to dump the dumbbells and showcases five readers' fun ways of keeping fit



Nadia (in green and yellow) swears by swimming to keep fit

SWIMMING & SLIMMING

Nadia Mirza

Age: 22

A graduate from London who swears by swimming to stay lean and trim

I used to go to the gym but found it mundane and tiring. A lot of my friends swim and suggested I try it. That was three years ago. I go swimming at least twice a week. I prefer to go in the evenings when I can relax or in the mornings at the weekend. In the pool you feel at ease and there are other activities you can do, like water aerobics and volleyball or even jogging around in the water, which is simple but hard work so you push your fitness levels further.

Swimming is so much fun and not only does it improve your physique but your heart rate and circulation too, and it's such a good relief from stress and tension. The best thing of all is it's cheap – just a few pounds to use the pool at your local leisure centre and you can control how often you want to pay to go unlike a gym membership fee that's deducted from your bank account every month. If I go by myself I don't find it as much fun. I'd rather be with friends because they give you the motivation to go unless you can push yourself to do that extra lap. It has become part of my lifestyle and once you get into the routine, you miss it if you stop going.

If you're thinking about taking up swimming, go with your friends who will give you extra support. If as an Asian woman you're extra conscious, call your local leisure centre and ask about women-only groups, which they many organise. There's no reason to put off doing something that not only keeps you fit but could also save your life.



Songwriter Kiran says running helps her body as well as her mind

ON THE RUN

Kiran Hungin

Age: 26

A singer-songwriter from Yarm in Teesside who took her preference of running on the treadmill to the great outdoors

I've been running in the gym for years but it's in the last six months I've made an effort to take it outside and it's much more challenging. I realised I was running a distance of 5km quite easily on a treadmill but I couldn't do it outside. I would be tired just from running after buses. I like to work up a sweat and running is the thing I find hardest. Ultimately I could do half an hour on a bike and I'd feel good about it but if I ran for half an hour, I'd feel better.

The definition in your legs and muscles get tighter and firmer – that's what's it all about! I also work on my biceps and triceps with dumbbells but running undoubtedly tones you up because you're moving your whole body.

I love feeling toned but also it clears my mind. I'll often have days when I'm at home writing songs on my piano for hours and going out for a run is a welcome break from it.

I also go to a running club once a week. You do things like track work, sprinting, slowing down, raising your heart rate and bringing it back down, which is good for increasing fitness and burning fat. In a group you can measure your fitness and it's more social but I prefer running on my own with my iPod. Three times a week for half an hour is normal but I try to go more frequently.

It's a hell of a lot cheaper than the gym and as I'm living on a budget, it's ideal. You can do it whenever you want and not within the limitations of gym opening hours. There's something free about being able to go for a run wherever you are – just grab your trainers.

One thing I want to do in a few years is a half marathon. I'm still relatively new to the outside thing but to do a few competitive runs and get sponsored for it will make it more worthwhile.

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Shareena Ali loves horse riding as a way to keep fit

SADDLING UP

Shareena Ali

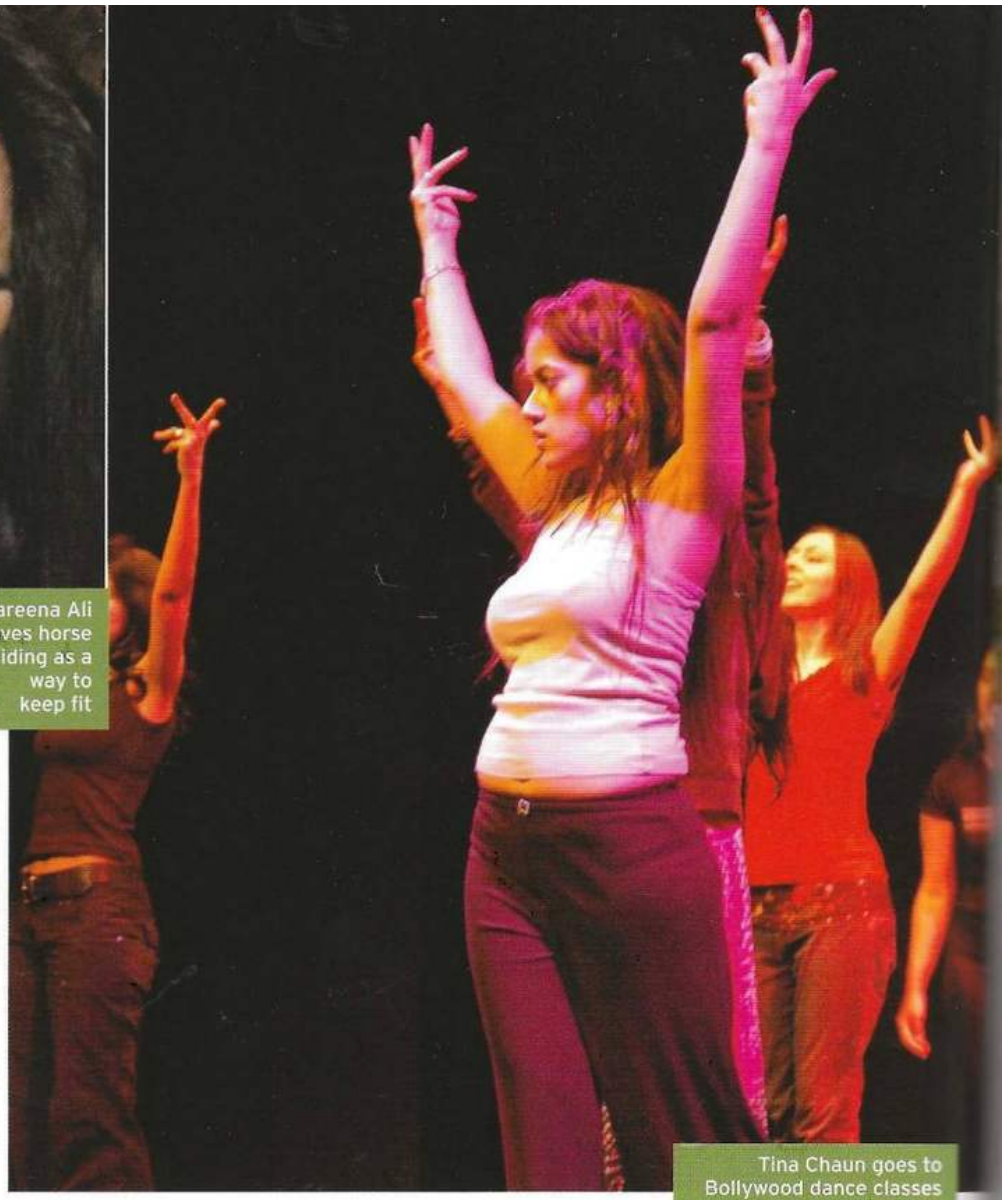
Age: 28

A PR Marketing Consultant from Stanford-Le-Hope in Essex who enjoys saddling up on her horse

I suffer from asthma. Living in the countryside I grew up with animals and I like the fresh air, so my dad took me horse riding as a child and I was hooked. When I first started, it was a group activity: learning how to mount a horse, how to stay on the saddle and then going off in small groups but now that I know my horse and the people at the stables, I go alone. I ride for an hour or two, usually twice a week, wandering through fields and woods. It's an opportunity to have time to myself and sometimes you just need that. It relieves stress and certainly helps with my breathing. I used to get asthma every day but now I get it maybe once every two months.

Physically, your butt, thighs, stomach, arms and shoulders are constantly getting a workout. You don't realise you're exhausted from horse riding but a mild gallop can wear you out. In fact you're burning as many calories as you would from cycling or jogging. Not only is it cardiovascular, it's very good for toning. My thigh definition is excellent just because of horse riding! If you have an aversion to exercise, horse riding will take your mind off things but animals can sense fear so if you're not comfortable around them, they won't be comfortable around you.

Horse riding is something anybody can join in and learn regardless of age. Whether you live in the countryside or in the suburbs, there are riding clubs. If you want to have a mild gallop or a brisk trot, it's still exercising the body because you're holding your posture and balance on the horse. I find it's more of an enjoyable hobby than anything else.



Tina Chaun goes to Bollywood dance classes twice a week to keep trim

STRICTLY BOLLYWOOD

Tina Chaun

Age: 28

A secondary teacher from Solihull who stepped into Bollywood dancing

I love dancing and used to go clubbing a lot but I'd never been trained until I took up Bollywood dancing. After spotting an advert in the paper for Bollywood Dreams Dance (www.bollywoodreamsdance.com), I decided to join the classes and have been going for over two-and-a-half years.

Bollywood dancing is a mixture of modern and classical dance. At last year's Diwali show we performed a Madhuri Dixit medley with each of us taking the lead for a song Madhuri had danced to. This year we'll be doing a track from *Dhoom 2*.

I go twice a week to regular classes for an hour but if we have performances coming up, it could be three, four or even five times a week. One piece we do at weddings is a 20-minute medley and it is demanding so you get a decent workout. As a result, my fitness levels have increased.

Initially I was on my own but I gelled very closely with the girls. We're quite a close-knit group so it's very much a social thing.

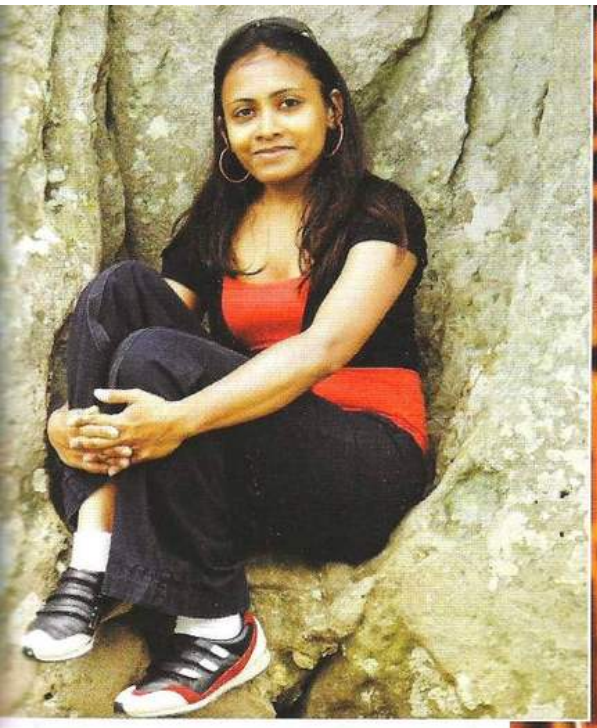
I never did anything like this at school. Being on stage and dancing in front of people gets your adrenalin going. Once I danced at a restaurant for a Bollywood evening. The next day when I went to school one of my pupils told me I had danced at his dad's restaurant that night!

Even if you don't think you're a good dancer, give it a go. It's good fun and you can make lots of friends.

Ten years ago, I'd have never thought I could perform in front of hundreds of people but also it's something that takes my mind off my job. I've always got work to do at weekends and in the holidays so dancing is a welcome break from it and something I love doing.

What fitness regime has worked for you? Email duch@asianwomanmag.com and share your success

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FIGHTING FIT

Sonia Gurjao

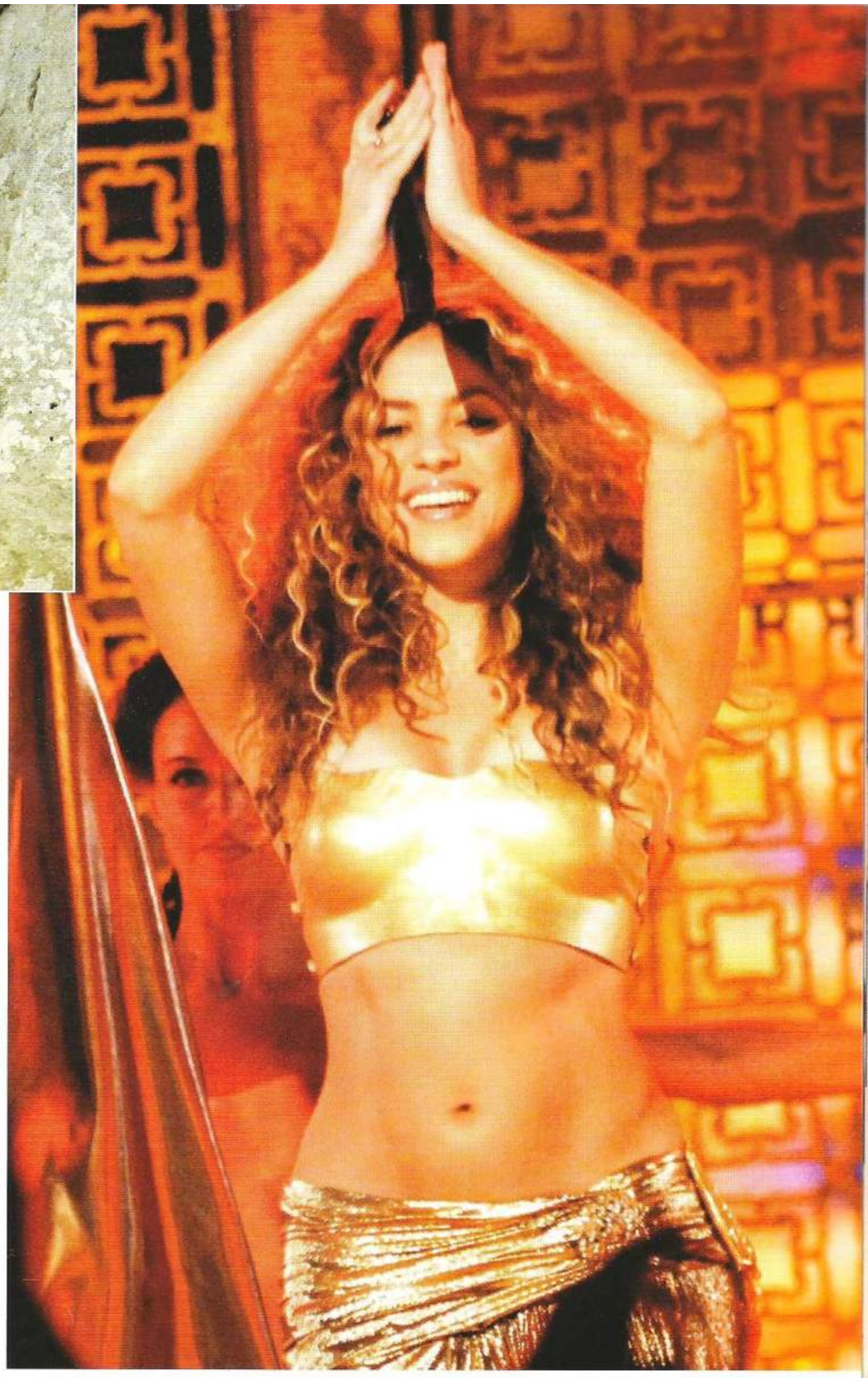
Age: 29

A PhD student from Reading who is crazy about sport and counts kickboxing as one of her favourite pastimes

I've always been very active and was keen on martial arts when I was younger. Although I play other sports like badminton and softball, I wasn't getting exactly what I wanted in terms of a demanding sport. Then I heard about kickboxing lessons at university last summer. It looked physically challenging and I thought it might make me more flexible as well. Many women kickbox these days for self-defence and that's another reason why I chose it.

Your entire body gets a workout. They start with your ankles, then your knees, followed by your legs, arms, elbows and back so it's very thorough. You can wear what you like and most clubs have all the necessary equipment so you don't have to buy a kit. My lessons are late in the evening and at the end of the day you don't want to do anything but to go home and relax so I have to really push myself to go. But after a session, I'm so glad that I went because I feel refreshed. I've noticed my metabolic rate has improved too. I go once a week in the summer (as I do other sports) but during the rest of the year, I go more often.

A lot of clubs have taster sessions so I'd advise people to try it. It can come as a bit of a shock because just the warm-up session is exhausting. Usually classes last an hour to an hour-and-a-half with 20 minutes for a warm-up. Just from that alone you'll realise how much can be gained whether you want to lose weight or increase your level of fitness.



HIPS DON'T LIE

Why not try belly dancing as a way of getting fit? It provides a great cardiovascular workout and helps increase the flexibility and strength of your muscles.

It is suitable for all ages and body types and can be as physical as you want. Belly dance classes are becoming increasingly popular. They are a fun way to spend an evening with girlfriends and a brilliant way to meet new people. Stars like Shakira swear by it as a way of maintaining a sexy belly. If your toned physique isn't enough to please you, your newfound ability to entice the man in your life at the shake of a hip is bound to!

See www.bellydance.org for a list of useful links AW