

DADS get in free to Alton Towers, Staffs, today when with a paying adult or child. See www.altontowers.com

A DAD or grandad in any family gets in free at Norfolk's BeWILd-erwood for Father's Day. See www.bewilderwood.co.uk

DADS also get in free to Zippos Circus in Glasgow at 3pm and 6pm today when with a paying child. See www.zippos.co.uk

By **FRANCESCA PACKER**

BODY slightly turned, right foot back, gloves up... I'm ready to throw my first punch.

A quick jab from the left, then I twist my back foot as my body turns and I cross with my right.

Chin by my shoulder, arm outstretched, it's like looking down the barrel of a gun—then I **WALLOP** a cop who's actually wearing one!

All above board you understand, because I'm learning my craft from Mickey O'Keefe, the police sergeant who helped train boxing legend Micky Ward and who played himself in the Oscar-winning film *The Fighter*, out on DVD tomorrow.

Still in uniform, his gun holstered, we step into the ring. "One, two, one, two," he drills as I jab on the pads—just like in the movie.

I'm at the West End gym in Lowell, Massachusetts, owned by Arthur "Art" Ramalho. He's the boxing daddy of this city, a maker of champions with a strength that belies his 75 years.

He started training "Irish" Micky Ward when he was seven and the story of Micky's 1993 comeback, his relationship with his drug-addled trainer brother Dickie Eklund, and world championship bout in London is told in the film starring Mark Wahlberg and Christian Bale.

In real life Ward trained—and some of the film was shot—at Ramalho's gym based in an abandoned textile mill, the 19th century industry on which Lowell flourished. Many a local has climbed its wooden steps hoping to realise a boxing dream.

And now it's my turn. Inside, it's raw, authentic and full of spirit, just as it appears in the film. Beads of sweat spring to life on my forehead, more to do with the cloying humidity that signals a belting storm than my bout in the ring.

I've already got fighting fit back home at the Better Body Shop in Sevenoaks, Kent (www.betterbodyshop.co.uk) where trainer Chris Wharton, 25, showed me the ropes—and now I've got to make sure I don't end up on them.

HERO

Art guides me through the moves lifting his palms to face me so I can practise my punches. "You're better than some of the men," he says (yes, really!). My eyes dart round at the young boxing talent honing their skills. I'm no Million Dollar Baby yet. But if David Haye needs any tips for his forthcoming title fight then...

On second thoughts just call Ramalho and O'Keefe, 63. They both had a hand in Ward's success—though the unassuming cop is keen not to take too much credit.

"Micky is the real hero," he tells me. "He's really something."

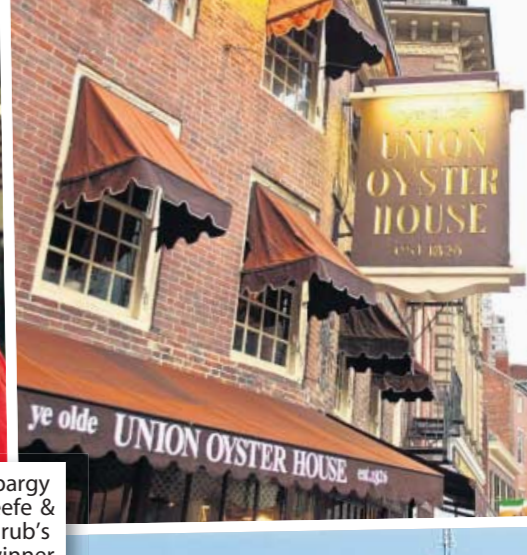
Ward's story is one of triumph over adversity. Born in 1965 when the city was in decline, his boxing success made him the "pride of Lowell". Today, though pock-marked by its tough past, the city of 105,000 residents 30 miles north west of Boston is undergoing a renaissance that *The Fighter* can only fuel.

Its people are earthy, friendly and its greatest asset. Deb Belanger, from Greater Merrimack Valley Convention and Visitors Bureau, tells me: "People were just in awe that these stars were shooting in the city." As we tour the local movie locations, including the courthouse and Tsongas "fight" arena, she grins as she recounts her own experience as a film extra.

It's a common theme. People hang out of windows itching to share their movie tales. In Cupples Square, where the first scene was shot, Rocky (not Balboa) showed us round his furniture store which was once the no-frills Highland Tap where Micky drank.

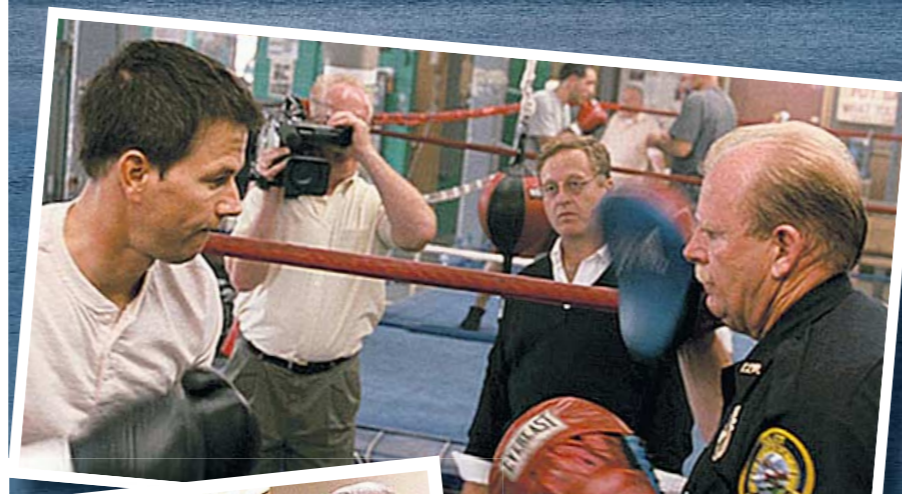
Having boxed my Boston Red Sox off it was time to go back to base in the state capital. I stayed at the beautiful 273-room Taj Boston overlooking the leafy Public Garden. It has long been a favourite with political, royal and movie heavyweights. Winston Churchill had a suite named after him, Prince Charles and Elizabeth Taylor stayed there—and more recently so did Christian Bale while filming *The Fighter*.

Boston is big on stars. You might spot a few at Scampo restaurant at the Liberty Hotel, once Boston's Charles Street jail and now a favourite with Hollywood's hottest such as Cameron Diaz. That's if you can be distracted long enough from



Packer punch... with Chris, left, & boxing with Ramalho

Sargy bary... O'Keefe & Fran. Grub's also a winner



Movie big shots... Wahlberg (as Micky Ward) and Sgt O'Keefe at Ramalho's gym in film, and with Art, left



enjoying delicious dishes such as lobster pizza.

To really enjoy the city you've got to tuck into its rich history—it was the birthplace of the American Revolution and, of course, how can we forget the infamous 1773 Boston Tea Party. Learn about the landmarks on The Freedom Trail, a self-guided walking tour.

You can hop on the underground "T" system (\$2 a trip) to get about town, but since Boston is known as America's walking city I enjoyed exploring on foot.

Amble along Newbury Street for fabulous

shopping, go up the Skywalk Observatory—one of five attractions covered by a \$46 (£28) Boston City Pass—for a 360-degree city view and stroll round elegant Beacon Hill with its townhouses and working gas lamps.

Boston was also US President John F. Kennedy's home town. He was a regular at Union Oyster House, America's oldest restaurant which celebrates its 185th birthday in August. His favourite booth (no.18) has been dedicated in his memory and was where I was lucky enough to enjoy a seafood feast (don't miss the lobster ravioli).

Mark Wahlberg and Matt Damon—in town during my visit—hall from Boston. And the city itself is also a Hollywood favourite because of its varied, photogenic quality. Take a \$40 (£25) On Location Tours bus trip and see famous TV and movie sites from The Departed to Bride

Wars and Ally McBeal. Then have a drink in the L Street Tavern of Good Will Hunting or the Cheers bar (www.screentours.com)

And if you want to leave like a film star, take a 10-minute water taxi ride across the harbour to the airport. We hopped on board and you'd never believe it but Bruce Willis—or a damn good look-alike—was at the helm.

That's the thing about this city. You never know which movie star you'll bump into. But one thing's for sure, you'll leave a Die Hard fan...

GETTING THERE

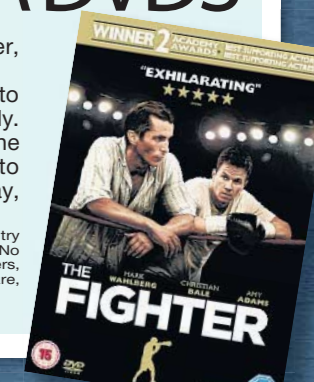
VIRGIN Atlantic flies daily to Boston from Heathrow with return fares from £550. See www.virginatlantic.com or call 0844 2092 770. Rooms at the Taj Boston from \$325 (£200) a night, call toll-free 00 800 4 588 1 825 or visit www.tajhotels.com/boston. For Lowell tourist board see www.merrimackvalley.org and for more details on Boston go to www.bostonusa.com

WIN 10 THE FIGHTER DVDS

HERE'S your chance to win a copy of *The Fighter*, released on DVD and Blu-ray tomorrow.

Thanks to Momentum Pictures we have 10 DVDs to give away. Only over 18s and UK/ROI residents only. Send your details including daytime telephone number on an email, subject FIGHTER, to comp@notw.co.uk by midnight on Saturday, June 25.

If winners can't be contacted, prize will be redrawn. One entry per person only. Suspected automated entries will be invalid. No cash alternative. Winners chosen at random. For a list of winners, contact NOTW Comps Department, 3 Thomas More Square, London, E98 1XY, quoting "The Fighter DVD Comp".



Get ready... be prepared for the Glasto crowd

WHAT TO BUY FOR FESTIVALS

IT'S festival time again and if you're heading to Glastonbury this week or any other summer music event, here's some great items to take along.

Pack up your troubles in a great value £65 **Vango Contour rucksack**, 60-litre which expands to fit in a further 10 if needed, and head for the festival site.

Pop up your £55 **Vango Airbeam inflatable tent** and sit back and let the music wash over you in a **Vango Malibu foldable arm chair** (£22). It's got a strong steel frame, an insulated cup holder and pocket on the back rest to store the carry bag.

When you return to your tent, with the bass still throbbing in your ears, open a bottle of wine and unfold a height adjustable **Kampa Duplex camping table** (£19).

Then it's time for bed. If you're on your own take a **Camping Gaz Quickbed** single airbed (£15), complete with its anti-slip airtight system. Or, if you're with a loved one, go for the **Coleman Comfort** double chamber airbed (£40). It has two separate air chambers, so when one of you moves the other won't fly in the air!

Snuggle up in a **Vango Planet 50** sleeping bag which has a mosquito net, £47.50.

If you find you've GOT to stagger across to the portable loos in the middle of night because you had one glass too many you'll need your **Silverpoint Hiker wind-up lantern** (£14) with LED bulb. An on-off switch gives you control and you can hang it from a loop and flip out feet to stand on the floor.

Items available from Cotswold Outdoor (www.cotswoldoutdoor.com) and tent and sleeping bag from www.vango.co.uk

You'll need to look cool as you mix with the crowd and you will with **Kangol oversized sunglasses** (£94, www.eyewearbrands.com) They're in a classic style and will definitely hide those dark circles!

Rain or shine, you are outside so slap on sunscreen. **Garnier Ambre Solaire** have launched an "Every day is SUNDAY" campaign to encourage people to protect their skin. Also, take **Lotit**, great for sunburn, scratches and treating bites (£2.05 from Boots).

Go prepared for dodgy weather. **OverBoard** have a range of waterproof products to protect your gear.

Camera and iPhone cases, both £15.99. Dry Tube bags for clothes from £10.99 and multipurpose cases for money, credit cards and that all-important festival ticket from £12.99. See www.over-board.co.uk

It won't matter about the weather with this craze sweeping the USA. **Flair Hair** is false, funky fake hair that sits on top of a visor or bandana. From £8.99. See www.hairyhat.co.uk

