

yoga¹⁰¹

You would have had to have been living in a bubble for the past five years to have missed the explosion of yoga in cities across Asia. While India is the philosophy's spiritual – and geographical – home, the Hindu practice dating back to 2500BC (from the Sanskrit word 'yuj' meaning unite) was all but left behind in the region's rush to modernise and urbanise. Imported to the Western world as early as the 1800's, its healthy and vegetarian belief system attracted students from the 1930s onwards, yet it was another 30 years before yoga teachers from India began to travel expressly to guide their enthusiastic new students. Maharishi Mahest (1917-2008), for example, focused on Transcendental Meditation and made its practice popular, while Swami Sivananda Saraswati (1887-1963), one of the first to offer yoga classes in the west, introduced the Five Principles of Yoga to better teach his lessons: Savasana (relaxation), Asanas (exercise), Pranayama (breathing), Diet, Dhyana (positive thoughts) as well as Meditation.

Ironically, while yoga gained popularity in the west, Asians focused on personal wealth and yoga was overlooked in the pursuit of commercial development. Today, however, with its mass appeal and commercial success, the ancient practice of yoga is back with a vengeance, and has arrived at the centre of pop culture. True to its re-born capitalist style, Asia now boasts some of the world's biggest and most expensive facilities featuring leading instructors.

Designer yoga gear is now showcased in flagship superstores and some gurus have reached super-star status. Not to be left behind, mainstream fitness studios across the region have added yoga to their class schedules alongside spin, step and cardio, and many resort and hotels spas offer complimentary morning and evening classes for their guests. Today there are literally hundreds of yoga studios with thousands of teachers offering classes practically around the clock. Millions of square meters of dedicated studio space across the region offering to improve physical, mental and spiritual awareness, flexibility and balance.

Yoga appeals to stressed-out urban worker-bees with its promises to help them chill-out, relax and improve performance. More and more top sports personalities are turning to yoga to help gain the edge over their competitors. Kids' classes are all the rage, and there are speciality yogas for mothers-to-be. Whether you've never taken a class or are a seasoned practitioner, finding and choosing a practice can be daunting, especially with the volumes of sometimes conflicting information available. There is no doubt, however, that at the very least regular classes of yoga serve to strengthen and tone, energise yet deeply relax, and challenge the practitioner physically and mentally, with spiritual advancements patiently waiting to be discovered further on along the journey. And it is a journey well worth taking.

writer KINZIE

what kind of yoga?

An important step in anyone's yoga training is to decipher its many forms. There are four main forms or pathways of yoga and they are progressive in nature: Karma yoga (right acts and actions); Bhakti yoga (devotion); Raja yoga (meditation) and Jnana yoga (inner wisdom or enlightenment). The classic four yogas have expanded and combined into many forms of yoga and a new style can be introduced each time a master (Yogi) combines elements from different forms and names their own unique system or set of movements.

Whichever yoga practice you choose, the basic principles remain the same. Classes are a series of movements to stretch and flex the body, historically in readiness for long bouts of meditation, and work to develop breath awareness and relaxation. Sometimes they include meditation. Classes may be gentle to extremely demanding.

hatha yoga

With today's emphasis on the physical, many people associate the word 'yoga' with Hatha yoga, based on the Raja yoga tradition. There are nine internationally recognised styles of Hatha yoga: Ashtanga, Bikram, Integral, Iyengar, Kripalu, Kundalini, Sivananda, Viniyoga and Jivamukti Yoga. The founders of three of the most popular Hatha yoga styles, Ashtanga, Iyengar and Viniyoga were all students of Sri Tiru Krishnamacharya (1888-1989), a renowned teacher at the yoga institute at the Mysore Palace in India.

Hatha yoga (Sanskrit for 'Union of Force') traces its origins to the 12th century and is popular with students interested in developing their physical health and vitality due to its emphasis on the body through asana (posture) and pranayama (breath). While many students are content with yoga for fitness, Hatha yoga also focuses on the purification of the physical as preparation for the purification of the mind (ha) and prana, or vital energy (tha). Mastery of the physical body can be seen as a way to attain spiritual perfection for those interested in this aspect of their practice. Hatha yoga classes usually include relaxation, a warm up, asanas, pranayama, meditation and theory or philosophy.

ASHTANGA YOGA

Popular with athletes, Ashtanga yoga, also known as Power Yoga, takes students through a series of vinyasa (flowing postures linked by the breath) to build stamina and flexibility. The Ashtanga system was compiled by Pattabhi Jois, born in 1915 in Mysore, India, from Sanskrit manuscripts written on palm leaves 500-1500 years earlier, which he discovered in the 1930s with his yoga master and Sanskrit scholar at a Calcutta University library.

Traditionally, the practice is intended not only to detoxify, stretch, and strengthen the body, but also to stoke the fires of prana (life-force energy) and move energy up the spine to create a state of meditative bliss. Though suitable for anyone in reasonable physical condition, even the beginners' routines are a physically demanding workout and not recommended for anyone new to exercise. The series of poses involves a combination of standing, seated, balancing and twisting poses, and backbends.

BIKRAM YOGA

Bikram, often referred to as Hot Yoga, is practiced in temperatures of 38°C or higher to replicate the heat of founder Yogiraj Bikram Choudhury's birthplace in Calcutta, where he was All-India National

yoga Champion from age 13 until 16 (he was born in 1946), when he retired. Leading European doctors proclaimed he would never walk again after a suffering a knee-injury during a weight-lifting accident at 17, so he returned to Ghosh's College of Physical Education in Calcutta and practiced with Bishnu Ghosh (1903-1970), the first person to scientifically document yoga's ability to cure chronic physical ailments and heal the body. Six months later Choudhury's knee had totally recovered and he went on to share his curative methods of yoga therapy.

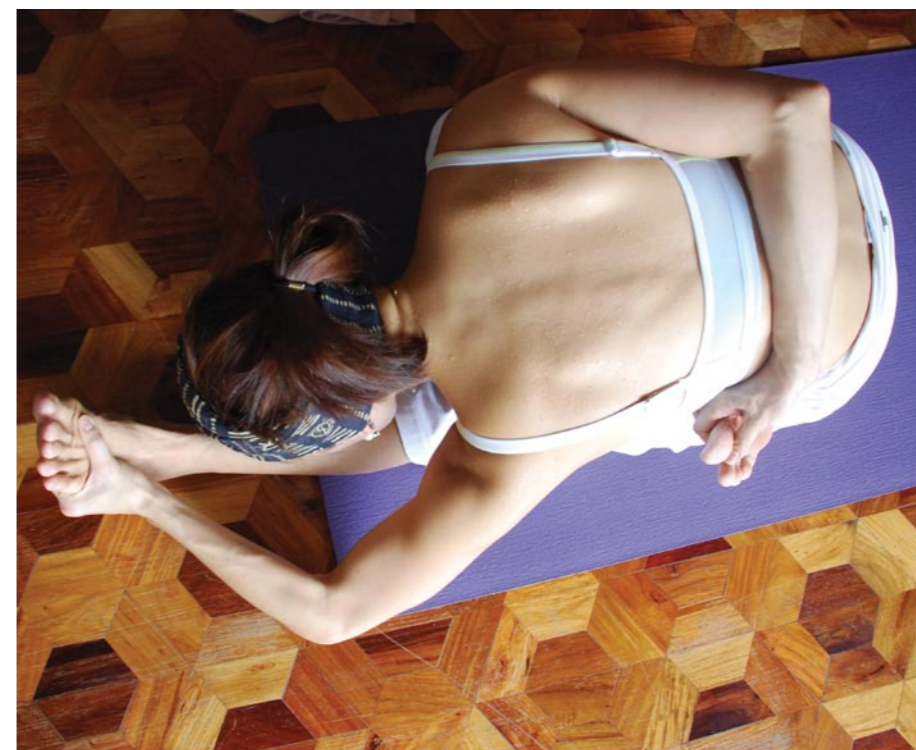
Bikram Yoga consists of a two-part series of 26 high intensity repeating postures with two breathing exercises, designed to stretch and tone the whole body, and concludes with a brief period of relaxation. Combined with the heat, this combination makes for a tough workout and is recommended for yoga veterans and extremely fit individuals. With regular practice, this yoga can be helpful in relieving symptoms of disease and chronic pain by warming and stretching muscles, ligaments and tendons in a particular order.

INTEGRAL YOGA

Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) initiated and defined Integral yoga in the early 1900s as a path for spiritual growth. This practice combines all the paths of yoga – postures, breath, selfless service, prayer, chanting, meditation and self-inquiry. Integral yoga classes generally follow a set pattern over 75 minutes, including 45 minutes of postures linked slowly together by breath, a deep relaxation, a breathing sequence, ending with a meditation.



OPENING PAGES: *Vishvamisrasana pose, courtesy of Sara Avant Stover from Four Mermaids, Thailand (photography Derek Dudek Photos www.derekdudek.com)*
 THIS PAGE: *Boat pose, courtesy of The Yoga Shala.*
 OPPOSITE PAGE: *Forward stretch, courtesy of Yoga Manila.*



benefits

Yoga is considered a mind-body intervention that is used to reduce the effects of generalised stress and prevent specific diseases by keeping energy flowing freely. It has been used as supplementary therapy for such diverse conditions as cancer, diabetes, asthma, AIDS, Irritable Bowel Syndrome and many others.

A May 2004 survey by the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) in the US stated Yoga was the fifth most commonly used CAM therapy in the country during 2002.

Yoga is believed to:

- balance the body, mind, and spirit
- improve coordination and flexibility
- aid and improve digestion
- calm the nervous system
- improve concentration
- lower blood pressure
- facilitate sleep
- reduce stress

new yogas

New yoga forms are created by teachers who have trained and experienced many yoga systems and blended different sequences and philosophies to create something new. These new styles contribute to a natural evolution of yoga.

ACROYOGA

AcroYoga blends yoga with acrobatics to form a practice that cultivates trust, connection and playfulness. Practised in pairs, AcroYoga aims to bring each partner into a state of union with themselves, with each other and with the divine. Yoga poses warm the body in preparation for partner work and mirrored partner poses help to develop concentration, focus, and flexibility. Through a sequence of mutually beneficial stretches between the base and 'flyer', participants develop communication, self-acceptance and honesty with compassion remaining central to the practice.

ANUSARA YOGA

Anusara Yoga was developed by American John Friend who drew on his Iyengar and Ashtanga training and combined alignment, attitude and action. While challenging, the style is also nurturing, with meditation a standard part of the practice in the form of silent sitting.

AQUA YOGA

Aqua Yoga takes the principles and movements of yoga and adapts them to the water environment, allowing the release of gravity to assist with optimum stretch. Water acts as a safeguard against injuries as movements become smoother, preventing muscle and joint strain. Ideal for pre-natal and post-natal practice, specially developed moves and positions help to realign the spine and tone the abdominal muscles. Aqua Yoga strengthens and tones the body, relieves tensions and renews energy.

DANCE YOGA

Combining gentle yoga, movement therapy, dance and meditation, there are as many forms of Yoga Dance as there are instructors. Dynamic classes may include elements of freestyle, shamanic and ecstatic dance with music providing the common background. Participants are attracted by the promise of fun and aerobic exercise. In Shanghai, India trained yoga instructor, former dancer and China's first female DJ Weila Wu created Freestyle Yoga Dance using yoga postures, yoga breathing techniques and the spirit of native dance to offer an experience that is at the same time modern and ancient. Yoga studios and health clubs around the world list dance yoga as favourites with their members.

LAUGHTER YOGA

Convinced of the medical benefits of laughter combined with yogic breathing exercises, Mumbai doctor and yoga student Madan Kataria set up the first club dedicated to Laughter Yoga in 1995 after writing an article for a medical journal, *Laughter Is the Best Medicine*. The technique is simple and warm-ups build confidence by coaxing participants out of their comfort zones to laugh out loud and relieve stress. Laughter yoga combines yogic breathing exercises with laughter exercises, providing natural pain relief by increasing the level of endorphins in the body. There are more than 5,000 laughter clubs and studios in more than 50 countries with new venues opening daily.

POWER YOGA

Power Yoga is a general term commonly used to describe a vigorous, fitness-based approach to vinyasa yoga often credited to two American yoga teachers, New York's Beryl Bender Birch and Los Angeles-based Bryan Kest, who introduced the concept at nearly the same time. Both had studied with Ashtanga master Sri K. Pattabhi Jois. Though many power yoga classes are modeled on the Ashtanga style with an emphasis on strength and flexibility, the term 'Power Yoga' became common in the mid 1990s as a way to market yoga as a workout to western students. Because Power Yoga does not follow a set series of poses, each Power Yoga class is different, unlike the standardised set of Ashtanga poses, and can vary widely from teacher to teacher. Power Yoga brought yoga into the gyms of America, appealing to people who enjoy exercising and prefer their practice free of chanting and meditation.

DOGA

Yoga for dogs, or Doga, as it is increasingly known, is offered in cities around the world, including England, Japan and Australia. While it may appear that dogs naturally practice yoga daily in stretches known as the corpse pose, cobra and the lion's pose, owners of pampered pooches are signing up everywhere for classes with their best friend. The idea of canine yoga classes was dreamt up by American-based yoga instructor Suzi Teitelman when she discovered that her dog, a spaniel, liked to join in with her yoga routine at home.



THIS PAGE: A yoga class in the garden, courtesy of Whatever, Singapore.

OPPOSITE PAGE: A duo practice together in synchronicity, courtesy of Yoga To Go; a student gets a helping hand, courtesy of Yoga Yard, Beijing.

IYENGAR YOGA

Iyengar is a widely recognised form of Hatha yoga created by BKS Iyengar, born in 1918 in Karnataka. He first studied in Mysore, went on to teach yoga in Pune and was named one of the 100 most influential people in the world by *Time* magazine in 2004.

Ideal for those who haven't exercised in a while, Iyengar uses props such as chairs, straps, blocks and pillows to compensate for a lack of flexibility. Each pose is held for a longer amount of time than in most other yoga styles, developing a state of focused calm or meditation in action. Iyengar Yoga is helpful for anyone, particularly those with back problems. Benefits include toning muscles, eliminating tension and easing chronic pain. As a starting point, Iyengar Yoga offers a good knowledge of classic yoga poses so that whatever other style you practice, you will have learnt the basic fundamentals.

JIVAMUKTI YOGA

Students of Sri K. Pattabhi Jois, co-founders David Life and Sharon Gannon infused Ashtanga yoga with spiritual teachings and emphasised the application of yogic philosophy to daily life, creating the Jivamukti (Sanskrit for 'state of liberation') Yoga method in 1984. Each class combines postures, meditation, breath awareness, music, scriptural studies and devotion and includes several sequences specific to the Jivamukti Yoga method. This modern and physically intense method has become a favourite of celebrities seeking a good workout and more – an enlightening dose of chanting and philosophising complements each class.

KRIPALU YOGA

Inspired by Sri Kripalvananda (1913-1981) Amrit Desai introduced Kripalu Yoga as a gateway to physical healing, psychological growth and spiritual awakening. This spontaneous, flowing and meditation orientated practice begins with breathing and warm up movements, intertwining breath and movement with short poses. Progressing to the second stage, meditation is included and poses held for progressively longer until finally the series of poses becomes a spontaneous dynamic movement.

KUNDALINI YOGA

The ancient spiritual practice of Kundalini Yoga has its roots in the Tantric yoga tradition, which dates back to the eighth century and is relatively new to the west. Sikh leader Yogi Bhajan, born in 1929, introduced the practice to North America in 1969 with promises of healing and purifying of the mind, body, and emotions.

A Kundalini class will usually combine breath, dynamic postures, mantras (chanting), meditation, visualisations and guided relaxation to activate different parts of the body and the brain, producing specific results. Several breathing techniques are emphasised: alternate nostril breathing; slow, diaphragmatic breathing; and a dynamic technique called breath of fire to heat up the body through the body's eight chakras or energy centres, eventually 'raising kundalini' to achieve a feeling of high enlightenment. Kundalini Yoga is beneficial in dealing with addictions and many people find it a natural way of releasing the body's feel-good endorphins.

SIVANANDA YOGA

Sivananda Yoga is a physical lifestyle practice originally created by former physician and world-renowned teacher, author, and spiritual leader Sri Swami Sivananda, born in 1887. His disciple, Swami Vishnudevananda, founded The International Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres in 1959 with the aim of promoting yoga for physical, mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing and to create a more peaceful world.

The practice features a structured series of 12 postures and breathwork with a short mantra chant and guided relaxation to begin and end each class.

VINIYOGA

TVK Desikachar developed Viniyoga based on his studies with his father Krishnamacharya, who was also the guru of Iyengar and Pattabhi Jois. Viniyoga is based on the principle of an organised course of yoga study with postures tailored to the physical needs and limitations of each student.

Typically offered in private one-on-one sessions, this method represents a middle path between the exact nature of Iyengar and the physically demanding Ashtanga. Instructors take into account age and condition, body type, emotional needs, cultural heritage, and interest while placing emphasis on their student's spine. The practice combines postures, breath, meditation, text study, counseling, imagery, prayer, chanting, and ritual. Breath is considered more important than how the posture is done and is consciously coordinated with gentle movement. Viniyoga develops strength, balance and healing, making it ideal for beginners, seniors, people with chronic pain or those in rehabilitation from injury or disease.

getting started

Students are encouraged to sample many different forms of yoga and many teachers as a way to find out which one suits them best. An easy way to get started is to enroll with a studio that offers a variety of classes. Most studios will offer you a series of free trials, allowing you to test out several styles and teachers, in much the same way you would try on shoes.

Once you've found a style you're comfortable with, continue practicing for a number of months before making any changes. As your body adjusts to the movement, you may experience periods of physical or emotional discomfort. Allow yourself to be aware of your resistance while being gentle with yourself and taking time to reflect on what may lie beneath it. As time goes by, you may be ready to move on to another teacher or another style.

Alternatively, private teachers for one-one-one training will specifically tailor make practices for you.

With so many options to choose from, the most important point to remember is to take your time and be patient with yourself. Continue to set your intentions for your own practice and measure your progress by your own milestones. Yoga is an intensely personal practice and you may eventually find your blend and fuse your favourite movements to create a home practice just for you.



yoga saved my life

A physically fit, healthy and strong Hong Kong based professional in his 30's, Chris Broad was suddenly explosively ill, before he collapsed, unconscious. With no warning, his pancreas had burst during a job interview in Japan, his third and final meeting with senior executives at Sony. Fast acting staff had Chris at a local hospital within the hour where he was admitted to intensive care. Doctors simply repeated, "Mr. Broad, you are dying," as his internal organs shut down, one after the other, poisoned by the enzymes that filled his body cavity.

Chris was a casualty of the Hong Kong lifestyle and an undetected gallstone had blocked a bile duct. He was airlifted to Hong Kong and admitted to the HK Sanitorium where he slowly recovered after months in the ICU.

On his release, Chris did something he had never before considered – he joined a yoga studio. Now, after 18 months of dedicated practice, Chris attributes Astanga yoga with saving his life. "I am starting to see this harrowing horrific experience as a gift," he says. "Yoga got me walking upright without a cane and taught me the importance of the mind body connection, in particular with how yoga healed my insides." The regular practice gently worked on his internal organs, helping restore them to health and vitality. Now a devotee, Chris has found the practice also helps with accepting the complete change in direction his life has taken since his near death experience. He is still amazed with the powerful healing properties of this simple and structured system of movement and the impact it continues to have on his life.



general studios

- Planet Yoga, Hong Kong, www.planetyoga.com.hk
- Anahatayoga, Hong Kong, www.anahatayoga.com.hk
- Fine Yoga, Beijing, www.fine-yoga.com
- Yoga Yard, Beijing, www.yogayard.com
- International Yoga Centre, Singapore, www.iyc.sg
- Oasis Holistic, Singapore, www.oasisholistic.com
- Yogshakti, Kuala Lumpur, www.yogshakti.com
- Jiva Yoga, Kuala Lumpur, www.jivayogastudio.com
- yoga @ 42°, Jakarta, www.bikramyogajakarta.com
- SPACE, Taipei www.withinspace.com
- Four Mermaids, Chiang Mai, www.fourmermaids.com
- Saigon Yoga, Vietnam, www.saigonyoga.com
- Yoga To Go, Sydney, www.yogatogo.com.au
- Pure Yoga, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taipei, www.pure-yoga.com

yoga dance

- Yoga Space, Shanghai, www.yogaspace.cn

iyengar yoga

- Iyengar Yoga Centre of Hong Kong, www.iyengaryogahongkong.com
- Yoga Limbs, Hong Kong, www.yogalimbs.com
- Iyengar Yoga Studio, Bangkok www.iyengar-yoga-bangkok.com

ashtanga

- Ashtanga Yoga Singapore, www.ashtangayogasingapore.com
- Whatever, Singapore, www.whatever.com.sg
- The Yoga Shala, Singapore, www.theyogashala.com.sg
- Yoga Manila, www.yogamanila.com

bikram

- absolute yoga, Singapore, www.absoluteyogasingapore.com
- Bikram Yoga City Hall, Singapore, www.bikramyoga.com.sg

kundalini

- Raja Yoga, Hong Kong, www.rajayoga.com.hk
- Yoga East, Singapore, www.yogaeastsingapore.com

laughter yoga

- Laughter Yoga, Sydney, www.laughter-yoga.com.au