

Japanzine

Travel ASIA

Japan's National English Magazine

web: www.seekjapan.jp keitai: www.jzmode.com



¥0 FREE

Manga Man

Tokyo's comicbook troubadour

Bend It Like Bikram

The road to self-improvement starts here

American Woman

Host versus Hostess: The Showdown

The Negi

Brainy Bovines Sidestep Beef Ban



Bend It Like Bikram

By ANNICA

When most people think of yoga they imagine incense, chanting and mystical gurus from faraway lands sitting on the floor cross-legged chanting *ommm* in a state of deep relaxation. A visit to a few studios was enough to banish all thoughts of patchouli-reeking hippies and set me straight on what is happening in the local yoga community.

In the last few years, yoga's popularity has exploded. So what's the big deal? Why has this 5000-year old science suddenly become such a hot commodity?

According to Kira from Yoga Osaka, it does a lot more for the body than most people realize – it's not all about getting in touch with your inner pretzel. "Jumping on the mat allows you to draw the senses inwards for a while and regain your composure and sense of self. It puts you back in touch with what is true for you and allows you to reassess where you are, to start fresh everyday. It teaches you to work with what you have on that day, because every day the body has something different to offer. By becoming more in touch with your body, you're able to work with it, not against it. This will enable you to go beyond your boundaries in a way you never considered before."

Practicing yoga develops strength and endurance, improves balance, enhances focus and can increase performance in every aspect of your life. It works the whole body – every joint, muscle and fiber – synergistically, to improve all of the body's functions. It is not necessary to sit in the cross-legged lotus position, chant *ommm*, or be able to put your legs behind your head.

For the uninitiated, figuring out which type of yoga suits your needs is essential. There are many styles to choose from, and you'd do well to try out a few different classes.

These days many sports clubs, such as Gold's and Central, are giving the best time slots to yoga classes. Aerobics and high-energy step classes seem to be taking

a back seat to yoga and Pilates as gym-goers look for a way to stay healthy, keep the body firm and find inner peace. Be sure to arrive early, as the classes tend to fill up quickly. You may find yourself mat-to-mat, as personal space doesn't seem to be an issue in the sessions offered at sports club facilities.

Yoga studios usually offer a variety of styles in their classes, although some may be dedicated to one particular school (such as *Ashtanga* or *Iyengar*). The styles you're most likely to come across are:

Hatha: the most common style, and what is usually referred to when people say 'yoga'. Here in Japan, Hatha yoga refers to static poses (*asana*) that are held for endurance.

Ashtanga: a set sequence that integrates postures, breathing and energy locks in a fluid style. This is an energizing and physically challenging style that is recommended for people who already have practice.

Vinyasa: also called Flow yoga, this is a new form of Hatha yoga, where individual poses are linked through the breath in a flowing sequence. Often based on Ashtanga, the poses are not necessarily performed in a set sequence.

Iyengar: focuses on precise alignment and uses a series of props (blocks, straps, bolsters, chairs) to modify poses and provide support. Good for beginners who are not so flexible or who have physical issues.

Hot yoga: concentrates on slow and static poses in a room heated to 42 degrees. The idea is to loosen up the muscles and to sweat, which is supposed to clear the body of toxins. Only recommended for those in good health. Be sure to drink a lot of water. A wimpy 500ml bottle may not suffice: the 2-liter size is probably better, as you will sweat a lot! ☞

Know Before You Go

DO wear comfortable clothing and layers that you can add/remove as your body heats up/cool down.

DO arrive at least a few minutes early to ensure a smooth visit. Getting to class about 10 minutes early can help you settle in. While you're waiting you can practice a pose, do a few stretches, or just sit or lie quietly, breathe and get centered.

DO let your teacher know about injuries or conditions that might affect your practice. If you are injured or tired, skip poses you can't or shouldn't do, or try a modified version.

DO bring a towel or your own mat if you sweat a lot, and arrive clean and free of scents that might distract or offend others.

DON'T eat anything for at least two hours before class. Digestion inhibits your body systems from getting the benefits of practice and contributes to lethargy and/or cramps.

DON'T wear jewelry, contact lenses or restrictive clothing.

DON'T bring cell phones to class. Leave socializing and business outside the studio, so the peace of the practice is not disturbed.

DON'T push it. Instead of trying to go as deeply or completely into a pose as others might be able to do, do what you can without straining or injuring yourself.

DON'T be afraid to ask questions, experience several forms/teachers to find the one that is right for you.

DON'T forget to drink water after class.

Tokyo Yoga Studios

By **MARIE DOEZEMA**

Sun and Moon Yoga



Location: Meguro Eki Mae Mansion, Higashi Guchi Bldg 204, 3-1-5 Kami Osaki, Shinagawa-ku, Tokyo

Types of Yoga: Hatha, Ashtanga, Sivananda, Mysore, Yin (restorative), meditation

Affiliations: White Lotus certified

Pricing and Policies:

Drop-in ¥3000; 4-class pass (valid for 3 months) ¥10,500; 10-class pass (valid for 3 months) ¥18,000; Unlimited pass (valid for 1 month) ¥20,000; Mysore pass (valid for 1 month, Mysore classes only) ¥17,500.

No mat rental fee

No membership fee

No reservations necessary

No credit cards

Instructors/Language: Seven foreign instructors, one Japanese; most classes are bilingual.

Studio details: Studio room can hold up to 18 students.

Facilities: Curtained changing rooms for men or women, no showers, shelf for storing personal items.

Comments: One of the mellowest, friendliest yoga spaces in town. The focus is holistic; classes are challenging without being competitive.

For more information: (03) 3280-6383 or

www.sunandmoon.jp