

POPULAR STYLES OF YOGA

HATHA

Hatha yoga simply refers to the execution of physical applications in yoga. The current, popular definition however is used to define a particular class style where yoga poses are performed individually in a slow and more static way.

VINYASA

Often referred to as 'flow' yoga, Vinyasa is the execution of yoga poses joined together to create a flowing sequence. Almost dance-like, the poses are strung together, moving from one to the next, and in-sync with the student's movement of breath. It is a more dynamic practice that can elevate the heart rate and induce an aerobic effect on the individual.

IYENGAR

Founded by *B.K.S Iyengar* (1918-2014), this style of yoga focuses on precision of alignment of postures and utilises a multitude of props (blocks, straps, blankets, bolsters etc) to assist students to safely refine and deepen each pose. Meticulous in nature, an Iyengar yoga class attends careful diligence to each pose, thus is a slower paced class and usually delivered without music.

RESTORATIVE

This restful style of yoga branched from the teachings of B.K.S Iyengar who utilised props for students to practice yoga in a passive way, without any strain or pain (particularly those with illness, injury, or stress). *Judith Lasater*, a student of Iyengar, popularised Restorative Yoga as a style of yoga in its own right in 2007 and practised for its calming, healing effects. A Restorative class includes fewer postures in which students rest for lengthy periods, using the props to shape the body in an effortless way, and provide support that enables them to relax more comfortably, thus more completely. With a focus on relaxation, it is not unusual for students to use eye pillows in this class to induce a deeper state of relaxation.

ASHTANGA

Introduced by *K. Pattabhi Jois* (1915-2009), Ashtanga yoga is a rigorous, disciplined, and systematic practice. Based on learning intricate and lengthy vinyasa style sequences (or series), students are required to memorise and master each series before moving onto the next - each becoming more challenging. In its traditional delivery students practice in a room together, yet at their own individual level and pace, with the teacher offering correction and instruction individually. (This class method of Ashtanga Yoga is also known as Mysore Yoga).

POWER YOGA

Often carried on upbeat music, Power Yoga is a vigorous, physically demanding, vinyasa-style yoga. Born in the 90's, Power Yoga is said to have originated from an attempt to make Ashtanga Yoga more accessible to Western students. However, unlike Ashtanga, Power Yoga is not confined to pre-determined, regimented series, but instead offers varied and creative sequences.

Americans *Beryl Bender Birch* and *Bryan Kest* are most often credited with the introduction of 'Power Yoga' – each learning from Ashtanga's 'master' K. Pattabhi Jois himself, then returning to the United States, and in time, modifying their teachings to offer independent variations of this strong style of yoga.

YIN

Originating as a blend of yoga and Chinese Taoism in the 70's by martial arts expert, *Paulie Zink*, and further refined as a 'style' of yoga by *Paul Grilley* (who studied with Zink in the 80's), Yin Yoga delivers passive floor poses held for up to 5 minutes or more. A Yin yoga class is usually structured to stimulate the body's meridian lines (energy pathways) while facilitating a deep stretch of the connective tissues of the body (the ligaments, joints, bones, and deep fascia). While many 'Yin Yoga' poses resemble conventional hatha yoga poses, Yin poses have different names and have no Sanskrit reference (as a result of its modern origin outside of India). This passive, quiet style cultivates a still, meditative state.

BIKRAM

Named after *Bikram Choudhury* who designed the practice and took it from India to California the 1970's, Bikram yoga is both a physically and mentally challenging class practiced in a bright, heated room (typically 40.6°C and 40% humidity) intended to replicate the climate of India. Guaranteed to be sweaty and predictable, each and every Bikram yoga class is exactly the same - consisting of 26 poses executed in a specific order, each performed twice over 90 minutes duration. Every teacher uses the same pre-scripted Bikram dialogue from one class to the next, and without demonstration from the teacher, students practice facing mirrors to check their own alignment. There is no music during class.

HOT YOGA

Like Bikram Yoga, Hot Yoga is practiced in an artificially heated and humid environment (anywhere from 27-38°C). However, that is where the similarities end. After the popularisation of Bikram Yoga by various Hollywood celebrities and its eminent growth in America, many studios took to heating their practice environment. This made available a vast offering of yoga styles, put quite simply, practiced in a heated room. Hot yoga is said to flush toxins, assist with weight management and allow students to move more deeply into poses.

KUNDALINI

Brought to the West by *Yogi Bhajan* (1929-2004) in the late 70's, Kundalini Yoga appears quite different from other forms of yoga. It incorporates a combination of fast-moving and invigorating movements and breath exercises, along with chants, mantras and meditation with the intention to awaken and release spiritual energy coiled at the base of the spine, and bringing it up along the spine through the seven chakras (energy centres) and out through the crown of the head for spiritual awakening and liberation. Each specific Kundalini exercise, referred to as a kriya, is a movement repeated rapidly, synchronized with the breath. Kundalini yogis are easy to spot – teachers usually wear white attire and a white turban-like head wrap, with students most often following suit.

SIVANANDA YOGA

Sivananda is a form of hatha founded by *Swami Sivananda* and brought to the west by *Swami Vishnu-devananda* in 1959. A typical class is traditionally practiced without music and includes breathing exercises, a warm up of Sun Salutations (a popular and widely applied vinyasa yoga sequence practiced in many styles of yoga), 12 basic 'Sivananda' postures, and deep relaxation. The 12 poses follow an exact order designed to move every major body part in a systematic and balanced way. Chanting and meditation can also be an integral part of class. Once the basic asanas are mastered, variations are then added to deepen the practice.

AERIAL YOGA

Also called 'Antigravity Yoga', Aerial Yoga requires the use of a special soft, silk hammock hanging from the ceiling, and allows students to improve their flexibility and build strength in a unique, fun way. It even offers students the opportunity to turn upside down without putting pressure on the spine and joints. In Aerial Yoga, regular yoga poses are creatively modified so that students can use the hammock throughout the entire class to hang suspended over, or wrapped in the sling (to open the hips, fold in to forward bends and release into back bends for example). Sitting suspended in the sling for meditation and cocooned within the sling for relaxation can bring a euphoric sense of floating.

ACRO-YOGA

Acro-Yoga emerged in 2003, combining yoga and acrobatics. It is a playful form of partner yoga where students learn acrobatic techniques - how to lift each other and be lifted, and the alignment you need to do this safely and more easily. Students work in groups of 3 (minimum). One student is the 'base' (the lifter), the second is the 'flyer' (the one who is lifted), and the third is the 'spotter' who provides assistance where required to ensure safety of the moves.

EVER-EMERGING YOGA STYLES & OFFERINGS

In the modern western world, many new styles of yoga are being introduced all the time by upcoming yoga teachers and yoga schools with their own ideas and approach. Many of these new 'styles' are simply variations in application or delivery of traditional yoga poses and class structure, however, there are also many totally 'unique' options erupting in the restlessness of the modern western world. Today students can find Nude Yoga (said to be very liberating), Dog and Cat Yoga (that's yoga with your pet), Vino and Vinyasa (yes, that's yoga and a social drink), SUP Yoga (Stand Up Paddleboard Yoga), and as mentioned above, Acro and Aerial Yoga.

The question could be asked, "Are these really valid forms of yoga?" Let's just consider for a moment, what is '*real yoga*' anyway? Where does 'real yoga' start and end? Is it any activity that makes use of traditional yoga poses? Is it any activity done mindfully with the breath? Is it only 'real yoga' if it comes from an Indian lineage or if it follows traditional methods? What then of the ever-popular and now well-established Yin Yoga, Power Yoga, and Hot Yoga? And whose methods are of traditional descent and whose aren't?

I dare not answer these questions. My only suggestion to you is to find *your* yoga... the yoga that makes you feel good on the inside, and leave everyone else to find *their* yoga.