

Bikram yoga practitioners travel hot path to fitness

SANDRA VALDEZ GERDES

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The idea of working out in a room hotter than the air outside may not appeal to many people.

However, when you see the calming environment of the yoga studio at Bikram's Yoga College of India, 6261 N. Oracle Road, you may wonder what all the "hot box yoga" hype is about.



jump through it?"

Sheldon Stokes, 47, had similar thoughts about four months ago when he joined wife Anna for his first class.

"I felt like I was going to die from the heat, but I knew it was good for me," he says. "At the end, I was dead. I was sore, drained and soaked with sweat."

However, something about the way he felt later - refreshed, invigorated, limber - made him return for another session.

"I played football, basketball and did other physical conditioning in the military and Air Force. . . . But now that I am older, the exercise that is easier and won't hurt my body as much and has a faster recovery is yoga," says Stokes, who now goes to classes a few times a week. "I feel better, fresher. It helps me stay focused, and I've lost about 5 pounds, and some inches around my waist and stomach."

A recent day brought many students - young and old, men and women, some fit and some not so much. This day's teacher is studio co-owner Bob Floyd, a 60-something in tip-top shape who has instructed Bikram yoga since 1998.

Floyd closes the door and with a fluid voice leads students through 26 Hatha yoga postures, including standing poses, backbends, forward bends and twists.

The regulars move through each pose gracefully reaching impressive lengths, while the first-timers pause to watch and at times topple over.

Diane Faircloth, 43, co-owner of the studio since 2004, says first-timers are encouraged to set a goal to just breathe through the nose and rest as needed.

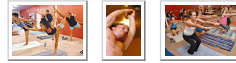
The temperature in a Bikram studio is not at the intensity of a sauna, she says, but more like sitting in the shade during a Tucson summer - it's dry and around 105 degrees.

"For those who are looking for low-impact exercise that challenges the body and cardiovascular system to get stronger, it is ideal," Faircloth says.

Critics of Bikram yoga argue that doing postures - asanas - in hot environments may cause damage or excessive strain to muscles or ligaments stretched beyond

PHOTOS & IMAGES

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XAVIER GALLEGOS/Tucson Citizen

Rocio Montero, 25 (foreground), in Dandayamana-Dhanurasana during a class at Bikram Yoga College of India.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

BIKRAM YOGA IN TUCSON

BIKRAM YOGA COLLEGE OF INDIA
6261 N. Oracle Road, 229-9642
www.bikramyogatucson.com

Details: Bikram-certified instructors offer only Bikram method yoga, with classes daily.

YOGA VIDA

3238 E. Speedway Blvd., 326-5853
www.yogavidatucson.com

Details: Bikram-certified instructors offer only Bikram method yoga, with classes daily.

ANOTHER 'HOT' OPTION

PROVIDENCE INSTITUTE

3400 E. Speedway Blvd., Suite 114, 323-0203
www.providenceinstitute.com

Details: This, massage, yoga and personal training center offers several styles of classes, including what it calls "hot room yoga."

BIKRAM YOGA BENEFITS

- Warms and stretches muscles, ligaments and tendons.
- Heat reduces risk of injury and allows for deeper and safer stretching.
- Promotes the cleansing of the body and release of toxins and work internal organs, including glands and the nervous system.
- Can reduce stress and increase blood circulation.
- Can help you lose weight and develop muscles.
- People of any fitness level, even those with chronic diseases such as arthritis, diabetes and thyroid disorders, can practice Bikram. As with any fitness regimen, people with health problems should consult a doctor before starting.

Source: www.abc-of-yoga.com/styles-of-yoga/bikram-yoga.asp

WHAT IS BIKRAM YOGA?

Bikram Method Yoga was created by Bikram Choudhury, who studied yoga with Bishnu Ghosh, brother of Paramahansa Yogananda.

It is a series of 26 *asanas*, postures done in a room with a temperature of about 105 degrees Fahrenheit. Each pose is usually performed twice and held for a set period. Choudhury developed the method after recovering from a serious knee injury he acquired during his weightlifting training,

normal limits because of the heat. They also say practicing in the heat may cause excessive water loss.

However, no scientific evidence backs up those criticisms, Faircloth says, adding that injuries - especially caused by the temperature of the room - have been rare during her years of practice.

"If you think of connective tissue like taffy, if it is in a warm room it becomes very pliable," she says, adding that the heat-induced sweating boosts detoxifying the body.

"Your skin acts as your third kidney and helps release toxins from your body, which is healing for the body on a cellular level," says Faircloth, who has practiced Bikram yoga for eight years."

Rebecca Thompson, 46, began her Bikram practice in April as an alternative to medication after a car wreck left her with chronic neck pain.

"I have always been active in sports, martial arts, soccer and running, but nothing has ever been like the Bikram yoga experience," she says. "After just two weeks (of Bikram), the stabbing neck pain that was keeping me up all night was now gone. Now, five months later, my skin is clearer, my nerves are calmer and I can handle more stress. I am happier at home and I feel more connected to my own spirit."

Susan Vanatta, 58, a certified fitness instructor in Tucson for 20 years, says she was humbled by her first Bikram yoga class.

"I knew enough from my own training that if I wanted to benefit, I had to persevere," says Vanatta, also a competitive ballroom and country dancer.

"Now my body craves it, and the yoga has allowed me to really discover the imbalances that I have created in my body over the years and to correct them.

"I now recommend yoga as part of any fitness regimen."

defying doctors who told him he would never walk again. He recommends doing the practice at least 10 times a month. And, if you have set goals to lose weight, reduce stress or heal an injury, he says more frequent classes may yield quicker results.

Sources: www.bikramyoga.com and www.abc-of-yoga.com/styles-of-yoga/bikram-yoga.asp

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