

experience

Yoga and music lovers flock to the Californian mountains for Wanderlust.



Yoga for all ages at BaliSpirit Festival.



Yogis at Wanderlust celebrate their high-altitude location with Virabhadrasana I (Warrior I Pose).

The Dutch Yoga Festival is a relaxed weekend event on the island of Terschelling.

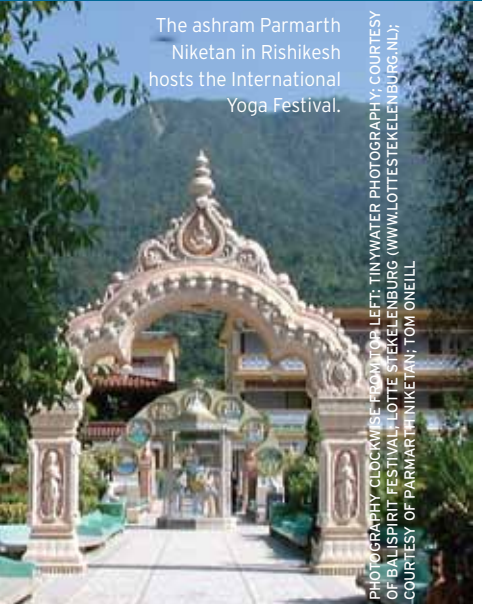


festival time

Ever dreamed of om-ming your way around the world? With the trend towards international yoga festivals, a yoga-filled 2011 is more accessible than you might think. *By Sue White*



Burlesque performers Yard Dogs Road Show at Wanderlust in 2010.



The ashram Parmarth Niketan in Rishikesh hosts the International Yoga Festival.

PHOTOGRAPHY CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: SETH LIGHTCAP; JULIANNE REYNOLDS/WWW.ROMANSKIFILMS.COM; COURTESY OF ASIA YOGA CONFERENCE; BALISPIRIT FESTIVAL; LOTTE STEKELNBURG (WWW.LOTTESSTEKELNBURG.NL); COURTESY OF PARMARTHNIKETAN; TOM O'NEILL



Yoga teacher Seane Corn at the Asia Yoga Conference in 2010.



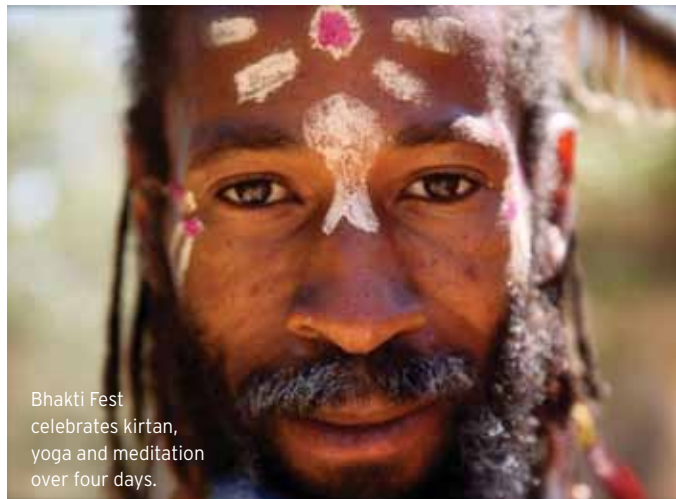
Kirtan artist and yoga teacher Govindas at Bhakti Fest.

experience

The International Yoga Festival (iYF) has a spectacular location on the banks of the Ganges, at the acclaimed ashram Parmarth Niketan.



Ojeya Cruz Banks teaching West African dancing at BaliSpirit Festival in 2010.



Bhakti Fest celebrates kirtan, yoga and meditation over four days.



A passionate audience at Bhakti Fest.

PHOTOGRAPHY CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: COURTESY OF PARMARTH NIKETAN; 2. X JULIANNE REYNOLDS/WWW.ROMANSKIFILMS.COM

For Brisbane vinyasa teacher and studio owner Keren Cooksey, signing up for her first international yoga festival was somewhat of an act of faith. “I decided to attend last year’s BaliSpirit Festival, but I didn’t know what to expect,” Cooksey admits.

“I travelled on my own to Ubud and when I got there, every cafe and restaurant was filled with yogis from across the world. I sat down in a cafe for a chai and immediately made friends,” she says.

If there’s a trend sweeping the yoga world at the moment, festivals are it. It seems every country, or indeed city, worth its yogic salt is starting to ride the festival wave. While some are sticking with traditional conference models set in urban locations, recent years have also seen swags of yoga festivals take over deserts, parks, islands and mountain ranges, for

anything from a day to a week of yogic overload.

Contrary to popular belief, festivals aren’t only for the bendy or long-time practitioners. Beginners programs feature on most jam-packed schedules, as do a wide range of yoga styles. Part of the joy is that no two festivals approach the experience the same way—you could be camping on an island, bedding down in a luxury hotel room or tucked up in an ashram dormitory, but regardless of the sleeping arrangements the intensity will be similarly addictive.

Sydney-based Kundalini teacher and student, Kimilla Simranjeet Wilson also knows full well how compelling the yoga festival circuit can be, having recently arrived home from what she describes as a yogic fairytale. “I spent last summer in California going to festivals. My highlight was summer solstice held on a mountain in

New Mexico. It’s hot and dry and everyone camps. It’s a Kundalini yoga festival so people dress in white, creating a sea of 2000 white yoga angels. The first couple of days it’s overwhelming, as the toxins and energy are released, but you walk away elevated and transformed,” Wilson says.

Although many attend a yoga festival to work on their Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward-Facing Dog Pose), it’s not always the teaching that’s the only appeal. “The surroundings, teaching and the food in Bali were amazing, but I also made a very good circle of friends—we’re all going back this year together. It’s that sense of community that will keep me going back year after year,” says Cooksey.

It’s no surprise that being surrounded by writhing masses ranging from the spaced out to the immaculately clad for days on end can eventually override our tendency to stick to the practice we know and love.

“I went to Bali really excited to study with [prana-flow yoga teacher] Shiva Rea. That was fantastic, but one of my favourite teachers ended up being Canadian yogi, surfer and environmentalist, Eoin Finn. In his classes we moved our mats to the side, jumping back from Chaturanga Dandasana [Four-Limbed Staff Pose] like we were on a surfboard. Anyone taking it seriously soon broke down in giggles,” Cooksey recalls.

Given the plethora of options on offer, Wilson says her recipe for a successful yoga festival goes beyond location, teachers and musicians, to a sense of openness that gets to the heart of the practice. “Festivals are for everyone, so I appreciate it when they have styles for everyone. It’s time on the planet to merge,” she says. >>

Sue White is a Sydney-based freelance writer and a long-time practitioner of hatha yoga.

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6 Days Eco Beach Wilderness Resort July 20 - 25 2011
Broome WA from \$1790



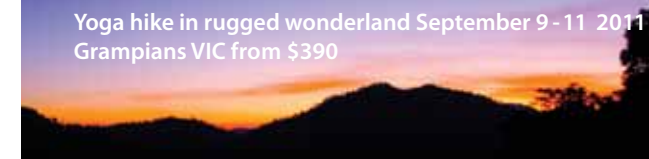
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2011 a year of yoga



The inauguration ceremony of the IYF.

January

>> YOGA JOURNAL CONFERENCE: SAN FRANCISCO

13-17 JANUARY
SAN FRANCISCO, USA

Every January, the Hyatt Regency bursts with more than 100 classes from a veritable who's who of the Western-yoga world (vinyasa-expert Seane Corn, Ashtanga-heavyweight David Swenson and OM-founder Cyndi Lee are the mere tip of the tree pose). The sheer scale means that for visitors like Sydney hatha-yoga teacher Mitch Gibson, tranquillity may not be the prevailing emotion. "It's borderline overwhelming—all those big names in the modern yoga world in the one place for the one weekend," says Gibson.

Fitting it all in here is impossible: Kundalini sadhana starts at 4.30am, classes run all day, and the Saturday Night Ignites event offers four hours of hip-shaking world beats with Shiva Rea, kirtan-wallah Dave Stringer and DJ Dragonfly. Expect allocated spaces for mats, plenty of retail therapy and lots of teacher/student interaction from the (mainly) American crowd. Full-on? Sure. But it's also irresistible. "I can't wait to go to another one," says Gibson.
COST: From \$500 for the two-day conference, with plenty of pre- and post-conference options.

WEBSITE: www.yjevents.com/sf/

March

INTERNATIONAL YOGA FESTIVAL (IYF)

1-7 MARCH
RISHIKESH, INDIA

Thanks to its inspiring location on the banks of the River Ganges and host, the well-regarded ashram, Parmarth Niketan, the International Yoga Festival (IYF) exudes yogic authenticity before you even attempt your first Sun Salutation. Each year, western teachers like Ayurvedic author David Frawley and Kundalini devotee Gurmukh join Indian swamis leading teachings that go well beyond asana; pranayama workshops, mantra walks and the devotional evening aarti are all part of this very Indian yoga experience. With an authentic yogic vibe, the mood is distinctly spiritual, in large part due to the dozens of yogis who travel here to do seva (selfless service) for the 500-odd festival participants from more than 30 countries. If you're nervous about your first trip to India, IYF could offer the cure.
COST: TBC. 2010 prices were from \$600 for seven days.

WEBSITE: www.internationalyogafestival.com

BALISPIRIT FESTIVAL

23-27 MARCH
UBUD, INDONESIA

Ubud may have always been the home of artists and creative types, but every March it becomes yoga-fied. With numerous outdoor venues making the most of Ubud's tropical environs, the yoga community is abuzz with the word that BaliSpirit may just have found the perfect festival recipe. Expect plenty of options from local, regional and celebrity teachers (prana-flow yoga teachers Shiva Rea and Twee Merrigan were two of the biggest names in 2010), a relaxed schedule that allows you to pick and choose classes depending on your mood and that mandatory yoga festival diversity: laughing yoga, water yoga and world-music evenings could easily be as much a part of your festival memories as the more traditional asana classes.

COST: From \$580 for a five-day pass (\$450 for early birds).

WEBSITE: www.balispiritfestival.com

EVOLVE YOGA AND WELLNESS FESTIVAL

27 MARCH
MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

If you're not up for heading overseas, a March daytrip to Melbourne could be just the trick. With classes and workshops from diverse traditions, and therapies such as massage rounding out the wellness experience, the heritage Abbotsford Convent is set to burst with yogis as part of this inaugural event. With classes from Byron Yoga Centre founder John Ogilvie, Iyengar-trained Judy Krupp from Sydney's The Yoga Room and delicious yoga nidra from Melbourne Satyananda teacher Kimberley Roberts, Evolve looks set to offer a yogic feast at an unbeatable price while chipping away at Australia's current dearth of home-grown yoga events.

COST: \$28 for one day (\$20 for early birds).

WEBSITE: www.evolveyogafestival.com.au

PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY OF PARMARTH NIKETAN

June

5TH ANNUAL ASIA YOGA CONFERENCE

9-12 JUNE
WAN CHAI DISTRICT, HONG KONG

As it enters its fifth year, Asia-Pacific's answer to the busy yoga conferences seen commonly in the US is broadening its reach. Under the banner of "many practices, one intention", over 4000 yogis will head to the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre for four days of everything from Ashtanga to Ayurveda. While the current yoga-focused recipe has worked for participants, organisers are broadening the event to have a wider wellbeing focus in 2011, a move we'll be watching with interest. Jivamukti Yoga devotees will be pleased the event has managed to lure Jivamukti founders Sharon Gannon and David Life to attend.

COST: TBC. 2010 pricing was \$685 for the four-day pass (\$515 for early birds).

WEBSITE: www.asiayogaconference.com

YOGAFEST DATE TBC BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA

Given that Australia lacks its own bumper-sized yoga event, Brisbane's one-day Yogafest in June at The Old Museum grounds holds the current honour of being our largest yoga festival. With more than 1000 people dipping into last year's event, 2011 will see more than 30 classes and events. Founder Jonathan Murphy balances a schedule of less-known locals with well-known regulars like Ashtanga teacher Graeme Northfield, INSPYA Yoga founder Lance Schuler from Byron Bay, Adam Bornstein of Radiant Light Yoga and Byron Yoga Centre's John Ogilvie. With music in the garden, indoor and outdoor stalls and an annual blessing of good weather (so far), Murphy says running Yogafest is a joy. "You can also see the joy it brings to other people," he says.

COST: \$48 for a day pass (\$40 for early birds).

WEBSITE: www.yogafest.com.au

PHOTOGRAPHY FROM TOP: COURTESY OF YOGAFEST; LOTTE STEKELBURG (WWW.LOTTESTEKELBURG.NL)



Local yogis get a taste of YogaFest in Brisbane.

3HO SUMMER SOLSTICE SADHANA CELEBRATION

16-25 JUNE
ESPANOLA, USA

This celebration in New Mexico packs Kundalini asana, chanting and meditation into a transformative eight days, with up to 2000 people attending. But don't expect any sleep-ins or luxury amenities. "You get up at 3am for a cold shower," says Wilson, who attended last year's festival. Highlights of the celebration include a daily morning sadhana, with people like acclaimed kirtan artists Snatam Kaur and Guru Singh leading chanting. "It's like an amazing concert every morning followed by back-to-back workshops with teachers from around the world," says Wilson.

COST: From \$750 for an eight-day pass (\$641 for early birds). Includes free camping (BYO tent).

WEBSITE: www.3ho.org

July

DUTCH YOGA FESTIVAL

1-3 JULY
TERSCHELLING, THE NETHERLANDS

Arriving on the Dutch island of Terschelling, it's hard not to be relaxed—tickets to the Dutch Yoga Festival include all workshops, meals from Australian chef Lauren Windsor, yogi teas and, of course, a bicycle. About 100km from Amsterdam, it's a 45-minute ferry ride across to the 30km-long island, where wide beaches and sand dunes host numerous festival tents. English is the language of the weekend, so opportunities abound for Aussies to meet their European counterparts over drum journeys, shakti dance, therapeutic flying (think AcroYoga with a twist), and classes from Swiss, Swedish and (mainly) Dutch teachers from all traditions. The beachside location is integral to the experience, so get ready to embrace sand in your mat (or tent, or yoga kit) at this relaxed European event.

COST: From \$270 for a three-day pass, including meals, drinks, rental bike and a spot for your tent (rental tents and airbeds additional if required).

WEBSITE: www.yogafestival.info >>

Beachside meditation at the Dutch Yoga Festival.



experience

Hundreds of people turn up for classes at Wanderlust.



>> WANDERLUST DATE TBC

LAKE TAHOE, USA

As if the high of attending a yoga festival isn't enough, Wanderlust now offers the chance to take a class with Shiva Rea at 2700 metres. Located in Squaw Valley, part of the Lake Tahoe region of northern California (and popular with skiers in winter), Wanderlust boasts "location, location, location" when its hedonistic mix of yoga and music takes over the Sierra Nevada for a long weekend every summer. While generous dashings of rock-star yogis make teaching appearances, there's an equal focus on music; Moby, Brazilian Girls and Yard Dogs Road Show all played Wanderlust in 2010. While the great outdoors plays a key role in the mountain vibe, on this occasion you won't need to camp: instead, festival organisers suggest renting a hotel room or a spot in one of the many private homes dotted around Squaw Valley.

COST: TBC. 2010 pricing was \$450 for four days.

WEBSITE: www.wanderlustfestival.com

September

BHAKTI FEST

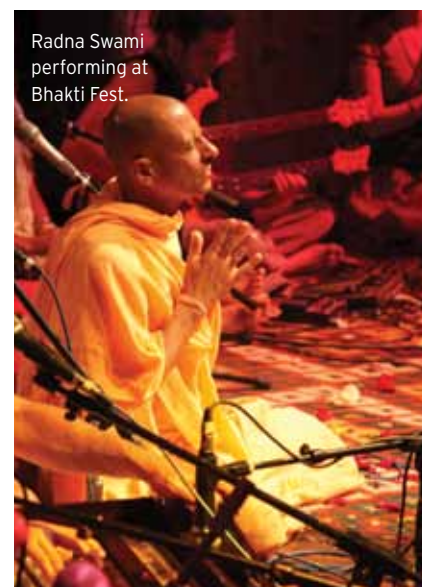
7-12 SEPTEMBER
JOSHUA TREE, USA

Never thought you could rock out to the lyrics "Govinda Jaya Jaya, Gopala Jaya Jaya"? Donna De Lory was just one of

the kirtan stars who joined 3500 yogis in proving that not only can yogic chanting be better than a rock concert, it can go for longer. Held at Joshua Tree, on 182 hectares in the middle of the Californian desert, Bhakti Fest 2010 boasted 80 hours of continuous chanting from folks like Krishna Das, Jai Uttal and Wah! Those dragging themselves away from the music will find plenty of actual asana classes on offer, but this is one yoga event where the melody is king. If you're ready to let kirtan lead you on its merry way this is the one to hit in 2011.

COST: TBC. Expect to pay around \$300 for four days (early-bird rates will save you almost 50 per cent).

WEBSITE: www.bhaktifest.com



Radna Swami performing at Bhakti Fest.

POWER TO THE PEACEFUL FESTIVAL

DATE TBC

SAN FRANCISCO, USA

Sure, San Francisco is somewhat of a year-round urban hippie haven, but things just get better at the annual Power To The Peaceful Festival (PTTP), where 5000 yogis bow down together to start their day with a two-hour group practice. Of course, there are 45,000 others at Michael Franti's brainchild—a merging of music, arts, activism and yoga that has taken over Golden Gate Park every year since 1999 to raise funds and awareness for health, education, youth and environmental causes. If you want an instant group of friends, why not volunteer—like most of the major festivals listed here, working at PTTP is a great way to get behind-the-scenes access while helping a great cause.

COST: \$5 donation for entry to the festival, \$10 for afterparty.

WEBSITE: www.powertothepeaceful.org

YOGA JOURNAL COLORADO CONFERENCE

18-25 SEPTEMBER
ESTES PARK, USA

Going strong for 16 years come 2011, the Colorado conference is a biggy on the US conference calendar. While most of the event is held inside, creative scheduling sees visitors don their fleeces and head into the crisp Rocky Mountain air to make yogic spirals out of pine cones, hang out with local elk and try out yoga slacklining under the trees. While the 2011 faculty has yet to be named, the conference regularly manages to pull in a cast of high-profile teachers—everyone from Shiva Rea and Power Yoga founder Baron Baptiste through to masters such as BKS Iyengar "play" Estes Park, so stay tuned.

COST: TBC. Expect to pay around \$450 for the two-day main conference, with plenty of pre- and post-conference options.

WEBSITE: www.yjevents.com/ep/

October

ANNUAL YOGA FESTIVAL, MILAN

14-16 OCTOBER
MILAN, ITALY

With 5000 Italians bowing down every year in Milan, Italy's largest yoga festival is on a growth spurt gearing up for its fifth year. Teaching alongside the Italians will be teachers from Switzerland and Belgium, but don't discount the possibility of an Aussie or two showing up—Australian teacher Lance Schuler was welcomed with open arms recently. If October feels a bit late for you, you can head to one of the other yoga festivals in Italy that the Milan organisers also look after. Head to Rome in June, or try out the newest addition to Italy Yoga Festival circuit, a mountain-based event being held a stone's throw from the Swiss border in the spa town of Merano in May.

COST: A tiny \$7 gets you access to all events in a given year.

WEBSITE: www.yogafestival.it



Anti-gravity Yoga at Milan's Annual Yoga Festival.

December

NEW YEAR CELEBRATION AND RETREAT

31 DECEMBER
MANGROVE MOUNTAIN, AUSTRALIA

Every year, Satyananda Yoga's Mangrove Mountain ashram (on the central coast of NSW) draws a few hundred people to its tranquil bush setting for a blissfully yogic New Year's Eve alternative, where gentle yoga classes, dining under the trees and a morning dose of seva (aka: cleaning, weeding, tidying up) are all part of the package. The trick may be in selecting who you tell: aside from being alcohol free, this celebration involves hours of mantra chanting, an aspect of practice which not all of your non-yoga friends may be into. For Sydney yogi Kirralie Dillon, the difference is just part of the attraction.

"It's so different to what you expect of New Year's Eve, which tends to be very external and stimulating, making it difficult to reflect on what's going on inside," Dillon says. "For me, it was a magical experience. There are simple joys such as homemade chai and sweet treats, and people come and go from the sadhana hall, where chanting is continuous for hours before the arrival of midnight."

COST: \$65 overnight (includes accommodation, dinner, breakfast and morning yoga), \$25 evening event only.

Website: www.satyananda.net

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