

DREAMSCAPES

TRAVEL AND LIFESTYLE

SPRING 2015

YOGA IN
INDIA

FLORIDA
GEMS

CELEBRATING OUR

20TH
YEAR

AIMING FOR
PAN AM GOLD
IN ONTARIO

CRUISE THE
GREAT LAKES

INVESTING IN
PARADISE

YOGA SANCTUARIES

INDIA IS NOT ONLY THE BIRTHPLACE OF YOGA.



TOP: Mandrem Beach in northern Goa is still very secluded. India Tourism Toronto

ABOVE: Most yoga retreats or shalas provide simple, but healthy, vegetarian fare. incredibleindia.org

BY MARIELLEN WARD

It's arguably the best place in the world to learn and practise this ancient art and science. Here are some of the best spots in India to "get bendy."

RISHIKESH: THE YOGA CAPITAL

At dawn in Rishikesh, as the sun rises over the mountains and illuminates the sacred town and the emerald green Ganga (Ganges) River that runs through it, people begin their morning yoga practice. Incense wafts through the air, temple bells ring and a quiet sense of sanctity pervades.

In this picturesque spot in north India, at the place where the Ganga River emerges from the mountains and heads toward the plains, people have been gathering since time immemorial for spiritual practice.

Today Rishikesh is often referred to as the "yoga capital of the world." It's chock-a-block with ashrams, yoga classes, stores selling chakra beads and harem pants, meditation courses and river-facing cafés specializing in western-Indian fusion food.

In Rishikesh, there's comfort in having many other foreigners in town while being exposed to genuine, authentic yoga teachings. It's a great destination for yoga students, newcomers to India and solo female travellers. And it's very accessible from Delhi via a four-to five-hour train ride or a quick flight to nearby Dehra Dun, plus taxi.

There are innumerable options for yoga study in Rishikesh. You can stay in an ashram and take a one-month (or longer) intensive yoga teacher training course.

Anand Prakash Yoga Ashram in Tapovan (the quieter end of Rishikesh) has one of the best in town, designed for foreign students. You can stay in a guesthouse or hotel and just take drop-in classes at one of the many places that offer them. Or, just hang out at the Little Buddha Cafe, overlooking the river, and drink banana lassis and talk about going to yoga class.

MYSORE: HOME OF ASHTANGA

The Mysore Palace, with its imposing façade, onion domes and gilded rooms, dominates the centre of Mysore and lends the town an air of exotic magnificence. About a three-hour train ride from bustling Bengaluru (Bangalore), the capital of the state of Karnataka, Mysore is much slower paced, a charming city of temples, markets and yoga *shalas* (places to do yoga), surrounded by green rolling hills.

The most well-known yoga *shala* in Mysore is the Ashtanga Yoga Institute, which was founded by Sri Krishna Pattabhi Jois in 1948. Pattabhi Jois is known the world over for popularizing ashtanga yoga. He taught here until just before his death, at the age of 93, in 2009.

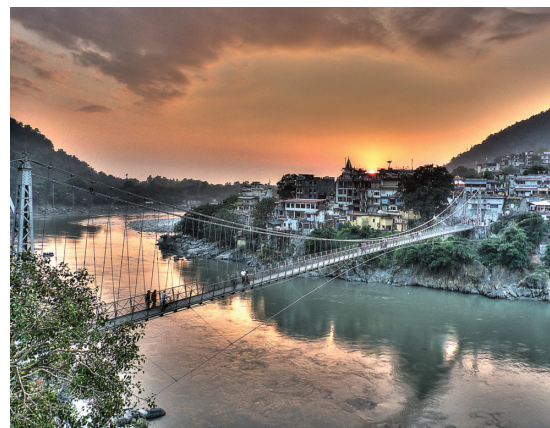
Ashtanga yoga is a series of moving postures, linked by the breath. It's a vigorous style that creates heat in the body. Though they might be together in the same room, each student has their own practice, which follows certain sequences and patterns. This style is called Mysore practice, because it emanated from here. Other gurus, classes and yoga *shalas* are available in Mysore, however ashtanga remains the style of choice here, due to the influence of Pattabhi Jois.

The Ashtanga Yoga Institute is located in a leafy suburb of Mysore, Gokulam, where many of the better yoga schools are found. Foreign students in Mysore generally stay in private homes or flats, as many of the schools do not have a residence facility; and

if they do, the facilities are usually very basic. Students are expected to stay one to two months or longer; drop-in classes are not encouraged. However you may find yourself catching the Mysore vibe and not want to leave.

GOA: YOGA ON THE BEACH

Goa, in southern India, is the top tourist destination in the country. A former Portuguese colony, the tiny, tropical state has a unique culture, a coastline on the Arabian Sea and a laid-back vibe that attracts beach bums, hippies, party animals, vacationers and yogis from all over India and the world. Full-moon raves on the beach originally put Goa on the hippie trail, however they have been severely curtailed in recent years.



ABOVE: Take in spectacular views from the Lakshman Jhula, an iron suspension bridge that spans the Ganga River in Rishikesh.
incredibleindia.org

BELOW: A yoga instructor demonstrates postures at an old hotel in Rishikesh, India.
Darko Sikman/Shutterstock





ABOVE TOP: Welcoming about three million visitors a year, the historical Palace of Mysore is one of the most famous tourist attractions in India. Noppasin/Shutterstock

ABOVE CENTRE: Colourful Indian spices and tea can be purchased at the Anjuna flea market in Goa, India. Pikoso.kz/Shutterstock

ABOVE BOTTOM: Initiated in 1610, Dasara is a 10-day festival held on the streets of Mysore in the month of September or October. incredibleindia.org

Goa is an ideal sunny holiday destination replete with wide, sandy beaches, swaying palm trees, pink sunsets and warm ocean waves. Beach shacks serve fresh, tender coconuts, beer and spicy Goan fish; resorts offer massages on the beach, meditation and yoga classes; and stores, hawkers and flea markets sell a dizzying array of flowing beach wear and om symbol necklaces.

Goa has become an increasingly popular yoga destination and retreat centres are sprouting up like mushrooms. Generally speaking, north Goa is the busier half of the state, and where most yoga centres are located. Most also focus on wellness and serve healthy vegetarian food, while some offer Ayurvedic treatments, massages and meditation.

The top-rated yoga retreats include Oceanic Yoga in Mandrem Beach, SWAN Yoga in Assagao and Little Cove Holiday Retreat in south Goa.

WORDS OF WISDOM

Before choosing a yoga retreat centre or ashram, do your research and find out if the instructors are well trained, from a

known and respected school, such as the Bihar School of Yoga, Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres, Ashtanga Yoga Institute, Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram and Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute. Make sure the yoga instruction offered is at your level and neither too advanced nor too basic for you. If you are seeking a teacher-training certificate, inquire about the teachers' credentials and where the certificate is recognized.

Also, read reviews and descriptions carefully about what is or is not included. Some yoga centres and ashrams have very basic accommodation (cold showers, hard beds and Indian-style toilets) and most offer only simple vegetarian fare. Be sure to ask what you need to bring (towel, ear plugs, water bottle, etc.).

Most of all go with an open mind, leave your cares and your gadgets behind and immerse yourself in the bliss of experiencing yoga in India. **DS**

TRAVEL PLANNER

For more information on India, visit incredibleindia.org.