

NO PLACE LIKE 'OM'

Local yoga studios share the path to balance.

By Jeanne Ferris

With GPS and Google Maps, getting lost in the city is hard to do these days. But getting lost in a menu of yoga practices can be easy if you're unfamiliar with Sanskrit.

The world according to Maharishi Patanjali's "Yoga Sutras"—profound Hindu works of philosophy written about 2,000 years ago—is considered by adept devotees of traditional yoga meditation to be the map to finding balance. Focusing on external stretching while detoxifying through breath rewards a student with clarity and flexibility, which is both transformative and curative. Consider it an internal GPS for finding enlightenment and revitalization.

On this map, there are eight limbs or disciplines practiced in sequential order. As the third limb, Asana postures are most common focal points in yoga. And the wildly popular practice of Bikram is comprised of 26 postures with two breathing exercises specifically guided with a verbal script by a teacher. The room is then heated to 105 degrees Fahrenheit with 40-percent humidity. Pranayama—mindful breathing—is a limb practiced in the more traditional shalas or studios.

"Pranayama is my personal favorite and the most powerful tool to balance our mind, body and spirit," said Beth Kupanoff, a Vinyasa yogini.

"Our breath is the bridge from our body to our mind. It alone is the tool which can bring them together," Kupanoff continued, quoting Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Buddhist monk.

From these eight limbs, 44 practices have evolved over time—

and often, when East meets West, offshoots like "Hot Yoga"—which employs moist heat to work with sports injuries and lack of flexibility—develop with less strict adherence to precise asanas, as styles and techniques vary on the individual teacher.

Follow the yellow brick road of yoga to a state-of-the-art, climate-controlled yoga shala named Yoga Six, the site that housed Haute Yoga until recently. Owner Bill Koman is a cancer survivor of two rounds of lymphoma. The St. Louis native said he found his way to balance with yoga and meditation seven years ago: "I wanted to branch out a little and try some different ways to balance my life, says Koman. "So yoga was one of the things I tried."

Still continuing with his yoga practice twice a week, Koman has now turned his passion into an investment, which he is creating into a chain across the heartland (St. Louis is the site of the first location) and San Diego. Koman met Haute Yoga founder, Dino Flacco—who succumbed to prostate cancer in last year—in St. Louis nearly 20 years ago. Koman admired Flacco's studio concepts and became an investor, recently purchasing the Solana Beach and Carlsbad studios. Adding these to a Point Loma studio and a 4S Ranch location planned for 2013, Koman has put his money where his practice is.

"The number six (in Yoga Six) refers to the six degrees of separation or the idea that everyone in the world is separated from everyone else by only six links. This interconnectedness, and the role each of us plays in it, is the common thread that holds infinite possibilities," said Lauren Cutshaw, director of marketing for Yoga Six. "It also represents the six pillars of Y6:



body, breath, mind, heart, intuition and the skill of crafting yoga.”

Classes that reflect the new ownership brand include Y6 Barre and Y6 Sculpt: yoga-inspired fitness classes. Minor exterior and interior changes have been made, but what remains at Yoga Six is the highest intention for the good of all concerned.

Continue north on 101 to the Jois Yoga shala in the energy vortex of Encinitas. Under the photograph of Sri Krishna Pattabhi Jois’ clear gaze, Ashtanga is practiced in his tradition. With the scent of sandalwood and free Chai tea, conversation is encouraged after class. Children’s Ashtanga classes are every Wednesday and Saturday. A free South-Indian breakfast is served Friday mornings after the first 6 a.m. class.

When asked her personal motto, Jois CEO Salima Ruffin said: “I achieve happiness and peace of mind when my life is balanced.”

Ashtanga has achieved an international reputation with a devoted celebrity following—although not for the faint of heart (literally). Jois’ teachers have studied directly with the Jois family and are certified after a minimum of four visits to the Sri K Pattabhi Jois Ashtanga Yoga Institute in the India, the motherland for yoga.

One of the final closing asanas in yoga is padmasana—the lotus pose, or the pose of serenity. Devotees click their heels together in the hopes of finding their way ‘om’ to transcendental self—and peace and balance come in a single breath. ■

