

YOGA ^{IN} Bali

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I am excited to return to Bali after more than 30-years. I expect change from the tranquil, traditional Bali I met in the 80s that had such a huge impact on me. I fell in love with the simplicity, the deep spirituality of the people, a spirituality that imbued every waking moment, not one reserved for Sunday's like I witnessed in my Christian upbringing. Bali is a Hindu island. Norman, my taxi driver tells me all of Indonesia was once Hindu before Muslims arrived and now the sacred Brahmin tradition remains only in the south on Bali and other smaller islands.

I am here to relax and immerse myself in my yoga practice. Over the last 15-years Ubud, once known for its artisans and rice farms, has traded its world famous rice terraces for air-conditioned shops, restaurants, world-class resorts and health spas. It has become the yoga capital of Bali, with people visiting from all over the world to practise their Downward Dog, Handstands and pranayama with numerous teachers and studios that permeate the area. The best known and my starting place is Yoga Barn,

I have the good fortune of attending an intensive Laya Yoga session with the phenomenal teacher, Ayurveda practitioner and Tantric Devi that is Umaa Inder; who studied in the Gurukula tradition with her teacher for 14-years: a true embodiment of yoga. I would need another article to share with you just some of the magic that Umaa embodies. Finding we had a lot in common, our down to earth, heartfelt, knowledgeable, funny, conscious conversation, embraced the yoga of Africa, India, Bali and America, truly cross cultural and inspired.





Those who know me know my work is all about energy, and Umaa is an absolute powerhouse, not afraid to dissolve toxic behavioural patterns of the body, mind and spirit, in exchange for reconnecting you with your true essence. No wonder I resonated with her, and no wonder she's a highly sought after practitioner. But as it pertains to this article, I experienced a powerful, unique session and conversed at length in an attempt to get a flavour of yoga in Bali.

What I see and understand from Umaa is that Bali is a melting pot, attracting people from all walks of life and all ages. People who share a common experience of needing to break away and redefine the meaning and purpose of their lives. This is often triggered by deep spiritual experience or a health crisis or other major turning point in life. Bali offers space and time to seek answers to long held questions. It provides the opportunity to explore new pathways and contexts for challenges people often suffer alone. In Bali your uniqueness can be supported; plus, knowing you are not alone, is a great tonic. There is unity in diversity here in Bali. This creates a special harmony, so when people come here they seldom want to leave.

To deepen my Astanga yoga practice, while here in Bali I sought out long-time Astanga yoga teachers, Kirsten Berg and Mitchell Gold. Kirsten has been offering regular Mysore practice in Bali since 1998, way before the wave of Eat, Pray Love enthusiasts descended on the island in search of its healing magic. Kirsten's exploration into metaphysics and interest in consciousness began in her teens. Coming from a family of Euro-Asians and having a mother born in Indonesia, means Kirsten is no stranger to the delights of Bali, like daily ritual, delicious food, warm relaxed people and the inviting sense of ease found everywhere.

I find ease and welcome in their classes. These are especially for students with an established Astanga practice. People come from all over the world, staying for months to practise. Kirsten and Mitchell are aware of the legacy they hold, having studied directly with Pattabhi Jois, while still creating a nurturing space that allows the intelligence of the practice to be experienced by the student. They gently offer suggestions, taking care not to leave a signature or impose themselves on students. There is a wonderful sense of being held and encouraged while having space to reach the heightened inner state that connects us with Self, our inner teacher. Holding this intention is rare, as yoga teachers, consciously or unconsciously, are often so keen to share their knowledge, that they run the risk of overpowering the student's valuable inner teacher. The practice itself leads us inside.



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Mitchell points out that working in a pair is a great way to keep your ego in check as a teacher. It creates balance. I often notice one of them meditating and holding sacred space, while the other skilfully adjusts. It's not just about the physical, as Astanga may appear due to the advanced poses it fosters. Rather it is about yoga tristana – internal balance of breath, bandhas, and drishti. The breath connects body, mind and spirit; bandhas are locks that strengthen the flow of energy and drishti develops concentration. Together they provide a path from the external to the internal, transporting you deeper to connect with Self, this is to yoke, the true purpose of yoga. Reaching back to source, so we can move forward with greater awareness.

As teachers Kirsten and Mitchell speak of the dance and energy exchange that takes place during Mysore classes, where the teacher does not stand at the front as the expert directing, but instead moves around navigating the subtle needs of each students. This cultivates Sangha, to use a Buddhist term, togetherness, where teachers are also students, and somehow when the energy is just right, a powerful sweetness is felt by all. A grace. It takes experienced and deeply inspired teachers to offer this to students. It's rare but beautiful. Mitchell called it the “Gift of Mysore” classes.

I am growing to believe as I speak with gentle souls such as Kirsten and Mitchell, that it is ‘space’ people seek when they come to Bali. As we step away from our busy worlds, and disconnect from the identities we built, we create a specific external space, as Umaa says, “there is a breakdown of the lie.” The right teacher and teachings leads us from this space to our own inner sanctum and that is where the magic, so many seek, resides.

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This inner space is also deeply creative. I am reconnecting with my creativity and developing a new programme to support yoga teachers and wellness experts to extend their reach and excel in the work they are passionate about. Being in Bali surrounded by beauty, everything is becoming clear.


A visionary artist and sculptor; Kirsten creates amazing 20-foot high installations. When asked about her art and yoga, she immediately replies that “art and yoga come from the same place.” The patterns of consciousness, the imaginings may be received in meditation. She says “the inspiration is similar, the expression different.”

Bali is an enchanting place. The Balinese exude art and yoga and live according to the philosophy of Tri Hirta Karana; which cites three causes of wellbeing and prosperity:

- 1. Harmony among people**
- 2. Harmony with our environment**
- 3. Harmony with God**

Good food, daily ritual, art, compassion and generosity of spirit all reside and radiate in glorious harmony. There is perfect alignment between humans, nature and the Divine. Not just theory but beautiful moment-by-moment conscious living. For visitors, Bali offers a level of luxury and beauty that allows more attention to Spirit. Once our basic needs are met, our consciousness can begin to rise.





Bali takes us beyond the accelerated world we live in, beyond the wave of urban cool offering yoga as the latest trend; and reminds us to attune to the rhythms of natural law. We are invited to experience ourselves in greater alignment with our essential nature, which of course is yoga. I love to see the banten - offerings that are made throughout the day, as people pause dedicating time and energy to the sacred in everyday. Each person can find something special here to re-connect them to Self.

I took a Vinyasa Flow class at Yoga Barn, it completed with Savasana (Corpse pose) deep relaxation. We were invited to roll onto the right side, no stretching, just curl into foetal position, and told the corpse marks the death of the old and now we are entering a rebirth, a new day, new opportunities.

Bali has changed, the old tradition blends with a new spirituality. Together offering the spiritual seeker ways to consciously infuse every waking moment with energy. In Bali lives are still being transformed, as mine was years ago, in the most simple and beautiful way.

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