



THE *yoga* PROMISE

When you put your mind and body in motion,
you begin a journey into truth, health and long life.
It all begins with the challenge on your mat.

BY CANDICE MUTSCHLER

While many people think of yoga in terms of physical fitness, it actually began some 5,000 years ago as an intensive spiritual practice designed to surpass limitations of the mind and free the soul from the material world. The ancient ritual evolved from the spiritual to one that incorporated exercises meant to unlock the human body's potential. The body was, after all, considered the temple of one's immortal soul.

Since the 19th century — when yoga was introduced in the West — it has proliferated, crossing cultural and language boundaries, enticing more than 30 million devotees to practice on a regular basis. It is one of the fastest growing health movements today.

At Mind & Motion Studio, Longboat Key Club and Resort's center for fitness and well-being, yoga plays an integral role. "The variety of classes offered at the studio allows members to create a complete fitness program," explains Barbara Bartelle, the Studio's supervisor. "Weight training, cardio and yoga are three components of a balanced workout. You need all three."

Bartelle, a 30-year veteran of the fitness industry, says classes such as

yoga are important because too many people don't stretch before they exercise, and a major benefit of yoga is increased flexibility through safe and gentle stretching. While this obvious benefit may prompt people to try yoga, it's usually not what compels them to return. Instead, it's the notion of a more unified approach to well-being that challenges both the body and the spirit.

"There is a sort of euphoria that happens after yoga — a quiet euphoria that keeps people coming back," says Leslie Tally, a yoga instructor at Mind & Motion Studio.

This euphoria rises from deep within. As one masters the mechanics of yoga — the postures, the breathing — clarity seems to follow. The body transforms from pain or stiffness into an instrument of power, strong from its very core. Each muscle is used in strength and balance. Metabolic fires ignite. Previously untapped stores of energy become available. The body is liberated, the spirit is awakened.

If it sounds strenuous or intimidating, relax. "Yoga is for people of all ages and abilities," Tally insists. "People come to class who have no training at all, and enjoy the class. They often feel right away that yoga will help them."

GET MOVING!

Mind & Motion Studio offers classes for members and guests over 16 years of age, and for all fitness levels. While some classes take place on the beach or in the resort pool, the studio's waterfront locale and spa-like ambiance make indoor workouts a true pleasure. The professional instructors can suggest which classes would be most appropriate in achieving one's fitness goals.

TAKE IT OUTSIDE: Beach Boot Camp and Beach Power Walk are fat-burning classes intended to shape and tone the body. Beach Island Stretch and Beach Yoga will improve flexibility, balance and strength — all while enjoying a fabulous view. Aquacise is taught at the resort pool (and, really, it does count as exercise).

HIT THE FLOOR: The studio's suspended wood floor is designed to absorb shock and reduce stress on joints. Mats and props are available for use, so members and guests need only bring a positive attitude and a little motivation. From yoga, Pilates and body sculpting to more intensive classes designed to get the heart pumping, such as spinning, step and cardio, there's something for everyone.

The Mind & Motion Studio is open Monday-Saturday, located in the Chart House building at the southwest end of Longboat Key Club and Resort. Call 941-383-2080 to reserve classes or for more information. For a complete list of classes and their descriptions, visit longboatkeyclub.com and click on Fitness.

— C.M.



Indeed, anyone with an appetite for growth, personal discovery and improved health can benefit from a healing yoga practice. “I came to study yoga seriously in 2000 because my own health was poor and I was physically unable to do the things that I had done for years,” Tally shares. “Once I began a steady practice of yoga, my health improved. I became convinced that this was the way to truly help people who didn't feel well.”

There are numerous styles of yoga, each based on the same physical postures, or *asanas*, but with specific areas of emphasis. Hatha (gentle), Vinyasa (breath-synchronized movements and sun salutations), Ashtanga (fast-paced power yoga), Iyengar (body alignment, props), Kundalini (awakens energy at the base of the spine) and Bikram (a.k.a. “hot yoga,” involving a heated room) are some of the more widely practiced styles. New methods are emerging as yogis expand on existing styles by incorporating meditation, chanting or spiritual teachings.

Mind & Motion Studio currently offers two levels of classes: gentle and beginner/intermediate. The style varies based on the instructor. Tally, a registered yoga teacher who is also completing certification in yoga therapy, teaches mostly Iyengar yoga but incorporates other methods as well.

Newcomers to yoga quickly learn that, unlike some sports or fitness programs, yoga isn't about competition or comparison. In fact, it's impossible to watch your neighbor when in pose because all your attention is on form and breathing. Students focus while Mind & Motion instructors monitor them, demonstrate or assist. “Yoga is like watching a flower bloom ... allowing the body to open in its own time,” Tally says. “Doing yoga teaches us to be honest with ourselves.”

Its benefits are well documented. “Yoga addresses such health concerns as high blood pressure, joint pain, lower back pain, cardiac and lung care, lupus, arthritis, fibromyalgia, insomnia and more,” Tally says. “By doing the poses, the skeletal system moves toward its correct position, allowing energy to flow more freely through the body.” The poses also encourage stimulation of organs. “Like a sponge, toxins are wrung out of tissues and organs, and fresh blood and oxygen rush in,” she adds.

But Tally notes that learning proper breathing, or *pranayama*, might be the most powerful aspect of the yoga taught at Mind & Motion Studio. “It keeps the lungs and heart strong, yet soft,” she says. Meanwhile, the body gets firm. “With persistent practice, you will see results,” she adds.

Beyond the physical, yoga is said to help alleviate depression, promote a renewed sense of purpose, and even inspire positive changes in other areas of life. By mastering the postures and learning to breathe, students release fears, fat, toxins, stress, soreness and anxieties. It is the ultimate path to mental, spiritual, emotional and physical fitness.

“There are no limitations,” Tally says. “Only opportunities for growth.” ✎