

All Things Yoga

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All things yoga with Lasse Holopainen of Maruia River Retreat.

What can a guest expect from yoga classes at Maruia River Retreat?

Firstly, that attending the yoga class is not compulsory. I find that when the 'must' disappears, then people are a little more open. Secondly, I like to create an experience where it is about them, about *their* practice.

Even if you've never practised yoga before, my goal is that you leave with the fundamentals for a solid, life-long practice. And if you have been to yoga before and have a practice, that you go away with a deeper insight of what that practice is.

Yoga can change the neuro pathways and connections in the brain. The asanas or physical postures create moments of elasticity in the brain when you are reforming all these neural connections. During those moments, we are childlike again.

If someone stays for three days and practises yoga daily, what can they expect?

On day one, I give them the basics of muscle activation and a scientific approach to stretching. A combination of the scientific knowledge of the Western tradition and the discipline of the Eastern tradition.

When you give a student a kinesthetic, or 'felt' experience, even a forward bend of just tilting the pelvis forward with the knees bent can be very powerful. And before they know it, they can touch their hands to the ground.

Even after three or four days of yoga, the benefits go forward in your life, they linger. By the third day, I'm instructing very little.

In the first class, I do an analysis. I have people on chairs so I can see how they move around and whether they have any issues. But even on a chair, I can make it very challenging, even for highly fit individuals. You are using your muscles as resistance bands to the opposite muscles. It can be hard work, but it doesn't matter what fitness level you are, you can still work.

Do you find that most guests are open to yoga?

Surprisingly, yes. When we run as a hotel when it is not a retreat weekend. I've had times when everyone comes here and nobody is planning to do the yoga. They do the first yoga class and then they show up for all three days. Then they all eat together because it becomes a shared experience. For dinners, even if you want your own space, we serve at the same time, so there's still a sense of being a part of something that is going on.

For the retreats, people arrive here unsure if they are going to like it. Will there be alcohol? Are they going to be serving meat? (Yes, to both questions.) And what do you mean, 'yoga'? And you have a bit of a chat. And

what we have found, is that if you have a group that goes to the first day of yoga, they will tell the others to go. And by the end, everyone is there.

In general, people have been very receptive and our reviews on yoga have been very good. But most importantly for me, people have said, "I'd like to continue, where can I find a teacher?"

I've found that what we do here especially resonates with couples. A lot of wives bring their husbands to the yoga class and the type of yoga I teach tends to resonate well with men. They get it. It is an intellectual engagement and it challenges them. And then they start working quite hard. And I like that, because then I can push them.

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Words —Diane Covington-Carter