



**Bikram Yoga - a challenge**

*Image by Ashton Bawden*



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## **REVIEW: Is Bikram the New Zumba**

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**Zumba is the latest exercise craze sweeping the country but could a different type of exercise become the next big thing?**

**Bikram Yoga is a form of yoga that involves 26 poses and two breathing exercises over 90 minutes in a room heated to a constant 38C. It was developed more than 30 years ago in India by Yoga Master Bikram Choudhury and was originally intended as a healing therapy to fix his injured knee.**

The heat creates better circulation within the body allowing for deeper, safer stretches. It also causes sweating, which promotes detoxification of the body. It is also believed that the heat revitalises all of the body's systems.

Authorised Ashtanga Teacher Dr Jean Byrne said that there are many benefits of yoga but it varies depending on the type of yoga being undertaken.

"Hatha, physical postures, are understood to have a variety of benefits including relaxation, hormonal balancing, stress reduction, increased strength, increased flexibility, [and] an overall sense of wellbeing.

"However, that's not the traditional orientation of yoga. Traditionally, yoga is practised to connect with something greater than our individual selves. Some people call it God, some consciousness or awareness, or in yoga terms, Brahman."

Dr Byrne explained that anybody can undertake yoga, regardless of whether they are pregnant, have a heart disease, or an injury.

She said: "A good yoga teacher can teach yoga to anyone. Even a quadriplegic can learn yoga with a good, passionate instructor. They may not be able to do all the asana (postures) but can still comprehend and undertake many of the other practises beyond asana."

Unlike Bikram, Ashtanga Yoga work involves internal heating through Vinyasa, where breathing is linked to movement. Sweating still occurs but the body is able to self-regulate this heat so it can be adapted for the individual.

After searching online and finding a Bikram studio in Perth I was excited to attend a class and reap all the benefits that Bikram seemed to offer. Sadly, I was slightly disillusioned. I had anticipated the sweating but had also thought I would feel the Zen achieved when undertaking other types of Yoga classes.

Boy, was my prediction wrong.

I was a little nervous. I had been told I couldn't eat for two hours before the class and I had to drink lots of water beforehand. I couldn't get in touch with anyone at the studio so I had to just turn up and hope for the best.

The classes are supposed to be for any fitness level and flexibility but the combination of my zero fitness, zero flexibility, and weak ankles meant that I was way out my league and facing a bigger challenge than I had first thought.

As soon as I walked in the room and felt the heat it took every thing I had to not turn around and leave. How was I going to survive in this for 90 minutes, while having to move?

The sweat doesn't just come out of your pores and sit on your skin - it pours out, dripping to the floor. I spent the whole class fighting with my body to get in the poses and stay there. When doing the poses there was no chance to relax - it seemed to be a constant battle and half the time my grip slipped because of my wet skin.

It didn't take long before I was feeling dizzy and seeing stars. We were told at the start that if we experienced any of these feelings we weren't allowed to leave the room, we just had to sit down until the feeling passed. Thankfully, there seemed to be quite a few newbies there and I didn't feel like a complete idiot when I was spending more and more time on the floor or failing to get into a pose.

Needless to say, I spent more time on the floor in "Dead Man's Pose" - the name says it all - than I did standing up trying to twist my arms and legs in seemingly impossible ways. Even laying down doing nothing I could feel the sweat running out of every single pore in my skin and soaking through my clothes.

Lying down was, at times, relaxing. After blocking out the teacher's fast-paced instructions I was able to focus on my breathing and allow my heart rate to slow down before I was brave enough to stand up again and attempt the next set of stretches. Lying there on the floor, though, in my own little pool of sweat, I couldn't help but feel like I could have paid less to sweat out my toxins in a sauna - that's certainly what the room felt like.

I just couldn't wait for the 90 minutes to be over so I could step outside in the cool air, get home, and get out of my soaking wet clothes. Surprisingly, despite the fact I hadn't joined in with every pose, I woke up the next morning feeling sore - feeling muscles in my body I didn't know existed.

Despite of myself - not one to be defeated - I will be returning for another class. Or maybe I could try out an Ashtanga class and work on my own internal heating.

Namaste.

**For more information on Bikram Yoga visit this [website](#).**

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