

Y O G A

Some like it hot

These days, there seems to be as many different types of yoga as there are ways to mispronounce ‘namaste’. From classics renewed to – *cough* – yoga in the nude, instructors are working hard to find new and creative ways to engage students in this ancient practice. This month, *Happiful’s* yogi-newbie **Kathryn Wheeler** heads to a hot yoga class to see if it lives up to the hype, or whether it’s all just a bit of a stretch

Loaded up on liquid? Check. Light lunch two hours earlier? Check. Highly absorbent towel for my soon-to-be very sweaty brow? Check.

I’ve arrived at Red Hot Yoga in Guildford for my first ever experience of, you’ve guessed it, hot yoga. The concept is simple – an hour of yoga in a room kept between 38–42°C with a humidity level of 40–50% – but the benefits, so I’ve heard, are ample.

Originally created by popular yoga teacher Bikram Choudhury in the 1970s, the practice is sometimes referred to as ‘Bikram yoga’ – although the yoga community has since sought to move away from the association following a stream of sexual assault claims. Today, there are many forms of hot yoga, from the ‘Hot 26’ – which includes a series of 26 repeated postures – to traditional Vinyasa Flow. For me, however, it was straight to the beginners’ class.

It was a chilly, winter evening when I arrived at the studio, and

the humid heat that washed over me when I first walked into the hot yoga room was very welcome. The room was dark and quiet and, as I weaved my way to a free mat at the back of the room (the classic first-timer spot), others were taking the 10 or so minutes we had before the class began to lie down and relax on their mats – an activity that I quickly learned was more than enough to build up a sweat.


Beginning in a seated position with some gentle stretching to warm up, we then moved into standing poses. The class consisted of mostly static postures with some short flows added in as well, though the motions through the poses are much slower than in standard yoga classes – and, though breathing is so often an important factor in any yoga practice, here it was vital.

Having this awareness – and, consequently, control – over your body is one of the unique qualities of hot yoga; it doesn’t encourage you gently to take back control like in other forms, it demands it. Additionally, hot yoga is thought to

give you a better workout due to an increased heart rate, and the heat also improves flexibility, meaning that you can stretch further than you would do normally.

The temperature of the room meant that each extension through my arms and legs blended into the space around me, and I felt the limits of my body blurring with the hot air as my heart rate raced in the heat. As I made eye contact with myself in the wall of mirrors in front of me, yes, I did notice the stream of sweat running off my body – in fact, more sweat than I thought it was possible to produce – but I also felt strong, serene, and in tune with myself.

The session came to an end and – as I stepped out of the hot yoga room into the cool, essential-oil-infused changing rooms – I felt... quiet. Hot yoga is an invigorating mix of challenging physical exercise, and uplifting mindful moments. From the mind-soothing qualities, to the way that it unlocks new physical limits, it may be time to turn up the heat on your yoga workout – you won’t regret it.



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T R Y A T H O M E

While it wouldn't be easy to replicate a hot yoga room at home without racking up a pricey energy bill, follow the flow below to unlock this ancient, mindful practice:

Mountain pose

Stand on your mat with your hands in prayer positions in front of you. Breathe slowly.

Forward bend

Raise your hands above your head and then slowly bend at the waist to place your hands on the floor or your shins.

Low lunge

Raise your head and step one foot in between your arms, resting the other leg on the floor.

Plank

Step your other foot back to meet the first and tighten your stomach muscles to hold a plank position.

Downward facing dog

Straighten your arms and, keeping your legs straight if you can, raise your hips to create a triangle.

High lunge

Step one leg forward, with your back leg straight and off the mat, and raise your head with your arms by your side.

Forward bend

Come into a forward bend, hanging loosely.

Mountain pose

Straighten up and bring your hands to meet in prayer position in front of you. Breathe. **11**