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## Yoga for the Non-Yogi

My Mission to Become a Yoga All-Star

by *Jamie Hamburg* – January 28, 2009

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When I think yoga, I picture granola, wheatgrass shots, stupid breathing techniques and cheesy airy music that makes me laugh. However, being a high-strung, extremely inflexible individual, several well-meaning friends have recommended that I go the yoga route. Well, I've tried to take their advice many times, and each time I walk away from the class feeling like I just wasted 60 to 90 minutes of my life – not to mention feeling like a total idiot because I'm always the only person who “doesn't get it.” I'd much rather be sweating it out in a kickboxing class or even running like a hamster on a treadmill. I just don't understand how forcing my body to bend and twist into ways it isn't supposed to go will help me achieve “Zen”, as well as – apparently – total body toning.

Recently, with the New Year upon me, I decided that I was in need of a little “calming” influence, and since every single celebrity seems to see yoga as a magic pill, I thought I should jump on the band wagon. But this time would be different. This time, I would embark on a “spiritual” journey to find the yoga class that was right for me. I searched near and far in the city of Chicago, attending four different classes over a one-month period. Here is what I discovered.

### Moksha Yoga

700 N. Carpenter St.

### Vinyasa Yoga 1-2

Nothing helps beat out the rigors of the work week like a Vinyasa yoga class, right? On an icy, foggy Friday afternoon, I headed out to this cozy River West yoga studio to begin my quest for Zen. The 90-minute class was definitely out of my comfort zone. I couldn't even master the basic downward dog pose! And I must admit, I found the chanting a bit uncomfortable. But, here is where I found the first key to enjoying a yoga class: the teacher. A quick glance around the room and I could see that what I was doing was vastly different from what was being done by nearly everyone else in the class. Thankfully, the teacher encouraged me to just “try my best” the first time around. Instead of correcting me, she let me explore the poses without feeling like a complete yogi-illiterate. This simple technique made all the difference in the world, and simply because of her teaching style, I would attend this class again.

Favorite part of the class? At the end, when we were told to lie down for five minutes and relax. Now, if only that little nap would have lasted the whole class! That's yoga I could enjoy!

**Recommendation:** Yoga for the yogi! This was an incredible class, but I feel it could be better enjoyed by someone who truly valued the principles of yoga, such as chanting.

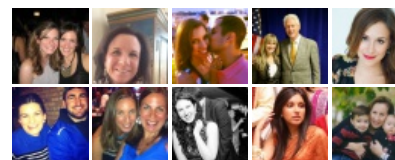
### Exhale Spa



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*Eternal  
nothingness is fine  
if you happen to be  
dressed for it.*

— WOODY ALLEN

945 N. State St.

### **Core Fusion**

This class was a bit of a stretch to qualify it as “yoga”, but I was desperate. On the website, Core Fusion is described as a fusion of “Lotte Berk fundamentals, core conditioning, Pilates and yoga”, so right away, I knew I was cheating. One big plus for this class was that Exhale, located in the heart of the Gold Coast on State Street, is an actual day spa, and I was able to make the most of the “serenity” of this trendy setting. As far as the class, the energy in the room was very different from all of the other yoga classes, and the music was a bit more lively, too. The class itself definitely incorporated some yoga moves, but there were weights, Pilates work and even a ballet bar involved! It was very different from a standard yoga class, but at the same time, I really felt like I was doing some hard-core toning! The downward dog move came up yet again, and thankfully, I already showed improvement

Favorite part of the class? The bar work! I felt like a ballerina (although I may not have looked like one).

**Recommendation:** Yoga for the non-yogi! The problem here is that it’s not necessarily a yoga class. However, if you’re looking for the same results with a little bit more “oomph” in the class itself, then Core Fusion is the class for you. I was also told that yoga lovers attend Core Energy Flow, and I may just have to try that out.

### **Harmony Yoga**

900 N. Franklin Ave., Suite 508

### **Candlelight Vinyasa Yoga**

You know that feeling you get when you think you’ve uncovered a hidden treasure? This is the feeling I got when I walked into Harmony Yoga for Candlelight Yoga on a Friday evening. A couple blocks west of the bustling Gold Coast on Franklin Street, this yoga studio was just removed enough to feel slightly isolated. Hidden in the middle of an extremely well-designed office-like building, I was instantly impressed. Maybe it was the incredible smell of incense that greeted us right when we walked in the door. I say “us” because, after two classes, I realized I could not continue on my Zen journey without a friend by my side. Unfortunately, my yoga buddy was also a former dancer, so I didn’t have the added bonus of using her lack of flexibility to make me feel better about myself.

From the moment we walked into the clean, dimly candle-lit studio, this class just felt different from the others. In addition, the owner/teacher, Heather Patterson, had an instant calming effect on me (which is rare, believe me). The 60-minute class flowed extremely smoothly. I still couldn’t really replicate all of the moves, but Heather made me feel extremely comfortable, and, dare I say it, even a little “relaxed.” When my yoga buddy and I left the class, we decided there was no better way to kick off our weekend!

**Recommendation:** Yoga for the non-yogi! This studio is fresh and new. It’s a real yoga studio without the pretentious vibe I’ve felt in so many other yoga studios. Instead of heading out for a happy hour martini, I would recommend some non-yogi’s first hit this Candlelight Yoga class on a Friday night!

### **Bikram Yoga Chicago, Lincoln Park**

2736 N. Clark St., Unit A

### **Bikram Yoga**

For the grand finale, I figured go big, or go home! Bikram yoga had always scared me, as the class is 90-minutes and performed in extremely hot temperatures. I hate sweating and I had always hated yoga, so this one was a “steer clear” for me. But with my yoga buddy in tow and a few other yoga classes under my belt, I decided to brave the unknown and head out to Lincoln Park for a 6 a.m. Bikram yoga class. The studio itself was not too intimidating and the teacher was very welcoming to newcomers, which I really appreciated.

Right away, I realized that “less is more” when it comes to Bikram, as in less clothing. Some people were wearing barely any clothing, and after five minutes in the steaming hot room, I could see why. We began with breathing techniques and then moved into a series of balance moves. After our first breathing exercise, I was dripping sweat. By the time we hit 30 minutes, I felt like I had went swimming in a pool of my own sweat. While it was a little uncomfortable at times, it was challenging and I felt determined to do my best for the entire 90 minutes! In addition, the teacher was phenomenal, explaining every move perfectly and even more interestingly, telling us how each different move would benefit our health. My yoga buddy and I both agreed that we felt extremely refreshed during the work day after our

wake-up Bikram yoga.

Favorite part of the class? The shower afterwards.

**Recommendation:** Yoga for the non-yogi! I was surprised to come out of the class with this feeling, but Bikram truly is a class for everyone. There were people with all different skill levels in that room, and everyone was so focused on not sweating profusely that when I performed moves incorrectly, I knew no one was watching. If you can adjust to the constant feeling of sweat dripping down your body, then Bikram is the class for you!

#### **Top 5 Tips for Your Zen Journey:**

- 1. Bring a yoga buddy**—You'll feel much more comfortable falling on your face that first time around if you have moral support!
- 2. Get to know your teacher**—I told every single teacher that I was new to yoga and expressed my concerns about catching on quickly. As a result, they went out of their way to make me feel comfortable
- 3. Experiment**—Never in a million years would I have tried Bikram yoga, but I did, and I loved it. There are thousands of yoga classes in Chicago, and one of them will be right for you.
- 4. Keep an open mind**—The principles and rules of yoga can be very intimidating at first, so just try to remember that there is a method to the madness.
- 5. Don't give up**—If you have one bad class, do not swear off yoga forever (like I did!). Head to another studio, check out a different style of yoga and try again!

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