

Yoga Day: From yogalates to beer yoga, America has it all

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Washington: The world is celebrating the International Day of Yoga on Sunday, but Americans have embraced it for years with a whopping 20.4 million, or nine percent of all American adults, practising it to fuel a \$27 billion industry.

From housewives to stressed executives to fitness enthusiasts, an ever growing number of 'yogis' are flocking to Bikram, Ashtanga and Vinyasa studios across the nation from "America's Last Frontier" Alaska, to the national capital of Washington and beyond.

Forbes calls San Francisco-Oakland-San Jose, California as "the most yoga-mad metro area" in America with residents 59 percent more likely to practice yoga than elsewhere. Seattle, home of Microsoft is next only to San Francisco, which was the first city to set up a yoga room at its airport.

Since President Barack Obama came to power in 2009, the first family has made yoga a part of the annual Easter Egg Roll, the largest public event held at the White House, featuring a 'Yoga Garden' on the lawns.

But like all things American, yoga too has gone commercial with the Yoga Journal's Yoga Market in San Francisco showcasing the latest in yoga apparel & accessories, jewellery, nutrition, natural health & beauty, local studios & retreats.

According to a 2012 study by Sports Marketing Surveys for the Journal, yoga enthusiasts are spending \$10.7 billion a year on pants, mats, bags, blocks and other gear, up 88 percent from 2008.

The Yoga Market also has a "Sangha Space" offering a place "in-between, and after class just to un-wind or to enjoy music, community classes, AcroYoga flying sessions, Happy Hours and much more."

Many breweries have also jumped onto the yoga bandwagon hosting happy hour events where one can do a yoga class and grab a beer.

BeerYoga (\$15 for yoga and a pint) at Port City Brewing Company in Alexandria, on the outskirts of Washington, "has become so popular that its twice-monthly classes sell out within a day," according to the Washington Post.

Washington DC's Hellbender Brewing Company has launched a "Detox to Retox", a monthly summer series of yoga, tastings and discounts, while Capitol City Brewing Company offers "Asana & Ale" in Shirlington.

"I really see DC as a place where maybe the two most sought after post-work activities are working out in some form or another and attending happy hours with your friends or co-workers," Amy Rizzotto, a yoga instructor/nutrition coach was quoted as saying.

At times conservative Christian parents in New York and California have raised objections to yoga calling its use in schools as religious indoctrination. But yoga's popularity keeps growing regardless.

Yoga was first introduced to America by Swami Vivekananda who came to America in 1893 to address the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi brought Transcendental Meditation (TM), offering tangible yoga that became "the most widely practiced self-development programme in the US" during 1960's and 1970's

In a new book, "The Goddess Pose," Michelle Goldberg attributes the rise of yoga in America to Russian Bollywood actress Indra Devi, whom he calls the "first lady of yoga."

Born Eugenia Vassilievna in 1899, Devi died in 2002, just weeks shy of her 103rd birthday. "For much of her life," Goldberg writes, "Devi's only goal had been to make yoga known to the West."

Huffington Post in a January 2014 article traces the growth of yoga into a \$27 billion industry to Sat Jivan Singh Khalsa, "a lawyer moonlighting as a Kundalini yoga teacher," who moved to New York to open a yoga studio in 1971.

It was a time, as Khalsa told the Post, when "people confused yoga and yogurt. They were both brand new and nobody knew what either of them were."

At that time there were only a couple of yoga studios in the Big Apple. Today dozens of yoga variations can be found within a 1-mile radius of his studio in Manhattan's Flatiron District, from Equinox power yoga to yogalates (yoga+pilate) to "zen bootcamp."

As Khalsa told the Post, "The love of yoga is out there and the time is right for yoga." And Prime Minister Narendra Modi has seized that moment to bring yoga to the world.

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