



Flexible travel dates

Silence and abstinence? Not a bit of it – a yoga break in an exotic location will have you both pampered and energised, writes **Deirdre Mulrooney**

IF YOU thought yoga holidays were purely spartan self-punishing retreats on a par with Lough Derg – but with 5am chanting in Sanskrit – think again. Go on, says Sinead O'Connor of Hush Yoga – have that mojito. Go out dancing. Fasting, chanting and abstinence will not be foisted upon you on these holidays. Yoga doesn't have to be hardcore – on these tailor-made yoga holidays, you can chill out, have fun, do some yoga, and come back home feeling restored, energised, and centred.

First of all: location, location location. How about – treehouses and beach

huts in Goa ("India light")? Trendy boutique luxury in Ibiza? Pool-side lounging in Gozo? Long walks in the Burren? Being spoilt in an opulent Irish country mansion? Skiing and yoga in the Swiss Alps? A yoga-focused sojourn in a French chateau? Thailand or Bali for a backdrop to your stretches and poses? A salubrious yoga Christmas and New Year in Morocco?

Tempted? These Irish-led holidays function on the basis that it's possible to be really nice to yourself – and benefit from yoga simultaneously.

Above and beyond the workout offered

by most 90-minute yoga classes at home, these holidays offer "an opportunity to learn how to use yoga in a gentle way to increase energy in day-to-day life", says yoga teacher Deborah Corradino. "You don't get restorative yoga unless you go away."

One big advantage of going with an Irish teacher is that before signing up for the holiday, you can try out the prospective teacher's class to see if their personality and yoga style suits you. Most cater to a variety of levels – from starters to advanced – and class sizes are small, generally eight to 15 in number. ►



Hush Yoga, various locations

Sinead O'Connor, www.hushyoga.com

THE Rolls Royce of yoga holidays – pampering is the name of the game on Hush Yoga's luxury holidays, run by Sinead O'Connor. Far, far from spartan yoga retreats, O'Connor's sojourns celebrate downtime and being nice to yourself. "It's not about self-denial. You can be up until 1am, and have a cocktail or two," she says, encouragingly for the weak-willed.

For the more determined, O'Connor also offers advice on detoxing. Designed as her own "dream holiday", O'Connor sets her Hush Yoga retreats in luxurious boutique hotels, like the Atzaro Hotel, Ibiza, frequented by the likes of Kate Moss and Sienna Miller. In November, Hush Yoga will stretch out for a weekend in the opulent surroundings of Bellinter House, Co Meath, and there is a New York City yoga tour planned for spring 2009 – with plenty of shopping time built in to the schedule.

As well as being a New York-trained yoga teacher, O'Connor, who comes from a contemporary dance background, is a nutritional therapist – so while detoxing isn't at all obligatory, you can avail of her expertise should you so wish. "It's all about balance," is her philosophy.

You can check out Sinead's Vinyasa flow style of yoga in her regular classes at Yoga Dublin (www.yogadublin.com), and in a workshop in Cork Movement Centre, October 18-19.

This Hush Yoga focus on chilling and pampering as opposed to beating yourself up could really catch on.



Ibiza, September 23-30

Atzaro Hotel, Ibiza, Spain;
www.atzaro.com

Six nights' B&B, two evening meals, one massage; €1,990

Bellinter House, Co Meath, November 14-16

Two nights' B&B, two lunches, two gourmet evening meals, one complimentary massage at the Bathhouse spa, four yoga classes in the 'schoolhouse'; €495

New York City yoga tour, spring 2009

Info on the Hush Yoga website; €1,950



Gozo

Ruth Walshe and Dave Curtis, Vinyasa flow yoga,
www.vinyasaflowyoga.net

YOGA teacher Dave Curtis likens Maltese island Gozo to "Connemara in the Mediterranean". Hosted by interesting new Dublin-based company Yoga Traveller, participants should come away centred, and "understanding more about their personal practice", says Curtis. Sailing (Curtis is a keen sailor), snorkelling, scuba-diving, hiking, rock-climbing, mountain-biking, excursions to adjacent smaller islands, lounging by the pool reading a book, or doing absolutely nothing are all extra-curricular options.

Accommodation is in self-catering luxury apartments around a pool. The yoga studio is subterranean, and food is broadly Mediterranean. Curtis, whose background is in Ashtanga yoga, and Iyengar-trained Ruth Walshe balance dynamic and restorative yoga in the hope that participants will come away with a more balanced practice. Four hours of expert tuition in two classes per day is designed to set participants on a focused yoga learning curve.

Dublin-based www.yogatraveller.com, which is hosting Ruth and Dave's trip, also organises such delights as skiing yoga holidays to the Swiss Alps (from €990 per week, including ski-pass); Christmas and New Year yoga holidays in Morocco (December 20-27; December 27-January 3; from €595 sharing); Bali (seven nights from €559 sharing); and Thailand (from €485 sharing). There's also a luxury trip to a French chateau (from €990).

You can check out the classes, ethos, and teachers in Yoga Travellers' new Rathmines, Dublin, studio. For more info, refer to www.yogatraveller.com

Gozo, Malta, June 2009

Includes: accommodation, most meals including two evening meals, two yoga classes a day, half-day boat trip to Blue Lagoon, sunset yoga trip to Azure window; from €890

Goa Jennifer Keegan and Tony Purcell

Goa, India, January 20-30

Includes: yoga classes (two per day), most food, accommodation, optional forays into town and surrounds; from €865 for 10 days/nine nights (all prices excluding flights)

"FOR regular folks, rather than yoga freaks" is how Jennifer Keegan describes her occasional yoga holidays in Goa, Granada, Andalucia, and Ibiza (Spanish holidays approx €700 for one

week). Keegan's holidays are "a labour of love". Her criteria is "something I would like myself – though I would be sterner with myself".

In Goa, accommodation is either in

dinky treehouses, or Portuguese mini-cottages. Keegan, whose "dynamic yoga" is a blend of Vinyasa and Hatha yoga, and Tony Purcell, whose practice is Ashtanga-based, like to vary the schedule a bit, so although there are two yoga classes most

days, they make sure people have some time to themselves, and don't frown upon the occasional alcoholic beverage either. Email antopurcell@gmail.com or jenniferk@eircom.net for more info.



Burren Yoga and Meditation Centre

Deborah Corradino

www.deborahcorradino.com

WITH its lunar-rock landscapes, beaches and dramatic skies, the Burren, Co Clare, is an amazing setting for yoga. No wonder Debbie Corradino, from Boulder, Colorado, as well as many other top yoga teachers, including Ciara Cronin of Dublin's Yoga Room, regularly manage holidays here. "People feel very grounded there," attests Corradino.

The 10-year-old purpose-built Burren Yoga Centre also boasts

vegetarian cuisine by Paddi Kean, who built her reputation running the Seventh Heaven vegetarian restaurant in Galway and has published her own cookbook. Described by Corradino as "a hybrid of a holiday and a retreat", you will also be expected to practise karma yoga at the centre – which entails pitching in with the washing-up and light cleaning.

An extended version of her upcoming weekend retreats, Corradino's week-long January sojourn offers participants a chance to really get into the yoga rhythm, with two to three daily yoga classes, meditation, Burren walks, and optional lunches in nearby Kinvara. "A daily walk in the quiet off-season is a lovely way to start the new year," she promises. Corradino aims to "energise and ground" her participants (who come from all over Europe). Check out her classes at Yoga Dublin (www.yogadublin.com).

Corradino, who is also an acupuncturist, is starting Ireland's first fertility and yoga retreat at Temple Country Retreat and Spa, Moate, Co Westmeath on October 17-19 (from €550 sharing).

Burren, Co Clare, September 26-28, November 7-9, January 3-10

Includes: meals, accommodation, two daily Hatha yoga classes; September and November trip from €300, January from €780

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