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## Yoga Scene

### Yoga Growing Quickly in Tokyo



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The worldwide popularity of yoga has most recently spread to Japan.

It was only ten years ago that yoga and anything even loosely associated with Eastern spiritualism became taboo after the 1995 Tokyo sarin gas attacks by the Aum Shinrikyo cult. The Japanese cult mixed Buddhist and Hindu beliefs, taking its name from the Hindu syllable *Aum* (which represents the universe), followed by kanji characters *shin* "truth/reality/Buddhist sect", *ri* "reason/justice/truth", and *kyo* "teaching/faith/doctrine". The cult originally grew out of regular yoga classes held in Tokyo.

Only now, a decade after the arrest and prosecution of most of the perpetrators, yoga is making a comeback in Japan. A steady flow of untainted international masters have been cooperating with local yoga schools to refocus the understanding of yoga on its true, open and nonviolent origins. Thousands of Tokyoites are learning the physical and mental benefits of regular yoga practice.

In the past eight months, more than 20 yoga studios have opened in central Tokyo, making it one of the fastest growing sectors in the lifestyle/pastime sector.

The studios present various styles of yoga in and around central Tokyo. Ashtanga vinyasa yoga has grown through its intense aerobics-like system, not to mention its popularity among famous movie stars worldwide. Although ashtanga has also become one of the more popular styles, various other hatha yoga traditions are also spreading in Japan.

Yoga provides people with a positive approach to promoting a healthy body and mind, but there can always be misconceptions due to dogmatic interpretations of the traditions. Incidents have surfaced in Tokyo much like other world yoga communities that have made people

question different systems. This inevitably bringing attention to spelling out the underlying essence of yoga.

The meaning of yoga is union, and the thought of it being regimented, takes away a key element of the underlying meaning of the yogic way of life. Yoga is not only a physical practice, but a daily lifestyle that augments perceptions and personal potential.

There are now a number of versatile studios in Tokyo that truly support yogic integrity and will continue to encourage enthusiasts to tap into their own growth processes, unhindered by invented rules or protocol.

In Tokyo, yoga is growing among people of all ages and characters. In this bustling world metropolis, people are finding a way to escape the concrete jungle of the city environment. People are taking a chance to practice yoga with the aim of managing stress and living a more peaceful life, subject to fewer complications and heightened awareness.

Japanese and other Asians have a generally more comprehensive understanding of yoga than most Westerners. Due to the Buddhist search for inner quiet, most Japanese intuitively grasp the more profound aspects of yoga within a couple of months of practice.

Japan is also known for its martial arts. Not far from yoga practice, disciplines such as Aikido, work with the movement and efficiency of energy (*ki*) and its breath-making power moving the *prana* (life-force) through the body to unblock the *Nadis* (psychic barriers) as in yoga practice. Like in Aikido, when the energy (*Prana / Ki*) moves through the body efficiently, it makes for a light, strong, focus on the practice.

The gift of delivering deeper meaning is energizing a wave of successful yoga businesses, most of which focus on well being and personal transformation. At a time when cultural values have been lost without defining new ones, yoga is providing the average Japanese with a tangible way of reaping benefits, and progressing with growth in a very fulfilling way.

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