

Evidently, the series of 26 postures (*asanas*) and two breathing exercises are always practiced in the same precise sequence and is guided by a specific dialogue in order to enhance their effectiveness. This sets it apart from other types of yoga practiced out there as the sequence is designed to prepare the muscles and lead you into the next posture.

Another differentiating factor is the heat – Bikram Yoga is always practiced in a yoga studio heated to a minimum of 41°C. While debate exists on whether the hotter conditions (compared with other forms of hot yoga) pose any risk such as the possibility of overstretching muscles, proponents of Bikram Yoga believe this to be the ideal heat enabling one to go deeper into the postures, which helps maximise the benefits that each posture provides.

Any cause for concern, however, is moderated by the fact that Bikram Yoga is certainly no fleeting fad as there is an extremely strict discipline surrounding the practice. For instance, it must always be practiced at certified Bikram studios under the supervision of qualified Bikram Yoga instructors.

If a picture paints a thousand words, there's no better narrative than experiencing the benefits of Bikram Yoga first-hand to truly understand.

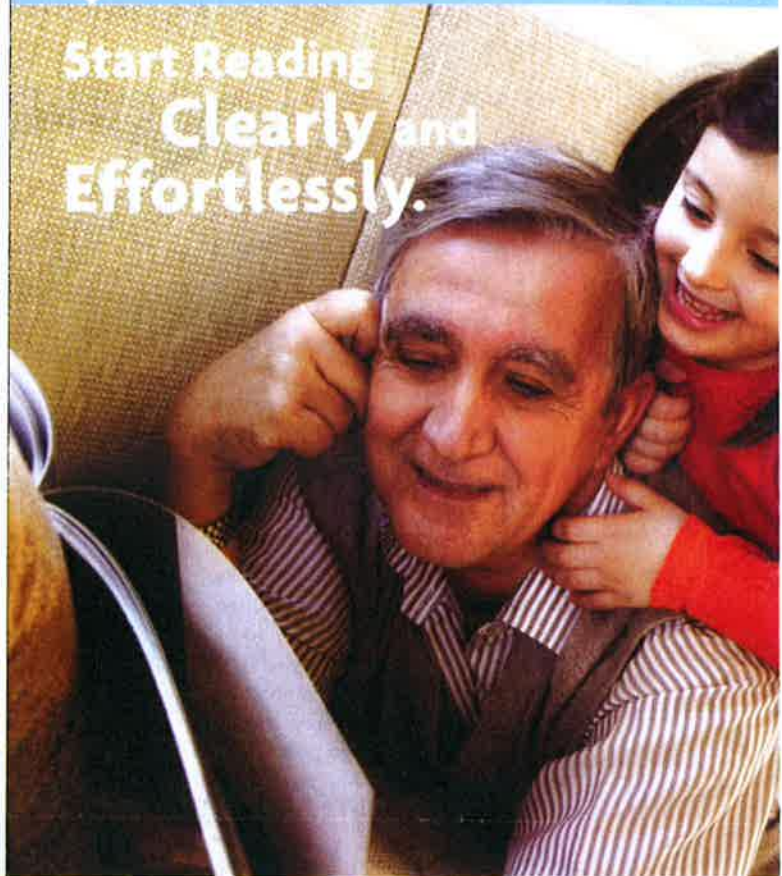
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Pop superstar Madonna is possibly one of the best known poster girls for yoga, the ancient Indian art of slow-stretching movements, concentrated breathing, and meditation exercises designed to improve the fluidity of joints, strengthen muscles, reduce stress, and help practitioners achieve harmony of mind, body and spirit.

An exercise trend that has swept across the world in recent years, yoga has picked up a strong celebrity following along the way including the likes of Julia Roberts, Sharon Stone and even George Clooney.

The Hollywoodisation of yoga could be said to trace back to the 1970s when yoga master Bikram Choudhury opened his first yoga school on US soil in San Francisco. Having trained almost his entire life in Calcutta, Choudhury developed his own form of Hot Yoga, a copyrighted series of 26 hatha yoga postures that are performed in a room heated to a minimum of 41°C.

Choudhury's repute soon spread like wildfire and by the 1980s, he was being celebrated within Hollywood circles. It's not uncommon to find Choudhury posing with celebrities like the late Michael Jackson and Brooke Shields from way back when, in photos adorning the walls of his original Bikram Yoga studios. Today, the Beverly Hills-based multi-millionaire boasts over 500 yoga schools around the world, with his main school located near Hollywood, of course.

In addition to all the famous names mentioned thus far, other celebrity fans of Bikram Yoga include Jessica Simpson, Elle Macpherson, Matthew McConaughey and Jenny McCarthy. But beyond the Hollywood hype, just what makes Bikram Yoga engender such a cult following?

"The postures in Bikram Hot Yoga are designed to systematically stimulate the body's internal organs and glands, strengthen and tone the muscles and bring the body back to its state of balance. The positions are sequenced to stretch the muscles, ligaments and tendons in the order which they should be stretched. It also promotes oxygen circulation throughout the body, all within a 90-minute class. Because of the variety of benefits that can be reaped, Hollywood celebrities have sworn by Bikram Original Hot Yoga to help them stay in shape while increasing their mental clarity," explains a spokesperson from Bikram Original Hot Yoga Singapore.

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