A power of good in a yoga pose

By CAMERON WILSON

y the end of the weekend, some of you are going to hate me."
Duncan Peak, instructor and ringmaster of this, my very first yoga retreat, is nodding his way around the room.

"That's cool, because you're going to have breakthroughs, too." Hate? Breakthroughs? I was just hoping I might improve my flexibility.

Perhaps I should have taken proper account of Duncan's background as an officer in an elite parachute regiment before signing up for my first two days of Power Yoga.

But it's Friday evening, the mats are being rolled out and towels handed round, so it's a bit late to think about that now.

I'm at Govinda Valley, the rather spartan conference centre near Otford train station that hosts at least one yoga group every weekend of the year. The property reminds me of church youth camps I attended in my teens: four beds to a room, basic communal bathroom facilities and a big dining hall.

But I tell myself I'm not visiting a holiday resort; and judging by the number of BMWs parked outside there are people here who will be doing it tougher than me this weekend.

"What comes out when you squeeze an orange?" asks Duncan as he prowls the room. "Juice!" a dozen obliging voices roar. "We're going to squeeze that juice out of you!" he responds.

My Upward Dog is holding together OK, but my Downward Dog, compared with those of my 71 new yoga buddies, is a bit ordinary.

This is inconvenient, since these postures are used repeatedly to segue from one group of movements to another.

Fortunately, I can take refuge in Child Pose (kneeling down and settling face-first on to the mat to rest for a bit), which I do often in the course of the weekend, while hefty blokes and skinny girls continue to stretch up a storm as the condensation runs in streams down the windows.



SHORT BREAK

At session's end there's just time for a shower before we troop upstairs for dinner.

The food, prepared by Govinda Valley's own volunteers, isn't flash but it's undoubtedly healthy. I'm told the cooks sing while they work in order to impart love and positive energy on to the food.

It sounds a nice idea, but faced with a plate of steamed broccoli and baked pumpkin, it seems to me someone could suggest they swap the kitchen song-sheet for a decent vegetarian cookbook.

After washing our dishes we're back on the yoga floor seated on scatter cushions, and Duncan kicks off a discussion about how we experience fear, love and compassion.



Saturday morning's session begins early and I find myself doing quite well on balance postures, such as Eagle Pose.

Just as I'm struggling to get my left arm tucked inside my right, Duncan appears in front Health haven: Getting into the swing of things during a session in the Power Yoga retreat at Govinda Valley (left)

of me. "You can get this" he says. "Remember in yoga, the posture begins the moment you want it to end."

I concentrate on breathing into the muscles in my shoulder, and miraculously my hands come together. Duncan grins. "Congratulations, you just had a breakthrough."

At the end of the session I'm utterly spent, and every person in the room is guzzling water or wiping up their sweat.

It feels like we've been doing Power Yoga for three hours, which of course is ridiculous; when I check my watch I discover it was actually closer to three-and-a-half. By mid-morning Sunday I have to head home. My juice has been squeezed, no doubt about it. Like someone going through detox, I have a throbbing headache and I'm decidedly delicate.

Heading for my car I spot Tim, the friend who invited me on the retreat. I apologise for leaving a bit early and for occasionally wimping out.

"Mate, are you kidding? For someone who's never done this before, you did great. Trust me; this is the Olympics of yoga."

☐ The next Power Living weekend is March 23-26. Three nights with all meals and yoga sessions costs \$450.

Power Yoga classes are held daily at the Power Living studio, 135 Military Rd, Neutral Bay; 10 days of unlimited classes \$17. Details from 9904 4874, or www.powerliving.com.au For more on Govinda Valley, see www.govindavalley.com.au





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