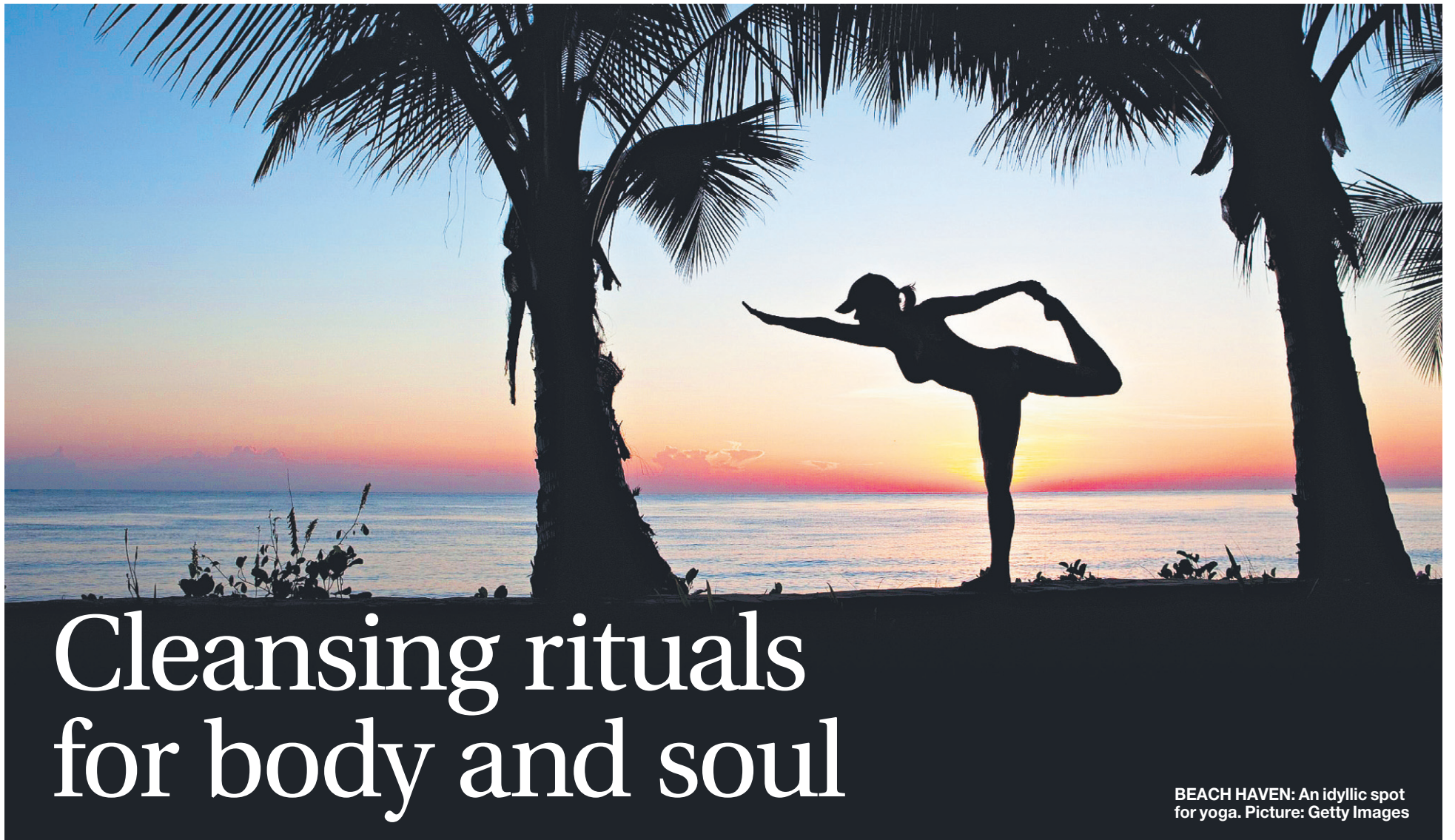


Yoga Bali



Cleansing rituals for body and soul

BEACH HAVEN: An idyllic spot for yoga. Picture: Getty Images

Once you get to Bali, just breathe deeply and put yourself in the experienced hands of the yoga masters, writes **Cameron Wilson**

AS THE van pulls away from the airport at Denpasar, I roll down the window and, like a big goofy mutt, stick my head out and let the smell of frangipani and rice fields wash right over me. Bali is, hands down, the best-smelling place in the world, in large part because of the Balinese Hindu practice of leaving offerings of flowers, fruit, sticky rice and incense in front of every temple, home, restaurant and shop on the island.

More should be made of this, because your olfactory sense is the most powerful of subconscious triggers – surround yourself with feel-good aromas and you're halfway to a happy holiday.

The van turns inland and we begin to wind our way into the hills towards the cluster of villages known collectively as Ubud, where I plan to spend the next few days doing yoga while taking advantage of Bali's natural outdoor aromatherapy.

Being a yoga novice I'd balked at signing up for a structured retreat, deciding instead to attend drop-in classes at the Bali Spirit Yoga Barn, a long-established centre brilliantly situated beside an emerald-green rice field in the village of Pengosekan.

Yoga Basics sounds like the right place to begin, although any expectation of taking things easy is quickly put to rest. "Is there anyone here who's never done yoga before?" asks Meghan, a gorgeous American instructor who's perky as a gymnast. "I should probably change the name, because by yoga basics I don't mean easy yoga; it's my collection of basic poses from Ashtanga, Vinyasa and Power yoga styles."

All goes well though as I join my classmates for a succession of upward-and-downward-facing-dog, warrior and balance poses.

By the time I roll up my mat and troop downstairs with my 12 new yoga buddies, I've decided that whatever else I do in Ubud, yoga will feature every day.

The pool-side pagoda at the aptly named Green Field Bungalows where I'm staying looks out on to neighbouring rice paddies, an idyllic spot to start the day with a plate of sliced pineapple, banana, pawpaw and watermelon followed by a banana pancake with fresh-squeezed lime juice and honey. Staff place sweet-smelling offerings in front of a miniature shrine by the pool and at

the feet of a resident statue of Saraswati, the Hindu goddess of music, learning and the creative arts.

Most of Bali's painters, sculptors and woodcarvers live or work around Ubud so it's no surprise that Saraswati is a key figure here. The presence of so many artistic types also goes a long way to explaining why holistic health practitioners have gravitated to the area: if you fancy just about any kind of wellness, spa or detox vacation, want to try Bali Usada (traditional healing and medicine), or think your chakras (energy centres) might need re-aligning, Ubud is the place for you.

Having made a good start with Yoga Basics, I settle into a daily routine that includes one yoga class followed by a one-hour massage (which costs \$10) and a swim. Some options on the Yoga Barn schedule are quickly ruled out: Early Bird Yoga, because it's early and I'm on holiday; Kung Fu Yoga, because I can't imagine what it is and leaping straight into a class may not be the smartest way to find out. I attend Vinyasa Flow with Wayan, a Balinese instructor who pushes us to hold each strength pose for several breaths, but also picks exactly the right moment to remind everyone to smile. Jane, a tall imposing Englishwoman with a long grey-blond plait and plummy accent, teaches Classical Hatha, which features many of the same poses as Yoga Basics but in different combination. I even give tai chi a go – an interesting experience if only to

find out how hard it is as a Westerner to go through a series of hand and foot movements slowly and mindfully.

When I'm not practising getting into union with the universe (yoga roughly translates as union), swimming or lounging by the pool, there's little to do besides eat and shop. Browsing the various galleries and shops that sell paintings, woodcarvings and other artworks is one of Ubud's chief pleasures, even if you don't buy a thing.

Yoga Barn has buffet dinner and movie nights, meditation sittings and musical performances such as Kirtan devotional chanting and

the haunting sounds produced by Tibetan "singing" bowls.

Ubud's unofficial hangout for yoga boffins is Kafe restaurant, a place that's big on cleansing juices, healthy salads and inventive curries full of vegies and soya bean, although the owners have added some indulgences such as an excellent apple pie.

By week's end I'm an inch taller and my hips are moving with a snakiness they've not displayed for years. Saraswati and her fellow deities have been good to me, no doubt about it, and I have a feeling Bali's omnipresent aromatherapy has played its part as well.

Wish you were here

Fact file

Jetstar has regular flights to Denpasar Bali (www.jetstar.com). A 30-day visitor visa, issued at the airport on arrival, costs \$US25 (\$A27.30); remember to put aside Rp150,000 (\$A17.30) for departure tax, payable at the airport when you leave. All classes at Yoga Barn are drop-in (no booking required); \$13 a class, \$50 for a five-class card, \$80 for a 10-class card (www.theyogabarn.com). Yoga mats, cushions and other props are provided. Two excellent places to stay, both three minutes' walk from the Yoga Barn are **Green Field Bungalows** (www.greenfieldubud.com) and **Tegal Sari** (www.tegalsari-ubud.com); bookings by phone or email.

Bali yoga resorts/retreats

Oneworld Retreats (Kumara Resort, Ubud): hosts yoga & meditation retreats throughout the year; popular wellness package "Escape the World" features yoga, meditation, Ayurvedic spa treatments


and Balinese blessing and purification rituals (www.oneworldretreats.com).

Zen Resort Bali (Seririt Lovina, north coast): spa packages feature yoga, meditation & Ayurvedic treatments; the same package in conjunction with the neighbouring dive centre includes four scuba dives (www.zenresortbali.com).

Yoga Arts (Bingin Beach & Ubud): Byron Bay-based yoga centre, runs nine-day retreats in forested surrounds of Ubud or overlooking the famous Bukit Peninsula surf beaches; an intensive yoga experience (www.yogarts.com.au).

COMO Shambhala Estate (Ubud): Super-luxury wellness resort in jungle surrounds; individually tailored packages for holistic health through nutrition, yoga, spa, massage and relaxation treatments (www.cse.como.bz).


Vitality 4 Life (Sari Resort, Ubud): Seven-day revitalising program devised by Byron Bay's Vitality 4 Life features raw food, daily colonics, yoga, meditation and massage, body scrub and beauty treatments (www.baliyogaretreat.com).



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