

# a time for rest

A Satyananda yoga experience leaves you in an interesting space where you're both rested and energised. *By Sue White*

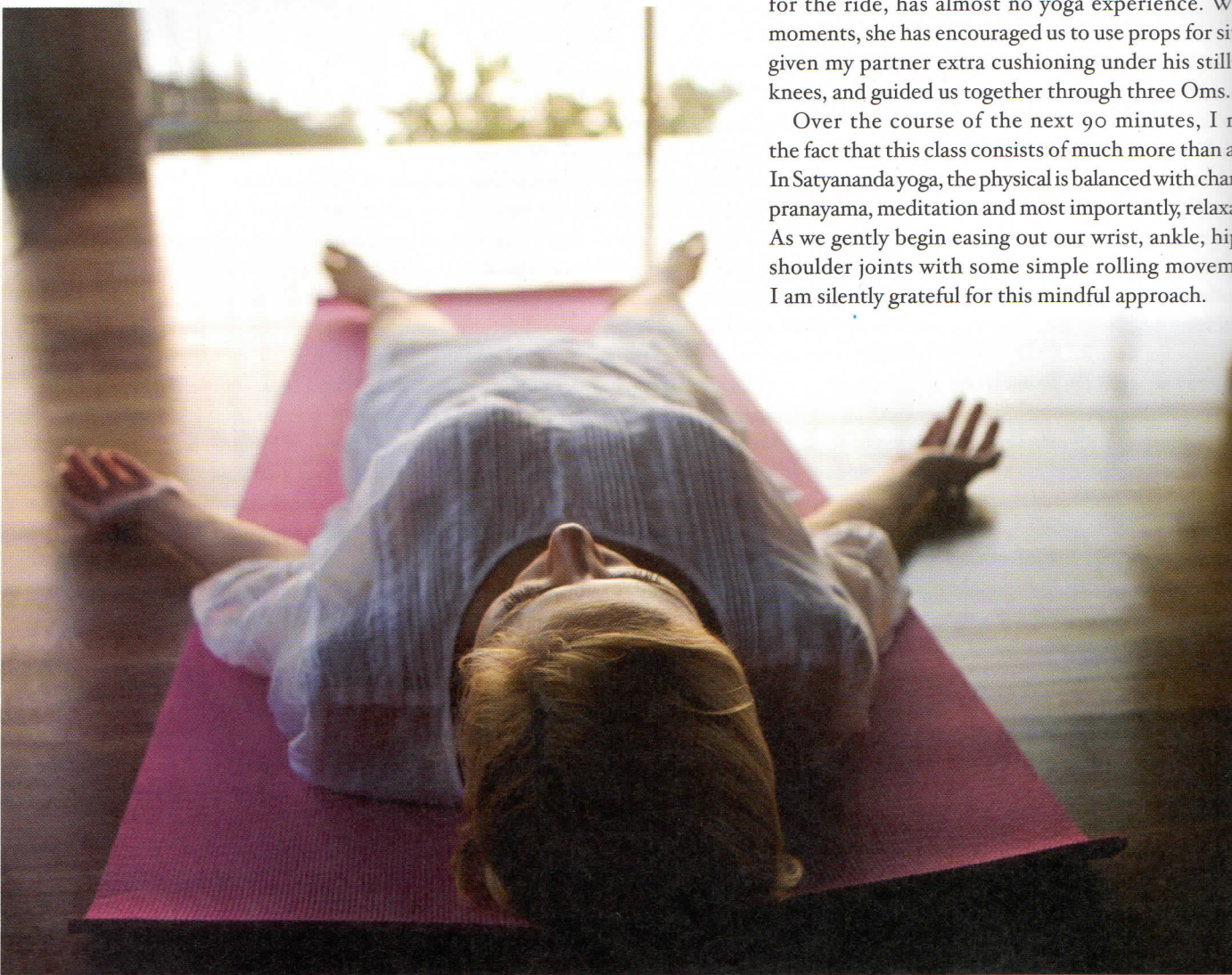
The ancient yogis may have risen with the sun, but if this modern yogi is going to be honest, I was drawn out from under the covers to attend the Satyananda yoga class with the promise of more sleep: yogic sleep, to be precise.

The ancient relaxation practice of Yoga Nidra is an integral part of Satyananda yoga, and frankly, I'm delighted.

My teacher, Riddhi from Byron Bay, breaks the class down gently. Yes, there will be Yoga Nidra, but I first need to work through asana, pranayama and meditation.

Riddhi isn't phased that my partner, who's come along for the ride, has almost no yoga experience. Within a few moments, she has encouraged us to use props for support, given my partner extra cushioning under his stillness, knees, and guided us together through three Oms.

Over the course of the next 90 minutes, I realise the fact that this class consists of much more than a simple relaxation. In Satyananda yoga, the physical is balanced with character, pranayama, meditation and most importantly, relaxation. As we gently begin easing out our wrist, ankle, hip and shoulder joints with some simple rolling movements, I am silently grateful for this mindful approach.





### SATYANANDA EXPLAINED

Satyananda yoga may not be found everywhere, but it is an established tradition in Australia with teachers in most cities, as well as large ashrams outside of Sydney and Melbourne (visit [www.satyananda.net](http://www.satyananda.net) for teachers, retreats and classes around the country). Founded by the Indian-born Swami Satyananda Saraswati, the lineage descends from Swami Sivananda Saraswati of the Sivananda Yoga tradition, and students of both will notice

the similarities. Swami Satyananda also set up the Bihar School of Yoga in India, fulfilling his guru's vision of a university for yogic studies. Travelling often to the West, he reminded students that tradition is a total lifestyle practice that includes *bhakti* (devotion), *karma* (selfless service) and *jnana* (study).

Swami Atmamuktananda Saraswati from the Satyananda Ashram at Rocklyn in Victoria agrees that this practice is far from focused simply on the body.

"Most people are very physically oriented, but at a Satyananda yoga class they don't get just that," she says. "A lot are surprised to know what is in yoga. It is expansive, and covers every aspect of the entire personality from the worldly to the spiritual, to our daily lifestyle."

### WHAT TO EXPECT IN CLASS

Of course, "balance" doesn't mean the asana can't be challenging. After class, Riddhi tells me that the practice can be as dynamic as a student needs, and that complicated poses such as the Peacock Pose do make an appearance.

"But yoga is really about mind management, so watching the mind and how it reacts is actually the most advanced thing," Riddhi explains.

For my part, I'm enjoying today's gentle asana, which includes many of the traditional poses such as Trikonasana (Extended Triangle Pose) and Garudasana (Eagle Pose), where we practise embodying the feeling of an eagle poised in flight. There are a few surprises as the Satyananda tradition occasionally uses different names for some of the poses, so here, Downward Facing Dog is Mountain Pose. They're not the only yoga tradition to vary pose names (Child's Pose becomes Baby Pose in the Kundalini tradition, for example), and given

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that in my opinion a rose by any other name still smells like a rose, I simply adapt.

I soon notice there are minimal physical adjustments in Satyananda yoga. Instead, Riddhi corrects us gently with her voice, offering props and variations (harder or easier) when they're needed. "We use props to make sitting more comfortable, but we don't interfere with the student too much," she says. "It comes from within you."

I'm at ease with Satyananda, but it's interesting to see how well my beginner partner is coping. It may be his first class, but he's chanting Om, doing a Panting Dog Breath that is a preparation for the more advanced Bhastrika as well as Nadi Shodana (Alternate Nostril Breath), all seemingly at ease under Riddhi's careful watch. If I ever wanted proof that the fullness of yoga doesn't need to be dumbed down for beginners, this is it.

Bringing my mind back to my own practice, I focus on my own alternate nostril breathing under Riddhi's clear instructions: "Inhale. One Om, two Om, three Om, pause. Exhale. One Om, two Om, three Om. Pause." The balanced cycle fits perfectly with this well-rounded experience and by the time we get to Yoga Nidra, I'm feeling so good I'd forgotten all about it.

Lying on my mat I hear Riddhi explain that for the next 20 minutes we are to follow the sound of her voice as it guides our awareness around the body, onto the breath and through sensations of hot and cold and various images. "A good Yoga Nidra is equivalent to a few hours sleep," she says as we begin. I believe her. But, as I leave feeling energised and relaxed, I wonder if maybe a good Satyananda class is better than Yoga Nidra. ❀

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