

# HEALTH POST

# Sample

## Flex, nudge and rock 'n' roll

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# Om vacation

**Yoga enthusiasts are increasingly flocking to outdoor festivals that offer a heady mix of meditation, music and dance against a backdrop of nature. Sue White looks at the world's top five**

It may sound like an unlikely healing recipe, but take lashings of yoga, mix in a generous serving of dance, a side order of music (anything from electronica to kirtan will do) and add a serious slice of nature. Bake for two to four days. The result: a yoga festival that could attract up to 5,000 people to a mountain, village or desert for some intense yogic fun.

While more formal yoga conferences such as *Evolution in Hong Kong* or *Yoga Journal* conferences across the US continue to draw crowds, thousands of yoga fans now prefer to master the pigeon pose (Eka Pada Rajakapotasana) in less prescribed, outdoor environments. Enter the yoga festival – a trend that's taken the yoga world by storm over the past five or so years.

There's now enough diversity among yoga festivals that you can plan by location or your personal style. Are the Italian mountains your thing? Check out the yoga festival in the spa town of Merano ([www.yogafestival.it](http://www.yogafestival.it)). After something slightly more spiritual?

Spend a week celebrating on the River Ganges at the International Yoga Festival in Rishikesh, India ([internationalyogafestival.com](http://internationalyogafestival.com)).

Regardless of where you go, you can be guaranteed one thing: the mix of yoga, music and the great outdoors is bound to leave you floating on happy healing vibes for weeks. Check out five of the best for this year.

#### The Phoenix Weekend

[www.thephoenixweekend.com](http://www.thephoenixweekend.com)  
**Where:** Satyananda Mangrove Ashram, Mangrove Mountain, about 1½ hours north of Sydney, Australia  
**When:** February 3-5  
**Cost:** A\$360-A\$515 (HK\$2,800-HK\$4,000) per person  
**Attractions:** Yoga, music, meditation, and rave? If you like your yoga accompanied by a bit of electronica, the three-day Phoenix Weekend is the festival for you. The festival is now in its second year, and this year's line-up has several events per time slot, with an emphasis on dance, yoga and meditation.

Days offer workshops and classes with teachers such as Mark Whitwell (US), Katy Appleton (Britain) and Simon Borg-Olivier (Australia), as well as speakers from the Satyananda Yoga tradition. Evenings are all about music: Friday is more traditional, with kirtan (yoga chanting to live musicians), while Saturday is anything but. Dress up and get set to rave with the Future Sound of Yoga duo, the popular pair behind the event.

**While you're there:** Mangrove Mountain is tucked deep in the Australian bush. Plenty of bushwalks start at the back of the Ashram. Otherwise, take a dip in the lake across the road, or simply enjoy the fresh mountain air surrounding this inspiring yoga ashram.

#### Bali Spirit Festival

[www.balispiritfestival.com](http://www.balispiritfestival.com)  
**Where:** Ubud, Bali, Indonesia  
**When:** March 28 to April 1  
**Cost:** US\$625 for a full festival pass (less for early birds and day passes)  
**Attractions:** Now entering its fifth year, the Bali Spirit Festival has loyal followers from Australia, Asia and

around the world. It's easy to see why. The line-up boasts a dozen musicians, including Dave Stringer and Daphne Tse and more than 30 yoga teachers, including Simon Low (Britain) and Twee Merrigan (US), as well as dance and meditation teachers galore. Although the schedule is packed, the vibe is relaxed, and many venues are outdoors. The Bali Spirit Festival manages to merge East and West: teachers and musicians come from across the world, but there's also a good local representation so you don't forget where your downward dog is taking place.

**While you're there:** for some post-festival relaxation, spend a few days in the nearby Gili Islands – three idyllic atolls. [www.gili-paradise.com](http://www.gili-paradise.com)

#### Wanderlust

[www.wanderlustfestival.com](http://www.wanderlustfestival.com)  
**Where:** Squaw Valley, California, US  
**When:** July 26-29  
**Cost:** US\$450 for four days of music and yoga  
**Attractions:** No one does a yoga festival quite like the United States, and Wanderlust California is the



Knees up at the Dutch Yōga Festival