

beauty

hurts so good

Bikram Yoga...some like it hot, or whatever.

In my experience, the term “Bikram yoga” was always closely followed by words like “sweltering” and “nightmare,” prompting expressions of either total agony or utter bewilderment. So I was understandably terrified at the prospect of trying it. I’d taken yoga classes before and knew perfectly well that it was hard enough without the added pressure of being in a room heated to approximately 105 degrees at 60% humidity. When Aiko Nakasone, my future class instructor at Bikram Yoga Brooklyn Heights, explained to me that Bikram yoga consisted of exactly 26 “challenging” poses, I contemplated her word choice. Did she realize that from my chronically-sedentary perspective, it was rather challenging to walk more than four blocks in sizzling New York City heat? Striking 26 random poses along the way would classify as roughly impossible. But Aiko assured me that much like fire, heat is our friend and allows for deeper and safer muscle stretching. “Bikram Choudhury [the creator of Bikram yoga] equates it to a blacksmith who’s working with metal,” she said. “You heat it up first in order to shape it, so you don’t crack it.”

With images of *Dante’s Inferno* in my head, I entered the heated studio and was instantly relieved. Sure, the room was warm — hot even — but it was a gentle, relaxing heat. I unrolled my mat, spread a large towel over it and thought, “No sweat.” Soon Aiko entered the room and began to take us through the poses, lulling me into a meditative state with her soft, kind voice. The first four warm-up poses were invigorating, but the next ten were as challenging as promised. During Tree Pose, I literally dripped with sweat trying

to balance my entire body weight on my left leg with my right foot clinging rather clumsily to my hip and my hands palm-to-palm beneath my chin. The whole predicament gave new meaning to the expression “hot and heavy.” I longed for a drink of water but made no move toward my bottle because Aiko had explained that adhering to yoga etiquette meant drinking water between poses, not during them. By the 20th pose, the therapeutic, sauna-like atmosphere quickly turned into a sweltering torture chamber. Aiko kept assuring me that I was doing extremely well for a first-timer, but looking around the room, I suddenly felt like I’d wandered into an especially grueling audition for Cirque du Soleil. The entire class seemed to be light years ahead of me, and the petite blonde to my left was somehow balancing her entire body weight on the tip of her big toe. Hot and bothered beyond belief (and quickly running out of puns), I reminded myself that yoga was about meditation not competition and focused as best I could on my own body. By the time we got to the 26th pose, I was so lost in my own world I didn’t even realize I’d made it through the entire class.

NIKIA DAWKINS

For more information, schedules and rates visit BikramYogaBrooklyn.com

BIKRAM YOGA BASICS

Bikram yoga was invented by Bikram Choudhury, the founder of the Yoga College of India, who at the age of thirteen won the National India Yoga Championship. After remaining undefeated for the following three years, he retired as the undisputed All-India National Yoga Champion. All of the instructors at Bikram Yoga Brooklyn Heights were trained by him at his Beverly Hills studio.

The benefits of Bikram yoga are extensive. It heals injuries, helps relieve stress and chronic pain, increases mental focus, stabilizes your metabolism and releases toxins through your pores as you sweat. It also jumpstarts the release of endorphins and serotonin, which can alleviate depression. But the best part is that it can actually improve your sex life. “Bikram is so crude sometimes,” Aiko laughs. “He says, ‘Do this posture well and you can go all night.’”



T:KUU's Sweaty Stuff yoga mat, available at Tkuu.com, is the perfect Bikram yoga accessory.