

## **Want winter heat without stretching the purse? Say namaste to HotPod Yoga**

Downward doggy in 37 degree heat, no it's not another wellness retreat in Bali, it's just down the road...

*by Grace Dembowicz*

There's nothing worse than a cold, gloomy January morning that begins with stepping off the bus and into a puddle deep enough to infiltrate your trainers and dampen your feet for the rest of the day because of that one tiny hole that you pretend doesn't exist.

I'll be the first one to admit summer is my preferred season, winter is too dark, too windy and the heavy clouds filled with rain feel like they're sitting on your shoulders. That's why, when I saw HotPod Yoga, a forty-five minute yoga class in thirty-seven degree heat advertised, it looked ideal. Cheaper than clambering onto a plane in desperate search of winter sun that's for sure.

I'll also be the first to admit yoga has never been my thing, I prefer a boxercise-angrily-whilst-punching-all-your-issues-out-on-your-poor-unsuspecting-partner workout, so it will come as no surprise that the incentive to sign up to this £16 yoga session was for the heat.

Since its conception in 2013, over 100,000 people have taken part in one of the 50 studios worldwide from Carmarthen to Cape Town with the aim to take yoga to the masses.

There's always a feeling of anxiety when attending a new fitness class, what if I'm the worst in there? What if I pass out from the heat and need to be airlifted out of the class? Dramatic yes, but these were my underlying thoughts as I got off the Overground and arrived at the Hackney studio.

Originally an old warehouse, you walk in to a sea of yoga mats, abs and potted plants with the main attraction in the middle: a massive purple inflatable pod. It reminded me of a child's birthday party, only one with considerably more Gen-Z lycra-clad yogis with a great deal more spiritual tattoos on their ankles.

Alice, the instructor greeted me warmly having obviously gauged I was a first-timer and gestured that I should step into the pod ready to begin. The heat hit me instantly, the low lit space offered immediate feelings of relaxation, I was slowly coming round to this, just as long as I didn't fall asleep before the class even started. The pod glowed with a purple hue that claims to help calm the mind along with a blend of bergamot, lavender and orange incense to help unwind.

As 12:30pm hit to signal the beginning of the class; the pod filled, accommodating up to around twenty people. As I sat scanning the room I began to observe everyone stretch, the kind of stretches that if I attempted, I'd pull a muscle and have to hobble out with distinct shame at 12:32pm.

Talking to regular attendee, 27 year old Tania, she explained that in the past she has tried to attend a variety of yoga classes but they "never stuck", with this class however, it's the heat that draws her in each time. "I really need the heat in my life, I'm not from the UK, I'm a long distance runner and I don't really stretch so when I found this, the combination of the heat and the stretching was perfect for me", she explains. Tania goes on to highlight how great the darkness is: "you never feel intimidated by other people's abilities as it's difficult to see what other people are doing".

The forty-five minute class flew by, and credit where credit's due, I deserve none. As I said, yoga is not my thing and my balance and flexibility were so far off compared to everyone else I must have been a source of entertainment. Nevertheless, I genuinely enjoyed myself. As the session drew to a close and we were reminded to engage our breathing and our bodies, (cliched I know), I felt an overwhelming sense of calm.

We emerged from the purple dome, I took a swift glance in the mirror and watched large beads of sweat rolling down my face: a shade of fuchsia pink was the closest match to my skin, but I wasn't alone so didn't feel too embarrassed.

As I thanked Alice for her class she explained to me that since joining the company five months ago she's really felt a sense of community, genuinely delighted that "it doesn't feel like a clique here,

everyone is so cool, it's a safe space which is helped by the darkness, people of all abilities can come here and feel part of the process".

I must say, I agree with Alice, with next to no yoga ability or experience I still left feeling I had achieved a sense of calm and accomplishment, however small. I was set up for the rest of the day. Maybe my next accomplishment should now be to invest in some new trainers.

(817 words)