

Having taught at the 1st Egypt Yoga Festival last year, I was honoured to be asked to teach again this year, particularly as Lama Tensing was to be present. The organiser, Hossam Darwish of T.E.N. Tours, engaged the services of Anthony Sadasiva, Director of Yogasynthesis in New York as executive consultant to the festival. With people coming from South America, USA, Europe, Asia and the Middle East it was an international and truly memorable experience. The aim of the festival was to bring together highly experienced and multi-dimensional teachers from several continents to share their knowledge in an open atmosphere. Festival participants of all levels were able to explore not only their own practice but to experience diversity in the differing threads of Yoga teachings and gain knowledge and understanding of its philosophy and science.

This year the festival took place at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Taba Heights, a resort situated near the top of the Gulf of Aqaba in Sinai developed by Orascom. It is a beautiful location, nestling between mountains and the sea. The stunning architecture of the hotel with its wonderful gardens created a serene environment. One of the aims of the Festival was to enable participants to expand their own creativity and spirituality, and most of all to unify in the quest for "Global Peace". Thus it was poignant that from the beach we could see Eilat in Israel to our left, Jordan directly in front and Saudi Arabia across to our right.

The opening ceremony, consisting of Bedouin music and dance, took place in the Hyatt's Bedouin encampment in a wadi (deep mountain valley) on the evening of our arrival.

Subsequently, our days would start at six AM with meditation on the beach just after sunrise. There followed three different ability levels of classes held either on the beach, in the gardens or inside. Lectures and workshops followed breakfast with further ones after lunch. During the afternoon we had free time to appreciate the beach and the local area. We would resume in the evening with a yoga class, lecture and dinner. All in all we had very full and fulfilling days.

The yoga teachers came from a wide variety of traditions. I provided dynamic-flow yoga classes set to music from a broad base of Indian, African and Celtic origins. Lila Leuzzi from Brazil taught Kundalini yoga. This is a very spiritual form of yoga inclined towards meditation and seeking a higher state of consciousness, making great use of sound with the aid of gongs and a Shurti Box (reed drone instrument). Jayadev Jaerschky is originally from Germany and now a member of the Ananda community



near Assis in Italy. Ananda specialises in community living and in applying spiritual principles to every aspect of life.

Jonathan Panks, a singer-songwriter and teacher of hatha yoga based in Florida, not only taught his classes, he also delivered a concert of his music based on his life and observations of American history and social change. Guru Dileep Kumar and Dr Nandita Devi a husband and wife from India and the US, taught classes based on Gurukula yoga. This powerful and therapeutic form frees up prana by dissolving energy blocks. Yoga Mata Guru Wafaa from Cairo is an artist as well a yoga teacher. Wafaa's classes combined a creative, energetic and compassionate style using dance moves. Dr Yogita Mehta is originally from Gujarat in India and is now teaching hatha yoga at the Indian Council for Cultural Relations in Cairo. She specialises in yoga and ayurveda.

Some of the lectures and workshops were presented by the teachers, others by particular specialists. Stephen Quong is a Vedic Astrologer from California. He practices Jyotisha (the science of light in Sanskrit) which originated in India over 6,000 years ago. His lectures showed the links between astrology, yoga and spirituality.

Swami Ramaswarupananda is from the Divine Life Society Sivananda Ashram near Uttarahashi in the Himalayas. He presented lectures on How to Cultivate Virtues, Thought Power and An Introduction to the 8 Limbs of Raja Yoga. Mahgo Suh is originally from the Korean mountains but now lives in the US. She ran a workshop to introduce the Dado tea ceremony that has been handed down through her family for generations and later demonstrated the full ceremony.

The state of our health,
according to yoga
psychology, is the
balanced flow of energy
(prana) through all the
energy circuits of the
mind and body.

When this flow gets interrupted, by interfering with or breaking some laws of Nature, the body begins to revolt. This revolt is seen and experienced in the form of different symptoms, discomfort and disease. Ancient people knew how to re-establish the lost

Egypt's second International Yoga Festival

Words: Heather George

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harmony and rhythm of the body and mind by utilizing the power of sound. The system is called Nada Yoga (the Yoga of Sound).

G S Sachdev, a world leading exponent of Nada Yoga, plays the Bansuri flute, one of the oldest instruments in existence. Sachdev ran two workshops on the Foundations of Nada Yoga where he explained the two bases of Indian classical music – the “raga”, the melodic form and the “tala,” or time measure. At the second workshop he was joined by Tapan Bhattacharya, a leading tabla player originally from India and now based in Barcelona, Spain. Tapan explained the structured rhythms played on the tabla and how they fit with the flute. On our last evening, with Anthony Sadasiva on the Tanpura (a four-stringed, fretless drone instrument), they provided a beautiful classical Indian music concert. Having had the theory explained in the workshops, we were able to fully appreciate the complex music and the musicianship.

Lama Tensing Yigmen is originally from Namgyal Monastery, the personal monastery of the Dali Lama in Tibet, and is now based in New York. He delivered lectures on the Basic Thoughts and Practices of Meditation, the Four Noble Truths, and Developing Love, Compassion and Kindness. The rest of the time he spent creating the Mandala of Buddha of Compassion. This intricate design is about a metre across and made from different-coloured rice flour. He started by chanting and then laid out the blueprint of the Mandala. Tensing applied the flour from a long metal funnel called a Chakpu, starting at the middle and working out. This took a number of days. At a concluding special ceremony he explained the meaning of the Mandala in terms of the symbols included. He emphasised that he was not creating a work of art or something of material value, but engaging in a process that benefits him and also serves to benefit others. A key to this is the absence of attachment, which



was reinforced as we all helped to dismantle the mandala, putting the flour into a jar. We then formed a procession to the shores of the Gulf of Aqaba, chanting Om Mani Padme Hum. Here Lama Tensing continued to chant as he poured the flour into the waters to send the compassion off to all. The fact that Israel, Jordan and Saudi Arabia are within sight, and just a few kilometres away, made this very poignant. This is the first time this Buddhist ceremony has been performed in an Islamic country. Everyone was very aware of the significance of this and was touched by it.

So a deep thank you to Hossam Darwish and the team from T.E.N. Tours, Anthony Sadasiva, Nikki Priestley from Orascom together with the staff of the Hyatt Regency for organising and hosting such a special event.

T.E.N. Tours are now planning the Third Yoga Festival after the great success of the first two. It will take place on 7th to 15th April 2008 (see www.egyptiyogafestival.net). This time the festival will be split across two sites. The first two days will be spent in Giza with yoga classes, lectures, workshops with teachers from across the world. This will include encircling and embracing the Khufu Pyramid in an ancient ceremony of Unity and Peace. On the third day we will travel across the sacred and magical Sinai to Taba Heights to continue the festival. I am trying to encourage as many people as possible to attend next year and share this wonderful experience. If you are interested please contact me at heather@omtropy.com.

Heather George (www.omtropy.com) is a yoga, Pilates and ChiBall teacher and life coach from Staines and was representing the Independent Yoga Network. She teaches in spas, health clubs & schools and for the CRISIS homeless charity, and runs classes, workshops, retreats and courses on stress management for private and corporate clients.