



Floating meditation at Monarch Beach Resort

# Defying Gravity

From floating workouts to weightless therapy, this new trend helps bring balance to your everyday life.

BY ASHLEY RYAN

Whether drifting in saltwater tanks or wrapped up in aerial silks, there's something captivating about floating. This recent trend of defying gravity has worked its way into workout routines, fitness classes and therapy sessions around the world, providing a freeing feeling in addition to many mental and physical health benefits.

From trying out local floatation therapies to enhancing your yoga routine at Monarch Beach Resort's Miraval Life in Balance Spa with aerial tricks, Orange County has plenty to offer for those that are falling in love with floating.

## A NEW TREND IN RELAXATION

While floating is one wellness

trend that has definitely picked up momentum over the last decade, it isn't necessarily new. According to a 2014 report by Spafinder, Benjamin Franklin experienced profound relaxation through saltwater floatation back in the 18th century. But the popularity of floating for fitness and therapy didn't come about until much more recently, with float centers starting to develop in the 1980s and celebrities like actor Robin Williams and musician Yoko Ono allegedly owning their own in-home floatation pods.

For a long time, float centers featured very basic equipment—simple pods that were often shrouded in darkness, depriving participants of their senses so they could clear their minds and find relaxation. While sensory-deprivation chambers still exist, floatation centers have seen quite a change in recent years, according to Beth McGroarty, director of research and public relations for the Global Wellness Institute.

Basic floatation pods, in many cases, have been replaced by beautiful capsules that provide much more space. "It's like getting in a large bath now because the industry is growing," McGroarty explains. "They're nicer, more sophisticated."

While the size and the aesthetics of the pods have evolved, technological advances have also improved the quality of floating tanks worldwide. McGroarty says that developments have allowed for improvements like mood lighting, cleaner water and filtration systems, enhanced durability and even music therapy by way of iPod docking stations.

According to Spafinder, floatation tanks are typically kept at a temperature of 93.5 degrees Fahrenheit, with a water-salt ratio of 3:1 to eliminate the effects of gravity and provide buoyancy. This means many pounds of salt must be added to achieve the perfect balance with the amount of water used.

These chambers can be found all over, with Sweden currently leading the world in number of float centers, but there is also a floating presence



Aerial yoga allows participants to strengthen their practice.

in Switzerland, Brazil, China and Canada. In the United States, urban metropolises like New York, the Bay Area, Portland and Seattle all have booming communities of those partaking in floating. McGroarty says this trend has even infiltrated the workplace, with high-stress companies sending employees to float centers to relax.

### ENDLESS BENEFITS

The recent fascination with floating isn't hard to figure out. According to McGroarty, "Floating is a shortcut to that state—the dream state between sleeping and waking. ... It's a very, very quick way to reach a meditative state."

Meditation has been an important part of relaxation for various cultures and religions for centuries, but McGroarty says that it's now a popular way to combat the stress and technology overloads that people face on a regular basis.

"People don't have as much time as they used to," she explains. "When they achieve this relaxed state, it offers an intense stress reduction and it opens their mind for creativity."

While the relaxation and mental benefits are amazing, the physical benefits of floating are even more impressive. Standard sessions, which

last from an hour to an hour and a half, quickly take pressure off of the body. "Gravity is what causes injury," McGroarty explains, noting that the ability to get rid of gravity for a while can work wonders on those suffering. Floating helps to reduce pain and muscle inflammation while the salinity has positive impacts on the skin.

But it doesn't end there. She says studies on the physical effects of saltwater floatation therapy have increased as of late, measuring brain

waves and using neuroimaging to see what participants' brains look like before and after each session.

"Stress related things are dropping fast," McGroarty says, adding that cortisol levels, blood pressure and heart rate all decrease after time spent floating. The Spafinder study also notes that floatation tanks have been used to positively treat headaches, insomnia and even depression. Many of the studies also found that the effects are long lasting, with



BOGA Fit is a weightless workout that takes place in the resort's pool.



Awaken Float Lounge in Orange, California

stress-related hormones like cortisol and epinephrine staying at decreased levels months after floating.

"More studies mean more evidence of its benefits," McGroarty says, noting that some professional sports teams have started using floatation therapy for injuries and that it is being tested on those suffering from post traumatic stress disorder as well. "As the evidence proves its benefit, you're going to see more mainstream uses as treatment."

### FLOATING AT MONARCH BEACH RESORT

While floatation tanks aren't available at Monarch Beach Resort—you'll have to venture a little further north for that—the spa has alternative ways of floatation for guests to enjoy.

One such therapy is floating meditation, which involves the instructor gently rocking guests as they combine the movement with sound meditation in the form of crystal chakra bowls. The class is currently offered twice a week in 45-minute sessions.

According to Assistant Director of Spa MacKenzie MacDonald, "During floating meditation, the guest is suspended lying flat in a silk [hammock] with their eyes covered with a lavender-scented eye pillow. ... The class is deeply relaxing and allows the guest to tune into their energy centers and, with the help of the instructor, determine if they are off balance."

Another way to get your floating fix at Miraval is with a more fitness-inspired aerial yoga class. Using silks as a tool, guests will strengthen their regular yoga practice with a flow that MacDonald says deepens regular postures in a supported environment, adding stability and aiding in inverted postures or suspended standing postures like tree pose.

"Aerial yoga improves balance, reduces neck compressions during inversions and improves circulation, reverse blood flow and stimulation of the lymphatic system," she explains.

MacDonald notes that the spa's new BOGA Fit classes—completed on top of a special board called a BOGA Fitmat in the resort pool—also offer a unique floating experience atop water. Allowing attendees to do tough cardio exercises like burpees and pushups over the water removes the harsh impact of these workouts, allowing guests to get a high-intensity workout while still feeling like they can do more.

Like floatation therapy, these activities and treatments at Monarch Beach Resort offer meditative benefits in addition to physical benefits, and the lack of gravity lowers the chance of injury. Whether you opt for a dip in a sensory-deprivation pod, a float across the pool on your BOGA Fitmat or a session of aerial yoga, you simply can't go wrong with these weightless activities. 🦋

### SERENE SOUNDS

While floating is one way to find relaxation, sound meditation can also be beneficial. "Sound healing uses sound vibration to tune into the brain through the sympathetic nervous system," Assistant Director of Spa MacKenzie MacDonald explains. "These sound waves entice the brain to focus and move deeper into relaxation."

At Miraval Life in Balance Spa, sound meditation is incorporated into both floating meditation and chakra meditation through the help of the following tools.



A Tibetan singing bowl

### CRYSTAL CHAKRA BOWLS:

These crystal bowls produce tones that can be felt in the body—tones that affect the chakras, or energy centers, for healing and meditation.

### TIBETAN SINGING BOWLS:

Tibetan singing bowls are composed of bronze alloy and produce sound when struck or rubbed with a mallet. They can also be found in the resort's in-room meditation kits (available upon request), along with other meditation accoutrements.

### TIBETAN CYMBALS:

Used for meditation and healing, the sounds produced by Tibetan cymbals have also been used to cleanse auras or temple environments.