



Paddleboard yoga is the ultimate test of balance.

Beyond the Mat

Southern California is filled with one-of-a-kind yoga classes, from those that encourage you to bring your dog to others that will make you glow inside and out.

BY ASHLEY RYAN

There's something soothing about rolling out your mat and taking a seat to begin a new yoga class. From fast-paced hot yoga sessions to more relaxing workshops focused on deep stretching and meditation, there is just something about the practice that leaves you feeling refreshed.

And now, the most popular fitness trend of the last decade is seeing enhancements that allow yogis to further customize their experience. Incorporate interests like stand-up paddleboarding, traveling or even laughing into your yoga routine and you won't be disappointed. These are just a few of the eccentric offerings for unique yoga experiences here in Southern California.

PADDLEBOARD YOGA

Get out on the water with SoCal Paddle Yoga for an experience that

will strengthen your core and improve your balance. After learning the basics of paddleboarding on the shore, participants take to Lake Mission Viejo to paddle out and anchor the boards before stretching and working on seated and standing poses. Because the practice of yoga is focused on the mind-body connection, surrounding yourself with nature can make for a unique experience. "Being on the water and in the elements is what really makes it special," says Kelly Huck, the company's founder. "Water has calming and healing effects, as does yoga, so the water element is what really adds tranquility to the entire experience." (949-945-9891; socialpaddleyoga.com)

LAUGHTER YOGA

One version that may come as a surprise to many is laughter yoga.

Developed in India by Dr. Madan Kataria in 1995, clubs around the world now engage in the practice. Jeffrey Briar, director of the Laughter Yoga Institute, leads a local club that meets daily on the sand in Laguna Beach. All sessions, which are held at the north end of Main Beach, start at 8 a.m. except for Saturdays, when they begin at 10 a.m. Laughter yoga consists of simple movements like shaking hands or pretending to do things like juggling or jumping rope, all while intentionally laughing. Every five minutes, the laughter exercises are broken up with stretches or breathing techniques until the end of the hour-long class, when a structureless laughter meditation takes place. "Benefits to [your] mood are immediate: within minutes, you feel refreshed, enthusiastic and

energized," Briar notes. "Everyone is having so much fun being playful together [and] genuine feelings of friendliness are generated." (949-376-1939; lyinstitute.org)

GLOW-IN-THE-DARK YOGA

For a more intense option, head up to Los Angeles, where The Bridge Mind Body Movement offers a glow-in-the-dark Buti yoga, filled with tribal dance, primal movements, cardio and plyometrics in addition to yoga poses on the last Friday of each month at 7:30 p.m. Instructor Theresa Lee says that participants are able to get out of their heads, let go and surrender to their practice once the lights turn off. Before getting started, the black lights are switched on and guests help paint each other with glow-in-the-dark body paint. Then, the class gets underway. "It is an experience," Lee explains. "It is not just about going to class to work out; you get to be like a kid again and get out of your comfort zone and just be silly." (213-537-0159; thebridgembm.com)

DOG YOGA

Bond with your pet during this unique yoga session that brings new meaning to the Downward-Facing Dog position. "Instead of leaving the dog at home while you go to yoga class, we incorporate them in the class," says Dawn Celapino, owner of

San Diego-based Leash Your Fitness. Upon arrival, the group takes the dogs on a short walk to get some energy out, providing their human counterparts time to warm up and stretch. Then, head back for a yoga experience that will leave you feeling lighter and happier after working on your posture and breath work. During the class, dogs are encouraged to sit quietly near their owners' mats. Then, at the end of the session, each participant gives their dog a massage. "Our dogs read our energy so if we are calm, our dogs will follow," Celapino explains. (619-822-3296; leashyourfitness.com)

TRAVEL YOGA

The immersive visual experiences at Earth's Power Yoga in Los Angeles are unrivaled in beauty. Founder Steven Metz says, "Yogascape classes are vigorous classes that are often set to a theme. ... Because I create them, I make each one specifically custom to that experience." The only class of its kind in Southern California, the studio's Yogascape sessions allow yogis to get away with sights and sounds of various travel destinations via projections of scenes from deserts, shorelines and beyond on the room's walls. "The environment adds a very visual element to the classes," Metz explains. "They are beautiful." (323-655-9642; earthspoweryoga.com) 🐾



There's no need to leave your pup at home with this dog-friendly workout.

PERFECTING YOUR ASANAS

These Miraval Life in Balance Spa classes will help you practice your poses without having to leave the resort.



IndoBoard yoga mimics paddleboard yoga, without the risk of getting wet.

Aerial Yoga: Use silk material suspended from the ceiling to discover a thrilling new way to complete your yoga workout; it's said to lengthen muscles, relieve tension and improve agility.

BOGA Yoga: Stability and balance are key during this Vinyasa-style class, which takes place on special boards on the water in the spa pool.

Full Moon Yoga: This donation-based class features outdoor meditation and gentle yoga set to soft music and candlelight under the full moon's natural radiance.

IndoBoard Yoga: Perfect your balance and strengthen your core by practicing yoga positions on an IndoBoard, a wooden board that sits atop two or three inflatable discs to create an unstable foundation that can be adjusted based on experience level.

Sunrise Beach Yoga: Accompanied by a breeze off the ocean and the sound of the waves crashing on the sand, this relaxing morning class will ease you into the day.