

Great Escapes

Chiang Mai | Rishikesh | Byron Bay | Ubud

A great holiday offers us more than just a reprieve from our everyday experiences. It shows us a different way of living by teaching us new skills, expanding our practice or pushing us beyond our comfort zone. We've chosen four destinations that are memorable and inspiring in all these ways, but are also genuinely affordable places to visit, allowing you to extend your great escape for that little bit longer.

PHOTOGRAPHY: UMBRELLAS; ©ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/ARTURBO; CHIANG MAI: ©ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/DANIEL COLE; RISHIKESH: ANANDA IN THE HIMALAYAS; BYRON BAY: GAIA RETREAT & SPA; UBUD: THE YOGA BARN.



Chiang Mai | Thailand



Rishikesh | India



Byron Bay | Australia



Ubud | Indonesia

northern star

Chiang Mai shines brightly with plenty of relaxation and interesting sites for visiting yogis. By Kristie Kellahan

The Night Bazaar takes place in the centre of Chiang Mai every evening, attracting huge crowds.



The sacred golden chedi and umbella at Wat Phra That Doi Suthep temple.



A class at Chiang Mai YogaSala.

If Thailand was a person, Bangkok would be its beating heart, vibrant and full of life. The party playgrounds of the south—Ko Samui, Phuket, Ko Phi Phi—would undoubtedly be its swivelling hips and dancing feet. And up in the north, where Thailand's second largest city Chiang Mai lies, would reside its intellect, memory and creativity. Chiang Mai's fascinating history as the capital of the ancient Lanna Thai kingdom, coupled with more than 300 spiritually significant Buddhist temples, has ensured a steady stream of visitors since traders first passed through, more than 700 years ago.

At first glance, Chiang Mai doesn't get the prize for the most beautiful place. There's no white-sandy beach, no glittering harbour, no knockout city centre. The higgledy-piggledy streets are teeming with evidence of the city's contradictions: old and new, spiritual and shamelessly commercial, yin and yang. Dreadlocked hippies share the footpaths with Buddhist monks, as Burberry-clad stylistas and smiling yogis queue for fresh-fruit shakes from street vendors.

Yet repeat visitors (and oh, how often they come back!) are testament to the seductive nature of Chiang Mai's peaceful,

nurturing rhythm. To spend a day here is to catch a glimpse of something special, to spend a week is to begin to appreciate the practical spirituality and reverence that permeates daily life, and to spend a month is to really surrender to the certainty of becoming a boomerang visitor for life.

For anyone interested in yoga, meditation or learning about Buddhism, Chiang Mai is an ideal spot to put down your roots for awhile. There is an abundance of riches when it comes to opportunities to learn more about the physical, emotional and spiritual aspects of yoga practice. It's affordable enough to stay several months without blowing budget, with bargain accommodation, food and transport a way of life here. There's a well-established expat community, its members welcoming newcomers at the Northgate Jazz Co-op on Tuesday nights or the Writer's Club & Wine Bar on Friday evenings.

They say they love Chiang Mai because it's so unabashedly, undeniably Thai. Chiang Mai clings proudly to old and new cultural traditions, rejecting the gloss while claiming the substance of larger cities. Nowhere else will you see so many men, women, children and even



Buddhas at Wat Phra That Doi Suthep temple.

planes, wearing bright yellow to honour the 60-year reign of much-loved King Bhumibol Adulyadej, the longest reigning monarch in the world.

What's not to adore about a place where mealtimes are always an occasion, whether it's pad thai for a dollar from a street market or a gourmet feast of aromatic curries, flavoursome stir-fries and more in the fine-dining restaurant of a five-star hotel by the twinkling Ping River. The pleasure of eating is vital to Thais, who often greet visitors with, "Have you eaten yet?"

Artisans of all kind are honoured in Chiang Mai. Their paintings, sculpture, silverwork and textile design are appreciated as a link with the rich, cultural heritage of the region. Sunday-night markets have practically taken over the neighbourhood around Thapae Gate, attracting thousands of visitors each week in search of vintage jewellery, fishermen's pants, banana pancakes and everything in between. The grand mountain temple of Wat Phra That Doi Suthep is worth the steep winding drive for the spectacular views out over the region. As home to Buddha relics, dating back to the 1300s, it is a holy place for all Thai Buddhists and one they will make pilgrimage to in their lifetime if possible. For tourists, the 15-minute hilly journey from the centre of Chiang Mai takes them away from the crowded streets of the old walled city and up into the lush, green vegetation of the mountains that cradle the town. It's the perfect place to sit still, breathe, and let the mind wander. ➔



Every early morning, about 400 monks from a local temple walk into town to collect offerings.



Fact File | Chiang Mai

Getting there and around Thai Airways flies regularly to Bangkok from Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Perth with connecting domestic flights to Chiang Mai. Visit www.thaiairways.com for bookings. A convenient system of **songthaew taxis** operate around town, simply flag down one of the red utes on the street and pay the standard fee, of around 70c/trip.

Stay Nimmanviengping Serviced Apartments are modern, clean, stylish, fully furnished and come with deep bathtubs for those aching yoga muscles—this is one of the best serviced apartment buildings in Chiang Mai on trendy Nimmanhaemin road. Studios from about \$140/week; daily and monthly rates available on a range of apartment sizes. Visit www.chiangmai.thaiapartments.net for bookings.

Learn Enjoy a five-day Ashtanga Primer course for \$170 at Chiang Mai Yogasala, visit www.cmyogasala.com for details; or for casual visits, Body and Mind Healing School run casual yoga and meditation classes in a variety of styles, visit www.bodyandmindhealing.org

Relax Enjoy an authentic Thai massage with Mama Lek, who has had the technique handed down to her on her mother's side—where it's been going strong for close to 80 years now. She and her team of masseuses use warm herbal compresses over your body to coax muscles into tricky stretches. Visit www.nervetouch.com for bookings.

Indulge Pamper yourself at The Chedi Chiang Mai, which commands the riverfront compound of the former British consulate. While the facilities and decor of this designer hotel are the most modern and comfortable available, there's an elegance and a sense of timeless hospitality that will indulge your historic senses. Visit www.ghmhotels.com for more information.

Explore Visitors can charter a songthaew taxi for the day and drive up into the majestic Doi Suthep mountains. A historic Buddhist temple at the peak enjoys superb views over the city.

Shop After visiting the famous Night Bazaar, you can soak up the authentic vibe at the Walking Street Market held every Sunday on Ratchadamnoen road. Traffic is blocked off to clear the way for pedestrians, and stallholders offer everything from handmade pouch clothes, to painted postcards, furniture and some authentic northern homewares at rock-bottom prices.

Eat The Whole Earth Restaurant's motto is "eating for enlightenment". With delicious Indian and Thai-style meals, and an idyllic teahouse location, it's a delight. Visit www.wholeearthcm.com for location and menu.

PHOTOGRAPHY: MARKET: ©ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/BLADE KOSTAS; TEMPLE: ONECLEARVISION/©ISTOCKPHOTO.COM; YOGA CLASS: CHIANG MAI YOGASALA

PHOTOGRAPHY: BUDDHA: ©ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/MARC BERTHOLD; MONKS: UNIQUE/©ISTOCKPHOTO.COM ILLUSTRATIONS: MAP: ©ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/ILLUSTRIOUS; PIN: ©ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/VICTOR MAFFE



Yoga classes at renowned health spa Ananda in the Himalayas.

indian express

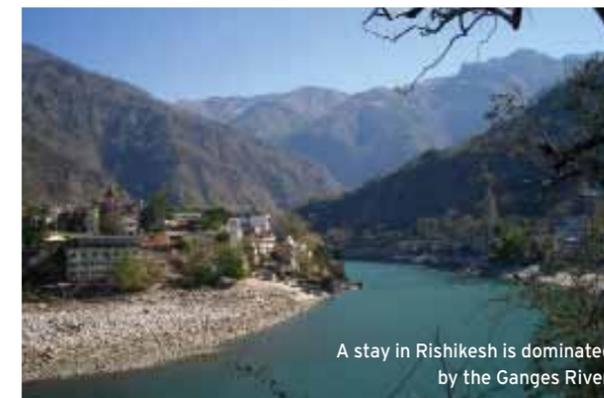
A visit to Rishikesh may not always be tranquil, but you'll find all the yoga experiences you could long for in this valley at the base of the Himalayas. **By Sue White**

Those searching for a slice of yogic relaxation quickly realise India's Rishikesh ticks a number of boxes. There's the beautiful scenic location at the base of the Himalayas; an interesting town small enough to walk around; the sacred

Ganges river for rituals, bathing, and general ambience; plus of course myriad ashrams, sadhus (spiritual wanderers) and yoga classes. But while it may be the yoga capital of the world, Rishikesh is Indian at heart—chaos prevails over calm and solitude.

Rishikesh boomed as a spiritual centre after 1932, when yoga master Swami Sivananda's teachings began spreading beyond the doors of his local ashram. But while Sivananda's presence sealed the town's popularity with locals, Western spiritual seekers followed their own gurus here—The Beatles' 1960s experience with transcendental meditation at Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's ashram drew worshippers as keen to worship John or Paul, as they were to honour Ganesh or Shiva.

Unless you're planning to stay in one of the town's myriad ashrams (Parmarth Niketan is one popular option) your first task should be deciding on a hotel. Options abound but it's worth remembering that in India your room is your haven, so spring for the top of your



A stay in Rishikesh is dominated by the Ganges River.

budget. In Rishikesh this often means forking out \$10 a night rather than \$5 for a spacious room, your own bathroom and (often) a balcony boasting a view of the Ganges.

Getting across the Ganges is an adventure involving one of the town's two suspension bridges, Ram Jhula further south or Laxman Jhula a few kilometres upriver. It remains one of the mysteries of Rishikesh, that regardless of how empty a bridge is when you step onto it, by the time you're halfway across you'll be jammed in amongst carts towing supplies, locals squeezing by on motorbikes, Indian pilgrims requesting your presence in a family photo (especially if you are blonde and female) and a few roaming monkeys. While the journey is a definite "wow, I'm in India" moment, it's neither speedy nor relaxing—if you're trying to get to a class on time you might prefer to cough up the 10 rupee (\$0.25) for the boat which makes the regular crossings with slightly less stress (departures are from the ghat, south of Ram Jhula).

Finding a yoga class is an ideal way to settle in. Teachers come and go, so it's worth asking for tips from a yogic-type sitting in one of the hole-in-the wall cafes between Ram Jhula and Parmarth Niketan ashram (you can't miss the latter; there's a massive Shiva statue outside). Quickly, you'll find your day falls into a soothing Rishikesh routine, starting with an early morning classic-style class at one of the ashrams. If you prefer Iyengar there's usually a well-known, but super-strict Swiss teacher Usha Devi in the yoga room at Omkarananda Hotel on the western side of the river. Look for a good pranayama or meditation class, too—especially since asana in India is often far unlike what you'll have experienced at home. If you end up preferring your own practice most hotels have a large rooftop available.

Afternoons in Rishikesh are best spent resting, especially in the hotter summer months, from April to June. If you're feeling more energetic, explore the town's excellent bookshops, or head an hour down the road to Haridwar, one of the sites of the mass Kumbh Mela pilgrimage. Return home at sunset, when hundreds of devotees gather on the banks of the Ganges outside Parmarth Niketan's Shiva statue. Join in by chanting your way through the evening aarti—a nightly celebration that will leave you on that sweet yoga high you came for. ➤



Fact File | Rishikesh

Getting there and around Qantas flies daily from all mainland capital cities to New Delhi via Singapore. From New Delhi, take the four-hour train journey to Haridwar (book at www.indianrail.gov.in) before jumping in a cab or an auto-rickshaw for the final leg. Narrow alleys mean you'll do a lot of walking in Rishikesh, but you can save yourself from long, hot walks by using shared mini-vans from the far side of Ram Jhula up to Luxman Jhula.

Stay At Omkarananda, on the west (entry) side of the Ganges, around \$10 should get you a huge room, private bathroom and a shared balcony with peaceful river views. Stay in the main building, as the other is less appealing. Check out www.iyengaryoga.in

Learn Parmarth Niketan is very popular for longer courses and daily drop-in yoga classes. Bear in mind most asana classes in Rishikesh don't run on Sundays. Classes and satsangs at Sivananda Ashram are a wonderful way to experience an ashram without actually staying (which requires writing months in advance for permission). Daily activities are open to all, although asana classes are separate for men (mornings) and women (evenings). Go to www.parmarth.com and www.sivanandaonline.org

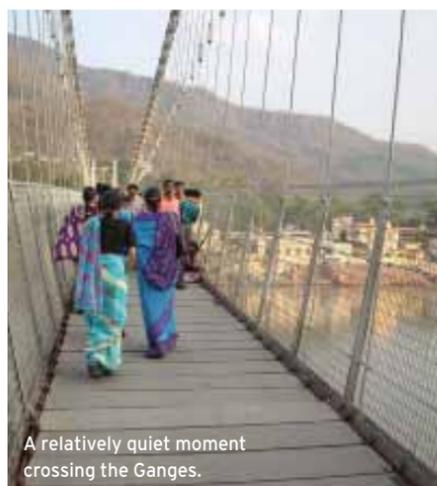
Relax An Ayurvedic massage will soothe any sore muscles, although the experience is usually more impressive in Kerala (southern India). Try next to Swiss Cottage Tents, or ask around for a good recommendation.

Indulge There's plenty of silver jewellery to treat yourself to here, but if you want to indulge on a whole different level, make the bumpy 16km journey to Ananda. Voted as one of the world's best spas, Ananda will happily open your wallet—to the tune of hundreds of dollars a day—as you delight in one of 79 wellness treatments, customised menus and unsurpassed views. www.anandaspa.com

Explore Go north towards Phool Chatti for a dip in the Ganges, or a swim in tucked-away waterfalls such as the Garud Chatti (2-3km north on the Phool Chatti road). If it's too hot to walk, the drivers know where to drop you off for a final 30-minute walk.

Shop Rishikesh has some fabulous bookshops. With yoga publications at bargain prices, you'll want to take advantage of India's special rates for packages containing only books. The better bookshops in the Swargashram area (or the popular store next to the German Bakery) will organise postage for you; expect packages to take a couple of months but should eventually arrive intact.

Eat After your morning yoga class spend a leisurely breakfast at the Devraj Coffee Corner (known to all as the German Bakery), on the west side of Laxman Jhula, which has spectacular views. As a spiritual centre, the town of Rishikesh is strictly vegetarian (as well as alcohol-free), but the dosas and thalis at restaurants like Swargashram's Chotiwalla (www.chotiwallarestaurant.com) should be a happy enough diversion to stop you from caring at dinnertime.



A relatively quiet moment crossing the Ganges.



The nightly aarti celebrations draw a big crowd.

PHOTOGRAPHY: YOGA CLASS: ANANDA IN THE HIMALAYAS; BRIDGE & TEMPLE: SUE WHITE.

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Left: Bryon Bay Beach Cafe. Top: Jessie Chapman is one of the many renowned local teachers at Byron Bay.



mecca by the beach

Boasting a superb heritage, Byron is home to local as well as world-renowned yogis. **By Kris McIntyre**

For more than 20,000 years, Byron Bay has been known as a healing place. According to Aboriginal legend this was a place for ceremony and spiritual inspiration, dancing circles, women's birthing rituals and many Dreamtime stories. The indigenous owners, the Bundjalong, named this sacred land Cavvanbah, meaning "meeting place"—a place to visit for a short while before moving on. In short, a place to retreat. Cradled by the 'cloud catcher', Mount Warning, and the shoulder of Cape Byron Headland, this sacred land heals through its natural beauty alone. The lush sub-tropical rainforest of the hinterland

ambles down to pristine waters where dolphins surf alongside humans with the free-spirited attitude that Byron Bay is renowned for. In the 1950s and '60s, Byron Bay was a whaling town that in turn became the home of the "Save the Whale" campaign of the '70s. The whalers moved out, the surfers and hippies moved in, and in 1973 The Aquarius Festival in nearby Nimbin put Byron on the map as a happy, hippie town. These days it's a mecca for more than a million backpackers and holidaymakers that come every year seeking the sun, the surf and the spirituality. The township



Byron Iyengar Yoga Lounge.



Gaia's luxurious rooms are a classic Byron indulgence.



Shopping on bustling Jonson street.

PHOTOGRAPHY: COUPLE CAFE: SHARYN CAIRNS; TOURISM NSW; JESSIE CHAPMAN: COURTESY OF RADIANCE RETREATS; YOGA CLASS: BYRON IYENGAR YOGA LOUNGE; HOTEL ROOM: GAIA RETREAT & SPA; WOMAN SHOPPING: ADAM TAYLOR; TOURISM NSW



Cape Byron Lighthouse marks the most easterly point of Australia.

centres around bustling Jonson Street and the Beach Hotel opposite Main Beach, jam-packed with cafes and clothing shops that are a mix of surfer dude meets herbal goddess. Many of the locals bemoan the fact that it's more commercial these days, but all the things that make Byron special are still ripe for the picking—an amazing year-round climate, beautiful surf beaches, eccentric characters and wonderful healers, including some of the best yoga teachers in Australia.

With names like Dena Kingsberg, Jessie Chapman, John Ogilvie, Louisa Sear, Liz Costigan and Lance Schuler calling Byron Bay home, it's not surprising that a yoga class can be found within a side stretch of just about anywhere in Byron. Ashtanga, Sivananda, Satyananda, Akido, Iyengar, Japanese and Kundalini styles are all taught here. In fact, with a smorgasbord of daily yoga classes, year-round retreats and teacher training across a range of styles and traditions, yogis are spoiled for choice here. Even at the infamous Arts Factory Backpackers Lodge, where communal living harks back to the Byron days of old, the day starts with yoga.

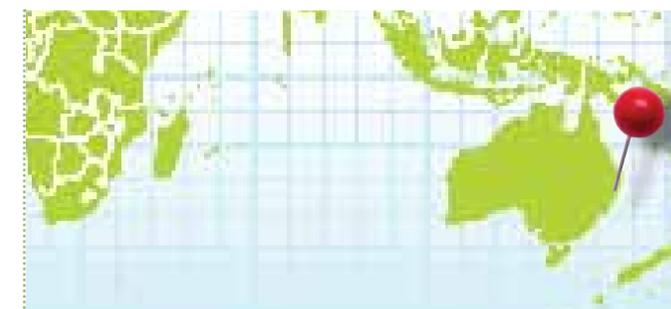
For aspiring yoga teachers, Byron is the perfect place to immerse in a relaxed yogic lifestyle and learn with intensive teacher-training programs ranging from four weeks to a year. The most popular include John Ogilvie's Byron Bay Yoga Centre and Lance Schuler's inspya training. Off the mat, take up surfing, scuba diving, drumming, Tantra, temple dancing or any of the myriad distractions that will entertain your inner soul-seeker.

If anything is testament to the positive effects of Byron's popularity, it's the variety and quality of the food. The regular farmers' markets showcase Byron's local and organic produce, while the growing number of chef-hatted restaurants in the area make for some sumptuous meals. But you can still find a 101 nourishing tofu-based dishes, as well as inexpensive vegan and vegetarian treats around town, just like the old days. ➤



The magnificent Minyon Falls are close to Byron.

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Fact File | Byron Bay

Getting there and around Byron Bay is about two hours drive south of Brisbane. Fly to Ballina or Coolangatta. Xcede Airport Shuttle service offers transfers to Byron from Ballina (\$18 each way) and Gold Coast (\$40 each way). Book online at www.xcede.com.au **Byron Bay Surf and Bike Hire** rent bikes from \$20/day, or you can buy a used bike from as little as \$150. Phone (02) 6680 7066.

Stay For relaxed communal beachside living, a 'frisbee throw' from the beach and a 10-minute stroll to town with shared rooms, studios and cottages from \$40/night—don't go past **Belongil Beach House**. Visit www.belongilbeachhouse.com. Check into one of the 'funky abodes' at **Arts Factory Backpackers Lodge** for \$18/day camping; \$34/day shared dorm; or \$80/day in a private room. Visit www.artsfactory.com.au for bookings.

Learn Stay at **Radiance Retreats** with Jessie Chapman, visit www.radianceretreats.com; Join Dena Kingsberg's **Yoga Shala** for Ashtanga Mysore classes (www.dena.net.au); Visit Liz Costigan's **Byron Iyengar Yoga Lounge** for a daily class, or try the five-night retreat (www.byroniyengaryoga.com). Check out **Inspya** for their four to six week hatha teacher-training programs for levels one to four with Lance Schuler (www.inspyayoga.com). John Ogilvie's **Byron Yoga Centre** offers daily yoga classes, seven-day retreats and teacher training modules with ashram-style accommodation. Visit www.byronyoga.com.

Relax Head out of town to **The Kiva Spa & Bathhouse**. Entry to the bathhouse is \$20 with treatments from only \$45 for a half-hour massage. www.byron-bay.com/kiva/

Indulge Give yourself the ultimate indulgence and stay at **Gaia Retreat & Spa** from \$912 per person (twin share) for two nights including all meals, one-hour massage, daily yoga and leisure activities. www.gaiaretreat.com.au

Explore A sunrise walk to **Cape Byron Lighthouse** is a must. Further afield, climb **Mount Warning**, visit **Minyon Falls** and explore the hinterland and surrounding towns including Mullumbimby, Brunswick Heads and Bangalow.

Shop On a drizzly day head to the esoteric **Abraxas Bookshop** (www.abraxas-net.com.au) or the **Heart Of The Bay** jewellery shop (www.heartofthebay.com.au).

Eat **Byron Beach Café** has a great view and an eclectic menu - Bloody Marys are served alongside 'LSD' (Soy Dandelion Latte) without a raised eyebrow. Further afield in Bangalow, the degustation dinner at **Satiate** is worth booking in advance for. Visit www.ate.net.au and www.byronbeachcafe.com.au

eat, practise, rejuvenate

Stunning rice paddies surround The Yoga Barn in Ubud.

An inspirational memoir set in Indonesia's Ubud has put the town on the international map.

By Erin O'Dwyer

It's almost obligatory to fly into Bali these days clutching a copy of Elizabeth Gilbert's memoir *Eat Pray Love*.

Like *The Beach* did for Thailand, Elizabeth Gilbert's bestseller about her search for meaning has been a mixed blessing for Ubud, a town of 8000 in Bali's lush, volcanic countryside, one hour's drive north-east of the capital Denpasar.

Spiritual seekers wearing hemp and dreadlocks swarm the streets of this once-quiet artisans village, and surrounding rice paddies are quickly being gobbled up for development.

"You know the Monkey Forest?" asks my driver. "From there to the main street used to be all rice paddies when I was a child. In 10 years in Ubud, no more rice paddies, I think."

That same stretch now bustles with galleries, boutiques and cafes. Sure, there are still rice paddies and simple scenes from daily life, especially if you wander off the Jalan

Raya (main road) and down the vein-like laneways. But the increased popularity of Ubud is a confronting reality for the savvy, spiritually aware traveller. How to find a meaningful retreat, yet avoid the tourist traps and still tread lightly on the earth?

It takes time and a little more research. But at least Ubud remains the antithesis of Bali's beachside madness. Night-time is a quiet affair, with plenty of fine-dining options rather than pubs and clubs—and everyone manages to keep their shirt on. Even in yoga class.

Yogis, then, should take heart. Many of the world's best yoga teachers make annual pilgrimages to Ubud, drawn to the strong spirit of the landscape, the jungle-covered riverbanks and imposing silhouettes of Mount Batur and Mount Agung. Teachers like Natanaga Zhander, Emma Balnaves and Sue Hawkins from Australia; Rodney Yee, Sharon Gannon and David Life from the US; and Indian sun yoga practitioner Swamiji Umashankar. They travel here not only to teach, but to relax and take time out for themselves.

Part of the attraction of Ubud is the Balinese people. Indonesia is the most populous Muslim nation, but Bali—the small island in the middle of the



Dragons are thought to protect Balinese temples from bad ghosts.

Indonesian archipelago—practices a unique blend of animistic Hinduism. Family homes are clustered around ancient stone temples, and religious ceremonies happen daily. Little offerings of food and flowers crowd street corners, windowsills and dashboards. Full-moon ceremonies are colourful events, with long lines of Balinese women snaking up the temple stairs carrying rattan boxes of food offerings on their heads.

Bali does not share India's yoga tradition, but the island's deep spirituality provides a warm, tolerant embrace in which to practice. At the centre of the Ubud yoga scene is The Yoga Barn—an impressive open-air pavilion overlooking rice paddies. The underwhelming name seems to keep secret the integrity of the studio and its teachers. Best of all, it's hidden down a laneway and unsigned from the main street.

The Yoga Barn offers as many as seven classes each day. These include hatha, Yin, Japanese-style Power yoga, vinyasa flow and Ashtanga as well as pranayama, meditation and



Como Shambhala Estate's beautiful facilities and bespoke programs are worth the price tag.

PHOTOGRAPHY: TEMPLE ©ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/MLENNY PHOTOGRAPHY: HOTEL: COURTESY OF COMO SHAMBHALA ESTATE

PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY OF THE YOGA BARN.



The Yoga Barn is the hub of yoga in Ubud, offering up to seven classes a day in several styles.

source of life experiences





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Market stalls offer clothing, jewellery and accessories.



A local woman carrying a rattan basket of food.

Fact File | Ubud

Getting there and around Garuda Indonesia flies regularly to Denpasar from Sydney, Melbourne and Perth. Visit www.balionanybudget.com.au. A 30-day visa, issued at the airport, costs \$28. A departure tax of \$18 applies. Many hotels provide transfers to Ubud. Perama Tours shuttle buses leave the airport four times daily and cost \$6 one way, visit www.peramatour.com. To get around Ubud, rent a scooter (from \$4.20/day) or a bicycle (from \$1.80/day). Car and driver hire for sightseeing trips can be booked in Ubud, from \$14/day.

Stay A short walk from The Yoga Barn, Green Field Bungalows has lovely garden-view Bale Bunga for \$30/night, or upgrade to a Bale Sukat Bali, in a teak-carved Balinese-style building with rice-field views for \$60/night. Includes breakfast and choice of double or twin beds. Visit www.greenfieldubud.com for bookings.

Learn Drop in to a class at The Yoga Barn. Casual classes cost \$12, or pay \$48 for a five-class card. Styles include hatha, Yin, Power yoga, vinyasa flow and Ashtanga. Yoga mats provided, no bookings needed. Visit www.theyogabarn.com for more details.

Relax Visit the Neka Art Museum, situated in a lush garden overlooking the Campuhan River. It houses a permanent collection of Indonesian and international artists. Open Monday—Saturday, 9am to 5pm, and Sunday, noon to 5pm. Admission costs about \$2.40. Visit www.museumneka.com for more information.

Indulge Sitting on the confluence of two rivers, 15-minutes drive north of Ubud, is an auspicious place for the Balinese—known as Como Shambhala Estate. This favourable spirit infuses the luxury estate, which employs a team of wellness consultants and offers bespoke programs, from Ayurvedic detox to post-pregnancy weight loss. Villas cost from \$1350/night. www.comoshambhala.com

Explore Buy a bunch of bananas at the entrance to the sacred Monkey Forest, then go talk to the natives. The long-tailed Balinese macaques are believed to protect the nature reserve and temple, which is operated by local villagers. Open daily 8am to 6pm. Visit www.monkeyforestubud.com for more information.

Shop Avoid same-same markets and wander down Jalan Hanoman instead. You'll find one-off boutiques with jewellery, clothing and accessories produced by local designers. Go to Dunia at No 23 for smart casual clothing and Asterisk at No 22 for fantastic silver pieces. www.dunia-bali.com; www.asterisk-shop.com

Eat An expat favourite, Bali Buddha serves organic, raw and vegan dishes, as well as salads and burgers. Visit www.balibuddha.com. For traditional Padang fare, try Puteri Mindang, near the BPD bank on Jalan Raya. A selection of spicy curries, served on banana leaf to be eaten with your fingers, will set you back a mere \$4.80.

Balinese mysticism. Short-break workshops are held regularly as are month-long retreats, teacher-training courses and private classes. After hours, it's a meeting place for expats, with a regular schedule of movies nights and guest speakers.

Hotels are getting in on the act, too. Many offer complimentary daily yoga classes, as well as meditation, spa treatments and in-house wellness programs. Try Kumara Resort, the Ubud Sari Health Resort or Uma Ubud—a gorgeous mid-range resort that runs women-only yoga weeks, led by world-renowned teachers (www.theumaubud.com).

Affordable guesthouse accommodation is plentiful too. Make a base close to The Yoga Barn, then establish a nourishing daily routine. Start with a yoga class or two, lunch on spicy Indonesian-style organic food, then cycle through a paddy field in the afternoon. Or you could just sit and read a book. *Eat Pray Love*, of course. ❀

Erin O'Dwyer travelled courtesy of Garuda Indonesia.



Long-tailed Balinese macaques populate the sacred Monkey Forest.

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