



Give me swelter: embracing hot yoga

PICTURE 60 PEOPLE EXERCISING IN A STEAMY ROOM — AND LOVING IT!

By Deborah Birkett

Photography • David Bebee

LOOKING FOR one of yoga's most intense workouts? You needn't go far: David Tiviluk recently opened what he says is the only Bikram yoga studio between Toronto and Winnipeg.

Bikram Yoga Kitchener-Waterloo opened in Belmont Village in mid-April with inexpensive introductory passes. It quickly attracted a diverse, devoted clientele.

Bikram yoga was named by Indian yogi/entrepreneur Bikram Choudhury, who developed and copyrighted a particular series of 26 Hatha yoga postures and two breathing exercises to be done for 90 minutes in a hot room.

The theory is that heat helps students achieve optimum flexibility.

"People coming to the class can expect a challenging class, a workout, done in the heat, so they should be prepared to stretch, sweat and focus for 90 minutes," says Tiviluk, who heats his studio to 38 C.

"Because it's challenging, it attracts Type A personalities, (but) everyone is free to take it at their own pace."

In May, in response to demand, Tiviluk added 6 a.m. classes, bringing the total of weekly classes to 23.

"The idea was to bring a very downtown, New York-style studio into this region," says Tiviluk, 42, who has practised yoga for 26 years.

He was teaching elementary school in Vancouver when he discovered Bikram, and was "hooked from the very first class."



David Tiviluk keeps a watchful eye on students in a noon-hour Bikram yoga class at his studio in Kitchener.

He immediately realized he would rather teach Bikram than academics, and after completing the nine-week teacher training program he began working toward his dream of opening his own studio.

Originally from Toronto, Tiviluk felt there was a "huge untapped market for this type of yoga" in southwestern Ontario. He was attracted to Waterloo Region for its proximity to family, friends and big-city life an hour down the 401.

In addition to a large, bright practice space, the studio offers a juice bar, shower facilities, a massage room and a lounge area. Tiviluk engaged a feng shui consul-

tant to achieve just the right arrangement of every element in his studio and make it an appealing space.

Bikram classes helped Joel Knight, 26, break through a months-long plateau in his weight-loss program.

The fourth-year psychology student saw himself as overstressed, out of shape and stalled since late 2007 in his effort to drop pounds. "I could barely touch my toes before. Now I can put my head on my knees and all sorts of places," he says.

Knight attended class every day for a week and lost seven pounds. Within the first month he lost 10. His mood has ►



Above: Tricia Beirnes is front and centre in a classic stretching pose.

Right: Stretching the other way, yoga students are reflected in a mirror in the Bikram yoga studio.





David Tiviluk says he turned to a feng shui consultant for advice in setting up his studio, which includes a lounge area and juice bar. At right, Frieda Tsintaris and the class strike a yoga pose.

► improved along with his flexibility. He finds Bikram yoga challenging, but insists, “if you push through that, it’s totally worth it. You feel so great after the class. I have so much more energy now.”

Bikram’s benefits accrue even to those already in excellent shape. Irene Divaris, 46, a Pilates instructor and personal trainer, found Bikram yoga pushed her to new levels of fitness. Though she wasn’t trying to lose weight, she dropped 10 pounds and 2.7 per cent of her body fat.

Divaris says she’s “totally addicted” and has gone to class every day since the day after the studio opened. She often goes twice on Sundays.

She’s been joined by her husband, pathologist Dimitrios Divaris, who’s found that Bikram yoga decreases the chronic lower back pain provoked by long hours of



bending over a microscope.

Irene Divaris claims the toughest part is getting herself to class; the second-toughest is staying in the room: “You sometimes want to run out of the room because it’s hot with 67 people, but the energy is incredible. What’s amazing is the room doesn’t smell of sweat.”

Tiviluk’s venture was well-received, but he

had a cool, wet spring on his side. Will business still boom when it’s 38 C in the shade?

He’s confident: “I think I’ll be busy through the summer, even when it’s hot like that. In other cities, people often trim the schedule a little bit in the summer, but I’ll be expanding mine.”

For more information, check the web at www.bikramyogakw.com