



# The Spiritual Divide

Getting Happy ● Healing Hands ● Practice Makes Perfect  
Bandung's Sounds of the City ● Mystical Mr. Fix-Its

# Time Out to Meditate

*Stressed out? Meditation is the most direct route to the most important kind of relaxation -- relaxation of the spirit. And it is the oldest known and most profound method of calming down.*



Consider the proliferation of day spas in Jakarta, offering the total relaxation experience, with aromatherapy, dimmed lighting, water fountains, ambient music – all to help your aching muscles and over-stimulated senses relax.

But where is the spa for our tired, tortured minds? How do I shower my mind with positive thoughts to reinvigorate my sense of purpose each week?

Of course meditation is not new. It has been around for thousands of years in various forms; in fact it exists in every religion in the form of contemplation, reflection, mystical experiences and so on.

While meditation helps us to relax, calm down, focus and concentrate, the ultimate purpose is to reconnect with the core of our being and in turn reconnect to the purpose of life to address life's fundamental questions such as: Why are we here? Meditation is like coming home to where we belong in our own minds.

We have become noise addicts, seekers of distractions; anything to keep our overactive minds entertained. Why? Because we think too much, and much of that thinking is unproductive. We have become slaves to our minds. Surrounded by gadgets to keep us engaged in various forms of communication we have become disengaged from ourselves, strangers to ourselves, our thoughts and emotions. Many modern maladies such as alienation, violence and depression have been explained as a mourning of this loss of self identity.

While we crave peace and silence, spending time in silence is ironically something many of us try to avoid. In physical silence the ticking of a clock or our own breath can be deafening, while the sound of the chatter inside our head can seem even louder. It's that room that you have never cleaned out, never attended to, and there are lots of things lurking in the dust and the shadows.

Meditation does not require a commitment to long stretches of time. Ten minutes in the morning and the evening is enough to begin with. This can also be enhanced by one minute stops every hour. So what do you need to do? Find a clean, uncluttered space in your home and find a time when you are feeling refreshed, rested but alert. Sit in a comfortable chair or on a cushion or mat on the floor.

You can enhance the environment, creating your own "mind spa" by playing ambient music, burning fragrant oils and dimming the lights. It is helpful to keep your eyes open, focused on a point in front of you. Begin by observing your thoughts. Don't judge, just observe and let the thoughts go. The mind will begin to slow down.

Here is a sample of suggested thoughts for a short meditation:

Gently I bring my energy away from external distractions. I bring all my attention to a point in the middle of my forehead just above and behind my eyes, toward a single point of focus inside. I now look through my eyes as if they are windows. I am a still point of awareness looking through my eyes at the world. I am a point of spiritual energy – silent, still, peaceful. My natural state is peace; I am a being of peace. Keep slowly repeating these thoughts until they resonate.

Become attuned to what is going on inside your mind, and start to integrate the practice of meditation into your daily life, stopping every hour or every few hours to recharge. Learn to tame your emotions, thinking positively and switching to a healthier lifestyle all help enhance the quality of your meditation.

+ **Melinda Hewitt**

**Photo courtesy Prana Spa, The Villas, Seminyak, Bali**

*For more guidance on meditation go to [www.just-a-munite.com](http://www.just-a-munite.com) for short guided meditations with or without music.*

*Mystical, enchanted Bali has long been a mecca for jaded folks seeking spiritual enlightenment. They are still coming today for the love of yoga, Sarasvati writes.*

**T**he yoga crowd stands out from other vacationers in Penestanan hamlet in Ubud.

Generally slim or at least well proportioned, they dress in loose, casual and slightly revealing garb; they smile a lot and have gentle mannerisms; and they order mainly vegetarian dishes at the three local diners.

Another clue: they are early risers, at the crack of dawn dutifully ambling out of their rented cottages to make their way to Santra Putra, the local arts and yoga studio, for meditation practice.

In the span of two weeks or one month – depending on the type of retreat or training being conducted – they bring good business to this otherwise sleepy village a five-minute drive from the center of Ubud.

To most people, Bali is synonymous with beaches and volcanoes, temples and ritual processions, shopping and parties, but in recent years the island has been marketed for a different breed of traveller.

They come to Bali to discover more about yoga, either in pursuit of spiritual enlightenment, relaxation or a bendy body – or a combination of the three. They have created a range of complementary industries, from yoga garments to holistic health treatments. Some boutique resorts have their own resident yoga teachers, while rental villas advertise their balconies as “meditation space”.

More and more restaurants have expanded their ordinarily thin vegetarian menus, offering meat-free versions of common dishes like satay or *nasi campur* (rice with a mix of side dishes).

With its year-round cool climate and surrounding lush rice terraces, Bali’s cultural capital of Ubud is a perfect setting for this ancient discipline that requires mental stillness for a return to one’s inner self.

Meghan Pappenheim wanted to tap into this when she started her yoga business in 2002. She launched a website to attract tourists back to Bali following the first terrorist bombings on the island.

The Bali Spirit website ([www.balispirit.com](http://www.balispirit.com)) promotes the island’s spiritual and alternative lifestyle scene, offering services like yoga and meditation retreats, holistic health treatments, as well as ecotourism.

For a US\$75 annual fee, yoga teachers, healers or retreat organizers can advertise their programs on the site. The site gets 175,000 hits daily, she says.

“I wanted to link like-minded businesspeople in one place to promote ourselves overseas with yoga as the main medium, so that people realize there is something special about Bali,” says the native New Yorker, who has lived on the island since 1994.

“In Southeast Asia, southern Thailand has been a popular yoga destination. I think Bali has so much more to offer.”

Already an entrepreneur with her Balinese husband Kadek Gunarta, she opened KAFE, a bistro featuring healthy food, with a yoga studio upstairs. Up to four yoga classes are taught daily by foreign and local teachers.

This year, she opened the Bali Spirit Yoga Retreat Center, also in Ubud. Every year, there are about 100 retreats, training gatherings or workshops in Bali,

with 90 percent of them located in Ubud, she says,

They are mostly yoga-related with some combined with other activities such as writing or surfing. Others include workshops on massage, astrology or holistic medicine.

But yoga is also thriving along Bali’s coastline.

Some retreats are offered at quieter beaches like Bingin in southern Bali, while other resorts, such as Desa Seni, bank on daily yoga classes to attract guests.

For the non-yoga visitors staying in touristy Seminyak or Kuta and who itch for a practice while away from home, the Prana Spa at The Villas also offers daily classes.

It may seem like another fad that will soon pass, but Bali has actually been a haven for yogis from the Western world as far back as the 1970s.

Californian Ann Barros is one of those early yogis who fell in love with the island. She arrived in 1980 on her way back home from India, where she had just studied with guru B.K.S. Iyengar.

“I felt that I had just found home, so I made up my mind to find a way to come back to Bali every year doing yoga, which is my passion,” she says.

It wasn’t until five years later that she fulfilled her dream, organizing retreats of small groups of people from America to Candi Dasa coast.

Now her retreats are held in Sanur and Ubud three times a year, and her students come from all parts of the world.

Like Barros, Emil Wendel, a Swiss native who has spent the last four decades studying and practicing yoga and other Eastern philosophies, divides his time between Bali and India or Nepal, his home for the last three decades.

He is drawn to the island, where he also teaches breathing techniques, meditation and yoga philosophy, because of its unique character as Indonesia’s only enclave of Hinduism, or what some call Balinism.

“I want to teach at a place where the practice of yoga and meditation is home,” he says.

A prominent healer-cum-yoga master and spa owner, Ketut Arsana, says Bali has an “inner power” inherited from its ancestors that draws spiritually inclined people.

A lot of Balinese ancestors were exiles from the Hindu empire of Majapahit in Java during its decline in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, he says.

“They set up at sacred places here and shared their teachings with the locals,” says Ketut, who has treated visiting celebrities such as Madonna, Donna Karan and Barbara Streisand.

History may be repeating itself – more and more Balinese are now learning from outsiders about the various schools of yoga traditions.

I Wayan Karja, an accomplished painter who owns the Santra Putra studio in Penestanan, says aside from the good business, he opens his door for yoga practitioners for the spiritual benefit.

“I always have a hunger for spiritual growth, and through discussions with the yogis I learn that there is something universal about this trait – that we are all one and the same.” ■

Photo courtesy Charley Patton / The Yoga Barn