

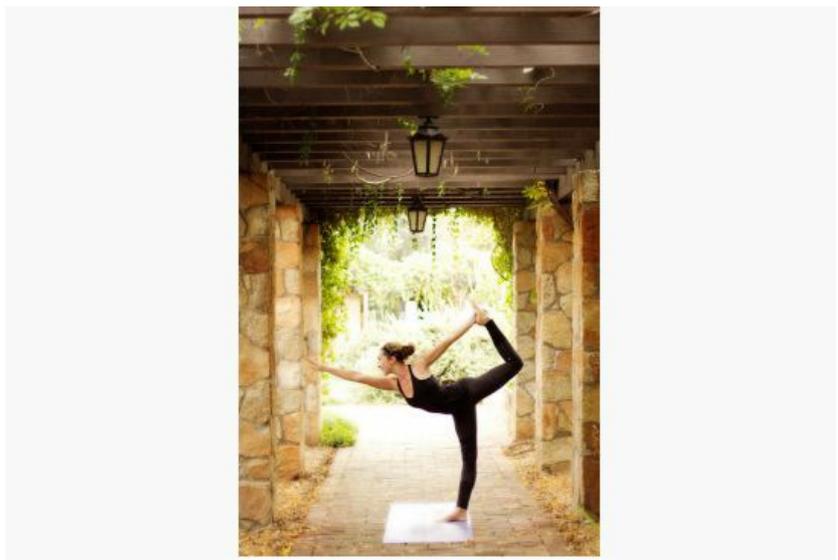
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Life / Travel

Mexico, Costa Baja Resort: Yoga on a paddleboard

Is this relaxing? It certainly requires a fine sense of bodily balance

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The yoga traditions at Rancho La Puerta, just across the border from San Diego, are tried and true. The godmother of Western Yoga, Indra Devi, helped formulate the Ranch's programs in 1955, and her influences can be seen today.

By: **Becca Hensley** Freelance Travel writer, Published on Fri Apr 10 2015

I am posed in Downward Dog on a paddleboard atop the cerulean blue Sea of Cortez. Or, I was. Right now, I'm swimming with a throng of particularly colorful fish, whose inquisitive nibbles prompt me to heave myself out of the water and back on the board with heretofore unexplored agility.

I'd like to say that SUP (Stand Up Paddle-boarding) yoga is easier than it looks. But, it isn't.

That's because this exercise combines two distinct disciplines: the ancient spiritual regimen of yoga and the recent rage of standing on an over-sized surfboard afloat a body of water.

It's essentially meditative fitness.

Even when I am crouched in the resting mode called Child's Pose, I struggle for balance as a wave ripples beneath me.

At Costa Baja Resort, a thousand miles from Tijuana, in Mexico's Baja California Sur, I don't care if I topple off the board and fall into the ocean. Who wouldn't want to swim in waters Jacques Cousteau once described as "the aquarium of the world?"

Still, I try my best to balance. My instructor at this five-day retreat, Michelle Gierst, a yogini and superstar fitness buff, thinks the first fall should happen fast.

"It's a metaphor for life," she says. "The sooner you fall in, the sooner you get back up on the board for downward dog."

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She leads yoga retreats at Costa Baja, a five-star wellness resort, located just 10 minutes from the still authentic Mexican pueblo of La Paz. Ensnconced amid desert terrain, dotted with coco palms, and boasting views of the purple-tinged Sierra Madre Mountains, this resort by the sea is easily reached from Los Cabos. Yet it feels a world apart.

With a Gary Player-designed golf course, pools galore, and opulently appointed rooms, it might seem more a place for repose. Yet, many trek here, as I do, to exchange their yoga mat for a board and their gymnasium room for the ocean's fluidity.

This form of yoga increases focus, tweaks technique and empowers its participants. Deep meditation can result simply from the sounds of the sea. As a change from your regular routine, this kind of yoga is simply a respite that keeps the habit interesting.

Do your asanas along Mexico's Pacific Coast during whale-watching season (January through April), and you may discover some migrating whales or a pod of friendly dolphins for classmates.

- Five-day, four-night sessions include daily yoga and meditation classes, a spa treatment, and all meals including alcohol. Starting at \$1,042. Costabaja.com

Becca Hensley spent her summers in Mexico's colonial city, Puebla, with her ex-pat grandfather. She has been practicing yoga since age 17, when she met a yoga master from Rishikesh, India.

Havens for Inner Balance

Haramara Retreat: Unplug at Haramara Retreat, named one of the 10 best yoga getaways in the world by Yoga Journal. Spread over 16 acres that edge the Pacific Ocean in Sayulitas, the Riviera Nayarit's hippie chic surfing town north of Puerto Vallarta, Haramara has thatched roof palapas, complete with hammocks, open-air yoga studios with 360-degree views of the jungle and ocean waters, vegetarian-based gourmet meals and a rotating array of famous yoga instructors. With no electricity in the rooms or restaurant, tuning out the noise of the world becomes second nature here. Customized private sessions, group classes, and locally derived food set the tenor for a successful mind-body experience. \$1,159 and up for two people when you book the three-night Sampler Package, which includes two yoga classes, two daily meals, a 60-minute massage each, and \$60 voucher to be used on site. haramararetreat.com

Rancho La Puerta: Yoga pioneer Indra Devi is considered by many to be the god-mother of western yoga. Having lived in India and studied under the nation's most influential yoga master, Krishnamacharya, she broke both east-west and male-female barriers by becoming a master herself in the mid-20th century. She brought her skills to Shanghai and Hollywood, and finally to Tecate in Mexico, where, in 1953, she opened her own yoga estate, just across the border from San Diego. Today, her legacy can be experienced at the renowned Rancho La Puerta, located near Devi's original yoga hideaway. Here, Devi developed a strong yoga program in 1955, which the resort still honours. Occupying more than 3,000-acres at the foot of Baja's mystical mountains, the Rancho La Puerta boasts 80 or so activities, from hiking to cooking to kickboxing, too. Starting at \$1,393, the price includes meals and all fitness classes. Rancholapuerta.com

Resort at Pedregal: Perhaps Los Cabos' most swank address, this resort took a hit during last year's Hurricane Odile. The 24-acre site features beach-front villas. A culinary component called the Champagne Terrace specializes in bubbles and canapes, but don't let it lure you away from your yoga practice. Sign up for the Yoga Getaway and be under the tutelage of the curative Luna Y Mar Spa. There are three private yoga classes, including an evening outdoor yoga-meditation; a spa treatment, and a luxurious beachside room and butler-style service. Starting at \$525 per night. theresortatpedregal.com

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