

# EYE WEEKLY.com

## WELLNESS



### Some like it hot

BY DAMIAN ROGERS November 05, 2008 15:11

Hot yoga — a combination of traditional poses and breathing exercises performed in a room heated to temperatures as high as 105°F — seems to be a wildfire. In the last few months, people have been telling me how amazing they think it is, from a friend who says going to a studio three times a week during a heinous breakup to a singer/songwriter who uses her practice to clear out her lungs and clean out her body.

On one hand, I've been intrigued — I love steam rooms and saunas, after all — but I've also been a bit skeptical of what sometimes sounds like hot yoga as an extreme, sweat-drenched sport. I've had less intense friends tell me they tried a class and it made them miserable, nauseated and drained so much money to feel so crappy. Anything with such a broad spectrum of subjective experience had to be worth checking out.

I arranged to try a full 90-minute class at popular hot-yoga haunt **Moksha Downtown** (577 Wellington W., 416-361-3033, [www.mokshayogadowntown.com](http://www.mokshayogadowntown.com)) on Sunday, Nov. 2 at 10am. Unfortunately, I forgot about daylight savings and accidentally arrived an hour early. Another student had made the same mistake, so we introduced ourselves and walked to a nearby café, where I broke down and had an Americano even though the Moksha website discourages coffee on an empty stomach, as hydrated as possible.) My new friend assured me she does it all the time.

Once changed into shorts, a sports bra and t-shirt, I entered the packed classroom (there's a 30-day challenge this month at the studio so classes are full) and found a spot right in front of the wall-sized mirror. The room initially felt pleasantly warm and I thought, "I can handle this." I had been warned not to push myself too hard and that the most important thing was to stay in the room, even if I needed to stop and lie down for a while, so I was pretty much suffering.

I was happy that I was able to keep up for the most part and though I did regret that coffee a little, I didn't feel too bad even when sweat was pouring. My focus was focused, as it was impossible not to be present in my body in the circumstances, and the poses were easier to do because the heat made my muscles more flexible. I didn't even pay attention to the guy in the Speedo a few mats down and I let go of my own modesty when I took off my top. By the end, I stayed in the final relaxation pose as long as possible before walking out of the room. I was drenched, but I felt great too. It's a little addictive.

#### HOT HOT HISTORY

The hot yoga craze originated in Beverly Hills, California, when Bikram Choudhury first opened his Bikram Yoga College of India in the 1970s. It became a controversial figure, portrayed in the press as rigidly controlling and aggressively litigious, and many of his former students have broken away to practice within a heated room according to their own terms.

A notable local example is **Moksha Yoga** ([www.mokshayoga.ca](http://www.mokshayoga.ca)), a successful franchise started in Ontario in 2003 by Ted Grand and Jessica Rotman. From a handful of Toronto-area studios to locations across Canada, in the United States and Trinidad. Tracey DosAnjos opened Moksha Downtown in Toronto two years ago, and the studio is celebrating the grand opening of its new location with two days of free yoga classes and presentations on meditation and a Ceremony during the weekend of Nov. 8-9. For DosAnjos, hot yoga's appeal is in its ability to slow down the mind while detoxifying the body through heat. She agrees that it's a very Western interpretation of Eastern tradition, but she suggests that is exactly why it's so effective for city dwellers. "It's so effective when we are constantly bombarded with stimulus," she says.

Because it requires a fair amount of energy to heat the rooms, there is a conscious effort at Moksha to reduce their carbon footprint, including us

the studios. Recently DosAnjos stopped selling bottled water and instead encourages people to use refillable bottles, installing a filtered-water for profit on water and now the water costs us money," she says, "but it all works out in the long run. I was just afraid that people would be angry, been great."

*MOKSHA YOGA DOWNTOWN'S GRAND OPENING RUNS NOV 8-9. SEE [WWW.MOKSHAYOGADOWNTOWN.COM](http://WWW.MOKSHAYOGADOWNTOWN.COM) FOR CLASS SCHEDULE.*

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