



Elaine would like YogaFest to become a fully sustainable green festival of yoga, other forms of exercise and meditation.

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Yogafest

Dubai's top Yoga festival unfurls this month

As thousands of yoga lovers are set to roll out their mats for the third annual Yogafest, Nathalie Hodgson speaks to founder **Elaine Kelly**, about her inspirations.



A couple of years ago, Elaine read an article about the summer solstice yoga event held in Times Square, New York. "I thought it was an inspired idea to celebrate the longest day of the year by offering free yoga classes from dawn to dusk, creating such calmness in one of the world's busiest cities. I decided to celebrate the winter solstice or shortest day of the year and Dubai Internet City seemed the perfect location; a hidden green oasis in the middle of the city," Elaine explains. "It's about being in the fresh air and learning about yoga."

The first Yogafest was held on 21 December 2010, celebrating the winter solstice and full moon coinciding on the same day, something that happens once every 365 years. "The event was held in the heart of the business sector and was aimed at getting people out of their offices to experience the benefits of yoga such as reduced stress and improved attention span," Elaine says. The first event attracted 350 people, as well as volunteer instructors from eight studios who taught 11 different styles of yoga, including a full-moon yoga class, bikram, yoga dance and budokan, a mix of martial arts and yoga. This first event started with sunrise yoga at 7am and continued on the hour until 7pm.

In 2011, the event was held over a weekend and expanded to include a meditation tent allowing people to learn more about the different aspects of yoga, in particular the



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eight limbs of Patanjali's Ashtanga yoga and to practise breathing or pranayama exercises. A total of 26 yoga classes and meditation sessions were offered. With the support of TECOM, Yogafest now attracts up to 1,200 people and this will continue to rise.

As a full time employee at Microsoft, Elaine knows first hand how difficult yet essential it is to get away from the desk and take some time to clear the mind. She is a yoga alliance certified Vinyasa flow yoga teacher, has been practising yoga for 25 years and teaching for two and a half. She also teaches body balance and body pump and is a certified massage therapist.

"Working in a corporate environment, I see poor posture and people surviving on soft drinks, coffee and cigarettes," says Elaine, who is passionate about spreading the message of yoga and its benefits. "I want to offer ways to counterbalance the stresses of everyday life by incorporating yoga into your day... For me, it's about inspiring people by example. You can work in the corporate world and have a balanced life; it doesn't have to be one or the other. If I can do it, so can you!"

Elaine would like the Yogafest event to become a fully sustainable green festival of yoga, other forms of exercise and meditation as well as incorporating healthy food and music, an event for the entire family. "There are so many events centered around bad food and alcohol, that create waste. I want this to become a truly carbon neutral event."

Yogafest 2013 will be an eco-friendly event with recycling on site, water coolers, eco-friendly clothes on sale, and there will be no lights, only candles in the evening. The tents are all reusable and Elaine has carefully selected food providers who only use organic items along with the Middle East Vegetarian society. And since Internet City is such an accessible location, visitors can arrive by public transport.

This year, participants will be asked to give a donation for a chance to win a one-week holiday for two at YogaMagic in Goa, India. "I found this beautiful eco-resort in the *Great Yoga Retreats* book and spent two weeks there earlier this year," says Elaine. "The accommodation is in a luxury tent with your own eco bathroom, all Ayurvedic

vegetarian food and daily meditation and yoga classes. The owners, Phil and Ishi created this sanctuary 10 years ago and it is the essence of everything yogic and pure."

A key addition to the 2013 festival is the yoga tent just for children. Opening the event up to families and giving kids aged 5-10 the chance to experience yoga is a natural progression. More and more schools are offering classes and Yogafest wants to support this initiative.

Also new to this year's event are the evening gong and singing bowl concerts by The Dancing Wu Li Masters, directed by sound practitioner Lawrence Michael Enderle. They will perform with ancient and contemporary instruments and the audience will be able to enjoy the concert under the full moon.

As the main media sponsor, *YogaLife* will be on site at the festival to meet guests and participants. We may even have some goodies to give away to lucky readers. Remember to bring your yoga mat with you; alternatively you may purchase one onsite on the day. ✨

Don't miss this year's Yogafest on 22-23 February.

YogaLife magazine will be giving

away goodies along with the second issue of YogaLife.

