

## **Finding more than yoga**

My arrival to Byron Yoga Centre was not how I planned, arriving late due to a breakdown on my airport shuttle but greeted at the gate by the smiling staff I instantly felt the stress melt away as I looked around my new environment where I'd spend the next 20 days.

After meeting the other participants and teachers and looking at the schedule I suddenly realised this was not going to be the yoga retreat my friends and family imagined I was on, it was going to be hard work both physically and mentally. And this was confirmed when my alarm went off the next morning and it felt like it was still the middle of the night. As the sun came up I sat with a cup of tea listening to the birds singing in the surrounding bush, this really is such a peaceful time of the day.

I felt I had everything I needed here yet everything was very simple. The food in particular was simple yet healthy and very tasty and with much of it coming from the onsite garden it felt very virtuous. After a long hot day filled with study and yoga classes a dip in the pool was a welcome relief. And with options of beautiful Kirtans or peaceful Yoga Nidras before bed it was the perfect antidote to studying hard.

During the course I learned so much about my own asana practice, alignment, anatomy, the yogic philosophy, whole food but also I learned a lot about myself. I don't think we could have come as far as we did without the support and inspiration of the teachers, who seemed to work as hard as we did!

My experience has changed the way I view my own practice. Rather than desperately trying to get my head to touch the floor and for someone to notice how well I was doing my new challenge became learning that it is about the journey not the destination. I now find that my practice is about so much more than the postures, I focus more on my breath and can be more attune to what's going on inside my body. I've also become much more aware of the link between physical and emotional in yoga, our strength and our balance when cultivated on the mat also help us become stronger and more balanced in our daily lives.

The philosophy of yoga has a special place in my heart and I believe it's something we should be teaching the world and loved that this was included in our schedule. We discussed topics such as; compassionate living (for yourself and others), freedom from possessiveness and envy, moderation in all things, generosity, truthfulness, purity of body and mind, motivation, inner contentment, study of the self, breathing, concentration and meditation.

This is when I realised yoga does not stop when you leave the mat, in fact it begins at that point, we should aim to take the practice into our daily lives. Learning to be grateful for what we have rather than always wanting more, living simply, letting go of our attachment to things and ideals and learning to turn inwards to still our busy minds and be at peace.

The 20 days went so fast and when it was time to leave I wasn't sure that I wanted to. The group of like minded people I'd taken this journey with had now become friends for life and for the first time ever I felt like I'd found my tribe. So I am now a qualified yoga teacher but I'm so much more after this experience, I have grown as a person as well as a yogi and whilst I may have achieved a certificate, it's not the end of my journey, just the start, the beginning of a new chapter.

**International Wellness Coach – Jess Stuart – [www.inspireyourlife.org](http://www.inspireyourlife.org)**

Speaker, author and coach with a mission to empower people to realise their potential to achieve balance in life, inspiring people to rediscover what matters and bring about a healthier, happier world.