

yoga farm

By Phil Chapman



Any visitors to Cornwall are sure to notice the natural beauty of the county, with its stunning beaches and beautiful moorland, but unless you know where to look, you won't find anywhere quite like Yoga Farm.

An old converted farmhouse set in a prime location overlooking Penzance and St Michaels Mount, Yoga Farm is a Yoga retreat and training centre set up by two very dedicated practitioners, Elizabeth Connolly and Gauté Gulbrandsroed, who are keen to share their extensive knowledge and passion for Yoga.

Yoga Farm often plays host to classes and workshops for the thriving local Yoga community which incidentally just happens to include the world renowned Ashtanga Vinyasa teacher John Scott. Now Liz and Gauté are inviting everyone to benefit from their Yoga teaching and the wonderful setting by hosting weekend Yoga retreats. Starting in late August of this year, Liz and Gauté are also running an Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga teacher training course which, as far as Liz is aware, is the only one in the UK to be certified by the Yoga Alliance.

The weekend retreats offer four Yoga classes (a blend of Iyengar and Ashtanga Vinyasa which are suitable for all levels and abilities), healthy and tasty organic food, and two carefully chosen massage techniques, which perfectly complement the Yoga. These are Thai massage and Chavutti Thirumal, an Indian Ayurvedic system of massage in which the practitioner uses their feet instead of their hands to give the treatment. After sampling everything on offer, I can guarantee that you will leave feeling healthier, calmer, and if my experience is anything to go by, greatly inspired by the Yoga classes. In fact, you probably won't want to leave at all!

Liz is a very gifted teacher who has enough experience to know exactly what your body is capable of, even as your mind protests and desperately holds on to your self-imposed limitations. I had not been in *Padmasana* (Lotus posture) for eight years since I tore some cartilage in my left knee while surfing. After light heartedly distracting me from my thoughts about what I considered possible, Liz took me through three well-chosen hip opening Asanas, and within fifteen minutes I had been gently guided into full Lotus posture! For me this was nothing short of miraculous. Admittedly, I had been slowly working towards this for the past few months, but had still considered it well beyond my current ability. With her depth of knowledge and her infectious enthusiasm to 'just try it and see', Liz

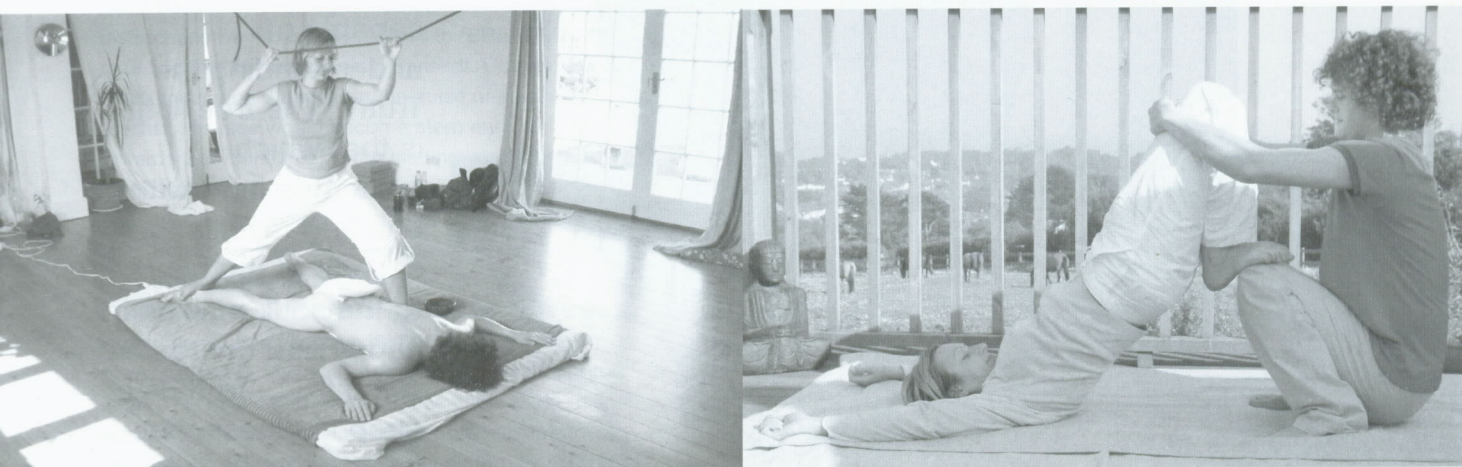
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Liz is keen to promote the benefits of Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga, and illustrated this point with an example from her own practice. It took her fifteen years to get into *Padmasana*, and yet she insists that she would have accomplished this in two to three years had she been practising Ashtanga Vinyasa. She cites the internal heat generated in Ashtanga Vinyasa, and the logical progression through the sequence of well-chosen postures, as the factors that make such fast progression possible. Like anything of true value though, the practice

students is strictly limited to sixteen. There is also a constantly evolving line-up of courses and workshops on offer, including ones with John Scott and Danny Paradise, as well as those on Ayurvedic massage.

After your Yoga sessions you may want to experience a relaxing massage [either with Mark Hudson (Thai) or Kath Seward (Chavutti Thirumal)] who have both worked at the prestigious Sri Lankan resort centre Ulpotha. The Thai massage could almost be thought of as 'passive Yoga'. All you have to do is relax as Mark guides you into a wide variety of stretches using his own body to press, pull, push and knead you into a state of deep relaxation. It is not just about the relaxation though, as a skilled practitioner is able to use the techniques to diagnose



can only work if you do, and a strong daily practice is recommended if you want to stay injury free and see the kind of results that Liz and Gauté demonstrate, and claim that anyone can achieve. Watching them now, it is hard to believe that they have both overcome severe spinal injuries through Yoga. Gauté broke his back very badly, and could quite easily have been confined to a wheelchair by now had he not taken up Yoga. 'For me, that is not an option', he states and faced with that kind of ultimatum, the motivation to practise probably comes just that little bit easier. Liz claims she collapsed to the floor in a belly flop the first time she tried Ashtanga Vinyasa but to see her now balance effortlessly on her hands makes this hard to believe.

Liz practises for two hours daily, sometimes longer, and expects her regular students to do the same. In fact, Liz believes it would be better not to practise at all, than to attend a demanding two-hour class once a week and spend the rest of the week recovering from it. If you only have two hours a week to practise, she recommends you practice for 15-20 minutes daily, and build your practice slowly from there.

Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga then, is best suited to those who relish a strong physical practice, but anyone can do it if they are willing to practise with, as Liz puts it 'softness and strength'. The requirements for the teacher training are quite strict, and this is to ensure the high quality of teaching on which Liz prides herself. Prospective students should have a daily practice of the Primary Series of Ashtanga Vinyasa, and should be able to complete the series or work towards completing them within the six-month time frame of the course. This is not for the casual Yogi who wants to 'make a quick buck' from the current popularity of Yoga, and the number of

imbalances in the body, even if they have not yet manifested as actual physical conditions. The various techniques are used to correct these imbalances and restore the proper flow of energy through the body. It is a technique that is widely used in medical settings throughout South East Asia.

Chavutti Thirumal evolved from a traditional martial art native to South West India, and involves the practitioner applying a strong massage using the feet. It might sound a little strange at first, but it all makes perfect sense as you lie on the floor and Kath applies long powerful stokes that cover the whole length of your body as she holds on to a rope strung from the ceiling for balance. I was surprised at how precise the treatment was, as Kath 'ironed out' my body from head to toe, and worked on the knotted muscles in my upper back. It definitely feels different to a massage with hands, but at one point as I drifted in and out of deep relaxation I remember looking up and being surprised that she was using her feet, as she was working with such sensitivity and precision. Kath told me that the technique pushes toxins towards the hands and feet so that they can leave the body through the skin, and sure enough a few days later I got a few spots on my forearms which is very unusual for me. This was much more than just an 'oily rub-down' that can sometimes pass for an 'authentic Ayurvedic massage' on the tourist trail in India.

So, whether you would like to work with some of the best Yoga teachers available, study to become an Ashtanga Vinyasa teacher, or just spend a blissful weekend pampering yourself with everything on offer and visiting some of the stunning local beaches, Yoga Farm has something to offer everyone, and can cater to all of your needs.

For further details of courses and holidays you may contact:
www.Yogafarm.co.uk or
e-mail:
Yogafarm@yahoo.co.uk,
The Yoga Farm,
Treggoddick Farm,
Madron, Penzance,
Cornwall. TR20 8SS, Tel:
01736 361301