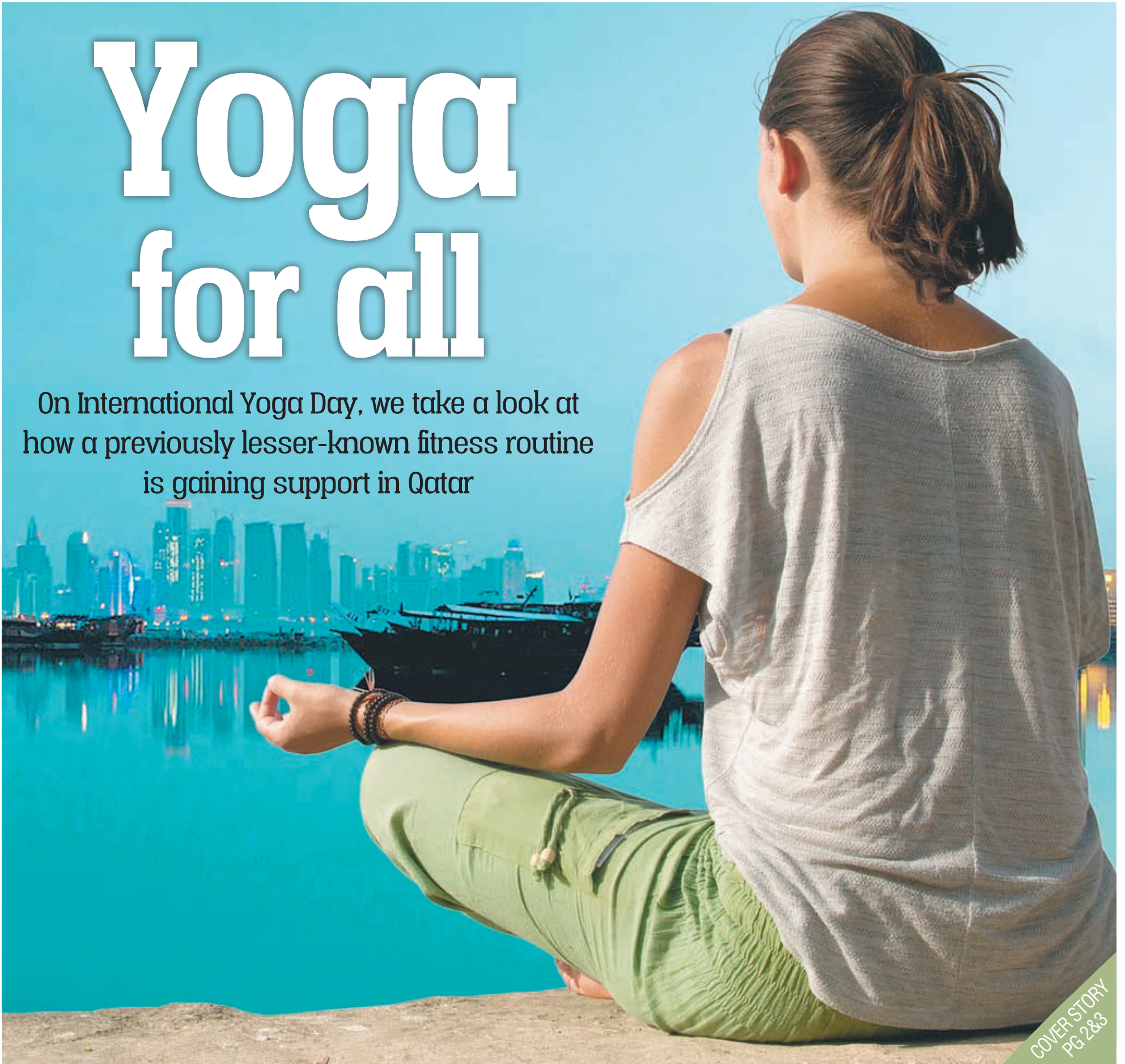


# Chill Out

## Yoga for all

On International Yoga Day, we take a look at how a previously lesser-known fitness routine is gaining support in Qatar



COVER STORY  
PG 2&3

Gene therapy might someday mend badly broken bones **PG 7** ▶

Cadillac CT6 adds 'sporty' to the luxury lexicon **PG 9** ▶



# Balancing the body and the mind

The physical, mental and emotional benefits of yoga are universal regardless of age or gender



Every year, Skills Development Centre conducts free yoga demonstrations and workshops on International Yoga Day.

**DIPTI NAIR**  
DOHA

**I**N 2015, June 21 was officially declared as the International Day of Yoga, through an initiative of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and adopted by the United Nations. Though Indian in origin, this 5000-year old practice has found many supporters globally, with more people discovering the various physical and mental benefits it provides. In Qatar too, yoga has caught up among not just the expatriate population but locals as well.

## Suitable for all

Perhaps the most telling factor is the opening of Niya Yoga last year at The Pearl-Qatar, launched by Qatari Jawahar al Fardan. The one-of-a-kind yoga studio has people of all nationalities attending the many sessions there.

Charlie de Rivaz, manager and teacher at Niya, said that a whole range of students attend their classes. "We have expatriates, Qataris, women and men of all

ages. A large proportion of our students are Qataris and we've had such a positive feedback. We have helped students lose weight, get stronger, become more embodied and relaxed. After just a few classes you can feel a marked change. The physical, mental and emotional benefits are universal regardless of age or gender," she said.

Vishnu Prasad, a leading yoga practitioner, who conducts classes called 'Vishnu Swasthi Yoga' at various places like Qatar Foundation, Radisson Blu, Sheraton and InterContinental The Beach Doha, said that yoga is like a medicine and it helps your body and mind be in harmony and it finds acceptance among those who know its benefits, irrespective of nationality.

"Unfortunately, there is not enough education about yoga and how it enhances well-being. I feel there should be more awareness about it to eliminate misconceptions. It has definitely found acceptance among Qataris who know about it, practise it and have experienced its benefits in their bodies, minds and life," he said.

Prasad said that among the people coming to him for lessons, the majority are female, though, of late, more men have also joined up as part of corporate programmes aimed to increase focus, energy levels, performance, productivity and the ability to tackle day-to-day stress.

Meanwhile, at the newly-launched Indian Sports Centre (ISC), the bulk of the attendees are women in their early 30s. The ISC too sees people of all nationalities attending their regular yoga.

“Qatar is home to people of different cultures, and one can see a small world in the yoga class, where the purpose of every person is to unite mind and body, and to get the benefit of overall fitness,” said an ISC spokesperson.

While some get attracted to yoga by learning about its benefits, for Qatari Amira al Ansari, it was the beauty and serenity of the Niya Yoga studio.

“I was so intrigued with the stillness and tranquility I felt in that studio that I was tempted to try a class and now I’m hooked. Initially, I started yoga for a number of reasons, first to clear my mind in the middle of an extremely busy day. The second reason was to stretch, as I workout at the gym and sometimes my muscles are sore. My third reason was to get help for lower back pain that I suffer from because of scoliosis. Luckily, yoga has helped with all three.”

## Not just a fad

This increasing popularity of a fitness practice, previously lesser known in the region, is because it is much more than exercise and is a philosophy of life that touches a person on a mental, physical and spiritual way. All the yoga gurus and practitioners agree that yoga is not just a fad that will eventually fade.

“Yoga is a tool to make us fit, not just physically, but emotionally and mentally as well,” said Prasad. “It will not just improve your stamina and focus but give you inner strength to handle challenging situations. If, for example, you have a desk job and sit in front of a computer for most of the day, yoga can prevent back pain and headaches. Even research has proved this. In our fast-paced lives, we need a tool to balance our outer and inner lives. I strongly believe this is why it is gaining so much popularity as it improves the quality of life in many ways.”

The ISC spokesperson said, “Interest in yoga is growing manifold and one of the reasons is that many new centres have opened up in the last few years. Now you can find easily find a yoga centre close to your house or work that suits your requirements. The long-term commitment and retention of the enthusiasts, who are regular in their practice, defy it being a fad.”

Rivaz points out that while having numerous benefits, yoga is essentially a fitness regime and is a popular way to build strength and flexibility.



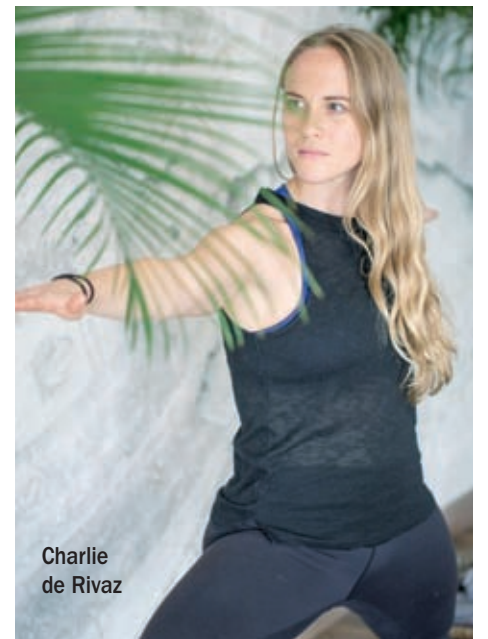
“Dynamic forms of yoga like vinyasa and ashtanga involve moving through flows and sun salutations, which increase your heart rate and have cardiovascular benefits. The poses themselves are similar to calisthenics – body weight training. Most yoga classes include set core work, and as you progress to more advanced postures like arm balances and inversions, you’ll notice the improvement in your fitness levels,” said Rivaz.

Ansari says that yoga has taught her to clear her mind and to concentrate on

her breathing. “It has taught me patience and inner strength. You sometimes get into poses that may not necessarily be comfortable and your brain tries to talk you out of it but you practice to silence that stay strong and keep going because the pain or discomfort is temporary and you will come out stronger at the end of it. This is the attitude yoga teaches you to adapt in life. I feel recharged both psychically and mentally every time I leave a yoga class and that feeling is the exact reason I keep going back!”



People practising yoga at Niya Yoga.



Charlie de Rivaz

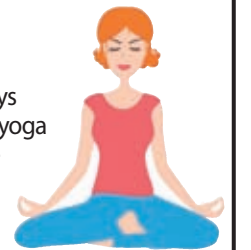
**“Yoga is a tool to make us fit, not just physically, but emotionally and mentally as well”**

– Vishnu Prasad



## Try it out

If you have always been curious about yoga but don’t quite have the confidence to quit your regular fitness routine and go for it, you now



have a chance to explore yoga and your level of comfort with it. Many centres are organising yoga sessions and demonstrations around the country in celebration of International Yoga Day.

Since the inception of Yoga Day, Indian fine and performing arts institution, Skills Development Centre (SDC) has been organising free yoga demonstrations and workshops on this day by professional yoga gurus who conduct regular yoga classes. The event last year had about 100 participants and this year they expect that to go to at least 150. You can head over to the SDC branches at Al Salata (7pm to 8pm) and Al Thumama (4pm to 5pm) for a free session.

Doha Sports Stadium is also holding yogasana, pranayama and meditation sessions (9pm to 10.30 pm) by yoga experts of Indian Sports Centre. It’s free, so all you need to bring is your yoga mat.

Vishnu Swasthi Yoga is also holding a free yoga event at Sheraton Hotel from 7pm to 8.30 pm.