



PHOTO CREDIT: Lee Canyon

Finding Calm and Clarity

How Outdoor Yoga and Meditation Can Destress City Dwellers

By Stephanie Forté

Las Vegas may be stressing us out. Studies show daily stimuli like traffic and construction noise can trigger a fight-or-flight response. It's why residents of urban areas have higher rates of anxiety and depression than people in rural communities. Luckily, nearby, we have plenty of what's needed to reset—Mother Nature.

Spending just two hours a week in nature can improve memory and focus while reducing stress. During the pandemic, 7.1 million more Americans were drawn to outdoor recreation. People found it improved their mental health. And the benefits have proven too good to give up.

The Mountains Are Calling

In Las Vegas, more people than ever before are playing outside. At Lee Canyon, in 2022, summer visitation was up 300% over 2018. "People escape the city heat, connect with nature, and feel energized," said Jim Seely, Lee Canyon's director of marketing. "So we're creating more ways for people to engage with the great outdoors."



PHOTO CREDIT: Lee Canyon

This summer, the resort added Mountainside Yoga, free one-hour vinyasa yoga classes held on the Sky Deck of the Bristlecone Bar located in the base area inside Hillside Lodge. Classes are suited for all ability levels. Students can position their mat in a sunny spot on the deck or opt for shade inside the Bristlecone Bar, which is transformed for every class. Either way, massive windows mean all yogis are treated to stunning views of Lee Peak (11,289 ft) and cathedral-like bands of limestone that line surrounding ridgelines.

Since Lee Canyon is up to 30 degrees cooler than the city, the experience is refreshing. Classes are Friday and Sunday at 10 a.m. People should bring a mat, water, and sunscreen.

After yoga, students can walk to a nearby aspen grove, enjoy guided meditation and breath work, and decompress to the sound of Tibetan sound bowls. Arrive early; classes have been filling up because when Mother Nature is mixed with yoga and meditation, the magic starts to happen.

Take it Outside

Angela Albuquerque is a former professional dancer who found it difficult to move while dealing with a debilitating illness that led to anxiety and depression. Before getting sick, she'd practiced yoga and had just started meditating. "The only thing that would calm me was getting outside to meditate," said Albuquerque.

Years later, as a yoga and meditation teacher in Las Vegas, Albuquerque led an impromptu yoga class while camping with friends in the Spring Mountains. The final posture was savasana, or corpse pose, that's done lying on a mat. It's not nap time, and it should be done consciously. For many, that's challenging. Surrounded by dramatic mountain vistas, her friends went into a deep savasana.

"The Earth creates a way to shift you energetically from the sympathetic to the parasympathetic nervous system," Albuquerque said. In other words, nature helps to slow our bodies down.

Inspired by her experience, Albuquerque created Human Nature Yoga, where she blends the outdoors with yoga, meditation, and energy-healing experiences like sound baths.

Focusing The Mind

Focus on the word love is what a meditation teacher told Paul Benedict, who'd never practiced yoga. Benedict closed his eyes, focused, and when his mind wandered, he returned to "love." He was meditating.

"There's a huge misconception that meditation is complicated and that you have to make [the mind] go blank. That's absolutely not the case," says Benedict, a yoga and meditation teacher with *New Rāja Yoga* in Las Vegas.

Your focus in meditation can be a word or the rhythm of your breath. Just be consistent. "Meditating every day for even three minutes will have benefits because you're training your mind to learn to focus," says Benedict.

Commonly known as a way to reduce stress and anxiety, meditation can also improve symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and sleep and may reduce age-related memory loss. Regular practice can even make us more kind and self-aware.

"[Meditation] literally reverses our attention from outward focus to inward focus. The result is more peace and clarity of mind," says Benedict.

Just Breathe

In yoga, the breath is used to go more deeply into a posture. At Lee Canyon, Jenn Urbaniak, RYT 500, recently led a guided meditation in the aspen grove. She taught alternate nostril breathing, a common yogic technique often used to quiet the mind and balance the body.

Using the right thumb, close the right nostril and inhale through the left nostril for four counts. Then close the left nostril with the right ring finger, remove the right thumb, and exhale through the right nostril for a count of four. And repeat.

"The breath is life force—we call it prana. If you're breathing slower and deeper, you can absorb more prana," says Benedict. "You'll think more clearly—and you might be happier."



PHOTO CREDIT: Human Nature Yoga



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Outdoor Happenings

Summerlin

Yoga on the Lawn by Tru Fusion

Downtown Summerlin

1st & 3rd Tuesdays through
September 19

7:30 – 8:30 p.m.

Classes vary each week and include vinyasa, yin, meditation and breathwork. Special full moon classes August 1 and 29. Visit Eventbrite to register.

Free

Henderson/Green Valley

Full Moon Yoga

Green Valley Ranch

Thursday, August 31

Thursday, September 28

7:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Poolside yoga with a guided meditation and sound bath experience.

Visit stationcasinosblog.com for info.

Free

Downtown Las Vegas

Yoga in the Park with Rayce Rayos

Container Park, 707 E. Fremont Street

Saturday & Sunday (weekly) 8:45 – 10:00 a.m. Visit Eventbrite to register.

\$11

Moonlit Monday

Container Park, 707 E. Fremont Street

Monday (weekly) 8:00 – 9:00 p.m. Visit Eventbrite to register.

\$11

Lee Canyon

Mountainside Yoga & Meditation

Friday & Sunday, weekly through September

10:00 – 11:00 a.m.

A one-hour vinyasa yoga class on the Sky Deck of Hillside along with a guided meditation, breathwork and sound bath experience. RSVP on Lee Canyon's Mountainside Yoga Facebook page or visit www.leecanyonlv.com.

Free

Stephanie Forté is a freelance writer in Southern Nevada covering health, fitness, and outdoor recreation. She's a longtime yoga practitioner, cyclist, and hiker. Learn more at www.stephanieforte.com.



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