

## WORKSHOP

# MY ANTI-GRAVITY EXPERIENCE

## Cocooned in a silk hammock for poses & *Shavasana*.

BY CRISTINA RODENBECK

My first contact with yoga was in 1997, when living in India. The institute treated yoga as a therapy, so early on I learned yoga was for health and wellness and was hooked for life.



All poses are done in hammocks

Although not a hard core yogi, I have a weekly practice mostly of Kundalini yoga and Meditation which serves my body, mind and soul needs.

At the beginning of this year I learned of my hip tear and wear issue that makes some poses painful. So when I heard about Anti-Gravity Yoga (AGY), I was curious to learn more. Would it ease my pain? Would I be able to do what I'd done before? I loved the idea of being upside down, as I'd heard of its benefits.

So I joined a one-day workshop in Anti-Gravity Yoga organized by Bodywize Yoga in Hong Kong.

Developed some 20 years ago by gymnast and dancer, Christopher Harrison, AntiGravity® Aerial Yoga is a fusion technique that aims to relieve compressed joints and align the body. The AntiGravity® Hammock acts as a soft trapeze, supporting the practitioner as they master simple inversions and progress to more advanced poses.

Christopher greeted all the participants, memorizing our names, and introduced the technique and day's agenda.

His inspiration for AGY was the pain he'd experienced in his careers in gymnastics and

dance. His goal was to find something active he could still do and enjoy, which would decompress his spine and be friendly to his joints. Inspired by the Brazilian hammock culture, he developed what he calls a 'fusion technique', which combines fitness and traditional yoga modalities.

At the workshop we experienced 'The Fundamental' and 'The Flying Fitness' with our beautiful red silk hammocks.

We used the hammock for all poses including downward dog, sun salutations and we had our own version of *Shavasana*. The most exciting ones were the ones where we were hanging like bats, flying like birds or cocooning. For sure all were very intense and we did have one participant fall from the hammock and one faint, but Christopher helped them very well. He is extremely careful and rigorous with safety and explanations.

For me, the most amazing experience was relaxing and cocooning in my hammock. I had only felt like this when swimming and floating in water. Extremely relaxing and pleasant, even more than traditional *Shavasana*!

Overall, a great experience, and I did feel some poses were more gentle on my joints and hips, but at the same time more demanding on my overall fitness and back strength, which are areas I certainly need to develop more. Mostly, it is a new way of seeing things and doing things - yoga with a different lens. AGY may not be everyone's cup of tea, but it's definitely worth a try.

And to complete my experience, I learned that Christopher has been to my home Brazil more than 20 times and knows Portuguese. So I wrapped up the workshop with even greater warmth than I started; speaking with Christopher in my mother tongue.

In Brazil we say 'it all ends in Samba and Carnival'... well doesn't it?

## CONFERENCE

# OJAI YOGA CRIB 2012

## An intimate alternative to the big conferences.

BY ZOE HO

Ojai Valley, nestled in beautiful California amongst orange groves and avocado trees is for free spirits. 45 minutes away from LA, this little town has decided to keep out big box stores to celebrate local flavours. The community is a haven to spiritual seekers,



Dharma talk with PaPa Erich Schiffman

especially during the Ojai Yoga Crib weekend (25-28 October 2012), with spaces of diverse beliefs opening doors to host visiting yogis. Instead of typical yoga conferences held in a hotel or building, Crib locations are spread out over town and you make small pilgrimages by foot or carpool to the teacher you choose.

With 17 amazing teachers on the roster (Erich Schiffmann, Patricia Sullivan, Saul David Raye, Uma Goswami, Cyndi Lee, Laura Tyree, Jason Crandell, Scott Blossom, Elena Brower, Dana Flynn, Noah Mazé, Ravi Ravindra, Chandra Easton, Sean Johnson, John Hickey, and Kira Ryder), the toughest part was deciding on a schedule. We began with a full day immersion practicing Freedom Style Yoga with Erich Schiffman (one of the original founders of the Crib and hence 'Papa') at the Meditation Mount. To bathe in his 45 years of experience moving beyond the surface was bliss, as was meditating amongst birdsong and the pink sunset.

My husband is new to yoga while I teach, and we both felt deeply nourished and inspired - Ravi Ravindra's delightful and deep sutra teachings, Jason Crandell's reminding us of Hatha yoga being a physical practice, and his grounding and precise sequencing, and two beautiful live music and yoga experiences. Sean Johnson and the Wild Lotus Band were deeply moving with their virtuoso blending of storytelling, chanting, asana, stripping away of inhibitions and healing, while Saul David Raye opened yet another window to expressing Bhakti, freeing our voices and bodies through movement and music. In every session, due to the intimacy of the location and group sizes, we were able to connect with the teachers and other students. It is such a difference to crowded yoga conferences where the teacher is up on a stage, using a microphone! There are also special nights where the entire crib gathers to sing, dance and talk.