

Yoga retreats: A real stretch

By **CHRIS WELSCH**
PRIMARY COLOR TRAVEL

The second-story yoga studio felt like a giant treehouse. It was open on three sides, and the only thing dividing us from the lush forest of bamboo, palm and orange trees outside was mosquito netting.

The sweet, early morning air of the Big Island of Hawaii was utterly still. Not a frond or leaf flickered.

Hayward Coleman, 58 but as muscular as a 24-year-old gymnast, paced at the front of the room, exhorting his students with the passion of a circuit-riding preacher: "Every cell in your body is connected to the mind. Where the brain goes, the body follows."

Coleman had already guided the class of 15 students through an hour and a half of postures. Now we were preparing for a wheel pose — a challenging backbend.

I was on my back, my palms on the floor beside my head, my knees bent. Coleman gave us a final verbal push. "Now, breathe in, long and slow. Pelvis neutral. Exhale and rise up! Expand to the heavens!"

I pushed upward and felt my whole body rise like a hot air balloon. My arms and legs extended, opening my chest and stomach to the ceiling. My spine arched into a bow. A few years ago, it would have been a painful contortion. Now it was a liberating stretch.

When class finished an hour later, I felt like I'd grown an inch. My body was relaxed. My limbs hung loose. The normal noise in my head — internal chatter about things to do, things I forgot to do and a general sense of anxious urgency — was not present. Instead, I felt as calm as those trees in the breezeless garden.

Achieving that calm is the whole point of a yoga vacation. For a week, I left behind the hurly-burly world of office work, traffic, television and various minor crises at home, and traded it for daily yoga practice, meditation, a healthy diet and plenty of sleep.

Making it even better was Yoga Oasis' location — 20 minutes from the ocean, thermal hot springs and the old-Hawaii town of Pahoa. My wife and I had a small cabin in a clearing to ourselves; we fell asleep each night serenaded by a chorus of tree frogs.

Yoga Oasis was my second yoga retreat, and yet another facet of a deepening appreciation for the ancient discipline. About four years ago, I started taking a weekly class as a way to deal with lower back and neck pain. It was very effective — the pain disappeared in a couple of months.

But I also noticed other benefits. I gained flexibility, increased my energy level, slept more soundly and developed more mental focus. I even met my wife in a yoga class (she was the teacher).

I started taking more classes, and eventually, last summer, went on my first yoga vacation. My reasoning was that if a 90-minute class made me feel good, a week of yoga would be exponentially better. I was right.

In seeking a remedy in yoga for the stresses, aches and pains of modern life, I am not alone. Yoga Journal reports that more than 15 million Americans practiced some form of yoga in 2004, a nearly three-fold increase from 1998.

The trend shows no sign of abating. As stress levels grow, the motivation to find ways to deal with stress does, too. "A regular vacation is nice

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To report feature news:

Hollie Johnson,
deputy managing editor,
753-1119, Ext. 9299
or dailyedit@aol.com

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The Villages Daily Sun

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COLORADO RIVER



Submitted photos

Rafters traverse the Colorado River on an oarboat amidst canyons shaped by the surrounding water.

THE ULTIMATE TRIP

A WHITEWATER 'DANCE' WITH THE COLORADO RIVER

As our raft shot down the Colorado River, wave after exhilarating wave slammed against us, filling the raft and tossing us from side to side as we steadied ourselves by tightly grasping the handholds and shifting our weight, all to keep from capsizing as our guide negotiated the angry, wild rapids.



**PATTY
POUPERT**
COLUMNIST

The thought of being pounded by whitewater rapids might scare the weakhearted, but for my husband and me, this whitewater rafting journey into Cataract Canyon was one of life's great adventures.

Our first whitewater rafting experience happened this past spring, when my husband, Mike, and I ventured west to the Colorado River for a trip into Cataract Canyon, a beautiful area that is nestled inside Canyonlands National Park in Utah.

The area is known as one of the all-time best whitewater locations in the country, so we couldn't think of a better place to get our feet wet, so to speak.

Our two-day adventure started when we hooked up with Sheri Griffith Expeditions in Utah. We arrived just in time for orientation, and the opportunity for the staff to brief us on the risks involved.

It became apparent very quickly that, no matter what we did or what kind of boat we used, all of us probably were going to experience the sensation of flipping over and fighting to survive in the choppy rapids.

The first part of a rafting trip into Cataract Canyon is usually slow and mellow as you quietly slip past the brilliantly colored cliffs and towering rock formations. There is time allowed for several stops along the way for short hikes in side canyons to visit ancient Anasazi petroglyphs and granaries and view beautiful waterfalls.

Since ours was only a two-day trip, we were taken by jet-boat to catch up with another expedition. Once we arrived and joined the others at an area known as Spanish Bottom, it was time for one more orientation, this one by José Tejedas, the head guide, who has been running the river for



Arlo Tejedas waits to greet the new arrivals joining Sheri Griffith Expeditions at Spanish Bottom.

more than 30 years.

With safety being the key issue, we were briefed as to what our jobs would be (depending on which type of boat we were on), what to do if we were tossed overboard, and how a rescue would be accomplished.

Tejedas also explained that some people come on trips like this to conquer the river. He said some feel a need to overcome a fear or accomplish a great feat when, actually, whitewater rafting is really more like a "dance" with the river. Of course, he added, the river always leads the dance.

Once we had our boat assignments, we put on life jackets and boarded the boats. The group consisted of two 22-foot J-rigs and three 18-foot oarboats.

We quickly learned that those on oarboats have more responsibility than those on J-rigs. In an oarboat, passengers hang on while the guide, sitting in the center of the boat and typically facing downstream, maneuvers the raft with two long oars.

No special skills or knowledge is required of the passengers, who are essentially just along for the ride. However, when a large wave hits, or when the raft enters heavy rapids, passengers may be called upon to quickly shift their weight to the high side of the boat to keep it from flipping over.

They also may be required to bail water out of the boat. With just four or five people onboard, these smaller, 18-foot rafts put you right in the heart of the whitewater action.

Traveling by J-rig provides a stable and comfortable rafting experience. The J-rig, a larger raft with inflatable pontoons that can hold eight or more people, carries a few more amenities and is maneuvered by a quiet outboard motor. The design keeps passengers a little dryer in the rapids.

Our whitewater experience came aboard a J-rig that was guided by Arlo Tejedas, who was working alongside his father as a river guide. We learned

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