

## Barefoot in the Park

*A devoted yogi braves the great outdoors*



Instructor Paul Kobel leads the class in a pose.

**By Caroline Jaffe-Pickett**

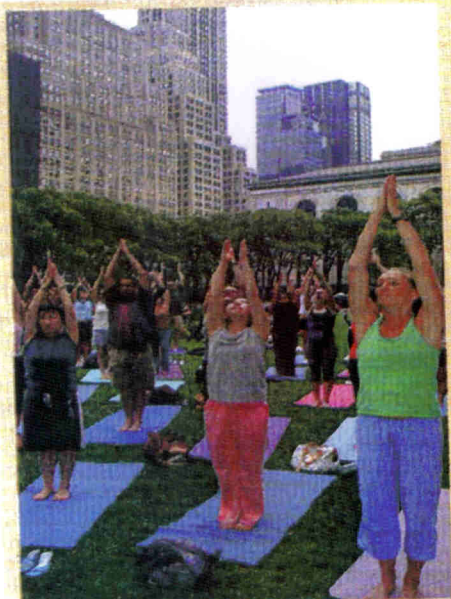
Whose great idea was it to do a story on outdoor yoga?

Oh right, mine, I mutter to myself, as I change into shorts and a t-shirt, douse myself with water, and head out into the 90 degree weather to attend evening yoga class at Bryant Park. Crossing a steamy 42nd Street, it occurs to me that unless a fortuitous arctic blast should float my way in the next 10 minutes, I'm a goner. The only vinyasa I want is diving into a sparkling swimming pool, preferably Olympic size.

Back to reality. I get to the park, and use my Girl Scout skills to find the south lawn. Then I remember I never was a Girl

Scout, but the sea of pastel yoga mats in the distance is a good clue that I'm in the right place. I meet the instructor, Paul Kobel, from New York Sports Clubs and the Yoga Project. He seems really nice, but he is sweating profusely through his t-shirt and we haven't even started yet—not a reassuring sign.

If I pass out, at least it will be in a scenic spot. I grab a mat, lie down on my back, shut my eyes, thinking, "I'm not used to this. I'm used to the yoga studio, to windows and walls, the faint echo of the ceiling fan, the smallest whisp of juicy air conditioning." Then I open my eyes and stare at the sky. The sky! When was the last time I noticed the sky in



Students stretch upward.

### Where to Take Free Outdoor Yoga Classes

Bryant Park, West 42nd bet. Fifth and Sixth avenues, southwest corner of lawn  
Thursdays 6 to 7 p.m. through Aug. 24  
Through the Yoga Project, mats provided  
212-768-4242  
[bryantpark.org](http://bryantpark.org)

Battery Park, State and Whitehall streets, Great Lawn  
Saturday, Aug. 19, 10 a.m. to noon  
A Taste of Yoga, a sampler of the yoga classes offered at Crunch Fitness  
888-2-CRUNCH  
[www.crunch.com](http://www.crunch.com)

Riverside Park South, overlook at 66th Street and Hudson River  
Evening Salute to the Sun, Hatha yoga for all fitness levels, bring your own mat  
Wednesdays 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. through Sept. 27  
212-408-0219  
[www.riversideparkfund.org/Calendar.htm](http://www.riversideparkfund.org/Calendar.htm)

## Tips for Hot Weather Workouts

### From experts:

- Paul Kobel, a hatha yoga instructor with New York Sports Clubs, advises: "Avoid the sun during the hottest time of the day, between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. Wear loose, comfortable clothing, preferably lightweight, breathable fabrics that wick away sweat and moisture. Drink water at least every 15 minutes, and beware of heat-related warning signs, such as dizziness, fatigue and headaches."

- Kristina Marchitto, founder of The Yoga Project, which organizes yoga classes in public spaces, says that on an average summer day, posers should generally expect to feel invigorated. "We feel more alert when we are outside," Marchitto said. "Our bodies oxygenate more quickly, which helps reduce anxiety and depression."

### What I Learned:

- Appreciate the breeze, trees and sky. Not only are they nature's air conditioners, but they remind us that Manhattan isn't all concrete and steel.

- It's okay to be mildly distracted by cute babies, snap-happy tourists and slobbering schnauzers—they won't put a crimp in your chaturanga or deflate your down dog. And besides, isn't experiencing the moment what it's all about?

- If you suddenly can't hear the teacher due to airplane noise, sirens and the general cacophony of urban living, lower down into child's pose and treat yourself to a zen moment to ponder which direction the grass is growing. It's fun, really.

Manhattan? And trees too!

People start to float over from seemingly everywhere, like it's some kind of communal gathering. "Namaste," I say to the woman next to me, feeling downright '60s, but she gives me a funny look as she deftly tucks her Blackberry into her Prada handbag.

Paul is great. He does a series of up cats and down cats to warm up, then side stretches, then sun salutations and down dogs. I notice in the trees that there's a bit of, yes, I think it's a breeze. I feel pretty good—my head lighter, my legs stronger. Pigeon pose, with real pigeons cooing all around me like I'm providing their

evening's entertainment. Surprisingly, I spring into "proud warrior" with new vigor, arms outstretched, legs wide. People are taking photos and watching, and I feel a little famous. Then I remember this is all about internal acceptance and validation, and give myself a little slap on the wrist—not a yoga move, by the way.

Finally, shavasana, corpse pose. I close my eyes and drift off. A few minutes later, I feel lighter, renewed. I think about when I can next strike a pose al fresco. My indoor class will always be there, but for now, I've discovered a meaning to the words "hot yoga." Autograph, anyone? ■



Balancing on one hand and leg, a yoga practitioner holds a pose.