

Positive thinking

New year, new you? Take inspiration from naked yoga teacher and body positivity ambassador Doria Gani. Interview by **Paul Rouse**...



WHEN YOU HAVE A DEGREE IN GEOMETRY, AN ESTATE AGENCY LICENCE, AND ARE AN EXPERIENCED ENGLISH-SPANISH TRANSLATOR AND INTERPRETER, WHAT CAREER DO YOU ULTIMATELY CHOOSE?

Teaching naked yoga, naturally.

Life is obviously never that simple, of course. Regular *H&E* readers may remember Doria from an introductory feature in December 2017, which explained how she first started practising yoga in 2010 as a form of rehabilitation after fighting cervical cancer, and then, after being introduced to naturism, put the two together in the form of naked yoga.

Doria is now not only one of the leading UK exponents of the art, holding regular classes, workshops and retreats, but also an ambassador for body positivity, or what she describes as helping others to feel confident in their own skin.

“That is no glib statement,” she is keen to emphasise. “It wasn’t easy for me, and I know it is often not easy for others. Society still has a long way to go when it comes to social nudity, but

I firmly believe that liberating yourself from restrictions and inhibitions can only be beneficial for your body and for your mind. Encouraging people to accept themselves through naked yoga is very powerful. We need more spirituality in our lives, and to feel more connected with our bodies. One of the best places to start is with naked yoga. It is a proven way of helping people to face their fears and to conquer them, making them stronger and boosting their confidence.”

She speaks from experience. “From that very first beginners’ class I took in yoga, wearing clothing, I found that the clear, mindful instructions improved my memory, my focus, and my sense of connecting with my mind and body. Daily practice showed me the value of acting deliberately, and yoga was the key to my recovery and transformation. As a result, I now live my life with a greater sense of purpose and intention.”

Liberating

Hooked, Doria then went to India and Bali to train as a professional teacher, and she is now qualified in ashtanga vinyasa, rocket yoga, yin and mandala, as well as the principles of ayurveda and shamanism. But it wasn’t until a liberating experience at the Burning Man Festival in Nevada a few years later that she discovered naked yoga.

“It was incredible,” she recalls. ▶



“Suddenly there were no barriers, no inhibitions, and no restrictions. Naked yoga gave me the full freedom I felt had been missing, finally teaching me to accept my body and exactly how I am, with all my imperfections: and it’s this feeling that I try to convey to anyone who practises with me.”

Since then, Doria has steadily built up her reputation, and now offers naked yoga tuition to men and women in a variety of forms: twice-weekly group classes in London, individual and couples sessions, Skype classes and coaching, and a series of overseas retreats, the next of which is scheduled for Ibiza in June.

“People take up yoga for different reasons,” explains Doria. “Many simply want to be more flexible or supple, especially as they are getting older. Some are recovering from illness. Others are starting on a spiritual path and are naturally attracted by disciplines such as yoga and meditation. As for those who then choose to do it naked, again the reasons are often different. Many are already naturists, so they already feel comfortable being naked, and just want to enjoy yoga without the restrictions of clothing. Some have suffered from illness, injury, anorexia, bulimia, obesity or other body-image issues, and have to really push themselves out of their comfort zone. You have to be brave to practise yoga naked, alone or in a group, if you are not used to nudity. But by facing these vulnerabilities with this brave and

bold approach, we become more grounded and comfortable with ourselves.

“As I said, it’s not always easy, and I often start with an exchange of emails, a Skype conversation or a one-on-one session to address any concerns or shyness. But being naked together with other people is an incredibly powerful way to improve your self-esteem and body image.

It is very likely that at some point you will be next to someone who has a ‘flaw’ that you feel you also have. You feel ashamed about it. But the person next to you doesn’t. Actually, no one next to you cares. So why would you? With these small questions, you already start feeling better about yourself.”

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Retreats

While her London sessions take place in studios that are heated in winter and cooled in summer, there is of course no substitute for practising naked yoga with the sun on your body. Having previously organised

residential retreats in India and the Maldives, Doria is heading to the Balearics this year, where the seven-day course, held in a private villa with panoramic views and a purpose-built yoga dome, will feature naked yoga twice a day, optional complementary therapies and treatments, and plenty of opportunities to unwind. “Participants will be free to go to local naturist beaches, explore the island, or simply relax. I





don't want to make my retreats too full of activities: it has to be a holiday, not a boot camp!"

Planning ahead, Doria is also hoping to run a second retreat this summer, in Italy.

"The owners are building the resort as we speak. It will

be a beautiful B&B in Tuscany and the retreat will combine yoga with cookery classes, wine tastings and art tours to Pisa and Florence.

So, what next?

"My long-term goal is to launch an online programme accessible to everyone. I would also love to run several women-only retreats, addressing female body and image issues in more depth. And I'm looking for a social media manager to help me spread the word about naked yoga to a wider audience. After that, who knows? Possibly more videos. Perhaps a book.

My life is constantly adjusting, but I take it as it comes. I have learnt to be open to any change and embrace it. Like naked yoga." 

