

## Studying yoga in Mysore

Mysore, the third largest city of the southern Indian state of Karnataka, is famous for its sandalwood and silk. More recently, it has also become famous for its yoga teachers. It lies on the slope of a low-lying plateau at an altitude of 770 m, which makes its climate pleasantly cool in winter. The name Mysore is derived from Mahishasura, the demon who allegedly used to rule there. Mysore was once the home to the royal family, and the spectacular Maharajah's palace still occupies a large portion of the city centre. Home of world famous ashtanga teacher Patthabi Jois, Mysore, now sometimes referred to as "Ashtanga city", is fast becoming one of the most popular places in India to study yoga.

### TEACHERS

Sri K. Pattabhi Jois, #235 8th Cross, 3rd Stage, Gokulam, Mysore 570002, Karnataka, [www.ayri.org](http://www.ayri.org)

Atma Vikasa, Yoga Vigyana Mandira (generally known as Venkatesh), Kamaskshi Hospital Road, Kuvempunagar Double road, Mysore 9, phone 0821, 341978 [www.atmavikasa.com](http://www.atmavikasa.com)

Mysore Mandala, 581 Dewans Road, Off Dble tank road, Tel +91-821-5256277, <http://mandala.ashtanga.org>

Pranavayoga Trust, (Jayakumar Swamishri), Kuvempu Trust circle, Kalidasa road, Jayalakshmpuram (close to Greens hotel). Phone 0821 510405, email [jayakumar64@yahoo.com](mailto:jayakumar64@yahoo.com), Website [mysoreyoga.org](http://mysoreyoga.org)

Patanjala Yoga Shala (BNS Iyengar), Parakalamuta, Jagan Mohan Palace circle, Mysore 4

Bharat Shetty, Yoga India, # 78, 8th cross, Gokulam 1st Stage, Mysore 570002, Phone: +91 98860 90291, [yogaindia9@yahoo.com](mailto:yogaindia9@yahoo.com), [www.yoga-india.org](http://www.yoga-india.org)

### WHERE TO STAY

There are a number of cheap hotels in Mysore. You can find a hotel room for less than Rs 250 (about US \$ 5) a night, and Rs 500 will get you a decent, en suite room. Ashtanga students get a special rate at Gokulam Woodlands Hotel (on K.R.S. road, next to the Gokulam Theatre). It is a very modest hotel but with a vegetarian restaurant and near to Patthabi's new shala. One must make reservations by telephone prior to arrival and ask for Mr. Ravi or Mr. Arun and tell them Mr. Joseph has referred them. Telephone # (91) 821 251286 or 2516418. Price between RS 150 and Rs 450. The *Green Hotel*, a restored palace originally built for a royal princess, is a much nicer place, amidst gardens, but it is also a good bit more expensive, with double rooms starting at Rs 1300. (The management are happy to do special deals for long term stays). It is convenient to Venkatesh's yoga shala and to The Ashtanga Research Institute. There's an organic market there every Sunday from 10 am to 1 pm, which is worth going to, and the restaurant is a good place for breakfast. Tel +91 821 2512536, fax 2516139, email [grenhot1@sancharnet.in](mailto:grenhot1@sancharnet.in). Kevin Kimple and Leanne Young (formerly Holly and Tony) Guest house in Gokulam is worth checking out as well.

Long term yoga students usually rent rooms in shared houses. A good place to start enquiries is the Sudharma House, Dewans Road, Off Double Tank road (opposite the Mandala Yoga Shala), phone 2333345. It is also possible to team up with other students and rent a flat or a house. Expect to pay between Rs 3000-7000 a month for a room in a mostly unfurnished or completely empty house or flat. Ask around or contact one of the many enterprising locals who have a few rooms to rent to yoga students, such as [nimmoo@rediffmail.com](mailto:nimmoo@rediffmail.com), Sashi, 98454-60204 / [shashizenman@rediff.com](mailto:shashizenman@rediff.com) or Jyothi Kumar [jyothiram9@yahoo.com](mailto:jyothiram9@yahoo.com) / 821.5288994. Local estate agents are also worth checking out. Some students are put off by the complete emptiness of rentable accommodation. However, mattresses, cushions, cooking

equipment can be rented out; or bought very cheaply in and around the market in town, and then sold on to other yoga students on your departure. Sometimes a cleaner is included. Some houses have hot water, a nice comfort in the Mysore winter, but if not, get a water heating element (to be used with a bucket) for around Rs 300.

Gokulum has now become the new focus for students since Sri. Pattabhi Jois has relocated his yogashala to a new and impressive space in this neighbourhood and facilities there are in growing numbers. Gokulum is one of the prime residential suburbs of Mysore, away from most of the noise, traffic and pollution of the city. To find a place there, inquire with other students at the shala or with the odd other "helper" of students and you should find something quite quickly. Expect to pay a little more than in old Laksmipuram. Rents can be from 4000 – 9000 rps but the quality of place is higher and newer.

Apart from the standard corner store and fruit + veg shop there are two supermarkets in Gokulum. Loyal World is on Temple Road. If heading out of Gokulum on the main road, instead of straight to the city or train station, you go right. This road is also dotted with many fruit and veg stalls. To the end of it and left you will find a brand new Nilgiris which is probably the best shopping spot in Mysore. It is the same road as the Southern Star, just in case the previous directions lost you!

## WHERE TO EAT

This is such an important aspect of students' life. Not just because of its effect on your practice but because it can mean the difference between staying healthy or getting sick. Indian restaurant food, chiefly the North Indian cooked meals, are loaded with oil and thickening powder, which ultimately doesn't treat your stomach and intestine nicely. South Indian thalis, idlies, dosas, rice bhaths are pretty free of them. Even better is home cooked food, either by yourself or some of the industrious Indian ladies in Gokulum.

Janaki, aka Bay's Landlady, also known as Janaki's Yogic Foods offers tasty and nutritious food. She cooks on Tuesdays and Thursdays. It is wise to let her know in advance. Call 2500058. If you have a group that wants to eat on another day you can also call her to book it.

Tina is chiefly known for her cooking lessons (see below) but also has a nice little garden café in the back, where she serves breakfasts to all the students and does a catering service if she's asked. Her house is closest to the new shala, just off the KRS Road near the Hare Krishna temple, phone: 2416668.

Gokul chats or more commonly known as Woodlands because it's beside the Woodlands guesthouse, is just off of the KRS road when turning in to Gokulum. Great big idlies (and if you don't know what an idly is just try one, with sambar, and they're perfectly safe!!) Green Leaf is a brand new, clean restaurant frequented by Gokulum- living western students of yoga. It is off of Temple Road, perpendicular to it, at the second roundabout, meaning the one just after Loyal World supermarket.

Shaila does unlimited "thali's" every monday, wed and fri for Rps 60 and cooking classes on Tuesday and Sunday, Address: No# 1015/A, 9Th Cross, 3rd STage, Near Doctors Corner, Gokulam, phone 0821-2513265

For students living near Laksmipuram, The *Mahesh Prasad*, near Bahal Circle, on the same block as the modern Nilgiris supermarket offers good South Indian food, and the service is fast and friendly. Like many restaurants, what's on offer depends on the time of day. For around Rs 50 (US \$ 1) you'll get a three course meal and a chai or a lime soda to wash it down, which is good value even by Mysore standards. It is also a good place to sample a South Indian breakfast of dosas, idlis and kesari bath. Also in Laksmipuram, the *Mysore Mandala* (see below) is a peaceful setting for Western breakfasts.

Mention has to be given to the great "Aunty", who has been serving clean, healthy and nutritious breakfasts, lunches and dinners to students for the past five years. If going toward the city or living in Laksmipuram or its vicinity she is worth a visit. Her little house is opposite the Kaveri Lodge Hotel with a small sign saying "Aunty house".

In the city centre, the *Illapur* restaurant, on Sri Harsha road (near Ghandi square), offers one of the best North Indian meals in Mysore, if you are in the mood to splurge (well, around Rs 150, 4 US \$ for a three course meal). Next door, the *Park Lane Hotel* has mediocre food and

incredibly slow service, but many people enjoy the leafy green courtyard setting and live Indian classical music each evening. The *Shilpashri Restaurant* on Ghandi Square is recommended by Lonely Planet, and indeed its roof top seems very popular with westerners, but not with Indians, who probably find the food overpriced and the service far too slow. The *Akshayar Restaurant*, in the courtyard of the Dasapraskash Hotel, nearly opposite, is a far better place. Their regular thali is excellent value, the service is fast and friendly, and the place is pleasantly quiet and cool.

There are many street-side food stalls in Mysore, serving wonderfully tasty gobi mandchuri (Chinese style cauliflower), puris (fried bread), fresh sugar cane juice and other South Indian delicacies at incredibly low prices. They are generally safe places to eat, but make sure to order your sugar cane juice "without ice". And of course, coconuts sellers are found everywhere, with fresh batches of juicy and sweet coconuts. These are one of the best things about practicing in Mysore. They are excellent for rehydration after practice and the "white meat" of it, known as gungy, is also excellent.

## **OTHER COURSES TO TAKE**

Mysore is traditionally a great centre for learning and you can probably find someone to teach you just about anything you are interested in. Here are a few suggestions:

### **Indian Cooking**

Tina Sasson teaches North and South Indian cookery from her home, located in Gokulam, a few minutes walk from the new shala. You choose the menu, assist Tina with the cooking, and feast on the fruits of your labours. Tina has lived in various regions of India, and speaks perfect English. She also does breakfast in her garden. Aside from her cooking classes and delicious breakfast, she is a mine of information about life in Mysore and in India. Her address: 1,7,main, 3, stage. Gokulam, phone: 2416668.

### **Sanskrit, Chanting & Philosophy**

A good way to learn the meanings of all the things you have been chanting at the beginning of your yoga classes. Hema, [Venkatesh's](#) wife, runs Sanskrit chanting classes and you will pick up a bit of Sanskrit in the process. Hema also teaches yoga philosophy and yoga sutras classes.

### **Ayurveda**

Dr Kumar, of the Dixit Clinic (opposite the Saraswati Cinema, phone 2543619 between 6.30 and 8.30 pm) is a popular ayurvedic doctor around town. He teaches classes to small groups on request. Three lessons a week for a month costs around Rs 4000.

Classes in Ayurveda may also be run occasionally at the Mysore Mandala (see below).

### **Drawing and painting**

M.S Anand, 646/1 1st floor, 1st cross, Kumbarageri, N.S. Road, a local photographer and artist teaches traditional Mysore painting from his home and has been recommended by his students (who produce, under his guidance, some pretty impressive pieces). A one month course (daily classes) costs 6000 rupees. Contact [Art\\_By\\_Anand@hotmail.com](mailto:Art_By_Anand@hotmail.com) or phone 9448246694.(mobile). His studio is located within easy walking distance to Mysore Mandala. Another option is Akhilanka who calls his classes "Colour Meditation". He and his wife both are artists. He has a bachelor's degree in art and he has specialised in painting. He has also sold some of his paintings to some western yoga students. He can be contacted on phone 2473461.

The Kundeling Monastery, 2830 Panpapathy Road, near Railway Gate, Jayanagar, phone 2461508 runs courses in Tibetan Thangka painting (the art of representing Buddhas and other holy beings) during the winter months. The monastery sometimes also run courses on various alternative healing techniques.

### **Traditional Tibetan thangka drawing and painting**

Lessons with thanka artist Karma Gompo, at the Atisha Charitable Trust, 1366 Vishwamanava Double Road, Kumvempunagar. Karma's mobile number is 9845 077142.

Cost 75 rupees / hour, flexible timings. You can also commission a thanka, price starting at around \$100 US.

### **Singing**

Manjula. M, known by her a students' as 'Manju' lives at 967/4, 1st Cross, Lakshmipuram, (behind the Sankalpa Apartments, near Guruji's old Shala), telephone 243 8040. Classes are mostly on a one to one bases and usually take between half an hour to forty five minutes, six days a week and cost 1500 rupees per month.

## **OTHER THINGS TO DO**

### **Get a massage**

Naga kumar, a devotee of Osho, trained as an ayurvedic massage therapist in Kerala and also does Thai massage. For Rs 750, he will collect you at your place and drive you to his on his old motorbike, or, if you insist, massage you in your place. Allow two hours for a full body massage and a cup of ayurvedic tea afterwards. Kumar also teaches ayurvedic massage and meditation, including a very interesting form of "dynamic meditation" he learnt in the Osho ashram. He can be contacted by phone 2442879 or email [naga\\_k33@hotmail.com](mailto:naga_k33@hotmail.com). He speaks excellent English and has been warmly recommended by happy customers, both male and female.

Deva Arhato is giving ayurvedic massage sessions and training to western yoga students in Gokulam. His house is near the yoga shala. Ayurvedic Massage or Thai Massage sessions cost Rs 600 for 90 minutes and Ayurvedic Massage Training costs Rs 5500 for 7 days training. He also sells cotton yoga mats and yoga bags. Contact [devaharhato@yahoo.com](mailto:devaharhato@yahoo.com) or ring 98454-60204

### **Go Touring.**

Visiting the Tibetan settlements around Bylakuppe constitutes one of the most popular day or weekend trips. Don't miss the spectacular Golden Temple at Sera Je, and while you are there, try the curd, possibly the best in India.

The 14th century Kevasha temple in Somnathpur is another popular destination, and can make a pleasant afternoon trip. With a guide book, or the very handy *road guide to Mysore* (available for Rs 50 at Ashok book centre, next to the market ) there are many other places of interest to visit. It is possible to go to most places by public transport, but renting a car and driver for the day is fairly cheap, at Rs 3.5 / km + 100 Rs for the driver. Go to the taxi station, opposite the central bus station (beside KR circle), and bargain!

### **Hang out by the pool**

The Southern Star Hotel gives a Rs 125 special rate for yoga students. It is a cool place where yoga students socialise in the afternoons. If you plan to spend a lot of time there, get a monthly membership which will give you a discount rate on food too. Team up with a partner for the cheaper couples' rate. There is also a similarly priced pool at the Lalitha Mahal Palace. The surroundings are nice, but, being a 7 km rickshaw ride out of town, it is less popular.

### **Astrology**

There are many Jyotish (vedic) astrologers in Mysore, often combining astrology with palmistry or tarot cards reading. One who speaks good English and is willing to teach astrology to westerners is Dr Venkata Rao, 905/131 4th Main, 3rd Cross, Vidyanapuram (near Chamundipuram bus stand), phone 2482348. However, he charges western prices (Rs 1000, US \$ 20 / hour).

Another astrologer recommended by yoga students is Shankara Narayana, 716 / E Block, 11th Main, 22nd Cross, J.P.Nagar (near Goblimara bus stop), phone 9844153202.

### **Check out the Mysore Mandala**

The Mysore Mandala, run by two western yoga students, hopes to be "a centre for art, healing, yoga and good food", and, in addition to yoga classes with [Sheshadri](#), it offers consultations with ayurvedic doctors and runs "cultural evenings" (mostly free concerts, kirtans or lectures) on Fridays. Other courses, such as Indian dance or ayurveda, may

sometimes be organised as well. It doubles up as the Garden Cafe Restaurant (at the back) and has an art gallery exhibiting a wide range of contemporary art. They have a [website](#) where you will find more details about their activities.

### **Bhajans**

A great thing for all budding and spiritually inclined yoga students. Bhajans is devotional chanting, call and response most often, accompanied by various musical instruments from India..

The Ramakrishna Ashram at the top of the Gokulum Main Road, at the junction of KRS road, has a very high spiritual program each evening at 7pm. They also have the best bookshop in Mysore (for all books on yoga and spirituality). That is open from 9-12 and 4-7pm.

The Hare Krishna temple, near Tina's, off of the KRS road. Not the image we have in the west but just a nice temple with a daily program of chanting and Bhagavad Gita discussions.

Sai Baba bhajans – done in the homes of devotees on different nights. The only one we can figure out is the house right next door to the shala. Every Thursday night from 6pm to 7:20. You can arrive late but why!?! These are real, alive and vocal bhajans. With feeling by the men and women brought up with them.

Ammachi's – out of Gokulum all the way on the Bogadi road but well worth it on a Sunday night. Beginning some time after 6pm, wrapping up around 8pm. It is held at Ammachi's AICT for which you will see signs when driving out there.

## **COMMUNICATION**

### **Internet and email**

There are many Internet cafes in Mysore, including some in Gokulum. All are connected by cable but the speed and connection does vary. Prices are ridiculously low by western standards, but in some places connections are excruciatingly slow, particularly in the afternoon and evening. The fastest and best Internet service in Mysore is still the Dishnet hub, as they have their own cable and are part of a national company. They are located above the bakery on Kuvempunagar Double road (just up from Venkatesh's yoga shala). It's worth driving there if you need a few hours of fast service. Their place also has air-conditioning, which can be quite pleasant! To get there from Gokulam, drive to Nilgiris, turn right just before it, driving through what appears to be countryside with the lake reservoir on your left. At the end a quick left and right and Dishnet is about a half mile down the road. It is usually open from 7 am to 11 pm (although this may vary depending on staff availability and Hindu festivals), and charge Rs 30 per hour.

For those travelling with their own laptop, it is possible to get a local dial up connection with either Dishnet or Satyam for around Rs 300, and then use the phone line at the Mysore Mandala (for a nominal charge) to connect to the Internet, or if you have a network card, you can connect your laptop to the network in Dishnet.

### **Mobile phones**

A lot of yoga students are now bringing mobile phones. You can get set up with a Sim card and a bit of talk time for Rs 1000, but as everywhere else, mobile phones are expensive (a local call costs nearly 10 times more than from one of the ubiquitous STD / ISD phone booths) and you have to pay for incoming calls as well.

## **MONEY**

The Bank of India, on Sayaji Rao Road, nearly opposite the West Entrance of the Maharajah's Palace, and the Canara bank, near KR circle give the best rates for travellers' cheques and cash, and have reasonably fast service. Contrary to what the Lonely Planet states, the State Bank of Mysore is best avoided as service is slow and exchange rates not great. There's a LKP Forex money changer on Devaraj Urs Road, on the right coming from KR Circle, which stays open for much longer hours, gives reasonable rates, and has fast and friendly service, but is difficult to find, phone 2420090. The Andhara bank on NS road give cash advances on credit cards at good rates. There are also a number of ATMs in Mysore where you can use a Visa, Mastercard, Visa Electron and even in some American Express

(note however that in India, Visa or Master Card are a better option than American Express). Remember to take your card's PIN number.

## HEALTH

You probably already know that some people have ended up in hospital after drinking tap water in India, Do not drink or brush your teeth with water from the taps. When showering, or more likely taking a bucket bath, just keep your lips closed. Dishes and utensils can be washed in tap water just make sure whatever you use is dry. You can buy bottled water from most stores but most convenient is to have a big 25 litre vessel delivered. The best and quickest in Gokulum is Marina,, phone 2500564. A deposit of 250rps is required for the can and then it's 50rps for each refill.

Most yoga students get a bout of diarrhoea at least once during their stay, from contaminated food or water. In most cases, it is only a minor inconvenience, lasting a few days. However, some people have been taken to hospital with serious dehydration, so remember if or when you are stricken to drink lots of (clean) water. You can also take rehydration salts (called Electral), available in most chemists shops. You will get conflicting advice as to what foods to take and foods to avoid until you're back to normal, but generally rice and chappattis are considered OK, while fruit (including bananas) and milk products should probably be avoided. If the condition lasts for more than a few days, fasting can give the gut a welcome rest, allowing the irritants to be fully expelled from the body. If symptoms persist, see a doctor (Dr. Kumar 's details are above, or one of the doctors in the Mysore Mandala). You might find that as you recover you will experience a period of constipation. (A lot of Indian fried food contains baking soda which also can lead to constipation). Cooking at home lets you sample the wonderful varieties of produce available in Mysore and guarantees the freshness and soundness of at least some of your meals.

There is no malaria in Mysore (although there are mosquitoes...)  
A good dentist is Dr Sujit Shetty, Kalidea Road, phone 2500318.

## WEATHER

Indians will tell you that it is cold in Mysore in the winter. What they mean by that is that when going to your yoga class shortly before dawn, you will need to wear a jumper, as it is a bit cool. The rest of the time, a shirt is fine. The climate of South India is tropical and there's little variation in temperature throughout the year. The hottest month are March, April and May, when the average daily temperature climbs to above 30C (86F). The coolest months are December and January, which are also the driest (in fact, it hardly rains at all) and the best time to be there. November is pleasantly cool, but there can be heavy downpours, February is usually dry, but it is getting hotter. It rains a lot from May to October.

## GETTING AROUND IN MYSORE

It is almost possible to travel by foot in Mysore if you have plenty of time, but most students get around on motorbikes or scooters. You can rent a moped or a scooter for around Rs 2000 a month from Niru Communications, downstairs in the Hotel Gokul Building, D. Banumaiah Square, near the Jagan Mohan Palace, email [nirucoms@hotmail.com](mailto:nirucoms@hotmail.com), phone 2432359 or 2429141. The bikes are fully insured and in good condition, and they'll even deliver it to you. Another contact for bike rental is Sashi, an Indian yoga and meditation student, on 98454-60204 or [shashizenman@rediff.com](mailto:shashizenman@rediff.com). If you are staying a few months, it's worth buying a bike or a scooter, and then reselling it at the end of your stay.

Some people just use rickshaws to get around. Except late at night, getting a rickshaw in Mysore is never a problem, and they are very cheap. Make sure you agree on the price beforehand, or get the driver to use the meter. Buses are frequent, and laughably cheap, but often very crowded. Unaccompanied women should get in at the front of the bus.

## GETTING TO MYSORE

The nearest airport is Bangalore. There's an increasing number of international flights landing there, as well as several daily flights from Goa, Bombay or Delhi. From Bangalore airport, take a rickshaw into town and catch a train or a bus. There are buses to Mysore every half an hour from the Central Bus Stand, across the road from the railway station. Bus and train take about 3 hours and cost around Rs 50. The faster Shatabdhi Express train (Rs 280) takes just two hours. The three hour taxi ride from Bangalore to Mysore costs about Rs 1,300, but make sure to agree the price beforehand or use the prepaid taxi counter at the airport.

Another option is to land in Chennai (Madras) and from there, to take the train. There are two direct trains from Chennai to Mysore. The Shatabdhi Express, which leaves Chennai at 6 in the morning, is a comfortable air conditioned train which makes the journey in seven hours, and there's also an overnight train.

For more information on train travel in South India, including time table and fare, click [here](#).

A useful number is that of Seagull Travels (for airport pickups at Bangalore, etc. (91) 821 2529 732.

## USEFUL INDIAN ENGLISH VOCABULARY

Indian English	International English
<i>Chats</i>	Snacks
<i>Cool place</i>	Ice cream parlour
<i>Curd</i>	Fermented milk, a bit like yoghurt, but milder. Diluted with water it becomes <i>Lassi</i>
<i>Geyser</i>	Electric water heater
<i>Hotel</i>	Often only be a place to eat...
<i>Meal (often called Thali or Plate meal)</i>	A bowl of rice in the middle of a plate, with plenty of (refillable) small bowls of curries and sambar (sauces) around it. Generally includes curd and a sweet as well. A cheap and tasty meal in one go.
<i>No change</i>	A very common complaint especially from rickshaw drivers! Make sure to always keep a supply of coins and small notes. (Rs 100, about US \$ 2 is a big note in Mysore where a lot of people don't earn that much in a day...)
<i>Rickshaws (sometimes called Autorickshaws or Autos in short)</i>	Noisy, ubiquitous