

Invigorating, refreshing, inspiring,
motivating and enlightening...

Yoga For Health

By Sylvia Brown

I have just returned from five wonderful days of yoga, relaxation, yoga teaching, meditation, sunshine, breathing, gorgeous vegetarian food (and I mean gorgeous!), fun and loads of laughter! Where have I been? I've been on a "Yoga for MS" course at the Yoga for Health Foundation!

There is such an amazing Spirit in this place: invigorating, refreshing, inspiring, motivating and enlightening: it is a place you can really unwind and forget about all those things which you "think" are important.

When we arrived there, nobody in the group knew each other of course, but my partner Steve soon had everybody rolling about or cracking a nervous smile.

At the Yoga for Health Foundation everyone is encouraged to participate as much as they can but there are no rules. You simply do what feels right for you. Even if you are severely disabled, it matters not. You can stay in your wheelchair and simply breathe and visualise the movements. Alternatively you can be lifted out onto a mat, and your carer or one of the Yoga teachers will help move and stretch your limbs for you. The focus at Ickwell is always on what YOU CAN ACHIEVE without pushing you beyond your limits!

The day begins with a 7am Yoga Session, which you will be glad to hear, is optional! This is followed by breakfast, then the main Yoga and relaxation session of the day (10.30 am till 12

noon), followed by meditation at 12.30 pm. Lunch is at 1pm and then there is time for a rest or to enjoy each others company.

At 4 pm there is usually a talk or discussion on a topic such as chanting, the eight limbs of yoga, homeopathy or the Breath. In Yoga a great emphasis is laid on the importance of correct breathing and posture.

This meeting is followed by dinner and in the evening there is either, another talk or a short film, or some kind of social event, maybe even a trip to the local pub!

I was most interested in the talk a lady gave about the Alexander Technique one evening, and the film about Mystics and Buddhism another. I didn't make it to the pub as I was quite tired that particular night, but I did end up having rather a mellow evening thanks to Norman and his pipe, which was passed around the picnic table we were sat around outside at dusk!!! Now, that is what I call relaxation!!!

There is plenty of time for resting, chatting, relaxation and enjoying the peace and quiet and beautiful grounds at Ickwell. The flowers and wild-life are truly breathtaking. We spent a lot of time stroking and communing with the horses (whom we did not feed any apples- honest!). We also enjoyed a visit down to the tranquil lake to watch the swans. We even spotted a heron in a tree, and another evening an owl!



Ickwell Bury

There were plenty of jokes cracked about having peacock on the menu for Sunday lunch because with it being June, it was mating season for this splendid bird, and, though beautiful, he did insist on meowing like a cat at 4 in the morning (ear plugs are recommended at this time of year!).

We could not have chosen a better week for the weather! I did a fair bit of sunbathing to get my all-important daily dose of vitamin D. The heat does get to me though, and I often needed to dose myself with water afterwards to cool off again.

While staying at Ickwell Bury, you can also book private sessions with various therapists, and enjoy Reiki healing, Massage, or Alexander Technique consultations. There is also a library full of interesting books, and a meditation room, which you can visit any time. The shop in the entrance hall is also packed full of books, videos, tapes, yoga mats, lovely smelling health products and trinkets!

The vegetarian meals at the Bury are both healthy and heavenly. Even Steve, a keen meat eater, never missed his meat once in spite of his many jokes about escape trips to the local McDonalds. We were told that they had photos of each any every one of us anyway, with strict instructions on the door not to let us in!!!

Ickwell does cater for special

dietary requirements. I requested a gluten-free, dairy-free diet and I also cannot tolerate chickpeas, which makes things tricky for them, but on the whole they catered for me very well. Just ensure that you let them know your dietary requirements well before you go and don't be shy about it!

The accommodation is very comfortable. You can stay in a room sharing with a few others or, as in my case, request a room just for yourself and your partner or carer. The Bury is disabled friendly. There is a wheelchair-stair-lift and disabled showers, hoists etc.

The staff and yoga teachers at the Foundation are wonderful, gentle, helpful people and I cannot praise them highly enough. You will come away from the week with plenty of photocopied hand-outs, as well as a 'Yoga for MS' tape, so as to enable you to keep up your daily Yoga practice!

The last night our stay was, for me, the best of all. We enjoyed the guitar playing and singing of a man called Roberto and a lady singer, and we all joined in with great gusto! I really let go of all my worries, labels and concerns, even MS and enjoyed this evening. My mind stopped thinking and all I could see around me was the greatness of human spirit, beautiful courageous people. Disability melted away, I was simply surrounded by majestic warriors, and all I could feel was great compassion for humanity in my heart and a true sense of joy for LIFE in spite of adversity. In that moment MS didn't seem very powerful at all.

The evening finished on a high with a round of "Hey Jude!" with everyone holding hands in a circle, some standing some sitting but everyone included! At this

point all I could feel was total compassion in my heart and love for life. We then burst into a round of the Lalalalambada.

I have precious little balance, but even I stood up and tried to dance a little with one hand holding my mobility scooter! Then suddenly two ladies from Warrington grabbed my hands and I was dancing arms in the air, and it was a truly wonderful feeling as I have not danced like that in 6 years! It just goes to show at Ickwell Bury anything is possible!

The friendships forged in this place can last a lifetime, the walls resound with laughter and it can even become a place for romance...! Just ask Roberto! He is now married to a lady who has MS, Helena Jeffs, and they have a beautiful little girl!

For those of you who wish to enjoy a taste of what the Bury has to offer from the comfort of your own home there is a video available called 'Yoga for those with Multiple Sclerosis, Step by Step.



The five day 'Yoga for MS' course cost £285. Carers qualify for a 50% discount.

Ickwell Bury's beautiful surroundings

Info Box

For further information on course dates and prices contact:
The Yoga for Health Foundation:
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(The Yoga for Health Foundation has been under threat by re-developers for a number of years now. To find out what you can do to support the Campaign to save the Bury please visit their webpage!)

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