

## East vs. West: How to Choose the Best Yoga School for You



Yoga schools and certification programs are blossoming more than ever before. From ancient teachings to modern-day hybrid programs, choosing a school can seem overwhelming because each yoga school's curriculum varies in style, philosophies and systems. Many gurus in India instruct the traditional, ancient lineage of yoga, while other native gurus have relocated to western countries in Europe, Australia or America to create and implement their own system. In the West, it is common to find hybrid, spin-offs or modernized yoga teacher-certification courses that cater to contemporary lifestyles or that focus more on the physical aspect of yoga. When exploring local or international schools, consider the following factors:

### Interest in the Subject

Yoga is a deep, complex subject that is fascinating in many realms. Although the majority of yoga philosophies follow a similar path, each guru or style of yoga has its own spin on the subject. If attending a school in the east, the school will most likely include the "roots" and the spiritual, deeper layers of the subject. This is not to say a western school does not touch on this, but in the east you are learning from a lineage and the original source. When contacting a school, request the course details or itinerary to have a better understanding of the subject matter. Also, ask the school how many students are allowed in the course. Some schools keep classes intimate, with as few as four students to allow individualized attention, while other schools allow up to 100 or more students.

### Style of Yoga

What style of yoga most resonates with you? The style you choose to study should reflect your career goals. If you gravitate more toward athletic pursuits, you may want to explore a more vigorous style of yoga such as *ashtanga* or *vinyasa*. If you want to help people in a healing or therapeutic manner, you may want to choose an alternative style. If you are unsure, attend classes at local studios to physically and mentally understand the difference between various yoga styles.

### **Career Goals**

What do you hope to achieve with a yoga certification? Given the time, money and effort that goes into earning a yoga certification, it is important to determine this early on. If you want a certification to use at the local gym, a local or modern-day certification may be all you need. If you want to teach at premier studios or open your own studio, you may want to explore a reputable school that includes the deeper subjects to broaden your skillset. Keep in mind that some studios only hire instructors who go through their certification. If your heart is set on teaching at that studio, research their certification, but know that if it is not through Yoga Alliance or International Association of Yoga Therapy, other studios may not recognize that certification.

### **Self-Discovery Pursuits**

Are you personally trying to overcome struggles or barriers? Some of the best yoga instructors are those who overcame personal issues and now use that success story to position themselves differently in the market. Studying yoga overseas is a transformational experience—yogis are disconnected from the “regular world” and engulfed in the yoga lifestyle at all hours of the day. This is the time for self-reflection and discovery of one’s path or purpose in yoga, fitness and career goals. The eastern school may also feature additional alternative subjects to study, such as Ayurveda or acupressure.

### **Financial Commitment**

Yoga is a specialty certification, which also comes with a special price. Most certifications range between \$1,000 and \$5,000 for a 200RYT, 500RYT or yoga therapy-training program. In India, many schools include food, housing, books and other amenities. Be sure to look at what is included in the price as various schools. In beach town Goa, India, for example, many schools do not provide room and food services. Travelers will also need to factor in the cost of flights, visas, vaccinations and other miscellaneous expenses on top of the certification fee. In addition, whether local or afar, yoga students may or may not be receiving an income during their studies, which is another important factor to consider for your life budget.

### **Stage of Life**

Are you transitioning from college to the real world? Or are you looking for a change in your life or career? Studying yoga can be an effective transition tool to guide people to their passions or life’s path. Individuals who are self-employed or are not

weighed down with responsibilities may have more flexibility with time and finances to travel overseas. People who are starting families or work full-time for a strict policy-driven organization may find a local certification will better fit their schedule. Some western certifications are similar to the east, with students spending several weeks in one location studying, but other courses are one to two years in length and meet once per month on the weekends for in-house training. The rest of the time is spent self-studying and teaching to gain hours and experience. Thus, many local programs still require greater self-discipline to be able to study while living under the stress of everyday life.

Life presented me with the opportunity to study yoga in India, live in an ashram in Australia and study yoga throughout Asia and America. Learning from ancient gurus and traveling abroad is an exceptional experience for the adventurous spirit, but is not ideal for everyone. For further questions or advice on what yoga school is best for you, please feel free to contact me at [erkovar@yahoo.com](mailto:erkovar@yahoo.com).



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