

Only for those who can stand the heat

“YOU have to fight for survival in there, you can really find out what kind of person you are,” I am told as I enter the sweltering room.

I am about to perform 26 yoga postures twice in 46-degree heat at the new Bikram yoga studio in South Quay.

The Bikram craze is sweeping the UK, having become a cult phenomenon in the US. Classes at the studio have been packed since it was opened in November by Conny Chitnis and her husband Jay, who both used to work in the City. According to Conny, Canary Wharf is the perfect location for London's eighth Bikram studio. “The Canary Wharf crowd like to be challenged,”



Marina Thomas finds Bikram yoga to be a testing experience

she said. “They are competitive people – there are lots of marathon runners and people who like to push themselves that much harder.”

During the first hour we perform all the body stretches standing up and in the last 30 minutes we work lying down.

The heat is unrelenting and as someone who struggles with flexibility and – I admit – patience, I have to fight to hold the postures as expletives frequently come out of my mouth.

The rest of the class is focused and in an almost meditative state, which is, apparently, one of the benefits. “It’s so intense, there’s no chance to think about anything else,” said

Conny. “It’s better than the gym as you have people here to help you. It is a group dynamic and effort.”

The workout is meant to benefit the whole body by exercising every muscle, tendon, joint, ligament, organ and gland. Every cell gets massaged and stimulated by a new blood supply, or so I am told. It is said to improve strength, flexibility, cardiovascular health and your mental state. Among its claimed benefits are feeling energised, sleeping better, healing sports injuries and, by detoxifying the body, having better skin.

I manage to endure the heat for the full 90 minutes while struggling to hold many of the postures. I produce about a litre of sweat during the session. After the class I feel pretty dizzy, which is normal. But within an hour I feel reenergised, positive and fresh. It is easy to see why people get addicted to this.

Yogis in the US are campaigning for it to be made an Olympic sport and tennis ace Andy Murray famously gave Bikram the credit for the improved fitness that helped him beat Roger Federer in 2008.

“People either love it or hate it,” added Conny. “But there is nothing else like it for creating muscle memory and overall fitness. It has changed my life.”



New members can get 14 days of unlimited sessions for £20. Drop-in classes are usually £15, a one-month unlimited pass £140. See www.bikramyogalondon.com.