

yoga

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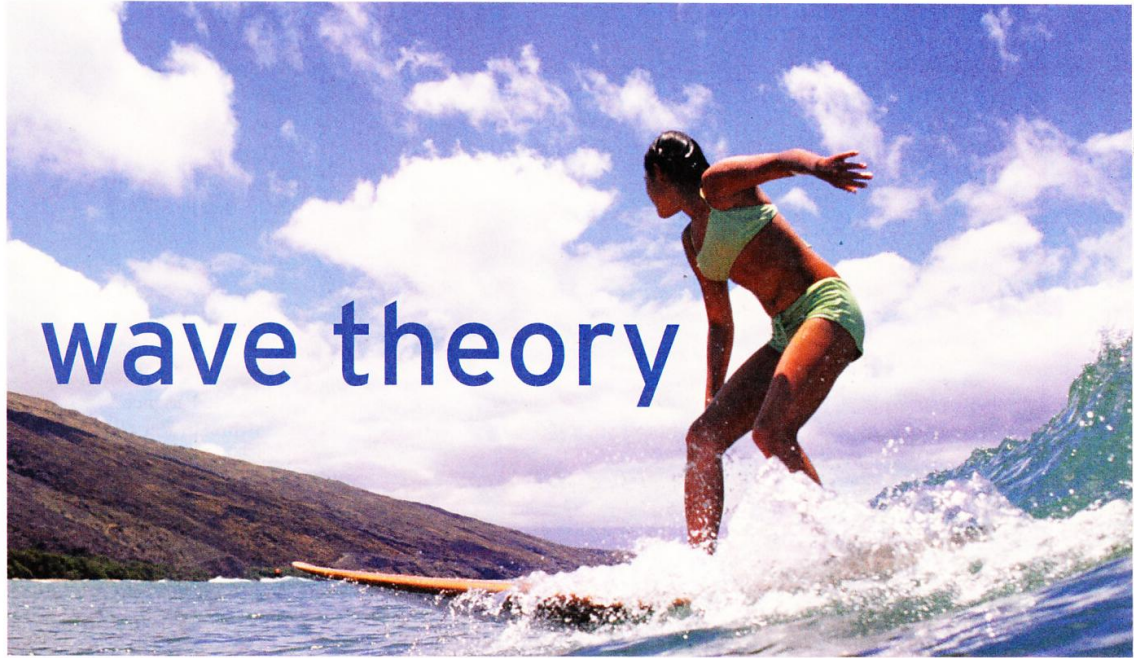
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Nicki Doane in Eka
Pada Rajakapotasana
(One-Legged King
Pigeon Pose)



wave theory

On a surfing retreat, the yogic principles of effort and surrender help novice surfers enjoy the ride.

It's midday, and the sun is beating down on the sleepy Mexican beach town of Sayulita. As the surf teacher and our group paddle out to where the waves begin to break, I'm grateful to be surrounded by the cool Pacific waters. Looking out onto the ocean's expanse, I feel an adrenaline-charged mix of **confidence and fear**. When a wave approaches and begins to crest, instructor Israel Preciado signals me to turn my board around so he can push me strongly into the wave. "Paddle, paddle," he yells. "Now up!" To my amazement, I settle into a standing position. Following instructions from our first lesson on the beach, I keep my knees bent, shift my weight from one foot to the other to control my speed, and ride the wave all the way into shore.

I've traveled here to dedicate some time to my yoga practice and also to learn how to surf—something that I've wanted to do for years. Via Yoga, a Seattle company specializing in yoga vacations, has been leading yoga and surfing retreats in Sayulita since 2002. Our seven-day trip is divided between daily surfing lessons with Preciado and some serious time on our mats. Our twice-daily Ashtanga Yoga classes emphasize balance as well as core and arm

strength to improve our chances of catching waves. But to start, one of our first lessons is about how to balance effort and surrender. In my yoga practice and in my life, I often find myself straining more than relaxing, and thriving on the rush I get from pushing myself to my limit. This approach, we're warned, won't work for surfing. Instead, this week we'll engage patience and nonjudgment even as we do the physical work it takes to get up on the board.

Back on the beach, though, I am elated. I had hoped that by the end of the retreat I would be riding waves, but I never expected to get up on my very first try. The five other yogis in our group cheer from the water, where they're waiting for their turn, and I dash back into the ocean, ready to do it again.

READING THE WAVES

At the start of the second day of lessons, Preciado announces that he's no longer going to push us into the waves. Instead, we have to wait in the ocean where the waves crest until we spot one building toward the shore. He tells us to point the board at the beach and then to

adventure

paddle—fast. Timing is critical: Start paddling too soon, and we'll tire out before building the speed needed to rise ahead of the break. Begin too late, and the wave will roll right underneath the board without lifting it onto the crest. However, if we time it right, we'll press up from the board and, if all goes well, stand balanced as we fly toward the beach.

I'm up for the challenge, but with the first few waves, I find myself paddling too early; then, becoming increasingly frustrated, I work more and more furiously to get out there at the right moment. Each time I do get up, the board simply sinks, leaving me defeated as I watch the wave roll on without me. "You're standing up too soon," Preciado says. "Patience, Elizabeth. Patience."

Although I'm combining two of my loves—yoga and the ocean—in the most picturesque of settings, I'm not enjoying the experience. Instead, I'm annoyed that I haven't mastered surfing yet. Back on the beach, I look out onto the ocean's expanse and meditate on its ability to change effortlessly—from completely calm to ferociously turbulent. It's so vast and powerful, so much bigger than any effort I could ever make. So why not surrender to that power and let myself go along for the ride?

CALMER WATERS

During one of the glorious breakfasts of fresh fruit, huevos rancheros, black beans, and fresh-squeezed juice, I look out at the ocean and notice how calm and serene it looks. Our morning yoga practice takes place in an outdoor studio perched on a hill above the beach. Seattle-based Ashtanga teacher Troy Lucero leads us through a series of Sun Salutations, standing poses, and loads of Chaturanga Dandasanas (Four-Limbed Staff Poses). My yoga practice has always been strong and dynamic, and I revel in the athleticism this particular class requires. Still, as I move through the practice, I wonder if my drive, my eagerness to assert myself, can be a limitation as much as an asset. Thinking back to the ocean waters, I imagine bringing more stillness to the mat, the board, and life in general.



get out there

Why Go Apply aspects of your asana practice, especially balance and core strength, and elements of yoga philosophy—

such as surrender, patience, and humility—to an exhilarating sport that fosters calm and connection with nature.

Tips Many yoga and surfing retreats take place in tropical locations—Bali, Mexico, and Australia to name a few—that offer a chance to enjoy hot weather year-round. If you choose a retreat with a busy schedule, you might want to stay a few extra days to visit with the locals and explore nearby towns or wilderness areas.

Trip Rundown Via Yoga (viayoga.com) yoga and surf retreats run year-round. Prices start at \$2,395 for seven days and six nights at Villa Amor, an open-air oceanfront villa in Sayulita, Mexico. The package includes two yoga classes and surfing lessons daily, breakfasts and three group dinners, a day trip to nearby Punta Mita, massage, and airport transportation.

More Around the World Liquid Yoga + Surf (liquidyogaandsurf.com) in New York and Costa Rica; Lucero Surf Retreats (lucero-surfretreats.com) on Costa Rica's Pacific coast; Milagro Retreats (milagroretreats.com) in British Columbia; Samudra (samudra.com.au) in Australia, Morocco, and the Maldives; and SwellWomen (swellwomen.com) throughout the Hawaiian Islands.

In the afternoon, I return to the water for a surfing lesson. The ocean is still quiet, and this time, instead of paddling, I simply float and wait. I watch the palm trees swaying in the wind, waves crashing against jagged rocks in the distance, the sunlight dancing on the smooth sea. And I begin to realize that this quiet moment, the waiting that is often dismissed as a waste of time, is as much a part of surfing as riding into shore. Finally, in the distance I see a small wave begin to arc.

I turn my board around, paddle strongly, not rushing anything, and finally push up to standing. The water lifts up my board, and I surf toward the sandy beach.

When I return to California, I'll take with me a new love of surfing. But more than anything else, I'll have found the willingness to surrender to the quiet moments, the downtime, in yoga and any action-packed experiences to come. ✦

Elizabeth Winter is a writer and yoga teacher.