

Text ANITA KAPOOR Photos GETTY IMAGES

*CALCULATED FROM TWICE-A-WEEK VISITS UNDER THE UNLIMITED PLAN

What Price Fitness?

Ever-popular low-impact workouts such as yoga and pilates are being taught in bigger classes with new — cheaper — price tags. But are these classes worth the time?

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A price war is raging in the world of yoga. From \$40 an hour, the cost of a class then dipped to \$22 and was once at an all-time low of \$15. A once-niche regime practiced only by those in the know at small, privately funded studios, yoga is to the 21st century what aerobics was to the '80s.

First, it spread by word-of-mouth; then it infiltrated the heartlands with community centres providing lessons up to three times a week. But it was the opening of the mega True Yoga Centre at Pacific Plaza this year that has taken yoga to the next — commercial — level.

True Yoga fills an entire floor, 12,000 sq ft to be exact. Started by Patrick Wee — he who brought in the Ray Wilson

California Fitness franchise — it is a leap in the opposite direction from yoga's inherent elitism. "Yoga hasn't been accessible to everyone," he explains. "Classes are not cheap, timings don't cater to the working adult and, more often than not, neither do the facilities. What we're doing is making it easier to fit yoga into busy schedules." Where many studios charge between \$20 and \$30 for a session, True Yoga charges as little as \$17.40*.

This mass-consumption exercise philosophy seems to be spreading. This month, Singapore's largest pilates studio, Sky Pilates, opens. It will offer equipment-based pilates to the masses. Pilates is performed both on workout mats, as well as on specific machines, usually on the Reformer, a \$5,000 machine that resembles a

torture device. While mat work classes are easy enough to organise at any gym (all you need are the mats), machine work comes at a heftier price.

Ivana Daniell was the first person to bring pilates to Singapore back in 1997. And her Ivana Daniell Studio at the tony Camden Medical Centre charges some of the highest fees for pilates sessions. A private session of machine work can cost upwards of \$120. "Our programmes, instructors and facilities, and our reputation for personalised care and expertise are our core values," says managing director Dario Lerer. "Price does not indicate quality either way."

The studio holds firm to its principles that you get what you pay for. And with their price tags, they promise "clinical exercise", catering to



whatever health issues anyone may have, from golfers to those with mobility problems.

There are only a handful of certified pilates instructors around — mat work can be taught with minimal certification but machine work takes years to master. The nature of the Reformer and other pilates machines also means that almost constant supervision is required or students are likely to sustain injury. This is the biggest challenge for Sky Pilates' owner Teresa Woo. Her studio will be the first here to offer varied machine work in a group-class setting. Sky Pilates' walk-in group sessions start at \$48 an hour. The studio has five instructors, including Woo, all of whom



have more than two years' experience in both mat and machine work.

At True Yoga, too, the quality of the instructors is important. Its seven yoga masters, all from India, have no less than 10 years of experience each. "It's

the level of the instructor that sells the place," says Woo. "It's pointless to have bad instructors."

But the field of yoga is so wide and varied that it's hard to distinguish between good and bad classes, and even between qualified and less qualified instructors. The number of yoga instructors here is at an all-time high. Where once yoga was an art of spirituality, it is now perceived as a purely physical exercise form. It used to take years to qualify, but now, one can be certified as a yoga instructor in a matter of months. The purists may disapprove, but they can do little about its proliferation.

There is still one bastion of elite exercise that has yet to succumb to mass consumerism. Gyrotonics, allegedly the most expensive exercise available in Singapore today, remains in the domain of private instruction. Conceived in the late '70s by Juliu Horvath, a professional dancer whose career was halted by a ruptured Achilles tendon, the exercise began as yoga for beginners and evolved into the Gyrotonic Expansion System. Incorporating gymnastics, swimming and ballet, it is supported by a series of pieces of equipment. Combining fluid movements on the machine, it works on the entire body to strengthen and increase flexibility.

Ivana Daniell's studio offers Gyrotonics classes at a whopping \$120 an hour. So does Sky Pilates, but at a more modest \$100 an hour. "It's quality, not quantity, exercise," insists Woo. "The effect is from the inside of the body. A class once a week for the time-pressed will definitely show tangible results." While its very nature seems to defy group instruction, perhaps all it will take is clever innovation and a brave entrepreneur to give Gyrotonics the mass-consumer touch. ■

NAME	Sky Pilates	Ivana Daniell Studio	True Yoga	Gaia Yoga Centre
				
TYPE OF EXERCISE	Pilates and Gyrotonics	Pilates and Gyrotonics	Ashtanga, Hatha, Hatha Vinyasa, Kundalini and Power yoga	Hatha, "Flow" yoga (Vinyasa), Yin Vinyasa (works on connective tissue and joints), Sivananda Dynamics yoga
ADDRESS	541 Orchard Road #05-03 Liat Towers Tel: 6100-7597	1 Orchard Blvd, #09-06 Camden Medical Centre Tel: 6736-2991	9 Scotts Road #04-01 Pacific Plaza Tel: 6733-9555 and 20 Raffles Place Level 2, Ocean Towers Tel: 6536-3390	30 Bideford Road #03-01 Thong Sia Building Tel: 6738-2028
WEBSITE	skypilates.com.sg	ivanadaniell.com	trueyoga.com.sg	gaiayoga.com
EQUIPMENT	Reformer, Cadillac (Trapeze Table), Tower; Barrel; Wunda Chair; Gyrotonic Pulley	Pilates Reformer; Gyrotonic Tower; mats and props for mat work	Mat (provided)	Mat (provided)
AVG NO. OF CLASSES A DAY	Four	Five	25	10
DURATION	60 mins	60 mins	60 mins	Yoga: 90 mins Pilates: 60 mins
PRICE	Private session: \$100-\$130. Pilates group equipment classes: \$320 for eight classes or \$48 per class.	Private session: \$120. Allegro (equipment) classes: \$450 for 10 sessions or \$55 per class. Mat work: \$300 for 10 sessions, or \$40 per class.	\$139 for membership with unlimited classes.	\$28 for single trial class or \$1,500 for six months' worth of unlimited classes.