



CREDIT: KRISTIAN KNUTSEN

ISTHMUS

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RECREATION

Standup paddleboard yoga requires a different kind of balance

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Carrie Anton on Thursday 07/10/2014

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Leave your yoga mat at home. Here, downward dogs and sun salutations are gingerly executed atop a standup paddleboard surrounded by nature and open water.

"Water slows the yoga practice, as keen focus is necessary to achieve and maintain physical balance on the board," says instructor [Maureen Hebl](#), both a certified paddleboard teacher and a registered yoga instructor. "The relaxed pace along with the beautiful surroundings naturally leads to a more mindful, yet still energizing, practice."

Unlike land-based yoga classes, which might begin with gentle head rolls and child's poses, participants in standup paddleboard yoga warm up with an invigorating single-oar row while standing or kneeling on a cushioned board similar in size to a large surfboard. A moderate headwind can create choppy waves, making it hard to believe that achieving yoga's stereotypical sense of calm is possible. However, once all class members are tethered to an anchored line of buoys, the class transitions to yoga, and a moment of stillness settles in. Blue skies and warm evening sunshine create the serenity that can only come from nature.

Hebl aims for a flow similar to the kind found in studio classes, complete with standing poses, seated stretches and a few bridges and wheels for those who dare to turn upside down. But working on an unsteady platform means good technique and proper alignment occur more organically than in a classroom setting. "If you're in a plank position on your mat, it's easy to favor one wrist or hold your weight improperly," says Hebl. "Do that on your board, and you'll take a dip in the lake."

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And yes, dropping into the drink does happen, but Hebl reminds students that the fear of falling off their boards, and actually doing so, have their benefits. She explains that the mere possibility provides just enough adrenaline to the workout to keep a student focused and motivated instead of mentally wandering off with an inner dialogue. If you do fall off, think of it as a life lesson. "Just like

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mentally wandering or with an inner dialogue. Try to do this, think of it as a life lesson. "But like every day, you are forced to overcome setbacks," says Hebl. "When it happens in standup paddleboard yoga, you climb back on your board, learn from your mistake and try again."

Veteran and newbie yogas, as well as those familiar or not with standup paddleboard, are welcome. All poses can be modified to a person's ability -- and, at times, courage level. If for no other reason, take this class for the final savasana, also known as corpse pose. Lying back on your board as the water gently laps around you might be the ideal way to reconnect with yourself and feel rejuvenated after a busy week.

An attempt to break the record for the largest paddleboard yoga class ever will take place during the Midwest Standup Paddle Festival in Madison; the SUP yoga stunt will take place July 12 at 10 a.m. at Brittingham Boats. BYOB -- bring your own board.

Standup paddleboard yoga

Fridays, 6:30-8 pm at Wingra Boats, 834 Knickerbocker Place, with Maureen Hebl \$35; classes through Aug. 29; advance signup at wingraboats.com.

Sundays, 6:30-8 pm at Brittingham Boats, 701 Brittingham Place, with Jami Collins \$35; classes through Aug. 29; advance signup at brittinghamboats.com.

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