

Estates West

THE SHOWCASE FOR LUXURIOUS LIVING

Via Yoga's Surf and Yoga Week in Sayulita Mexico

Written by Karen Loftus

Via Yoga's surf and yoga week in Sayulita Mexico is a perfect retreat for thrill seekers in search of a little reflection with their recreation.



I flew in to the [airport](#) with just enough time to check in and get to the gate. Fighting the unforeseen lines at LAX early on a Sunday was enough to challenge the most balanced of yogis.

Aside from the crowd, there was an army of boards. A sea of surfers, mainly male, was heading to [Mexico](#) to get their wave on. According to the ex-hippy, now exec, still surfer in front of me, his buddies, his son and his son's buddies do a men's-only surf retreat every year in an undisclosed, remote location in Mexico. No addy's were mentioned for fear that a flurry of females would crash their Iron John-meets-Beach Boy retreat.

When I disclosed my soon-to-be surf oasis in Sayulita, he confirmed that it was a very cool, remote fishing village, a longstanding fave of the serious surf community. That very day the paper ran a huge story on just how hip Sayulita is. I needed to catch this wave before the inevitable commercialism comes crashing down.



As I arrived in [Puerto Vallarta](#), I had no idea who was going to be on my yogi retreat. I assumed a bevy of overly serious crunchy granola yoga enthusiasts, talking karma and counting calories. As I stood at our designated meeting point, our group slowly took shape. I could spot them from a mile away. No one mentioned caloric activity, but the group was very yogi-esque.

An hour after we pulled away from the busy Puerto Vallarta airport, we slowly crawled in to the edgy and interesting center of Sayulita. The sun was just setting as we bounced along the unpaved dirt road. At the end of this seaside journey was the appropriately named Villa Amor. It was a slice of Mexican heaven right on the water's edge, away from the beach bustle and the center of the tiny town.

I didn't know what to expect, but upon arrival, it was just what you would imagine. It felt like a fit. Michelle Gantz, the Seattle-based proprietor of Viayoga, and her long, flowing sinewy limbs were waving us warmly in to the private gate at the end of the dirt road. After a quick check-in to the expansive, authentic Mexican villa, we all met in the open-air yoga studio down the dusty road for our welcome and intro.

It was a larger group than I expected, an eclectic and interesting group of 19 or 20 people. The group was largely women with three men thrown in for good measure. There were a few BFF's, girl duos, female friends turning 40 together, two married moms reclaiming independence while rekindling a friendship, the other duo of girlfriends, one a mom, one not, an older hip couple dealing with their now-empty nest, a flurry of singlets, mainly gals and few guys coming off, in or in search of a relationship and, of course, our yoga instructor for the week Matt who brought his lovely wife Amy with him.

Our crew came from many of the major US cities and from different points on their path, yet there was a common thread in the crew, every one was searching for something.

After a round robin of intros, we hobnobbed over the best chips, homemade gauc and salsa I have ever had. As I eagerly reached in to the ceramic bowl, there was a sea of hands heading in the same decadent direction. We were going to get along just fine...

After a highly spirited candle lit dinner by the water's edge at the [hotel](#), we ran like schoolgirls from suite to suite to see each other's digs as no two rooms or villas are alike. Villa Amour was rustic luxury. It looked like it was artfully designed by a bunch of happy, hippy people that decided to build a little something. It's an unapologetic place, filled with whimsy, creativity and individualism at every turn.

I felt sinfully spoiled until I saw the other suites. I adored my sweeping, open and airy one-bedroom villa complete with kitchen, dining room and a deck the length of a bowling alley. I could have lived there happily ever and after. It was a pitch perfect spot for reflection or romance.

Yet the envy set in once I caught wind of the others. If sharing, which is an option with Viayoga; you get put in one of the larger, upstairs downstairs or expansive wraparounds with incredible decks. Regardless of your room, we all looked out at the same sun and sea each morning and evening.

Each [yoga retreat](#) comes with a different yoga instructor. We all felt lucky to be in the last retreat of the season with Matt Pesendian, an LA-based yogi. It appeared they saved the best for last. I had been taking yoga for 14 years off and on and have studied many disciplines, but Matt brought a whole different flavor to the table.

With our early morning mediation and two yoga classes each day, one in the morning (8:00 a.m.) and one in the evening (5:00 p.m.), we did enough sun salutations to make your arms border on a buckle by the second class of that day.

Matt kept our mind and body busy as he added Shadow yoga and Qigong to our classes. As a practicing acupuncturist, he wove in several relevant lessons about the body and Chinese herbs. It was as much of a lesson as it was a test. After a surf lesson between the two, I craved the final corpse pose of the day. We deserved to play dead, if only for a minute.

Surfing was another story. Every one except the three men wore a bikini, moms and all and quite well. I was rocking a friend's sort of surf shorts and a borrowed rasher from Via Yoga.

Day one, every one got up on the board, arms in the air, including a man in his 60's, and every one's favorite. As a baby brand new surfer, I just wanted to get up by week's end. That was my goal.

Day two, my exuberance and every one's concern over my lack of leverage had me push myself to get up. The union of yoga and surfing is no mistake. Not only do you need the yogi strength of the upper body to pull you up, you need your core to center and balance you. The other muscle that you strengthen in both practices is patience.

I had none of the above. In a desperate attempt to keep up, I got half way, sort of, but not really up, but up enough, to take an ungodly, potentially fatal fall.

After being tossed around in a full-blown brawl with the wave, the sea spit me out in a state of disgust. I looked like I had been in a wet war. My hair was running from my head in every direction and my knickers were in a twist. I had an army of tears at the tip of my ducts awaiting the cry command.

By dinner I felt so disenfranchised and semi-conscious, the mere mention that they ran out of my fish dish at the restaurant, I all but bawled. I didn't know if it was my walking concussion, near death or the tears on the mat. With a few days of intensive yoga and the peeling of the layers, I was a walking nerve with a bad head of hair.

After a reluctant and slow return to the water, waves and my board the next day, I finally found the fun again. It was hard to miss as it was all around you from fresh-cut coconut juice on the beach, sunset cocktails, impromptu beach performances by locals, after dinner drinks on the deck, salsa dancing in the bars, boutique shopping and being introduced to the local characters and culture. It was an endless string of bliss and a complete departure from one's routine.

Our group gelled by midweek. The layers were dropping off as egos exited and business types and worriers let go of their work and worries.

At night we walked leisurely along the dusky beach like a band of yogic gypsies to the evening's restaurant. The Oregon-owned spot that we dropped in to served authentic Italian food, lots of pizza, pasta and even more wine. It was the perfect precursor to an intense day of surfing.



Day four was our serious surf day. We drove to Punta Mita, about an hour away to catch real waves with real surfers. Some in our group sat this one out, opting to sunbathe or snorkel in place of chasing waves. My two new BFF's and I hung with the bad boys and went out to ride real waves.

We three nearly died paddling a million miles out to sea while our surf instructor, the effortlessly sexy Andrea in her surf ensem seemed to skim over the water.

An hour later, I was antsy and ready to ride one in. Andrea with yogi-like patience let me know, "This is surfing. It's about reading a wave and knowing when to ride one in." She and our other instructor Israel weren't shoving us in to waves that day. We were on our own. We had to read and find them ourselves. I couldn't read, see or catch a thing. Every thing seemed to pass me by.

As we sat calmly, all of us soaking in the sun sitting on our boards, out at sea, not a wave in site, Andrea in a Zen like manner said, "This is surfing." It was the a ha moment. I got it. I no longer needed the wave. I stopped looking and was ready to head in to shore. As I did, this big wave snatched me and took me for the ride of my life as I was paddling in. It was the thrill of the week.

Our final day, I didn't want to leave as the only one that didn't fully get up on the board. I was confident that I could do it. Michelle of Viayoga was photographing every one in the water. So I asked her boyfriend to capture me on video on the board.

Our final one-hour lesson zipped by. Every one else was out or heading out of the water, but I couldn't leave. I had taken many a wave all the way in, no spill, in my semi standing, low squat position, but my brain would not tell my arms to let go of my vice grip on the board. There was a definitive disconnect.

I asked if I could do just one more. A wave came and like a mother birthing a child, tough love Israel, our other surf instructor pushed me in to the world and a wave, yelling, "Go!" I immediately got up, fully standing, hands in the air. Alas, a surfer was born. My mission was accomplished.

As I resurfaced from the water, Michelle said, "We missed it." Missed what? She and her boyfriend were photographing and shooting a statuesque brunette, a fellow surfer and a lovely gal worthy of camera time and attention, just not then.

My famous surf video is a shot of their feet, Michelle and her boyfriend's, with my wave washing over their yoga toes with a voiceover of them saying, "I missed it." "I know I missed it too." In the background you hear my screams of joy. It's the best video of the trip. I have no proof that I got up. You'll just have to take my word for it.

For more information:

If you're in to rustic luxury and you're looking to disconnect and get off the grid, I strongly suggest this surf and [yoga retreat](#) for both new and savvy yogis alike. It's a week where new friendships are formed and established relationships are revitalized. Whatever you are seeking, you are sure to find it in a wave, on the mat or on the beach. It's a blissful retreat that's good for the soul.

Via Yoga: www.viayoga.com, 1.800.603.YOGA

Yoga instructor, Matt Pesendian www.bodhimanda.com

Surf Instructor: Israel Presiado

Surf & Yoga & Pilates instructor: Andrea Arriaga www.andreaarriaga.com

Villa Amor: www.villaamor.com

Sayulita: www.sayulita.com