

'All for the good of yoga'

By **THAIS ACKERMAN** June 29, 2017



Charney Engelbrecht, who works at Jai Aerial yoga studio.

Yoga saved my life, said Ruby India Glass, as three chanted “aums” echoed through the Cape Town International Convention Centre (CITCC).

Hundreds of people united to celebrate International Day of Yoga on Saturday June 17, in the CTICC, including Ms Glass. With a yoga mat in hand, Ms Glass and around 500 other people were prepared to embrace a day dedicated to an ancient physical, mental and spiritual practice.

“I’m just blown away by this event,” Ms Glass said. “It’s really special that everyone, collectively, can bring people into this space and really turn it into a safe haven because yoga was my saving grace and my safe haven when I was lost.”

Five months ago, Ms Glass started a class package at YogaLife studio that she said turned her life around for the better.

After dedicating an hour a day to practising yoga, she improved her health and emotional state. She decided to attend Saturday’s event to celebrate her journey.

“Chaturanga, upward facing dog or cobra. Lift the thighs,” Joelle Sleetbos said as she demonstrated yoga poses front and centre of the venue. Ms Sleetbos teaches classes at YogaLife and is the organiser and instructor of Cape Town’s official yoga day event.

In 2014, the United Nations General Assembly declared June 21 International Day of Yoga. Ms Sleetbos was the first to host an event for the international holiday in Cape Town in 2016 and this year, on June 17, took the event to new heights.

This year Ms Sleetbos joined forces with her sponsor, Adidas South Africa, and other organisations to present an International Day of Yoga event that offered two different sessions for participants to choose from, a morning timeslot and an afternoon stretch. Each session was five hours long and included the same schedule of yoga workshops, yoga markets and a raffle with prizes.

This was the third official International Day of Yoga event globally, Ms Sleetbos said. It featured 24 vendors on its yoga market and around 30 teachers and 50 other volunteers from various yoga studios all over Cape Town. More than 2 000 people booked a spot to participate in this year’s event.

“We’ve received an incredible response from the first International Day of Yoga event and vowed to create an event in 2017 where people from all walks could experience yoga in a unified way,” Ms Sleetbos said in a press release.

She was also a part of the first yoga day official event in Europe, and decided to bring it to Cape Town to commemorate yoga while giving back to society.

Although the entry to the gathering was free, attendees were encouraged to donate to two charities, the Muizenberg-based Earthchild Project and Mothers2Mothers, on the Foreshore in the city centre.

The Earthchild Project aims to create sustainable change by placing facilitators in under-resourced schools to teach yoga and practical life skills to children of all ages. The goal of the Mothers2Mothers project is to eliminate paediatric Aids by training, employing and empowering local mothers living with HIV to prevent passing the virus to their babies.

“This is something that is really close to my heart,” Ms Sleetbos said.

“In my teacher’s training they asked us to think of a karma project where you give back to the community, to society, and I thought, ‘I might just organise it and try’.”

The definition of yoga is unity. Ms Sleetbos said she hoped that the Cape Town International Day of Yoga event would do just that – create connections between attendees from all demographics.

“We are not only connected here in Cape Town. We are actually connected on a global level because this day is celebrated everywhere, officially the 21st, but this whole week there’s activities all over,” Ms Sleetbos said.

The practice of yoga requires self-assessment. Ms Sleetbos said complete concentration on subtle body movements acted as a mental and physical exercise through meditation and had a positive impact on overall health. This is a part of why she was glad yoga had become a popular exercise.

“I think the world becomes a better place if people are just more conscious of how they live, how they deal with their own challenges in life on their mat,” Ms Sleetbos said.

Cape Town’s International Day of Yoga event required three and a half months of planning and many sleepless nights for Ms Sleetbos.

“But it’s all for the good of yoga,” Ms Sleetbos said. “Just seeing everyone today, it was completely worth it.”