



A balancing act

SUP YOGA TAKES A CALM SET OF MEDITATIVE EXERCISES AND BALANCES THEM ON A PADDLE-BOARD. WATERCOOLED ABU DHABI GETS IN ON THIS FAST-GROWING SPORT

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Yoga instructor Pauline digs her toes

into the sand on the Hilton Abu Dhabi's stretch of beach near the Watercooled centre and kneels down on all fours, placing her hands firmly in front of her. "This is the downward dog pose," she says, dropping her head, straightening her back and pushing her hips into the air. Like jack-in-the-boxes, we flop onto the sand and emulate the pose. "Perfect," Pauline says. "Now let's try it on the board."

There are three of us signed up for a yoga paddle-boarding session with Watercooled Abu Dhabi this morning. I'm one step ahead of Erwin and Max, as I've done yoga before. It's a little slow for my tastes, so the idea of adding a paddle board into the equation increases the appeal. Pauline couldn't agree more. "I was already a yoga instructor and then I tried paddle-boarding. I just loved it so I thought it would be fun to combine the two," she explains, steadying a board in the shallow turquoise water.

Pauline waits expectantly as I urge Erwin to go ahead. He clambers onto the board somewhat inelegantly, gripping the long, single-ended paddle, and Pauline gives the board a gentle push. As he wobbles off towards the horizon, Max confidently leaps

onto the second board and paddles away like an Ironman in training. It's my turn.

I tentatively place one foot on the board and Pauline gives me an encouraging nod. The board shifts sideways on a gentle wave and my confidence evaporates. "It's okay," Pauline reassures. "If it's easier, start on your knees." With both knees on the floating plank my confidence comes back in spades and I quickly push myself up to standing position, widening my stance to shoulder width. Dipping the paddle from side to side, Abu Dhabi's sandy atolls forming a shimmering backdrop, I skim happily across the water's surface.

Half an hour later Pauline calls us in from our disparate sections of ocean. Reconvening at a mooring line stretched between two buoys, we clip on, securing our paddles in a loop of rope at the tip of the board. The current pushes us gently around to face the beach as we sit cross-legged, squarely in the centre of our boards. "Breathing is extremely important in yoga. Close your eyes and breathe in deeply through your nose," instructs Pauline, anchored in front of us.

Calm and centered, feeling perfectly poised after the deep breathing, we open our eyes

and stretch into some of the basic *asanas* [yoga poses]. We don't look at each other, instead focusing on balance and breath, as Pauline's murmured intonations guide us through the series of moves. The tasks increase in complexity, moving through a menagerie of animal names from cobra through cow, cat and pigeon poses, culminating in standing warrior. This is difficult to master on the board, the slightest tremble sending the move into turmoil. Pauline endorses our efforts with kind words, her softly spoken guidance helping us achieve balance as we contort into pretzel-like knots.

At the end of the session, lying on the board, Pauline's voice wafts softly on the gentle puffs of breeze that swirl around us like mist. Drifting in and out of awareness, to the soothing lap of the waves, my body lightens, at one with the tide. My mind is empty and I am at ease, any worries floating away on the wispy clouds. As Pauline's disembodied voice suggests we move to a sitting position, we snap back to reality. Benevolent smiles are stretched across our faces as we rescue our paddles from the dangling watery depths, and glide in to shore without a wobble. Calm and balanced, we know next time it will be even easier. ☺