



YogaToday

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In-flight yoga

by Alex Faive

One of the things I used to consider extremely exciting in the past has become a real traumatic experience over the years: flying; i.e. embarking on a plane for a fair distance. I would consider my yearly pilgrimage back to France a fair distance: 16,810 km from Melbourne to Paris, an average 24 hour journey from airport to airport and an 8 to 10 hour time difference. According to Ayurveda, stagnation is the enemy of good health, and I get why: tight hips and shoulders, back tensions, butt discomfort, swollen ankles and feet, dehydration, intense fatigue, mental boredom are just a few examples of the 'inconveniences' that I experience on a plane. Don't get me wrong, seeing my family once a year is a luxury that I wouldn't trade for anything in the world, but the joy arising from such a longed for reunion doesn't become real until I land on French soil.

I have lived in Australia for over six years now and have flown back and forth seven times in addition to a few other holiday trips around the world. Ishvara pranidhana was my only option if I wanted to live at peace with the prospect of many future long-distance flights back to motherland inter alia. I had to accept what is and eliminate all unnecessary disruptive thoughts. Winning the Lotto to afford flying first class was of course an idea, but not a tangible one. On the other hand, practicing yoga to ease my body and mind into this ordeal was much more realistic and appealing. Google... and my respected teacher Leigh Blashki, were of big help to put together my travel yoga program. I do

hope the following suggestions will also assist you improve your future air-travel experiences.

Pre-travel

- > Mental preparation is essential. Do not build any negative thoughts nor anticipate or visualize the width of your seat, the quality of the food, the sympathy of your neighbour, or the very unlikely misfortune of your plane crashing! Meditation, pranayama and affirmations are great practices to ground yourself in the present and to stay calm.
- > Have a think about what could improve your comfort on the plane and make your flight (more) pleasant. Gather your travel accessories: neck pillow, compression socks, earplugs, eye mask, comfy clothes, good reads, music playlist, guided relaxation/meditation, yoga strap... whatever works for you.

During travel

- > I have poor blood circulation so I start making simple movements very early on: Neck, Shoulder, Wrist and Ankle Rolls as well as Seated Twists.
- > My seated practice includes: Knee to Chest; Seated Lateral Stretches; Seated Marjariasana; Supported Forward Bend (forearms resting on the seat in front of you, and forehead on your forearms). I also try to discreetly put my feet up on the seat in front of me to stimulate the blood flow into my legs.
- > Drinking water is very important to stay hydrated, and as tempting as it could be, forget about the free soft drinks and alcohol.

- > Go for regular walks and head off towards the bathroom where there is more space close to the wall for some in-flight yoga moves. It certainly takes courage to practice yoga in public so I personally choose something that doesn't bring too much attention on me. Having said that, if you can unroll your mat and ignore everyone else staring at you like you're a weirdo, by all means, go for it!
- > My standing practice includes: coming up on my tip toes a few times, Urdhva Hastasana, Lateral bends, Adho Mukha Svanasana against the wall, Uttanasana grabbing elbows and swinging side to side, Standing Twists using the wall, Standing Knee to Chest, Malasana, a modified Natarajasana using the wall. When it gets darker, I even squeeze in Virabhadrasana 2 and Trikonasana.
- > Most importantly listen to what your body needs. We are all different and you'll definitely need a dose of improvisation!

Sleeping:

When I read Leigh's email in response to my request for travel tips, he first warned me his advice was going to sound very counter-intuitive, and it did. I thought I would never be able to put it into practice, but at least I could try.

Option (1) Depending on the length of trip/time of day, it is sometimes better to sit upright and not go to sleep. This can work well if you are well rested before you go and can have a day or two to recover post-flight, getting plenty of sunlight.

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In-flight Yoga - continued...

Option (2) If you need to sleep, try to have short power naps and move around, stretch etc in-between.

Option (2) was more realistic for me. I resisted the temptation to roll up into a ball like I usually do in order to get as much sleep as I can for the trip to go faster – as years go by my body tends to not handle that strategy that well. I have tried Leigh's method and my body is extremely thankful for it and I am grateful for this advice.

Post-travel

Reclaiming range of motion, circulating the energy around the body, grounding, shedding the old and inviting the new are all key to enjoying your time upon arrival. When you finally get some privacy, take 30 minutes to rebalance your body, reboot your system and manage your jet lag. You will need to get creative in regards to props: folded blankets, pillows, books, belts are all you need to support your practice. I like to start really slowly lying on my back to make contact with the earth, feeling firmly supported by the floor and appreciating the fresh air that I breathe. I then use a block (or folded blanket) for a gentle supported Back Bend with my arms extended back and comfortably resting down, focusing on a deep slow breath. After a few breaths, I open my hips in Supta Baddha Konasana. From there, I bring my feet back on the floor, my knees stay bent and I interlace my fingers to stretch my arms back behind my head. This helps stretch my shoulders and the side body. I am now ready to move a

little bit more dynamically. I choose a simple sequence of poses according to what I feel my body needs. I mix floor and standing poses that target the hips, legs, chest, shoulders and back. I include Spinal Twists, which are very beneficial for both the spine and stimulating the Agni. I also include inversions to increase and better distribute the blood flow in my body and help with jet lag and balance. As always, finishing in Savasana is non-negotiable to settle the nerves and mind. Don't rush, do what feels right for your body. Be gentle, pause often, observe the stress and tightness moving away from your body. Notice the shift in

energy and find some sort of safety, comfort and relaxation.

Wherever and however your journeys take you in life, there is no doubt that some preparation and a few simple yoga poses during and after travel will improve greatly your experience. It certainly transformed mine. Namaste. ॐ

Alex Faive is a Yoga Teacher with a strong French accent! She has been practicing yoga for 12 years, and since her graduation from the Advanced Diploma of Yoga Teaching at CAE, she has fully embraced the yogic lifestyle. Alex is now teaching mindful yoga full time in both English and French in Windsor (Vic) and surrounds.



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