

# The Yoga Business: Spreading Beyond the Boundaries of Age & Sex

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## Introduction

LOHAS International, Inc. currently has 18 Studio Yoggy locations offering yoga, Pilates, and “beauty pelvis” (pelvis adjustment) programs. In 2014, as the company marks its first 10 years in business, we have grown to the point where these programs draw more than 60,000 participant visits each month. With Studio Yoggy at its core, the company also operates the Yoggy Institute, which develops and conducts courses designed to train instructors, and Style Yoggy, which offers lifestyle solutions through the development and sale of clothing and other products.

By spreading our corporate philosophy of “Look for and nurture the essential goodness in everything” through these businesses, we hope to help people find happiness for themselves and to contribute to creating a peaceful and prosperous society.

## The Yoga Market in Japan

Yoga originated thousands of years ago in ancient India. It involves turning one’s consciousness inward and breathing deeply while adopting specific poses, and brings mental composure in addition to regulating the body.

Yoga came to wider attention in Japan when it was popularized first by Hollywood stars in the 1990s and then by models and actresses in Japan beginning around the late 2000s. According to data released by the BRICs Research Institute in 2006, 328,000

people in Japan take part in yoga, constituting a market worth 22.77 billion yen. Another survey — the *Iyashi to supirichuaru ni kansuru chosa* (Survey on Healing and the Spiritual), which targeted 2,000 Internet users aged 20–59 and was conducted jointly by Mitsubishi UFJ Research and Consulting and Yahoo Research during the summer of 2008 — found that, at 32.5%, more people had an interest in taking yoga classes than in any other type of spiritual content, suggesting a future of continued growth for the yoga market in Japan. Yoga classes are some of the most popular programs at sports clubs; when cultural centers are included, the number of yoga facilities and participants rises even further.

The number of men practicing yoga has been increasing in recent years and, with global corporations providing employees with meditation instruction on Wall Street, a growing number of businessmen have adopted meditation both as a means of developing their capabilities and as a holistic tool for promoting health. It is well known that prominent business leaders such as Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, and Sony founder Masaru Ibuka have practiced meditation. There are reports that last year, for the first time, more than 30% of the participants at Yogafest — Japan’s largest yoga event, held every autumn — were men. At Studio Yoggy there has certainly been a steady increase in the number of men taking part.

The recent coinage *asakatsu* (“morning activity”) reflects the growing trend among businessmen of applying the hours before going to work to self-improvement efforts. Yoga was one of the first among many possible activities to gain notice in this way, and the class that Studio Yoggy offers at Tokyo’s Morning University of Marunouchi has been a popular one, with men making up roughly half of participants. In addition, our early morning classes that start at 7:30 have drawn a total of more than 70,000 participant visits since we began them in 2008. There is also a tendency now, particularly among the young, to seek out highly specialized studios for particular activities rather than general fitness clubs offering a broad range of exercises.

Yoga tends to be thought of as something for women, but has actually always been practiced by men. Today, whether in India or in the United States, to see men engaged in yoga is not at all out of the ordinary. We believe there is a strong latent demand for yoga in Japan, too, and intend to be proactive in continuing our efforts to publicize the practice.

Photo: LOHAS International, Inc.



Yoga

## Studio Yoggy's Non-yoga Programs

Pilates is a system of exercise developed by Joseph Pilates, a German national who was interned in Britain as an enemy alien during World War I, to increase physical strength and promote the health of other internees. Pilates said of his system, which seeks to resolve bodily distortions and lead to correct, stress-free posture by developing the inner muscles at the core of the body we are not usually even conscious of, that "in ten sessions you will feel the difference, in twenty you will see the difference, and in thirty you will have a whole new body." Pilates is recommended for people who want limber, more beautiful muscles and an effective means of regulating the body.

The "beauty pelvis" method was developed at Studio Yoggy as a way to strengthen the entire body by focusing on the pelvis. By improving bad habits and distortions picked up in the course of everyday life, it draws out the intrinsic beauty of each individual.

At Studio Yoggy, we believe that combining these three programs is a more effective way of regulating the whole, both physically and mentally. We recommend resetting the body using the beauty pelvis method before moving on to yoga and Pilates. More than a decade after the boom, these practices are not so much a fad as on their way to becoming an established lifestyle.

## From Company Founding to Present Day

The first Studio Yoggy was founded in 2004 at a time when yoga studios were not yet an established business in Japan and there were only a few in the country.

The impetus for founding the company was the terrorist attacks in the US on Sept. 11, 2001. Company founder (and current vice president) Sawako Tayu learned of the attacks while flying to New York to start a new life. Although the drop in tourism there led many shops and restaurants to close, yoga studios seemed to be opening up everywhere. Watching the city being reborn together with yoga, Tayu felt she wanted to share with others a lifestyle that was good for the self, for other people, and for the environment, one in which yoga is the lens through which one can look closely at what is essential.

Right from the outset, Tayu sought to ensure that anyone could take part by eliminating religiosity and creating an environment that was both refined yet familiar. Rates were set in a way that made it easy for people to begin; customers could pay for unlimited visits by the month, pre-purchase multiple visits at a discount, or pay for single visits at "drop-in" prices.

Tayu provided more than 30 different types of classes ranging from those oriented toward beginners to energetic courses that offered more of a workout and relaxing courses based on slower, gentler movements. She contracted with roughly 230 instructors around the country, and customers could choose their instructor freely based on their needs and lifestyles. Studios were opened near

Photo: LOHAS International, Inc.



*Chair Yoga*

major train stations in large cities and became part of the lifestyle of business people.

In the beginning, most people were motivated to join because they felt they were not getting enough exercise or wanted to lose weight, but in recent years a growing number of people seem to be joining for more spiritual reasons, because they want to relax or feel healed.

## Making It Easy to Begin

One of the things we've been working on in recent years to make it even easier for people to incorporate yoga into their lifestyle is "chair yoga". Chairs can be used as support when adopting poses and we especially recommended them for beginners and the elderly. In 30-minute lunchtime classes that do not require a change of clothing, participants adopt poses that stretch their backbones in all directions, stretch their legs, and open up their hips as a way to improve lower back pain and back problems exacerbated by working hunched over a desk all day. This is a popular class with office workers who say it is easy to attend and makes for a refreshing break before the tasks of the afternoon. People tend to think of yoga as something that is only for women and requires a lot of flexibility, but we think chair yoga offers an opportunity for people to learn how much fun yoga is while also getting a taste of its depth.

The Yoggy Sanctuary brand of apparel that our company offers is a varied line of what looks at first glance like ordinary casual wear; many customers come to the studio dressed in Yoggy Sanctuary items, take their classes, and then head home without changing clothes. This is another of the ways we have tried to make it easy for people to make yoga a part of their lifestyle.

We also help promote mental and physical health through the development of content that can be enjoyed easily at home. This includes supervising the production of numerous books and DVDs; the *Maternity Yoga Lesson* book and DVD set, in particular, has sold steadily since its release in 2009. We have also developed the

Photo: LOHAS International, Inc.



Yoga clothes

*Otoyoga* (Sound Yoga) series of smartphone apps, which provide audible instructions on how to adopt poses and have been downloaded more than 1 million times.

### Growing the Business

As yoga becomes a part of more and more people's lives we are frequently asked to open more studios, but opening a new studio means finding high-quality instructors. Only about 10% of those who audition to work at Studio Yoggy pass the test, and even this select group of instructors must then work to maintain and improve their skills through a training and assessment system. We have a dedicated department for evaluating classroom performance that performs evaluations as needed to ensure that we maintain high standards in our courses and always continue to improve.

To secure high-quality instructors, it is important that we train them ourselves. Instructors obtain certification not through a standard national certification but rather by completing training courses run by businesses like ours. More than 6,000 people have completed the course at our Yoggy Institute and then gone on to work as instructors at fitness clubs and other locations throughout the country.

This year, as we reach our 10th year, we have introduced a new certification system designed to provide yoga instructors with a measure of social standing and to help promote the further spread of yoga. We are also bolstering our efforts to help our instructors continue to grow through ongoing educational opportunities involving outside experts in fields such as anatomy.

### Athletes & Yoga

In recent years, many athletes have come to incorporate yoga and

Pilates into their training regimens. Studio Yoggy is sometimes asked to provide programs for professional athletes or to provide assistance in gaining certification, which suggests high expectations.

Yoga involves being conscious of both body and mind. Continuing the practice not only strengthens core muscles but also fosters mental strength because being conscious of deep breathing encourages practitioners to look inside themselves. It is extremely important for top athletes not only to pursue their physical training but also to strengthen themselves mentally in order to control both their everyday state of mind as well as to stand up to the pressures of competition. I suspect the reason so many athletes turn to yoga is because they are looking for a way to stabilize and strengthen both body and mind.

I hope they will also consider incorporating our original "beauty pelvis" program as a care method, too. With the Olympic and Paralympic Games now coming to Tokyo for the first time in 56 years, interest in sports is sure to rise throughout the country. We hope our programs can contribute to helping athletes improve their performance and bring about better results. As the Olympic excitement continues to grow, we expect more and more people will want to get their bodies moving, and yoga is an easy activity for people who have not exercised in a long time to begin. We intend to continue promoting yoga as a light activity that can be continued for a lifetime. We have collaborated with running events and running facilities in the past, and hope to actively taking part in a variety of events targeting a range of sports enthusiasts.

### Working With Healthcare & Corporate Customers

Currently, our company is emphasizing initiatives with healthcare organizations. We held a seminar for doctors on the topic of yoga and depression that combined both deskwork and yoga practice, and have developed courses with a company that provides services for measuring autonomic nervous function.

Research on the effects of yoga and meditation is moving forward overseas and companies such as Apple, Google, and Nike are said to recommend yoga to their employees as a means of relieving stress and improving mental health. In the expectation that this approach is likely to increase in Japan, too, we offer on-site classes in corporate conference rooms and other such locations.

Yoga courses can also be effective at small and medium-sized enterprises that do not have occupational health physicians on staff. We also work together with outside research institutes to study the effects of meditation.

The population of elderly people aged 65 and over in Japan now exceeds 30 million, the highest level ever. This constitutes 24.1% of the population, meaning that today roughly one in every four people in Japan is elderly. This trend is likely to continue as medical advances extend the average lifespan, and it is estimated that 20 years from now the ratio of elderly people will reach one in three. At



the same time, people in this age group are much more active than those of the same age were in the past.

Looking ahead to an aging society, we have started a specialized training course to help instructors teach older participants. They learn which exercises take into account participant needs, the instructional environment, medical conditions common to the age range, and specific symptoms — and which exercises to avoid — and how to provide balanced programs that incorporate the right tools at the right time. From the standpoint of preventative care, too, we also conduct exercise programs at facilities for the elderly that it is hoped will promote healthier minds and bodies among the aged.

### Maternity Yoga

Studio Yoggy offers yoga and Pilates classes that support women as their minds and bodies undergo constant changes during pregnancy, after giving birth, and while raising their children. We take particular care to ensure that even those who are doing yoga for the first time are able to relax, get some exercise, and feel refreshed.

The maternity class provides mental and physical support for women during pregnancy. We work to prevent and alleviate lower back pain and bloating and other discomforts that are prone to occur during this period while also preparing the body for giving birth. Through yoga and Pilates, participants become more conscious of their bodies, feel a sense of connection with their babies, and improve their ability to recover after giving birth.

The post-birth recovery class is one mothers can take part in together with their babies up through the time they start to crawl. While deepening physical contact with their babies, mothers gradually tighten bodies that have grown slack during pregnancy and birth and restore the stamina they need for childrearing. This is an optimal forum for mothers not only to refresh their minds and bodies but also to communicate among themselves.

Mama yoga is a class mothers can take part in together with

children from the time they start to crawl up through three years old. Moving the whole body in a balanced way while being conscious of their breathing relieves the lower back pain and sore shoulders that so frequently accompany childcare, while also cultivating minds and bodies with the strength and flexibility that raising children demands. This class focuses on mothers in order to nurture through yoga the sound minds and bodies they need to look after their children.

In recent years, maternity yoga classes have grown in popularity and many are now offered by obstetricians as well as by specialist studios like ours. At the Yoggy Institute, we offer specialized training courses for maternity class instructors. We recommend these courses for yoga and Pilates instructors who want to lead classes focused on pregnancy or post-birth as well as for midwives and others who work in the areas of pregnancy and childbirth.

### Conclusions

Creating a business that is both socially and economically sustainable — one that contributes to customers' mental and physical health by popularizing yoga in a way that is easily incorporated into contemporary lifestyles and developing systems that enable more people to make their living as professional yoga instructors — is a challenge that seems both profoundly meaningful and deeply rewarding. In the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake, Japan has a renewed appreciation of the importance of the bonds between people; there is a role for yoga to play as an established, broad-based part of the contemporary lifestyle that transcends age and sex, and we believe it is our mission to help.

The core of our customer base today is working women in their 30s and 40s. We will continue to develop support programs by expanding offerings that target particular stages of life such as maternity classes and those geared toward older customers, and those that take advantage of the growing interest in sports that the Olympic Games are expected to generate.

We aim to be a studio with a broad customer base loved by men and women of all ages. It is not uncommon for non-Japanese residing temporarily in Tokyo to visit and we hope that people from overseas who are in Japan on business or holiday will also come to our studio. In the future, we hope to continue focusing on the importance of the ties between people while serving as a center for improving the quality of life not only in Japan but also overseas. **JS**

Photo: LOHAS International, Inc.



Maternity yoga

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