



June 2007

## Heat teachers

**Absolute Yoga Studio stages Asia's first training course for instructors of hot yoga. It was tough, pricey and, yes indeed, very hot**

If you're going to train someone to be an instructor of the increasingly popular "hot yoga", you take them someplace sunny where they can really get burned to a crisp.

That may or may not have been the thinking at Bangkok's Absolute Yoga Studio last month when it conducted Asia's first certification training session for hot-yoga teachers on Koh Samui. It was a rigorous, month-long workout at the Bophut Fisherman Village, where Absolute has a branch.

There were 30 trainees, both Thai and foreign, in search of full- and part-time jobs, some hoping to open yoga studios of their own.

Absolute's founder and owner, Benjaporn Karoonkornsakul, attributed the boom in hot yoga partially to the fact that it's easier to do than the traditional form. But until now anyone who wanted to become a certified teacher of the bending exercise's steamy cousin, she said, had to go to the United States for a Bikram Yoga course.

That's where Benjaporn, 35, got her training five years ago, with Bikram Chauduri, who started the modern hot-yoga craze. It was like "rehab camp", she said. "Not joyful."

The training course on Samui was planned months in advance to give applicants time to clear their calendar. All were required to commit to at least six months' practice beyond the four weeks of the course.

Samui was chosen rather than any of the six Absolute locations in Bangkok because there are direct flights there from Singapore and Hong Kong and the island is a well-known holiday destination.

As well, Benjaporn remembered how exhausting her sessions in the US had been.

"I thought it would be better to have some classes outdoors, and some by the sea. Plus, we wanted the trainees to leave their work behind and focus only on the lessons. It has to be very intensive to be effective.

"In this environment, it's a course they'll never forget."

Conducted in English, the classes ran six days a week from 7am to 8.30pm, complete with meditation sessions and lectures. Things went so well that Benjaporn is planning a second course for November.

It wasn't cheap - Bt160,000 including accommodation and healthy meals - although that's about half the price charged in the States. And it wasn't easy.

As well as learning 30 postures, students had to memorise a 47-page manual.

"Everyone had to lead the class using the exact wording for all 30 postures in the manual," Benjaporn said. Once certified they can modify the language to suit their own style.

**Chief instructors** Harreson Martell and **Gabriel Azoulay** said the course was geared to building confidence as well as knowledge.

There were some, Azoulay acknowledged, who were ready to quit by the third day, usually because they were intimidated by the thought of being in charge of up to 100 people.

"Public speaking isn't for everyone," Martell said. "They were shy about it, but they gradually found the confidence."

Full-time teachers can expect to lead two or three classes a day and, since hot yoga has become popular worldwide, the opportunities are plentiful.

Absolute pays its teachers Bt800 to Bt1,600 for every 90-minute class, depending on their performance and experience.

Azoulay pointed out, though, that being a yoga instructor brings rewards other than monetary. "You help people get healthier and show them how to handle stress. It's an inspiring job."

Tanaporn Tangcharoenmankong

The Nation

[www.nationmultimedia.com](http://www.nationmultimedia.com)