



Universal Highlights

What's the pulse of fitness from a few key spots around the globe?

As an international continuing education provider, I experience firsthand the fitness and wellness disciplines that are popular in different cultures and countries. One consistent trend I am seeing is a shift from traditional fitness to holistic wellness. Fitness professionals are embracing the concept of training as a trilogy of mind, body and spirit. The following details offer a peek into what's shaping the schedules in other parts of the world.

Puerto Rico

Never before has Puerto Rico offered so many group fitness classes with mind-body disciplines. Rita Maldonado, fitness supervisor of the Golden Door Spa at El Conquistador Golf Resort, says that Puerto Rico is embracing mind-body more than ever. She teaches "Taming the Monkeys of the Mind," a class based on the book of the same name by Luis Emilio Robles, which explores the benefits of meditation and stress-management techniques. Maldonado uses tried-and-true techniques from yoga and qigong, instead of using a high-intensity "traditional" approach to movement. The island is also home to innovative forms of cardiovascular and strength fusions such as "Drums Alive® Zen," which combines

cardio drumming with stability balls interspersed with yoga and Pilates postures.

Philippines

Filipino schedules are offering different classes for aging adults, including formats for balance, agility and activities of daily living. Latin and Eastern dance classes are still growing, and Neva Grace "Bum" Mogato has created "Belly and the Beat," a fusion of traditional belly moves with modern music. Fusion programs—including Shirley Quejada's unique creation "Swoga," a combination of swimming and yoga—are swelling in popularity. Sensual dance variations, made popular by instructors like Earl Jimenez, are also in demand. Nia is now known in this part of the world thanks to the work of Tina Iuan, who trained in California before offering classes in Manila.

Greece

Dimitris Kandris, a group fitness professional for Holmes Place in Athens, says that not only are traditional gyms incorporating more mind-body programs into their schedules, but independent mind-body studios are also emerging. Kandris created "Yoga Healing," a vinyasa flow class that combines physiotherapy principles with yoga postures to help heal and recover the spine and joints. Group studio cycling and cardio dance are still enjoying growth as well.

Australia

Ryan Hogan, sales manager and group fitness instructor for Australian Fitness Network in Sydney, says that many Australian instructors approach the freestyle programming versus prechoreographed debate by teaching both. "Prechoreographed programs dominate the scene at major chains like Fitness First, but are certainly not the

only ones we offer," says Hogan. "Many instructors not only teach those programs, but also teach other unique classes as well." To that end, Hogan developed his own classes featuring step and core training, two formats that enjoy popularity now, along with cardio dance.

Italy

Across Italy, cardiovascular movement thrives while group strength and flexibility classes are static. The mind-body approach is taking hold, although a bit more slowly than in other countries. Patricia Saschuk Oliveri, former director of Reebok University in Italy, created "No Age Fitness" in response to the increasing number of Baby Boomers. This class, predominantly for postmenopausal women, focuses on motivation and mental training as much as it does on physical empowerment. Aquatic programming, often called "Aqua Gym," pulls in participants at indoor and outdoor pools throughout Italy.

Japan

In Japan, mind-body fitness continues to emerge on schedules, while it's almost impossible to find an indoor cycling studio. Kayoko Takada has raised both the standard and the popularity of Pilates in Japan by importing Peak Pilates and opening her own studio. Takada also recently commissioned "Shakti," the first mind-body prechoreographed program (for both land and water) in Japan. ■

Lawrence Biscontini, MA, won Instructor of the Year awards from ACE (2002), IDEA (2004) and Cox-Fit-Pro (Specialty, 2004), as well as Best Mind-Body Presenter from ECA (2005).

Look for more creative ideas from around the world as IDEA Fitness Journal launches World Buzz in the January 2009 issue.

Sharing the Buzz

Have you heard of a creative new class? Drop us a line and share the buzz. Send an e-mail, a letter or a fax detailing the class. We'll be publishing your ideas in upcoming issues.
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