



a weekend of  
*tranquility*  
Dover Yoga's Annual Island Retreat

*By Lara Bricker*

Visitors to Star Island have almost a universal response as soon as they step off the boat and onto the rocky shores of the island. They look around and are surrounded by the ocean on all sides. There are no phones. No computers. No pagers. The chaos of their daily lives quickly becomes a distant memory along with the mainland, which sits 60 minutes away on the horizon. There is only the ocean breeze, the birds and the island. "You step off the boat and your shoulders drop," says Carrie Tyler. "It's so serene."

Tyler, the owner of Dover Yoga, has organized an annual yoga retreat in September to the island, part of the Isles of Shoals, for the past four years. The retreat gives people a chance to spend from three to five days on the island practicing yoga, meditating and simply relaxing. "The retreat is an opportunity to reconnect with each other, to plug into something greater, and remove ourselves from a lot of our daily obstacles," Tyler says. "It's about finding health and wellness and focusing on your practice and your daily life."

Those seeking spiritual, mental, and general escape, have been going to the island since 1897. Guests stay in the



Oceanic House, a majestic white building overlooking the water, with a look reminiscent of the grand hotel era that brought hotels like the Wentworth by the Sea and the Mount Washington to the state. The Oceanic House has been on the island for over a century and has attracted artists and writers such as Nathaniel Hawthorne and Childe Hassam. Not much has changed on the island over the years, which is part of the allure for guests. "Star Island is a time machine," says Steven Longworth, a regular at the annual yoga retreat. "When you step off the boat onto the island, you magically appear in the 1800s. The sounds and smells of the ocean, sailing crafts, sea birds, the other islands, the non-plastic, non-modern living quarters, all help feed the soul."

While the retreat is coined as a yoga retreat, Tyler says people don't even have to practice yoga if they prefer not to. They can simply relax, explore the island and be together with their fellow guests. "It's an opportunity to get away; it's almost like the yoga is secondary," she says. "It's a great getaway for parents. They're close enough that they could get back if there was an emergency."

The yoga schedule is very flexible and includes a variety of daily classes throughout the day. Scheduled for the retreat this year are seven instructors who may lead classes inside or outside, depending on their preferences. "Carrie and the other yoga instructors possess innate spirituality that is incorporated into their yoga classes," says Diane Gallant, who has attended all of the annual yoga retreats. "In addition to the physical movement of yoga, they share the meditative and philosophical aspects, which are the foundation of yoga. Without this imparted knowledge, the yoga practice would be about the movement only. Being in such a beautiful, natural setting at Star Island is the perfect environment for yoga practice. It is truly a magical experience that I would not miss."

For other guests like Wendy Beagen, the whole experience of being on the island, with its nautical sights and sounds, is what keeps her coming back year after year.



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“The sense of hearing is my favorite out there — boats clanging at their moorings, the docks gently creaking, the gulls, quiet voices on the porch at night,” Beagen says. “The vision of the island is almost unbelievable. Here is this huge rock in the middle of the ocean, with a beautiful green lawn, and plopped on top is this gorgeous, shining white hotel with a full-length porch and old fashioned rocking chairs. You can’t believe it can still exist through all the storms. Sometimes, I feel like I’m on a movie set or in a story book.”

The island’s history dates back to 1651 when sailors gave it the name Star Island, because the island’s “points stretch out in all directions like flashes of a distant star,” according to the Star Island Corporation, which oversees the island. The group of islands had been mapped and named “Smyth’s Isles” by John Smith in 1614, and later became known as the Isles of Shoals. The islands comprised the busiest commercial port on this side of the ocean at one point, and dominated the fish market. In 1800, a simple stone meeting house was built on the highest point on Star Island, and is still in use today as a chapel. These rustic and simple structures help transport guests to a place of true relaxation and greater awareness of their lives and those around them. “We eat meals as a community. We sit together, and we sleep in the same buildings,” Longworth says. “I believe this has real value; value which is hard to find in everyday life. On



Star Island, we literally stop, and for a couple of days, we listen. We listen to what others are saying, what the world is saying, and what our hearts are saying.”

Beagen brought her husband and daughters along on the retreat after her solo trip, and says they also took home the lessons of the simpler lifestyle. “It was quite freeing for my oldest to realize that no one was even going to notice what she was wearing, or how her hair looked, or if she decided to lie down and rest instead of doing yoga,” Beagen says, adding it was also beneficial for her children to see adults having fun, and letting go of their reservations. “I want them to know it is possible to have the greatest time ever with people who are not only completely comfortable with themselves, but equally comfortable with others, naturally.”

Tyler says the retreat is open to all from children to adults. They even had an 85-year-old guest last year. “Anybody is welcome,” she says, adding that no matter who attends, they have the same feeling at the end of their stay: They feel they have truly escaped without traveling more than one hour from home. “It’s unbelievable. We never want to leave. It’s hard to step on the boat and come back to reality.”

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