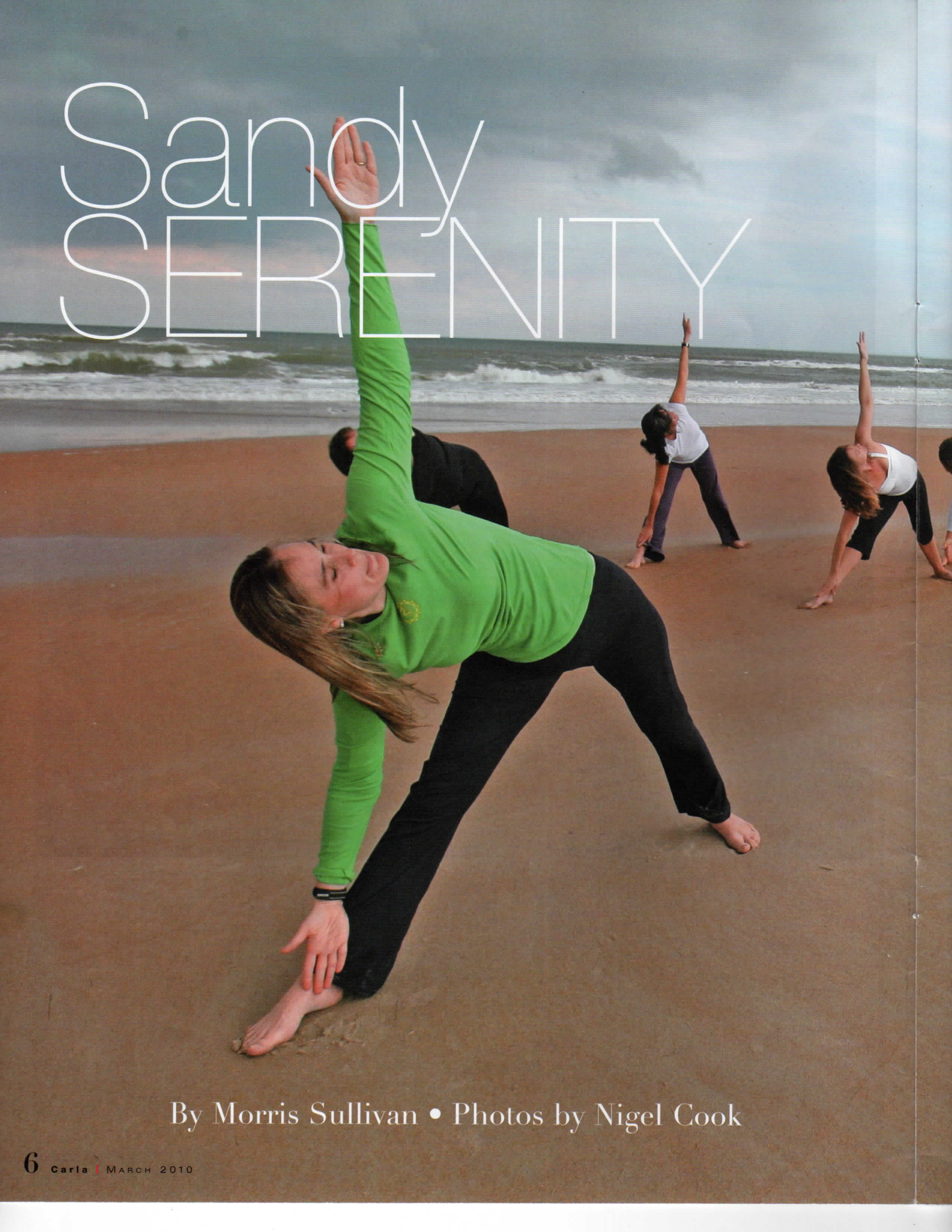


Sandy SERENITY



By Morris Sullivan • Photos by Nigel Cook



Lt's a mildly chilly, breezy day on Daytona Beach, and a handful of stalwart yogis walk mindfully onto the packed sand and proceed through a series of postures designed to develop the body and calm the mind.

Standing in the exalted warrior asana, a student is asked to gaze up at the fingertips extended overhead. With no ceiling to contain it, the gaze travels beyond the hand, beyond the few white wisps of clouds and into the deep azure sky.

A thought arises: With a perfectly good beach at hand, why would anyone want to do yoga indoors?

Krista Ghaffarian, who owns The Yoga Center in Daytona Beach, leads this particular class. The studio sits about half a block from beach access and is one of a handful of providers that offer yoga classes on the sand of Ormond Beach, Daytona Beach and Wilbur-by-the-Sea.

Yoga on the beach is a different, often more profound experience than yoga in a studio, say Jane Loewinger and Bebe

Daeffler, who are both regulars at Ghaffarian's beach yoga classes.

"I love the beach," Loewinger explains. "I grew up in West Palm and my parents were always taking me to the beach, and it just relaxes me — I just feel more at home there.

"It's so nice when it's warm, and there's nothing like sea breeze," she adds. "I always have a good night after these classes."

Daeffler attends about five yoga classes at various times during the week, most of them indoors. "I do yoga as often as I can, but I organize my work schedule so I can be here for the beach class," she says.

"It's energizing and relaxing at the same time," Daeffler adds. "Doing yoga in nature is really nice — it's very spiritual.

The beach is "the greatest yoga studio there is," says Jodi Ascherman, who teaches yoga on the beach at Wilbur-by-the-Sea.

"I do my own practice there whenever I can," she says. "It's really peaceful at this beach — there's no driving, and very few people, so it's pretty quiet."

With nothing separating the soles of the

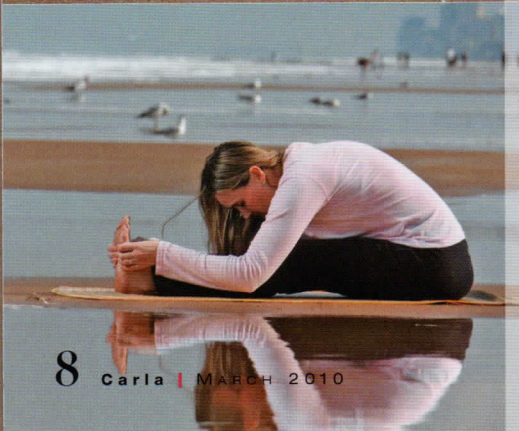
feet from the sand, a yoga practitioner can truly feel grounded to the earth. On the beach, it's also easy to expand awareness of the breath to include the touch and smell of the breeze, the call of the gulls that glide overhead and the rise and fall of the waves.

"To do yoga in nature is the ultimate sensory experience," Aschermann says. "I like the fresh ocean air and the sunshine. And being able to see out into the infinite just reminds me of all the possibilities."

There are some technical differences between yoga practice indoors and on the beach, she says. Some postures are easier on sand, and some are harder. Also, she structures the class so that students face the ocean as much as possible.

"Like I'll get them to turn around when they go into a headstand," she says. "That way, they face out to the ocean while they're upside-down."

Kim Latford began teaching yoga in Ormond Beach about four years ago. Her beach class began as a matter of practicality — the health club where she taught



eliminated its group fitness classes and her students wanted to continue meeting.

“So we moved outside, and it turned out very well,” she says. “We meet at the very end of Granada, right where it comes into A1A, and it’s a great spot. We get to really celebrate the true meaning of yoga and its connection to nature.

“People ask me what ‘Om’ means,” Latford says. “It really means ‘everything.’ When we say ‘Om’ out there and our sound joins the sounds of nature — and you can see the infinite expanse of the ocean — you really feel connected to everything.”

Preparing for yoga outdoors is a little different than for an indoor class, Latford says. Her classes are on a wooden deck overlooking the ocean, so sand is not too much of an issue. “But it’s not as clean as the typical yoga studio,” she says. “But you can put a towel under your mat if you don’t want it to get dirty.

“Also, you need to have sunscreen and sunglasses,” Latford adds. “And bring a bottle of water so you can stay hydrated — it can get pretty hot out there.”

Students also should be prepared to cope with weather conditions as they develop. Ghaffarian’s beach class can stay in the studio during bad weather. Latford moves her class into a gazebo.

“Or we can re-purpose to an indoor location,” she jokes. “If it’s raining too hard, we might just go to Starbucks, have a cup of tea and talk about yoga.”

Doing yoga on the beach entails some other challenges, Ghaffarian says, like occasional crowds or even Spring Break debris.

“But yoga is much more than just movement and postures,” she points out. “Being in that environment, the other limbs of yoga come into play.

“It’s an opportunity to be with all that is going on,” she says. “Not knowing what to expect is a part of that,” she says. “We’re going to be less focused on alignment and perfect posture and more focused on the breath and on finding our connection to whatever we find here.”

“We’ve seen rainbows, heard laughter from children playing,” Ghaffarian says. “There’s a beautiful ocean, and sometimes there are cars, or we hear the lifeguard truck go by.

“But the ocean is a great source of awareness — it’s like a mantra in the background, so it has a very calming effect,” she says. “You just can’t help but relax.” #

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Jodi Aschermann teaches yoga on the beach at Wilbur-by-the-Sea on alternating Sundays. Class time varies according to the tides. For schedule and location phone (386) 761-1214 or e-mail Aschermann at igniteom@hotmail.com.

Krista Ghaffarian teaches yoga on the beach at 4 p.m. Mondays at The Yoga Center, 820 S. Atlantic Ave., Daytona Beach. Phone (386) 868-0954 or visit daytonayoga.com.

Kim Latford teaches at the Birthplace of Speed Park in Ormond Beach on Saturdays at 10 a.m. Phone (386) 235-0143, e-mail kim@yogaormondbeach.com or visit yogaormondbeach.com.

Joy Pratt also teaches yoga in Ormond Beach, on the sand at the north side of Granada at A1A, with classes on Friday mornings at sunrise, Saturdays at 9 a.m., and monthly partner yoga workshops. For specifics, phone (386) 473-1119, e-mail barefootyogaob@gmail.com or visit facebook.com/1/39e15 or meetup.com/Barefoot-Yoga.

