



Why run a World Yoga Festival?

By Ram Banerjee Ram@yogafestival.world
www.yogafestival.world



*"Give the world the best you have,
the best will come back to you"*

Swami Dayananda Saraswati

Pujya Swamiji never liked yoga festivals until he went to one. He thought them frivolous things that distract from the essential learning of Vedanta. But he was persuaded to go and talk at a Yoga Festival in Rishikesh and reluctantly went. He was amazed at how many were in the class. Who are these people? Who brought them here? These are Yogis, came the reply. They brought themselves for the love of Yoga. The talk, as you might expect, was a great success with many people coming up to Pujya Swamiji afterwards wanting to know more. Their interest in Vedanta was ignited.



Later that evening, having rested, Pujya Swamiji called Swami Santatmananda to his room and stated that a yoga festival is a good way to introduce people to Vedanta. We should have one he declared, specially in the west where Vedanta is needed so badly. We need one in London, see to it he declared. But how Swamiji? came the bewildered reply, we don't know many people in London.

Roll forward 15 months and in summer 2015, Swami Santatmananda finds himself in my car travelling from Cambridge towards London.

By chance we had met at a Rishikesh Camp and I had invited him to hold a workshop at our house in the UK. We had just seen the private collection of Sanskrit manuscripts at Cambridge University and the drive was pleasant amongst the rolling hills of England. Pujya Swamiji's words were circling in Santatmandaji's mind and without any warning he said Look at all the beautiful space you have here in England, what this country needs in an authentic yoga festival!

Having dropped off Swamiji in London for an overnight stay with old friends, my wife, Sonali and I discussed the statement. We both thought it a great idea but with her pragmatic mind, Sonali worried that setting up a yoga festival would be far too difficult and she reminded me that neither of us had run a festival before. Indeed, she added accurately, neither of us had ever been to a festival before! WorldYogaFest.



We returned the following day to pick up Swamiji and stated that we wish to conduct the World Yoga festival in 2016. He was amazed and pleased and a little nervous as we were both in our late fifties, this activity could be too much for us. But for us the choice was simple. This was something that needed to be done. Yoga has too long been diluted and transformed into something unrecognizable in the west. This needed to be stopped and indeed reversed. The wisdom traditions of India needed to be maintained and what better way to spread the healing effects of Vedanta than to a receptive audience of yogis.

Thus, the journey began, often difficult but ultimately hugely rewarding. We are now in our third year and this years festival (run as a not-for-profit charity) took place 19-22 July and attracted over 1100 attendees daily from over 25 countries – truly, a World Yoga Festival.

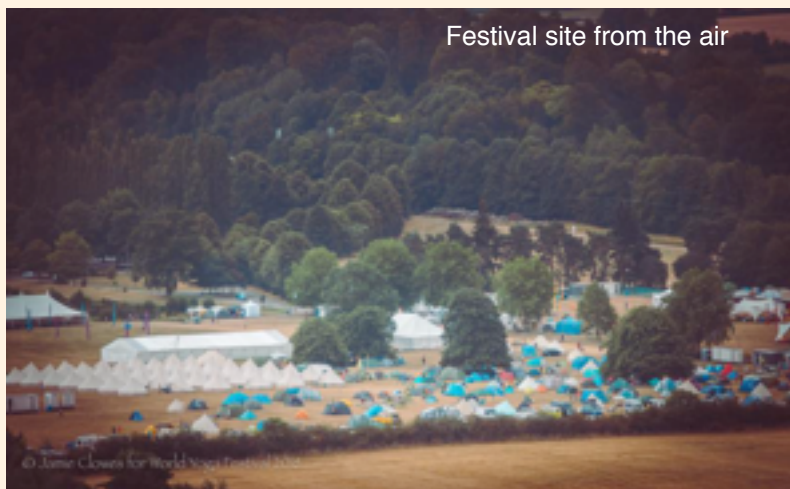
The atmosphere was so uplifting, the volunteers I met super-helpful and friendly, and the attention to detail and care was just lovely I came away it my heart, mind and soul noticeably transformed!

Yasmin, Spain



The Arsha Vidya tradition was well represented with four swamis and Sri Louise present. They were fabulous and the interest generated in Vedanta within a few short days surpasses everything that has been tried before in UK to date. Jnana Yoga was conducted in the Fire tent which was appropriately washed in a white canvas with little embroidered suns and carpeted in bright orange.

People camped on site in order to be able to make the early morning classes and by 7am, the whole festival was buzzing with four parallel yoga classes taking place in four large tents.



Festival site from the air

Beale Park where the festival is held is a beautiful 420-acre estate nestled next to the river Thames with its own lake. The weather was beautiful. Unnaturally warm for UK with temperatures touching 30C. In England, that is hot!

Almost 40 teachers from around the world provided masterful classes in all aspects of Yoga, wellness and Vedanta. Teachers from India included Smt. Damini Dalal from the Yoga institute in Mumbai (the oldest Yoga Institute in India) as well as Dr. H R Nagendra, the chancellor of S-VYASA University in Bangalore

The festival reviews have been fantastic and they are still coming in.

Spoilt for choice, it is hard to decide where to immerse yourself. Gurus masters and teachers from all ages, from all places, sharing such a variety of offerings to get involved in and learn about.

Sofia, Argentina



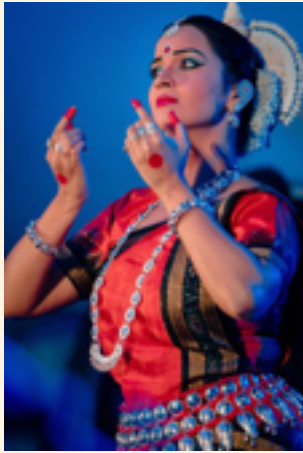
Dr H R Nagendra from S-VYASA

The classes brought together all the traditional Yoga schools including Iyengar, Ashtanga, KYM and Svananda to name but a few. Everybody enjoyed learning from each others traditions. The atmosphere was one of unity and understanding



"I would give it 10 stars if I could! This was an incredible experience that really brought me back to myself. Not just the wonderful teachers and organizers –but the energy of the people attending really restored my faith in Humanity ."

Laura, UK



Music and dance also played a key part of the festival with an evening concert on all four days involving great musicians from around the world.

Classical Kathak and Bharatanatyam dance were also greatly appreciated.



As Pujya Swamji, would have said, all things that have a beginning must have an end and the end of the festival was marked by a closing ceremony that appreciated the contribution made by not only the teachers but all the attendees and volunteers of the festival who made it happen. Ram and Sonali reserved special thanks to Swami Santatmananda who 3 years ago started it all. If he did not carry his Gurus wish forward, the World Yoga Festival would have forever been a dream rather than the success it now is.

This success is not measured in monetary terms. Indeed, all the funding has come from us to date. Money we could afford? No, it was meant for our future, but what future is there for us when people around us are losing faith. It was Pujya Swamiji's wish and Ishvara has magically delivered the festival through us.

We must not be complacent; the work has only just begun. If the festival is to have a long-term future it must be supported, sponsored and replicated, around the world wherever all aspects of Yoga need to be brought to the public in an authentic manner.

The next festival is scheduled for 18-21 July 2019. Please help us by attending, spreading the word with friends and family or donating to the charity Arsha Kula Foundation through the donate button on our web site www.yogafestival.world. DO something. MAKE a difference. Life is not a dress rehearsal. The interest has been ignited. The fire of knowledge is still burning bright thanks to Pujya Swami Dayananda Saraswati. Hari Om.



Laura, UK