

Yoga Retreats

MAINE, MASSACHUSETTS, CALIFORNIA, ARIZONA

THE WILLIAM SEWALL HOUSE, MAINE

Numerous yoga retreats nationwide and in Canada nurse their guests back to physical and psychological health with a loving atmosphere, healthful food, and the simplicity of country living. Although only one option is described in detail in this chapter, other excellent programs in North America are listed below in “One Click and You’re Off” and in Chapter 9, Pampering Retreats.

The William Sewall House in Maine is a place of solace. The intention of its owners, husband-and-wife duo Donna Sewall Davidge and Kent Bonham, is to integrate yoga with nature: Close to the north end of Baxter State Park, 90 miles from Bangor (which many guests fly into), the property is surrounded by wilderness prime for biking, hiking, swimming,

canoeing, or simply reflecting on your life. They also intend to continue the house's legacy as a place of healing. The Sewall House was built in 1865 by Donna's great-grandfather, an established nature guide in the late 19th century who had a lifelong friendship with Theodore Roosevelt, who came to Sewall House as a college student to recuperate from asthma. Today the building is on the National Registry of Historic Places. In 1997, the couple bought it and soon after opened it as yoga retreat from June 15 to Columbus Day (mid-October). Donna, a certified Kundalini Yoga teacher (her yoga video, "The Challenge," was a top-ten pick by *Yoga Journal* in 2000), brings to Sewall House 20 years of yoga and meditation experience and a Masters in nutrition. She is adored for her patience, encouraging nature, willingness to learn, and friendliness. No matter if you're a veteran yogi or a beginner, there's a silencing of the mind and loosening of the body to be gained in Donna's daily yoga and meditation classes. Kent adds his passion for vegetarian cooking, yoga, and music. The twosome work very hard—and it shows—to maintain this house of five private, sun-flooded bedrooms, each with full-size antique beds and dainty wallpaper, and cozy communal areas (including a living room with a fireplace and a reading nook, and a large wraparound porch with chairs). On your journey back to spiritual or emotional health, you'll be joined by no more than ten fellow guests in search of the same curative effects. To fully reap the benefits of the retreat, five days are needed. In this time you'll feel yourself unwinding, the yoga renovating your body, the food cleansing you, and the meditation clearing your mind.

A TYPICAL DAY

Guests rise (by choice) for an 8 a.m. meditation session, a silent sitting for never-evers to experts with Donna leading the way, held in the converted "shed," which they transformed into a lovely studio. Then at 8:30 a.m., for an hour and a half, she guides students through a Hatha/Ashtanga-based class. Incorporating the Vinyasa, poses that flow from one to another, it's an energizing practice. Over breakfast, options for the day's activities are discussed. There may be canoeing on Mattawamkeag Lake, hiking in Baxter State Park, biking around the country roads (with the bikes provided by the house or your own), or swimming among waterfalls (\$20 per person for arranged hikes or lake tours). It's all up to the guests, and if you want to stay at the house and read on the porch, you're free to do that as well. There's a "Midday Munch" around 1 p.m. And at 5 p.m. Donna leads a Kundalini class; this discipline focuses on energy work and breathing. Then some guests enjoy a sauna or a massage before sitting down with everyone for a family-style dinner.

SING YOUR HEART OUT

Mantra work is a big part of Donna's Kundalini practice. The afternoon class typically ends with 5 to 11 minutes of chanting, soothing and catchy songs composed by Kent and accompanied by him on the guitar. The harmony of the other voices in the class meld into an inspirational hymn, much like Gospel music. You'll find yourself abandoning your inhibitions as you begin to raise your voice after each verse. Kent plays again for shavasana, soothing you during this final, relaxing pose.

MEALS

Kent and Donna buy much of their produce from a local Amish community. Kent then whips up these fresh ingredients into absolutely delicious vegetarian meals that won't make you miss meat one bit. Breakfast may consist of homemade yogurt and granola and fruit. Then the Midday Munch may be leftovers or a salad. And dinner, served with salad and homemade whole-grain bread, is where Kent's ingeniousness in the kitchen really shines: His coconut Thai curry, lentil stew, and an imaginative peanut

stir-fry in a philo pastry are among guests' favorites. (You can now understand why some guests get excited about eating the leftovers at lunch.)

BEST HIKE

If you're looking for a confidence booster, take on one of the East's most infamous peaks. The highest in the state, Mount Katahdin in Baxter State Park has challenged day hikers, backpackers making their way along the Appalachian Trail, and teenage campers being dragged up by their counselors for ages. It's a majestic (and challenging) peak that just about stands alone, offering endless views to New Hampshire, the coast, and Canada. There are many ways to get to the top, but no matter which way you decide to go up, bank on needing the entire day with a very early morning start. And for those of you who can stomach it, the Knife Edge traverse along the peak truly lives up to its name.

BEST BIKE RIDE

There's very little traffic on the roads around Sewall House, making them prime for bikers wanting some peace and scenery. In particular, Belvedere Road is a seven-mile loop with jaw-dropping views of Mount Katahdin.

PAMPER YOURSELF

Exceptionally talented local masseuses apply a blend of Swedish massage and trigger-point techniques in a quiet room off the yoga studio (\$75 for an hour massage). Off the studio you'll also find the sauna, which guests can use any time.

ONE CLICK AND YOU'RE OFF

The Sewall House (starting at \$155 a night for single occupancy, including meals and two daily sessions of yoga and meditation; 888-235-2395, www.sewallhouse.com).