

# Iyengar Yoga in St. Petersburg, Florida

Written by Peentz Dubble

Iyengar Yoga St. Pete is located at 6480 Central Avenue in the beautiful city of St. Petersburg on the Gulf Coast of Florida. St. Pete is a hip little peninsula city just south of Tampa, nestled between the Gulf of Mexico to the West and Tampa Bay to the East. The studio is owned and directed by Tricia Amheiser, a Jr. II CIYT who married her husband, Nick a Florida native and relocated from England to live and work in St. Pete. She completed her Introductory Iyengar certification in England, with Sheila Haswell before moving.

After moving to the Tampa Bay area, Tricia realized there was an absence of Iyengar Yoga in this part of FL, with no Iyengar studio. She began teaching classes in various studios in Tampa and offered classes out of church halls in Pinellas county, as well as teaching out of her house in the evenings. Her house is very small so the maximum number of students she could have in the space was 5. It also served as her practice space so it meant she and her husband had no functioning dining room. Something had to change!

Tricia also missed the energy that forms around a dedicated yoga studio and felt that her students deserved to practice in an actual yoga studio. After selling her property in the UK, she decided to go for it.

It wasn't easy to find a space that would be wide enough as there is a standard width to commercial properties in FL that is narrow and long. When she finally walked into the current space, she knew it could be workable, although not perfect, and immediately visualized the layout of the space. And after a month-long build-out, the Iyengar Yoga Studio of St. Pete quietly opened in the summer of 2016. The renovation had pushed her beyond what she thought she could do. It was a physically and emotionally demanding year in many respects, but she says she will always be grateful that she made the leap into this great unknown.

In August of that year (2016) my husband and I were visiting our family in St. Pete for perhaps the 4<sup>th</sup>. consecutive year and began to notice all the positive changes happening in the community. St. Pete attracts a diversity of people and has a very exciting artistic community as well as a focus on sustainability and ecology. We discussed the possibility of moving to this vital community, which was a HUGE change for us, as we had been living in Boston for nearly 25 years and NYC before that. My husband was tired of ice and snow and ready for new changes. I was not so sure I could make such a drastic change from north to south for various reasons. One of my main concerns was leaving the New England Iyengar Yoga community. I had been teaching in the Boston area since 1994 and studying with my teacher, Patricia Walden. I was deeply involved in helping to develop Teacher Training Programs there and to mentor students who wished to become certified teachers. Another joy and passion was developing and directing the Yoga Philosophy Discussion Group at DUY-Newton for 6 years. The Iyengar community in New England has now grown and evolved to include a large number of certified Iyengar Yoga teachers, and the student population is robust. This strong Sangha would not be easy to leave!!

Much to my joy, I Googled Iyengar Yoga in St. Pete and found that Tricia had recently opened an Iyengar Yoga studio there! She agreed to have tea with me and thus began a warm and friendly relationship. Gradually, I began to open my mind to the possibility of moving. We found a home in a neighborhood that is an Artist Enclave and decided to buy with the intent to rent until we made the final decision about the move. We eventually relocated to St. Pete in October 2017. Despite my pangs of homesickness for my dear Boston community, I felt excitement about the possibilities of helping to build and evolve the Iyengar community in St. Pete.

I started slowly, getting to know Florida (where have I landed?), the people, the yoga scene in general, and the Iyengar Yoga community in particular. Anastasia Bizzarri is the only other CIYT in St. Pete. There is a small but dedicated core group of Iyengar Yoga students. Although yoga is popular in St. Pete, educating the public about Iyengar Yoga is challenging. Recently, I helped to organize a monthly Yoga Sutra study group among in St. Pete. It is ecumenical in nature, and Tricia and I are the only members representing Iyengar yoga. Now in its 2<sup>nd</sup>. year, it has been fascinating to hear how people from other yoga traditions understand and find meaning in Patanjali yoga sutras. This group has been helpful in building community among the diverse yoga styles that co-exist here, as well as spreading the word that Iyengar Yoga lives in St. Pete!

Tricia is a hard worker and teaches 6 days a week! She has an interest in helping students therapeutically and offers Care Classes, where students can receive help with neck, shoulder, knee and hip issues. She also has begun to offer a class specifically for women, educating them on female issues. And this year she began to teach a class for pregnant women.

I am offering a monthly Sunday workshop for Seasoned Students and Teachers which includes Yoga Philosophy study/discussion as part of each workshop. There are not enough teachers/advanced students locally to make this a viable weekly class as yet. However, the monthly format provides opportunity for Iyengar teachers in the northwest part of Florida to come together to learn and build community. I am also offering Pranayama Series each Fall and Spring. I find that Pranayama is not regularly taught and practiced and feel strongly that it is essential for students and teachers to learn about this vital limb of yoga. Together, we are gradually building a roster of weekly classes for both beginning and intermediate students.

The studio would like to offer workshops in Sutra study, Sanskrit, Teacher education, as well as host Iyengar teachers from around the US. This takes time to build a robust local community that can support such opportunities. Collaboration between nearby Iyengar studios and teachers is also key, in order to generate enough interest and participation to support visiting teachers and workshops.

***It is our hope that the seeds we are planting today will continue to grow and Iyengar Yoga in St. Pete and the Tampa Bay area will flourish!***