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WHAT'S ON HK EAT & DRINK STYLE BEAUTY WELLNESS LIVING WEDDINGS TRAVEL INFLUENCERS



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Naam Yoga Comes to Hong Kong at the Landmark Mandarin Oriental

FEATURED, FITNESS, WELLNESS | BY AOIFE MACKENZIE

We interview Anastasia Williams, an expert in the unique Naam Yoga

This October is the perfect time to reboot, rejuvenate and get Zen, as the **Landmark Mandarin Oriental** hosts **the city's first Naam Yoga weekend retreat**, led by the renowned yogic pioneer, **Anastasia Williams**. Naam Yoga is hailed as a preventative and prescriptive practice, offering tools to help improve our physical and emotional health, increase our energy levels and explore our nutritional behaviours. **Harmonyum Healing** will also be available; described as a gentle form of bodywork that aims to connect our collective functions and lead us to peace and healing within ourselves. Now that's what we call a staycation with a twist!

Here we chat to Anastasia about her **background in ballet and acting**, her journey around the world that led her to Naam Yoga and her real, refreshing approach to **accessible yoga and meditation practice** for busy people in Hong Kong.



Tell us about your journey to becoming a Naam Yoga guru.

I have a movement background and a degree in modern dance. As part of my degree, I was introduced to yoga and instantaneously had a deeply emotional response to the practice. After **training as a Pilates instructor**, I delved into Ashtanga yoga, before moving to New York to study acting full-time. I then explored **Kundalini yoga**, which I found really cathartic and awakening, fell in love with it and qualified as an instructor.

After reading a book by Dr Joseph Michael Levry – the founder of Naam Yoga – in New Mexico, the stars aligned, I met with him in New York and the course of my whole life changed. I abandoned the idea of moving to LA to pursue acting and was **immediately hooked on Naam Yoga**; Dr Levry's classes and teachings blew my mind! I was the first person to take Naam Yoga to Australia and Bali and am now super excited to be the first person to bring it to Hong Kong and Macau in partnership with the Mandarin Oriental!

Can you explain more about the concept behind Naam Yoga?

There are many ways to explain Naam Yoga but, from my own experience, we all have four forms: our physical, mental and emotional bodies, as well as our energy. Naam Yoga helps us to tie all of these together by realising the particular state we are in at any given moment. There is an integral intelligence in the work that helps us to tap into our own intelligence. **The practice itself is not about headstands, handstands or tricks; it's about getting to know yourself.** There is a focus on movement in Naam Yoga, but also a huge emphasis on **breath work** and we work on a lot of different rhythms which stimulate our true nature during the sessions. **Sound vibration** is a main component of Naam Yoga and we work to strengthen the vibrations within our students to help them to overcome challenges and stress and enter the thriving space which increases their effectiveness in life. There is a huge meditative quality throughout Naam Yoga to assist us in being present and aware in the moment.

Who or what inspired you to pursue Naam Yoga and who is/was your greatest mentor?

Dr Levry inspired my pursuit of Naam Yoga and is still my greatest mentor and inspiration; I am immensely grateful to him for bringing the practice to me. I still travel overseas to immerse myself with him for a specific period of time and I continue to learn and develop with him.



How is Naam Yoga a distinct practice from other types of yoga?

Naam Yoga is extremely inclusive and flexible and can be modified for any body's current limitations. We **welcome all ages, abilities and genders** – real men do yoga! Naam is extremely nourishing and is a very useful tool that enables mental and physical clarification and detoxification.

What level is Naam Yoga suitable for?

Naam Yoga is suitable for everyone; from the novice to the yoga expert and is an ongoing journey. The amazing thing about Naam is that it leads you to your weaknesses and changes everything after that for the better.

Harmonyum Healing sounds fascinating; talk us through this treatment and how it works.

Harmonyum Healing is truly special. We work from the nape of the neck down to the sacrum using **different pressures of touch**, depending on the particular client and how they are feeling on the day. We use three levels in Harmonyum Healing; starting from level one to level three, to facilitate the process or, we can combine a couple of different levels. Harmonyum Healing can help with psychological, emotional or physical issues and many clients feel a state of peace after a session and feel positively altered. Harmonyum Healing takes a very gentle and loving approach to guiding each individual through the obstacles that they may be facing.



What kind of person would benefit from practicing Naam Yoga and Harmonyum Healing and how do they complement one another?

Usually, it is the person who thinks that they do not need to practice either, needs them the most! Combining Naam Yoga and Harmonyum Healing is the *crème de la crème* of spiritual healing – It brings about **self-realisation and wisdom**.

How did you decide on the format for the Urban Retreats “staycation-style” getaways?

After teaching for many years, I have a basic format in place but the Urban Retreats are going to be very organic processes – I will look at who is in the room and change and shift the sessions accordingly. There are many things going on in the world that are disconcerting and chaotic and we offer a safe place for people to abandon their fears and worries. **One of the most underrated parts of modern life is self-care** – which is a necessity – and **a gorgeous stay at the Landmark Mandarin Oriental** is a perfect opportunity to focus on yourself during an Urban Retreat.



How do you think the Urban Retreats will benefit people in HK and what makes them different from other yoga escapes?

The Urban Retreats will help people to **change their perception to a more positive, confident and courageous outlook**. It will empower them physically, mentally and emotionally through the nature of the practice. Everyone is going to feel more relaxed and think more clearly. You will never be the same again, in the best possible way, and that level of thriving will never stop.

How does one of your one-on-one yoga or healing classes work?

My one-on-one sessions are very personalised experiences. I see myself as the pipeline between universal energy and my client. I take steps during each session to make sure that I am concentrated and neutral so that the person receiving the treatment gets as much as possible out of it.

How do you think diet and lifestyle choices integrate with yoga and meditation practices?

A healthy attitude toward diet and lifestyle is important but the way you think, act and feel towards other people is even more fundamental. I think that **adopting a fresh diet, with foods that come from mindful places** and support positive vibrations around the world is the best partner to yoga and meditation.

Have Naam Yoga and Harmonyum Healing helped you to overcome any obstacles?

Absolutely. Like most people, I have had a lot of obstacles throughout my life and Naam Yoga and Harmonyum Healing have made me extremely grateful for those experiences. They have taught me to be **humble in challenging times** and so my self-worth has increased.



What are your top tips for people trying to incorporate yoga and meditation into their lives?

Yoga is not a performance style exercise and it's not a competition, it's a practice to get you closer to who you are and to remember who you are in the challenging moments of life. The societal pressure of becoming "better" is not the point of Naam Yoga and flexibility is not the measure of success – try not to be intimidated by the perfect Instagram yogi shots of backward bends and downward dogs! I like to tell my students to put everything about the traditional yogic and meditative poses out of their heads, take a childlike approach to the practice and feel like they are simply making shapes. **There is no wrong way of doing yoga or meditation; just show up, engage and that is enough.**

The Landmark Mandarin Oriental will host exclusive classes, one-on-one private therapy sessions and a weekend retreat package led by Anastasia Williams. The two rejuvenating retreats, dedicated to "Vitality and Vibrancy in the Modern World" and "Courage, Confidence and Self-Love", will be available from **7 – 9 October or 14 – 16 October**. Each retreat will be limited to 16 people and are priced at \$7,895 + 10% service charge, including yogi lunches and morning smoothies.

For those wishing to splash out staycation-style, go ahead and book two-nights' accommodation at the Landmark Mandarin Oriental, breakfast, set lunch, daily smoothies and a selection of one of the hotel's newest signature in-room bath experience packages for \$5,800 + 10% per person per room, or at \$22,800 + 10% service charge for two persons in one double room.

www.mandarinoriental.com/landmark

www.anastasia-williams.com