

The Lotus

Extra Edition – September 2011

Celebrating a ten-day intensive retreat ICYER

(International Centre for Yoga Education and Research)

Ananda Ashram, Pondicherry, South India

10 – 20 August 2011



**This Special Edition is dedicated to Yogacharini Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani (Ammaji)
and Yogacharya Dr. Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani
in honour of the selfless service they impart in sharing the Rishiculture Ashtanga Yoga
teachings as expounded by Yogamaharishi Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj.**

**Ammaji and Dr. Ananda are truly an inspiration to mankind.
May the great *rishis* continue to shower them in a multitude of blessings.**

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Ten-day intensive retreat, ICYER, Ananda Ashram, South India 10 – 20 August 2011

Editorial by Cathryn Doornekamp

This Special Edition of The Lotus released alongside the September 2011 Lotus newsletter pays tribute to a ten-day intensive course in *yoga sadhana* held at ICYER, Ananda Ashram, Pondicherry, South India, 10 – 20 August 2011.

A group of six Australians and six New Zealanders gathered at the Ashram for this event. I was privileged to be one of those in attendance.

Ammaji, Dr. Ananda, Devasena and family welcomed us into their home with such loving open arms. The atmosphere in the Ashram was one of acceptance and nurturing, a reflection of who they were simply being.

A great time was had by all, under the expert guidance of Director, Yogacharini Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani and Chairman, Dr. Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani.

Yogacharini Devasena Bhavanani and senior students Yogacharini Shalini Devi of Czech Republic, Yogacharini Vibha of Chennai, India and Yogacharini Shwetha of Czech Republic assisted with the teachings.

Special thanks is due to all the teachers who so willingly shared their knowledge with us. The instruction we received was superb!

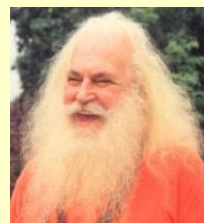
About Ananda Ashram

Ananda Ashram was founded in 1968 by Yogamaharishi Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj. In 1989 he established ICYER, the International Centre for Yoga Education and Research.

The spiritual base of ICYER is located at Sri Kambaliswamy Madam, an ancient Hindu holy site in Pondicherry. Yogamaharishi Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj was named *Madathiapathy* of Sri Kambaliswamy Madam in

1975, where he scrupulously carried out his religious duties, until he attained *Maha Samadhi* at the grand age of 88.

Prior to leaving his body in 1993, Dr. Swami Gitananda established a flourishing City Centre, known as Yoganjali Natyalayam, for teaching the Indian cultural arts of Bharat Natyam and Carnatic music as well as *Rishiculture Ashtanga Yoga* to the local populace.



Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri

Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj, was one of the greatest *Yogis* to live in the twentieth century. Known as “The Lion of Pondicherry”, he was a medical doctor and scientist. He successfully combined these areas of expertise with the ancient techniques of *Classical Yoga* that he studied in his youth with his Master, Sri Swami Kanakananda, “expressing ancient abstract insights in practical modern terms”. The result being what Dr. Swami Gitananda called “*Rishiculture Ashtanga Yoga*”. Today it is known as “*Gitananda Yoga*”.

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During his life, Dr. Swami Gitananda touched the lives of thousands of people through his nine world tours, the many books he wrote and the courses in *Rishiculture Ashtanga Yoga* that he personally conducted, the 'Yoga: Step-by-Step' correspondence course and the annual *Six Month International Yoga Teachers Training Course*.

These courses are now directed by Yogacharini Meenakshi Devi. She met her *Guru* in Yogamaharishi Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj in 1968. Since then, she has devoted her life to his teachings and the institutions founded by him.



Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani

A journalist by profession and editor of the *Yoga Life* journal since 1970, Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani also directs the year-long *International Diploma in Yoga Education*. A popular conference and seminar speaker, Yogacharini Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani is the author of many books and the Director of Yoganjali Natyalayam. Over the last twenty years, she has successfully composed, choreographed and directed more than forty Dance Dramas, most of them in Tamil.



Dr. Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani

Dr. Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani was born in Pondicherry, South of Madras, in India. He is son and successor of Yogamaharishi Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj and Yogacharini Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani.

Dr. Ananda is a Western trained doctor and Yoga Therapist - a Gold Medallist in Medical Studies, with Postgraduate Diplomas in Family Health and Yoga. In addition to his duties as Co-ordinator of ACTER (the Advanced Centre for Yoga Therapy, Education and Research) at JIPMER, one of India's top research and medical training hospitals, Dr. Ananda is an accomplished Carnatic Vocalist, South Indian Percussionist, Music Composer and Bharatanatyam Choreographer. Author of 18 DVDs and 17 books on Yoga, he is Chairperson of Yoganjali Natyalayam and Honorary President of the Gitananda Yoga Association of Australia.



Devasena Bhavanani

The talented wife of Dr. Ananda, Yogacharini Devasena Bhavanani, is a professional Carnatic Vocalist, Bharatanatyam Artist and Yoga Teacher. In addition to holding a Masters Degree in Sanskrit, a Bachelor of Performing Arts degree and a PG Diploma in Yoga, Devasena has over two decades of training at Sri Kambaliswamy Madam and Ananda Ashram. She has been performing recitals since 1985 under the expert guidance of her Guru Kalaimamani Yogacharini Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani. She is the proud recipient of many awards and scholarships in dance, music and Yoga. Devasena is currently Head of the Department of Dance, Music and Sanskrit at ICYER and Yoganjali Natyalayam.

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Ananda Ashram (ICYER) is located near a fishing village on the shores of the Bay of Bengal. It is set in idyllic surroundings close to the elements of nature, so necessary for a healthy lifestyle and intense *yoga sadhana*.

The waves can be heard at all times and the ocean is visible from the second story and rooftop. Here we witnessed the majestic break of dawn. It was pure magic, facing the rising sun as we did our sun salutations. The fresh air that carried on the sea breeze complimented the practices.

The Ashram complex is made up of a number of buildings with connecting paths set amongst exquisite gardens. The fine red soil beneath our bare feet, grounded us with mother earth as we walked from one area of the Ashram to another.



Ananda Ashram is truly a blissful abode in all respects. A sign above the entrance door says “Enter here only if you are Happy”.

'Coming Home'

By Cathryn Doornekamp

Most of you will know that I am a participant in a correspondence course with ICYER – Ananda Ashram. In an article entitled '*Yoga: Step-by-step*' that appeared in the March 2011 edition of '*The Lotus*' I wrote of how I came to be enrolled in this course by way of a 'strong calling'. Callings of this nature we must follow if we are to evolve. Allow me to elaborate.

Early this year I had another 'strong calling', this time to go to India to attend a ten-day intensive retreat at Ananda Ashram in August 2011.

My partner, Eric studied *Rishiculture Ashtanga Yoga* with Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri at Ananda Ashram in 1968. And to think that I was only 5 years old then!

As a teenager I had a fascination for India. I also had a knowing that one day I would spend time in an ashram, and not any old ashram.

And so, on the 8th August this year, I boarded a plane in Wellington, to connect with a series of flights en route for Chennai, India.

They say to “expect the unexpected” while in India. My first impression of India, landing in Chennai was exactly that. The tarmac was wet and rain was falling!

When we asked the driver who was escorting us to our hotel, if it was the monsoon season, he replied, “No, it is just raining”.

At 11.00 p.m. Indian time, the road was a picture of 'organised chaos'. Our driver negotiated the wet conditions with great skill to the chorus of tooting. A mass of trucks, cars, buses, vans, motorbikes, bikes and bullock carts shared the same road along with the cows who wandered across when they felt like it!

I couldn't help but wonder why all these people were out at this time on a Monday evening.

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Families rode together on motorbikes without helmets and protection from the rain, the women sitting astride in their saris cradling a baby in their lap!

I have to say that India grew on me and I fell in love with the place. My first impression of setting foot in Ananda Ashram was a knowing deep within that I had 'come home'.

A tour of the Ashram that ensued was full of mixed emotions. The deities, shrine and pictures in the main Satsangha hall stirred up a deep sense of familiarity, that of 'connecting with my roots'. Dr. Swami Gitananda's presence was especially noticeable. The energy in the Patanjali Kutir, an octagonal shaped building was akin to that in the Sanctuary back home, only magnified. When I came to be in the hut where Swamiji spent the last few years of his life, I was moved to tears of joy. Waves of nostalgia swept over me, as I browsed over the photos in the dining area and lounge, of days gone by.

The only other time that I have had such a sense of 'coming home', was when I flew over the Andes to Cusco in 1996. Both these 'knowings of coming home' were linked to 'strong callings'. These callings can be likened to being drawn to a magnet, a 'calling on a Higher Level'.

Interestingly, this 'calling' to Ananda Ashram, India was stronger than the 'calling' I had to go to Macchu Picchu, South America, where I met my spiritual partner Eric Doornekamp. It was through Eric that I came to Yoga.

In the great scheme of things there is a right place and time for everything. As Dr. Ananda so succinctly says: "Dharma is being in the right place at the right time with the right person doing the right thing".

It was indeed an honour to finally meet Ammaji and partake in the teachings from the source in the 'womb' of the Ashram.

Life in Ananda Ashram seemed so familiar and I simply melted in to the cocoon of Ashram life.

The experience has brought new dimensions to my *yoga* studies and practices as I go about them with renewed vigour.

My heart is overflowing with gratitude for the life-style I have come to lead at The Lotus Yoga Centre, by way of meeting Eric and the link I have with Ananda Ashram. I consider myself truly blessed to be part of this *paramparai* (tradition).

I could easily have stayed on and will be going back for sure!

Ten Days of Yoga Sadhana

The daily schedule consisted of a wake up bell at 5.00 a.m. followed by a second bell at 5.20 a.m. Herbal tea was served before gathering at the Ashram shrine in the main Satsangha hall for aarthi, the fire ceremony at 5.30 a.m.

Meditative sitting, *hatha yoga asanas*, *kriyas*, *mudras* and relaxation commenced at 5.45 a.m. on the rooftop under the instruction of Shalini, aided by Vibha and Shwetha.



The rooftop proved to be a bountiful playground for *Akasha* and *Bhumi*, the two exuberant Ashram dogs. They were very much part of the family and their presence did not go unseen, as they adhered to their own variation of *yoga asanas*.

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The early morning session concluded at 8.00 a.m. followed by breakfast at 8.15 a.m. in the dining hall. Shanti, the Tamil cook spoilt us a treat with her vegetarian delicacies.

After breakfast, *karma yoga* was performed. Each of us were assigned an area in the Ashram to clean, with the intention of leaving the Ashram a better place than when we arrived. It was a pure joy to be of service in this way.

At 11.00 a.m. the group reunited on the roof top in the *Pranayama* Hut for a two hour session of instruction in *pranayama*, *raja yoga*, *jnana yoga* relaxation and concentration *kriyas* with Shalini.

Lunch was served at 1.00 p.m. followed by free time to simply rest, meditate, review notes, take a walk, shop or perhaps ride in a tuk tuk.

Vibha's much loved chai tea awaited us at 4.15 p.m. and the program resumed at 4.30 p.m. in the Patanjali Kutir. Dr. Ananda lead us in *mantra* chanting, *raja yoga* concepts, study and guided chanting of the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali.

A light dinner of soup and bread warmed our taste buds at 6.00 p.m.

We gathered in the Patanjali Kutir at 7.00 p.m. for *bhajans* (sacred songs) with Shalini, Vibha and Shwetha, followed by *Satsangha* at 7.30 p.m. with Ammaji.

Over a series of evenings Ammaji covered various theoretical aspects of *yoga* with an emphasis on the Three Brains of Man, Conscious Evolution, *Yama* and *Niyama* and *Yoga* as the Mother of all Sciences.

We also attended three special lectures with Dr. Ananda on various aspects of *yoga* theory and two Carnatic Vocal Classes (classical Indian Music Vocal Exercises) with Devasena.

On Sunday we had the privilege of witnessing *Guru Pujas* (ceremonies) at the Samadhi of

Yogamaharishi Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj at Sri Kambliswamy Madam in Pondicherry.



We also enjoyed a visit to Yoganjali Natyalayam where we watched *Yoga* and *Bharat Natyam* classes in progress.

On the final evening, 20th August we were graced with a Valedictory Function held on the Ashram's stage.

Yogacharini Shalini of Czech Republic received her well deserved Advanced Yoga Teacher's Diploma from Ammaji, while Yogacharya Muralidharan and Margo Hutchison were presented plaques in recognition of their service to the *Paramparai* and *Yoga* in general.



Ten Day Certificates were awarded to course participants; Murali, Margo, Julia Ballinger, Lyla Jean Ballinger, Heather Maylayton Box and Diana Timmins from Australia, Cathryn Doornekamp, Ann-Maree Bukholt, Valerie Andrews, Selwyn Williams, Anthony Britton and Thor Bukholt from New Zealand.

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Ammaji honoured Yogacharini Vibha and Dr. Balaji for their loving and dedicated service, during her recent hospitalization.

Dhivya Priya performed her prizewinning solo dance: *A Happy Home is Like a Temple* and Anandraj performed his “crow act” dressed in a crow costume with crow *asanas*. The two children are truly a credit to Ammaji and their parents, Dr. Ananda and Devasena.

Energetic students from Yoganjali Natyalayam gave a spectacular cultural performance. The girls performed various *Bharat Natyam* items which included *yoga asanas* in the choreography, while the boys did a *Yoga* Tableaus demonstration.



Dr. Ananda captivated the 100 strong audience, with a Carnatic Vocal Concert. The evening concluded with a mouth-watering buffet dinner of Indian delicacies, a feast to remember!

Early on the morning of the 21st, we left the Ashram to embark on a three-day temple tour. Ammaji's parting words were “It was a great joy to have you with us. You arrived happy and left even happier! Our mission was successful”.

Eulogy for Raymond on The Rooftop in Pondicherry

By Anthony Britton

I travelled to India in August, mainly to stay on a Pondicherry ashram for ten days. Ashram life involves routine, and our early morning routine was to go on to a rooftop to do *hatha yoga*.



As we worked through the *yoga* poses in the dawn of those warm mornings, the sun slowly rose, and a discordant symphony of sound from cawing crows, cuckolding roosters, eerie tinny chanting from village music players, and the distant honking of motor vehicles merged to a crescendo.

During the second week of my stay at the Ashram, on a number of consecutive mornings I felt an incredible urge to be in England. At the time I wasn't sure where this came from; though ashram life in many ways was challenging, there was a simple routine in those pleasant surroundings, giving peace and predictability.

It was a strangely sad, overwhelming longing to be in England and, in the midst of doing group *yoga* exercises, my whole being was suddenly flooded with memories of my stay in England in the early 2000's.

For a number of reasons for me the turn of the millennium was a watershed. That was the year I began attending *yoga* classes regularly and travelling to the UK in the June of that year was a metaphorical journey to understand where I'd come from, where I was now, and where I was going.

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After an absence of 22 years I found my family and old friends in the North-east of England openly welcomed me, their open friendliness made me proud of where I'd come from.

But when I travelled down to Hartford in Cheshire, it was our Raymond, his lovely wife Carole and gorgeous children Amie and Jonathon, who unconditionally opened their doors and hearts for me and, as my own children were so far away, with the realization that it is a lucid love that bonds family, a love that spans time and space.

During that time there was quality time with our Raymond, to somewhat compensate for times lost in our younger days. He had a magnetic personality and was fun to be with.

On one occasion we criss-crossed England. Luckily he loved to drive, as much as I loved to be in the passenger seat, but mostly it was a time to talk, or simply sit in silence, happy to be in each other's company.

We travelled from Cheshire to London together. I have a picture of Raymond standing outside an old hotel in Henley, where he had to stoop to walk through the door. After London we then drove towards Bristol, in search of our family roots. There, in another picture, he is standing in Mangotsfield cemetery in the rain, underneath an umbrella we were soon to lose. He looks slightly spooked; we both were as we'd spotted such a large number of our 19th century Britton relatives' gravestones.

My ex-wife was Maori, and Lynn met Raymond towards the late 1970's when Ray was a teenager. There is an old fading picture of him and Lynn standing on Lindisfarne Island. They are profiled by one of the arches of the relics of the priory, smiling, their hands held in the prayer position.

It transpired that the overwhelming thoughts

and feelings about England during those early mornings on the rooftop in Pondicherry was about the time our Raymond passed on. The Maori believe the spirit stays in the material world for 3 days before finally departing.

At the time I rationally dismissed the compelling need to travel to England and flood of memories: it was simply the warm summer mornings, reminding me of summer days in England. But there is an existence beyond that manifest to the rationale mind. If our Raymond did pass my way in Pondicherry my intuition is that it was meant to celebrate our times together, and that there is a deep heartfelt bond between us.

When someone dies we want to remember and celebrate the good times, to recall all that was good about the person's life. For me in the first half of the 2000's there were plenty of good times with my brother Raymond, both together and together with our respective families.

But even then our Raymond was struggling with addictive behaviours and a depression beyond that of the ordinary mid-life crisis. This only makes me more glad and proud to have been involved with my kid brother's life. For whatever we went through, we did it together – which also included some ding-dong fights and falling outs – the very stuff of being brothers.

I'm blessed to have one dear grandson, now forever a poignant reminder that our Raymond in his life never experienced the joy of grandchildren.

This reminds me that, as we grow as people, we must forgive our Fathers and Mothers; to realize they did the best possible with what they had available at the time. We do this for our own sake, for with forgiveness in our hearts we can go with peace in our hearts, a precious gift to our children.

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Selwyn's India Experience



Although I have travelled to many countries over the years I had never been to India and had a long held desire to do so. When the opportunity came up to visit Ananda Ashram this year I was quick to put my name down. One, for the chance to advance my Yoga experience, and two, to sightsee in a country I had read and heard so much about.

So, firstly the country. When our group of four Kapiti Coasters arrived at Chennai airport, the first thing we noticed was the rise in temperature. We had left NZ in the coldest part of winter, when snow was falling in places it didn't normally fall, and even though you know it's coming, being hit by that heat, was the first shock to the system. (It was in the high 30's deg C most of the time we were there) The next shock came when we walked outside. I had read there are 1.2 billion people in India and it seemed like most of them had come to greet us. But no, a sea of faces is the norm here, and I now realise how sparsely populated NZ is.

We found our driver and he drove us to our hotel through the rainy tropical night, some 25 odd kms through the main roads of Chennai. Our next culture shock – the traffic. First, there is lots of it, and everyone seems to be racing. If you are not overtaking, you are being overtaken. Everybody is sounding their horn and our bus was moving past vehicles with barely a few

centimetres to spare. Small motorbikes (of which there are millions) seem to need even less room and 'shoot the gap' whenever they can. There were a few gasps of surprise (and possibly terror) from our crew as huge trucks roared by with the smallest of margins of room. And many had loads that looked less than secure.

This set the scene for the rest of our road travels, and eventually we got used to it. In fact I came to appreciate that most of the drivers are highly skilled and are excellent judges of distance. Despite the apparent craziness and lack of road rules, the traffic generally flowed smoothly, (although not very fast) and I noticed little or no gridlock despite the vast number of things on the road. I say 'things' because there are always cattle on the road, even in the middle of town. They seem to know the local 'road code' and don't step in front of vehicles if they toot at them first. The traffic just flows around them.

Oxen drawn carts are common place and I was amazed at the loads they were pulling – loaded with bricks or a cubic metre of roading material was not unusual – very fuel efficient! Pedestrians meander across the roads at will and the Zebra Crossings seemed to be generally ignored by pedestrians and traffic alike. Push-bikes, rickshaws, motorised rickshaws, scooters and small motorbikes, old cars and new, and trucks and buses of every shape and size vie for any gap they can take. Most trucks had “Sound Horn” written on the back of them, as if the drivers need any form of encouragement! Horns are used almost like echo sounders and there seems to be a code to their use – although “Coming Through!” seemed to be the most common message. My driver in Delhi, later in the trip, told me you need 3 things to drive in India – good brakes, a good horn, and good luck!

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So we had a day in Chennai and did some sightseeing and enjoyed a dip in the hotel pool, and tried out the local cuisine. Very nice. But still hot and sweaty. That evening the Australian contingent arrived and the next morning we were happily on our little bus for the drive down to Pondicherry. A few hours later we arrived at the Ashram, were shown to our rooms and met up with the other two Kapiti Coasters who had arrived earlier. Next was a shopping trip down to Pondi town where we bought local clothes made from light cotton, ideal for that climate. Many litres of bottled water were purchased – most of which was sweated straight out again (at least our pores should be well flushed). And mosquito repellent – the local variety seemed to work better than the stuff we bought with us.

After our 10 days at the Ashram we were back on our bus to tour around Tamil Nadu, taking in the magnificent ancient temples. First was Chidamabaram, and the Nataraja (Shiva) Temple - where the men in the group had to don dhotis' and remove their shirts and shoes to get inside. The women had to cover up. Considering the heat I think the blokes got the best deal – much more comfortable. There were no photos allowed inside fortunately! I cannot do justice to these temples here – the beauty, the architecture, the spiritual significance etc. (Google them!)



Nataraja Temple

After that we travelled on to Darasuram and another temple where some of us took the opportunity to practise *yoga*.



We spent the night at a resort where we dined under the stars and frolicked in the pool. After the long bus ride and fairly plain facilities we had been used to, this place seemed luxurious – it even had hot water and toilet paper!

The next day we bussed on to Thanjavur, and more amazing temples. Some complete with resident elephant.



Then a long ride through the countryside past fields of sugar cane, rice and other crops and dusty small towns and villages to Thiruvannamalai. Our hotel was a nice upmarket Eco resort on the edge of the suburbs. Another significant temple in the centre of town, which like the others, was amazing. And like the other temples, visitors have to run a gauntlet of market stalls, hawkers and beggars to get through the gates – some negotiated these more successfully than others.....

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The other site we visited there was the Ramana Ashram which is at the base of the holy Mt Arunachala. After walking through the Ashram, alive with devotees, tourists, peacocks and families of monkeys we made our way (barefoot and sweating profusely, as always) up a mountain path to the cave where Sri Ramana meditated for over 20 years. It was a most peaceful place with an incredible ambience.



A view of Mt Arunachala

We travelled back to Chennai where we all went our separate ways, most headed home to NZ and OZ. I flew up to Delhi for a few days sight-seeing and of course a trip out to Agra to see the Taj Mahal for myself. No trip to India is complete without that!

There were many things to see and do in Delhi but the one unexpected bonus was a visit to the house that Gandhi lived in, and died in the back lawn thereof. It is now a museum with hi-tech audio/visual displays in many rooms, but the room Gandhi lived in was very simple and as he left it. A bed on the floor, a small writing desk (at floor level with no legs), his walking stick, a shaver, a cup and a few bits and pieces – his entire personal affects which were so little. From this room he walked out the French doors and around the back of the house to go to prayers and was shot there on the lawn. They have built a shrine on the spot and it gave me goose bumps to stand beside it.

The Ashram

We had ten extra-ordinary days in Ananda Ashram, Pondicherry which was the main purpose of the trip. I had attended inspiring sessions with Dr. Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani at the Lotus Yoga Centre in 2009 and in Brisbane, 2010 and could not pass on the opportunity to extend my knowledge/experience at his home base.

The accommodation was fairly basic but for those of us used to camping it was more than comfortable enough. Four of us staying in the rooftop rooms were flooded out during a thunderstorm on our first night there, which was another one of the many challenges we faced – the toilets were another! Mostly the squat variety and toilet paper was forbidden as it blocked the drains. So we had to learn to do things the local way with a bucket of water, which drew reactions ranging from amusement to horror from some of the crew.

All sitting and yoga practices were done on the tiled concrete floor – another thing to get used to, in temperatures of 36-40 deg C, constantly sweating, with no air conditioning, drinking up to five litres of water per day. The food was cooked fresh and was simple and healthy but tasted superb and mealtimes were eagerly anticipated. We often had the company of two friendly little dogs and the Ashram cat would often grace us with her presence. Sometimes Dhivya and Anandraj, Dr. Ananda's delightful children would join us at mealtimes and playtimes – which often ended up with a game of cricket.



Dhivya Priya and Anandraj

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Crows were ever present and little squirrels (or chipmunks?) would scurry around the rooftops and gardens. I observed a snake moving through the thatch roof of one of the huts we used one day but fortunately it disappeared not to be seen again. Red centipedes about 50-75 mm long were everywhere and many other colourful bugs could be observed in the gardens. Geckos chirped around our rooms at night and much larger members of the lizard family entertained those on garden duty when we were doing our karma yoga each day.

The teachings we received were excellent and powerful. It was great spending time with Dr. Ananda, his wife Devasena, his mother - the most amazing Ammaji, and the other wonderful teachers were also very special.



Shwetha, Shalini and Vibha

To soak in the extraordinary energy of the Ashram is something I struggle to describe. It was no picnic and we had to put in some effort at times but it was also a most enjoyable time.

The results could probably be classed as life changing. I have had a major tune-up. I've lost weight (and my pores have been well cleaned!). I am more flexible and have been healed of some niggling health issues. I have no desire for chocolate/cake/junk food/alcohol – habits have been changed and urges burnt.

I came away feeling calmer and wiser and motivated to continue the practices we have learnt and to study further. The challenge is not to let it wear off as I slip back into my normal life routines back home. Or I may need to go back....

Margo's thoughts.....

For some of us India is now a distant memory – but what beautiful memories we have.

We were treated as honoured guests. Such valuable instruction in all aspects of yoga given by our wise, charming and delightful teachers; delicious food prepared by Shanti the most amazing cook who does so much with so little; and as always kind and welcoming hospitality.

We had a happy group of six New Zealanders and six Aussies very well balanced in gender and ages ranging from 20 – 79 all willing to fit in and participate in whatever was required.

Ammaji advised us to “regard it as camping” and despite (for some) waking up on the first morning to a flooded room after some rain, it was a pretty darn good camping trip!



Ten-day intensive course participants

Top left to right: Thor, Diana, Valerie, Selwyn, Heather, Murali

Bottom left to right: Margo, Ann-Maree, Anthony, Cathryn, Julie and Lyla.

Photos of the ten-day intensive retreat at Ananda Ashram can be viewed in the photo gallery on ICYER's website www.icyer.com