

# Claudia BAEZA

Owner,  
Pineapple  
Yoga + Cycling



**P**ineapple Yoga + Cycling in downtown Sarasota prior to the pandemic was very busy with students coming in and out all week, all day long. But with the pandemic, things changed for her business and, like so many others, she was forced to innovate to survive. She moved her studio outside and also added online instruction to keep yoga available for her many students. Her gentle, thoughtful approach makes it all flow together.

**H**ere is a small business, woman-owned and run. Since it's yoga, it's intimate and often in a closed space. How does such a business respond to a pandemic? Possibly one word answers the question: innovation.

Pineapple Yoga + Cycling is indeed on Pineapple Avenue in downtown Sarasota, a stone's throw from Burns Court. Prior to the pandemic, Claudia Baeza's business was, like so many other fitness or wellness establishments, in a studio and very busy. But spring brought the virus as a new reality and Claudia had to do something, and that meant re-examining her business and making changes.

Admitting she at first felt "lost," she sought out a Ringling College graduate she knew who helped create the digital library of classes for her website. As summer moved in and the virus persisted, Claudia wisely took advantage of an open space at her building that she never used before. It was time to adapt again and the outside patio became her new studio.

And that summer heat and humidity? She added misters like you experience at Disney World, but also added privacy screening, outdoor lighting, vegetation and a doggie pool for pets like her own bulldog puppy. And it's washed constantly and pressure-washed monthly.

Next was an outdoor cycling class which, she adds, helps with the "pandemic 15" weight gain. It may seem like an unlikely mix, but she's offered it at Pineapple since 2017. Unlike typical spinning classes where the goal is to feel the burn and pump as hard as you can, her take on cycling is to make the experience "compassionate" and not "high pressure." She stresses students work at their own pace with the goal of taking control of their own health. The classes are popular and are often fully booked.

As an experienced yoga instructor, Claudia knows how important it is for students "to stay connected" and not interrupt their training. Thus teaching indoors was not an option and thus 95% of her classes are now outside. It seems to be what people wanted and it was necessary for her business to survive. Only private clients are indoors and must arrive with masks on.

"We're very strict," she states and so far there have been no incidents even with over 700 people passing through her studio in a typical month. Pandemic or not, the goal is to maintain mental and physical health. But the pandemic brought with it a side effect: many people are isolating too much. So she changed her business model to make it easy to take classes, whether online or in person. Calling her outdoor space "a nice oasis" and, despite all the changes she's had to make, Claudia says she remains "excited" and considers herself "blessed."

Things were a bit different for this Sarasota-by-accident transplant a few years back. Claudia has an art degree and taught graphic design in the Boston area. She added a law degree, but that wasn't a good fit. She loved teaching, but wanted to do something different. Her "true calling," she says, "is to help people heal."

But first Claudia had to heal herself. Yoga is so personal to her because it saved her life. She admits she survived a suicide attempt - something she's public about - and found that the sense

of "feeling broken" had "lost its power" over her when she studied yoga. "Yoga was my toolkit," she explains and adds that it brought her not just a trim and fit body, but also "emotional stability." She explains that she had mental health struggles all her life. An attempted suicide 14 years ago left her hospitalized for two months. "That's why I want to teach yoga. Yoga was the only thing that worked," she explains.

As for opening her business in 2016, she and her husband had been living on the east coast. They drove to Naples for a yoga training Claudia was attending. They then drove to Tampa and then were headed back to their east coast home when they said, hmmm let's check out Sarasota and the rest as they say, is history.

And with such a full life with a business she clearly loves and loves to share with others, Claudia helps others via her Dharma Footprint Project. The nonprofit offers classes for a nominal amount (or free) to anyone - those recovering as well as those with a loved one who is in recovery.

According to her website, "DHARMA Yoga for recovery is an innovative mind-and-body practice that addresses addiction relapse prevention by combining the practical tools of the 12-step program of recovery with the physical and spiritual practices of yoga...the body bears the burden of our obsession and compulsion, the effects get 'stuck' in us. 12-step recovery is cognitive; a talking, thinking practice. Yoga offers a somatic approach...and is open to anyone and everyone who has dealt with addiction, their own or the addictive behavior of others. The class is taught by a certified Y12SR instructor."

So, if you're wondering if yoga is for you, first, dispel a few misconceptions. It isn't about tight abs or complicated contortions requiring a spine like warm taffy. And it's not just women who take classes. At Pineapple Yoga + Cycling the breakdown is about 50/50 men and women. As for ages - it's across the board from young people to those in their eighties.

Claudia teaches Kripalu which is described as "...a gentle yoga practice with a compassionate approach. It places an emphasis on meditation, physical healing, and spiritual transformation that overflows from the yoga mat into daily life." Her instructors—as many as 14 in season—offer a variety of types of yoga including power sculpt yoga, alignment flow, Vinyasa flow, Yin yoga and a lot more.

Yoga, Claudia feels, "was my toolkit. It brought emotional stability," and she adds, "other people deserve that." Helping others, she explains, "makes my life meaningful. My heart is so full."

STORY: Louise Bruderie  
IMAGE: Courtesy of Amanda Marie Mason Photography

**Pineapple Yoga + Cycling**  
517 S Pineapple Ave, Sarasota  
(941) 210-3739  
<https://pineappleplayogastudio.net/>

**A really nice gift for yourself:** purchase a 10 class package at Pineapple Yoga and get a \$20 credit towards a massage or facial at the Westin Spa plus a pool pass. Expires Dec. 31, 2020.

**The Dharma Footprint Project** is a 501(c)(3) non-profit in the State of Florida. For more information about their community work, visit: [dharmafootprint.org](http://dharmafootprint.org).

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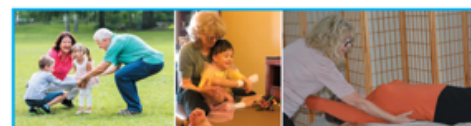
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