

## **Part 2: Whatever Happened to Expectations?**

I left for London from Baltimore on time and arrived in London a little early. But lo and behold, my flight from London to Nice was delayed about 45 minutes. I was a bit peeved again, as I wouldn't be getting to France until well after 1:00 p.m., and I wanted some down time at the villa before the first class. In London I contemplated having two late flights and wondered what I was learning by the inconveniences. I turned to Facebook to vent my frustrations, which were met by replies of going with the flow and having a good time anyway. Nice stuff to hear, but I expected a smooth arrival to France with lunch from the villa, a decent nap, and time to talk to the guests and staff of the retreat, not a completely rerouted trip. Surely this was the only unexpected change, right?

The flight from London to Nice seemed longer than the two-hour flight it was, but I finally landed, got my bag and met a LUXYOGA staff member named Giulia. What I've always loved about LUXYOGA is the wonderful service we get. We're always picked up and dropped off from the airport by a staff member, and everything we could possibly need at the villa is taken care of. Giulia is from Venice, Italy, and had just recently completed the Bikram teacher training in Los Angeles. After she left France, she would go back to Italy for a short time before teaching Bikram full-time in Madrid. I was incredibly tired and dehydrated from the long travel. Driving through Nice seemed like a mirage to me, even though it was the third time I'd been through these roads. I asked Giulia if the retreat was full and if I was the last person to arrive. She said I was the last person to arrive and mentioned the number five, as in only five people were attending the retreat. I thought the people count was a misunderstanding on my part, so I left it alone. Giulia also told me we were starting retreat activities at 2:30 p.m., which was a big surprise. It was already closer to 2:00 p.m., meaning I wouldn't have much time for eating or rest. At that point though, I didn't have time to care much about it.

The views from the Alps in France never get old. It's absolutely beautiful to drive by and see the small towns in the hills overlooking the forests and ocean. I knew I was back where I belonged by seeing that, making it worth the frustration from the past 24 hours. When Giulia and I got to the villa, I saw Dan, who anyone would describe as the best person ever, almost literally. I gave Dan a nice warm hug upon finally getting back to the villa, and entered



the second home I've always loved. Dan was the first person to pick me up on my first LUXYOGA trip, and I knew back then I was going to have a great time. Other than the food and yoga, Dan is the other reason people come back to LUXYOGA. He has a genuine kindness and great energy that makes anyone happy. If anyone needs anything, Dan's the one to have it or find some way to get it. I've never had a problem bringing wine back because of him or getting my chocolate fix.



I was fortunate that a plate of delicious food had been saved for me, so I could eat before the retreat started. The plate was a nice variety of sorts: radishes, a chickpea dish, smoked salmon, egg, quiche and tomato. Dan had already taken my bag so I could eat at the table in the kitchen. Time was running short so I tried to chow down my food. I'd hardly seen any other guests or staff though. In fact, it seemed quieter than usual. I saw a few people on the deck talking, but the sound inside was quiet. Dan came back around to tell me to take my time eating,

and that it was a small group for this retreat of about five people. There were only five people? So I hadn't misunderstood Giulia after all. I could've sworn when I looked at the Facebook page and got the LUXYOGA email updates the retreat was full, as in 12 people had been booked. But no, only five guests attended the retreat this time around. I never asked why the number was small, although I was baffled.

Slowly but surely I saw a few more people come in to the kitchen and introduce themselves. I hardly remembered any of their names the first time they came around because I was so tired, but the other guests were Katie, Mary, Ian and Ludovic. Mary, Ian and Ludovic lived in France, and Katie was from San Francisco. I also met Martin, a staff member and Bikram teacher like Giulia and Anne, another staff member and vinyasa teacher. Ben was the last person I saw. Fortunately I had about finished my food because after he greeted me it was 2:30 p.m. and time to start the retreat. The group met in the den of the villa, and there were pens and paper for us. Ben started the retreat with a welcome to everyone before saying the surprise of the day: he would be running the Resolution Retreat himself, as Craig had gone back to Los Angeles. I never asked why that was. Maybe it was the small crowd or circumstances, but Ben would be running the classes and activities this time around. Craig being absent was the biggest surprise of all the surprises, and I admit I was a little bummed. I hadn't seen Craig since my first retreat in 2011, and I was hoping to get some of his insight again, but the universe must've figured I didn't need to hear Craig's voice this time around. Still, between that, the small group and the crazy flight situation, I had to be learning a greater lesson I needed to understand. Why else was all of this happening?

Well, now that Craig was gone, it was time to focus on the writing exercise at hand, which was something I hadn't expected on the retreat. The exercise was about the heart: the needs and wants of the heart, strengths, weaknesses and what affects our yoga practice. It was oddly good timing to have this heart exercise; given all the personal work I was doing for myself had to do with the heart. As I said before, I had quit my job to do something more fulfilling for myself, and the exercise was addressing some of the setbacks I've had. This included self-doubt, fear of "falling out" and perfectionism. Yet I also found some good qualities about myself too, including determination, overcoming and ease. Ben's challenge to us was to use the good quality we had whenever we found ourselves faltering in one of our destructive behaviors. For example, if we found ourselves disparaging ourselves for our practice, we might bring a quality such as serenity into our practice to calm the negative mentality. Ben also

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mentioned another important point in that the behaviors we displayed in the yoga room reflected our behaviors in life. All great points, and before I knew it, it was time for practice.

All things considered with the jetlag, my practice wasn't terrible, but the class was a challenge. With only five guests, although Anne, Martin and Giulia practiced with us, we got more individual attention. There were no five minute awkward poses as would've been the norm with Craig, but pranayama breathing and half-moon pose seemed to last forever. Ben pressed on maintaining a solid standing position, which in a nutshell is butt and thighs tight, weight in the heels, hips forward and stomach sucked in. There's a few more nuances than that in reality, and at first, maintaining the position can be difficult because it's utilizing a lot of strength in areas we're not used to. To this day I can still hear Ben say "thighs tight" in my direction, and I'm thankful for it. Although the first day of practice I wasn't as thankful given I was tired. I also noticed my behavior and mentality of self-doubt and fear was entering my practice. I knew my form in some postures was lacking because of it or I didn't take time to rest so I wouldn't look like the weak link in the group. Yet I didn't feel any better not taking rest. I just mentally disparaged myself instead. At certain points of the class Ben told us to think about our good quality we wrote for the exercise. I decided to bring in the presence of ease for me to refocus my attention from my faults to my strengths.

When we finally got to the first savasana, I was so tired I actually felt part of me was rising out of my body and looking at myself from the ceiling. There was no judgment on myself from the experience. I simply observed myself, trying to connect with the reality that I was back in France and that I was still in my body. I had this sort of "out of body" experience in every class, and it was actually liberating not to be too consumed by my emotions, but to just be.

Time always passes; no matter how much we think it doesn't, as did the first yoga class. As usual, we had some delicious fresh pressed juice to help rejuvenate our bodies, and it was time to get ready for dinner. I learned from the first class I was going to need to work on myself more than my physical practice, which seemed odd given I came back to LUXYOGA to get my practice back in order. But after Ben's unique writing exercise, I learned there were other things I needed to address before I could improve aspects of postures such as locking my knee or getting more arch in my spine.



The one downer to only five people being on the retreat is that I didn't have a roommate. I did, however, share a bathroom with Mary, but given we had separate rooms, it wasn't the same as if we shared the same room so we had more time to talk. At the same time, I did have more time to myself, which wasn't necessarily a bad thing either. My room was a blue room with floor to ceiling windows. It was a pretty quaint room, and the third different room I've stayed in at LUXYOGA.

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After taking a shower and putting on evening clothes, I went up for dinner. Chef Stefan prepared all of our meals for the retreat. The food being absolutely fabulous was a given. I just wish I could've remembered the names of the intricate dishes we had. Like my trip to Rome last year, I could hardly remember the names of the some of the food we had, just that it was delicious and I took pictures.

At dinner was where I got to know more about the other guests and staff members at LUXYOGA. For a few of the guests, this was their third retreat like mine. Katie had actually been on the recent New Year's retreat and decided to stay for the Resolution Retreat. This was Ludovic's first retreat and though he had only been practicing Bikram yoga for a year, he knew he wanted to go to the Bikram teacher training. I spent most of



the night listening and asking questions as opposed to talking. I'm introverted anyway, but there was something about this time around that I really enjoyed not talking that much. Usually, I would hope that people would ask me questions so I could express myself and not be known as the quiet one. Perhaps I was finally getting comfortable in my introverted skin, but I didn't care if people thought I was quiet as much as how I made them feel, and generally people feel good when someone's interested in them.

The night seemed to go by quickly, and it was 11:00 p.m. when I went to bed. I was going to try to be up early enough the next morning for breakfast and experience the morning view of the villa. It's one of the few times I could see the sun over the water. Ben mentioned tomorrow in our morning class we'd have pictures taken of our postures. That was a big deal because I typically didn't like pictures of me, whether in the yoga room or elsewhere. This would be my third time at LUXYOGA seeing pictures of my postures, and my feeling about it didn't change: I wasn't looking forward to looking at myself.