

How Yoga is helping adults rediscover play

Across Uganda's growing towns and cities, adulthood often means pressure, financial responsibility, long working hours, family expectations, and the silent weight of survival in a fast-changing economy. Yoga, for a moment, makes people loosen up and feel young again.

BY TREVOR LUTALO

The skies at dawn in Entebbe do not clear with urgency. It drifts in on soft lake winds, on the quiet shuffle of workers that begin to move earlier, on the slow sound of distant engines moving without haste. Life here feels measured, almost careful, as though the town has agreed to breathe more deeply than the rest of the country.

A few steps from the calm lakeside, inside the art-lined halls of ViaVia Hotel, another form of calm is taking shape. Shoes are never important to the affair. Voices lower into whispers. Bodies stretch toward stillness.

This is where adults of all walks of life—teachers, entrepreneurs, parents, students, and retirees gather not to compete, but to relearn something many left behind in childhood: how to move freely, how to breathe the fully, and how to play.

Orchestrating this slow return is Allan Ali Mugisha, a 31-year-old wellness instructor whose own life once stood at

the fragile edge between illness and recovery.

Dangling from the ceiling inside the conference room, art stretches across the ceiling in both old and contemporary forms. Iron rods run above like scaffolding. From them hang silk hammocks, soft, bright, and unexpectedly strong. Each one can hold the full weight of an adult body, sometimes more.

Students arrive one by one. They loosen clothing, fold away the stiffness of the outside world, and step barefoot onto the floor. Some wear tight athletic wear; others choose flowing fabrics that move like breath. There is no uniform here, no performance to impress, only presence.

When Mugisha speaks, he does not rush instructions. He guides. "Yoga is not about forcing the body," he says. "It is about listening. When you listen long enough, the body begins to answer back."

Moments later, bodies slowly rise into the air, carefully held by silk. Suspended between gravity and trust, adults who spend most of their days seated behind desks or bent over responsibilities rediscover movement that feels somewhat like play. Some laugh softly at the unfamiliar sensation. Others close their eyes. For a brief hour, seriousness loosens its grip.

Before the calm, a body in distress

Years earlier, Mugisha's relationship with his own body was very different. He had been a dancer, active, expressive, always moving. But somewhere along



The silk hammocks are secured to the ceiling with metallic hooks and strong straps capable of carrying up to 300kg. PHOTO | TREVOR LUTALO

KEY

"As people grow older, they forget how to play. And when play disappears, stress takes over the body. Muscles tighten. Breathing becomes shallow. Even the mind loses flexibility. With yoga, seriousness softens. Laughter returns, sometimes shy, sometimes sudden. And with it comes a quiet kind of freedom."

the way, breathing became difficult. Fatigue deepened. His heart began sending quiet warnings he could not ignore.

"My body was trying to fail me. I could not breathe well. I was always tired. At one point I felt like I was close to a heart attack," he recalls. Medication offered little comfort. Rest did not restore strength.

What he found instead was yoga, first as curiosity, then as necessity.

"When I started breathing exercises and stretching, something changed. It was slow. Very slow. But the body started responding in a way medicine alone had not done. That is when I understood healing is also inside us," he explains.

By 2015, yoga had become part of his daily survival and by 2018, it had become his calling.

The long discipline of gentle healing

Today, Mugisha teaches multiple disciplines, Hatha, Yin, Ashtanga, Qigong, and aerial yoga across Entebbe and Kampala throughout the week. But he is careful not to present yoga as a miracle or quick fix.

"Yoga does not give fast results," he explains. "It asks for patience. Consistency. Some days you feel nothing. But if you stay with it, the change comes quietly and stays longer." His own routine reflects that belief.

Three to four hours of daily practice, sometimes alone, sometimes with students, form the backbone of his life.

To outsiders, such devotion may look extreme. To him, it is simply maintenance of breath, balance, and awareness. "We service cars. We charge phones. But we forget to service the body," he says. "Yoga is that service."

Across Uganda's growing towns and cities, adulthood often arrives carrying pressure, financial responsibility, long work hours, family expectations, and the silent weight of survival in a fast-changing economy.

Play rarely survives this transition. Mugisha sees the consequences daily. "As people grow older, they forget how to play," he says. "And when play disappears, stress takes over the body. Muscles tighten. Breathing becomes shallow. Even the mind loses flexibility."

Aerial yoga, with its swinging hammocks and mid-air stretches, challenges that rigidity. "When an adult is upside down in a hammock, something interesting happens," he says with a small smile. "For a moment, they stop worrying about how they look. They start feeling again. That feeling is the beginning of healing."

In that suspended space, seriousness

softens. Laughter returns, sometimes shy, sometimes sudden. And with it comes a quiet kind of freedom.

Beyond the culture of exhaustion

Modern fitness culture often celebrates intensity, heavier weights, longer runs, and faster results. But Mugisha believes extremes can harm bodies already under stress. "The gym is not bad," he clarifies. "But when exercise becomes punishment, the body suffers. Some people push without understanding anatomy, without guidance without rest. That is dangerous."

Balance, he insists, is the missing piece. "The body heals in between efforts, not only during effort. Yoga teaches the balance." Rather than competition, yoga offers awareness. Rather than speed, it offers patience. Rather than comparison, it offers individuality.

"Everybody is different," he says. "Yoga respects that. It allows you to discover your own rhythm instead of copying someone else's strength."

Baby steps

Despite its benefits, yoga in Uganda remains a small, slowly expanding community. Many still see it as foreign, elitist, or unfamiliar.

Mugisha hopes that will change. He wants more Africans, more local people to understand that yoga is not foreign to us," he says. "Breathing, stretching, stillness, these are human, not Western. Wellness should belong to everyone."

His work has already carried him across borders, teaching in Kenya, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Ghana, and Rwanda sharing simple lessons about movement and self-healing. Yet his focus remains grounded in everyday communities.

"The greatest joy is not travelling," he says. "It is seeing someone who was in pain begin to smile again because their body feels lighter."

Listening to the body again

As the session in Entebbe draws toward stillness, students lower gently from the hammocks. Feet meet the floor with new awareness. Movements slow. Breathing deepens. Silence settles not empty, but full.

For many here, this hour is the only space in the week where nothing is demanded of them. No deadlines. No noise. No performance. Only presence.

Mugisha believes that the body has the power to heal on its own. "The body speaks every day," he says. "Pain, fatigue, tension these are messages. Yoga teaches us to listen before the messages become illness."



Yoga may not deliver quick results, but it is a practice worth pursuing for steady progress. PHOTO | TREVOR LUTALO