

# conference *call*

are you ready to take your next step as a teacher—or maybe as a presenter?

BY TANNIS KOBRINSKY

Imagine a weekend at a four-star hotel in Palm Springs, Phoenix or Miami, where you can take an array of Pilates workshops and sit in on lectures taught by top instructors under one roof. Sound like the ideal learning vacation—one that's also tax write-off for exercise professionals? You betcha.

You rise early to enjoy an energizing buffet breakfast and get your first chance to chat up

other attendees over coffee. By 7:30 a.m. you've located your first class and prepare to participate in, for example, a workout with Triadball creators Ton Voogt and Michael Fritzsche.

At 10 a.m. you're on the mat for a post-natal workshop with Lynne Robinson, cofounder of the London-based Body Control. Noon finds you lunching poolside and mixing it up with other students and instructors. Afterward you stroll into the Exhibit Hall to check out the trade show, where you can buy the latest in Pilates equipment, fashion, accessories and DVDs. Then you take in an afternoon panel discussion on "How Pilates Has Evolved" with First-Generation instructors Ron Fletcher and Lolita San Miguel along with second-generation master teacher Rael Isacowitz and superstar Mari Winsor. One more workshop at 4 p.m. on scoliosis with Madeline Black, owner of Studio M in Sonoma, CA, and you're ready to shower and dress for a

wine and cheese party in the main ballroom. And that's just Day One.

The weekend offers more opportunities to take classes, watch demos and make more contacts. "Conferences are a

valuable mix between serious business and intra-industry fun," says frequent presenter Rebecca Leone of Pilates Powerhouse NW, in Seattle.

Aside from Pilates, lectures about the business side are often offered, as well as classes in complementary practices.

The latter actually changed my own career course. At my first conference, I tried a Gyrokinesis class—and fell in love. I became certified in Gyrotonic and Gyrokinesis, adding substantially to my client base.

At the same conference, I met a person who changed my life. A rep from R&R resorts encouraged me to lead a Pilates retreat in Costa Rica. From there, I launched my own business, and six years later my passport is filled with stamps from all the countries where I've taught Pilates.

## so what's stopping you?

There is a price tag for all this fun. If the event is close to home, you can opt for a day pass, which entitles you to unlimited classes and averages around \$300. Two days will usually set you back around

\$500; three, approximately \$650. If you sign on for the whole shebang, you should budget \$110 to \$200 nightly for lodgings. Quality hotels recommended on organizers' web sites always offer reduced rates. Save money by registering early or getting friends to go for a group package. Breakfast and lunch are often included in the package, and dinner is on your own. And there's always the cost of transportation, whether you drive or fly.

However you finagle it, participating in these educational experiences is money well spent. With about two-dozen Pilates and fitness conferences to choose from, the hardest part can be selecting which one is most appropriate for you. Plus many conferences enable

students to earn continuing education credits.

(To check, visit the individual web sites on p. 85.) A good way to get your feet wet is to start on U.S. soil. For instance, the Body Mind Spirit conference held

in Santa Clara, CA, is touted

as the largest worldwide educational exercise event. Offering Pilates, yoga and Gyrotonic, it offers some 250 classes taught by 75 master teachers. Sessions last two to three hours, with anywhere from 10 to 100 students per class. It is so well attended that if you take an apparatus class, for instance, chances are you'll share Reformer time with other enthusiasts.





Large-scale events allow you to sample a wide variety of teaching techniques. IDEA draws hundreds to Las Vegas and Chicago with 268 classes, 42 of them Pilates-based. Also sponsors of INNER IDEA, they offer four days of holistic immersion at Palm Springs' posh La Quinta Resort featuring more than 150 classes, including Pilates, yoga, life coaching, nutrition and meditation. The Pilates Method Alliance (PMA) conference, considered serious business by professionals, offers 100 classes, this year, taught by world-renowned instructors such as Elder Mary Bowen, STOTT PILATES founder Moira Merrithew and PMA Gold Star instructor Julian Littleford. You may also take the PMA's certification test while there.

If you prefer smaller gatherings, Balanced Body's peripatetic Pilates on Tour comes to cities like Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Phoenix and Austin. "We feature six or seven of the world's top instructors, such as Elizabeth Larkam and Lolita San Miguel," says codirector Al Harrison. "Our class enrollment is smaller than most, so it's a more intimate experience. Longer sessions expose attendees to great depths of information." (And fewer attendees mean more time per student on apparatus.)

Feeling adventurous? Go abroad. Make a French connection at Mondial Body Fitness in Paris. Grab a brewski and toast Joe Pilates in his hometown of Cologne, Germany, where Polestar attendees visited his birthplace. "Each conference is different," says Ton Voogt, who frequents his native Holland as well as Turkey, Spain and Italy. "One of the most unique was last year's Festival del Fitness in Florence, held at a huge old fort with 50,000 [!] attendees."

Far-flung ports of call often showcase many of the same presenters and courses offered in the States, but you'll also be exposed to new instructors who don't go to the U.S. Rates are similar to U.S. prices, but travel is,

expectedly, more costly, especially with the euro so out-of-reach.

### present yourself

Of course there's more than one way to attend a conference. Ask yourself: Do I have a strong desire to share my knowledge and expertise? Can I take command of a room of 100 eager students? Do I possess effective communication skills? If the answer is "yes, yes and yes," you might consider becoming a presenter. But if you're in it for money and glamour, forget it. "The pay ain't great," says Leone. "It's about \$100 per hour for second-generation underlings. Real master teachers command more."

Presenting, most agree, is the biggest challenge. Prepping, traveling, adjusting to time zones, and then teaching three-hour workshops can be grueling. And for those like Brit-based Robinson, the trip alone can cost more than you earn. But she and Leone agree that the PR and goodwill they rack up make it a wise investment. "No advertising you can buy matches having a couple hours to expose people to what you do," notes Leone.

Organizers usually recruit presenters a year in advance through other instructors' leads, attendee suggestions, web sites, journals and general word of mouth. "We seek up-and-coming leaders," says Harrison. Having an established name and conference track record scores points for candidacy, but you can break in by presenting outside the formal Pilates circuit. Kelly Kane, owner of NYC's Kane School of Core Integration, first taught a Pilates workshop in the late '90s at the annual DCAC International Fitness Education Conference (which now offers dozens of Pilates classes) in Washington, DC, knocking the socks off attendees by performing an advanced Reformer workout.

Ten years ago Madeline Black taught workshops at studios nationwide, which led to a formal workshop sponsored by PhysicalMind Institute. Julian Littleford conducted many workshops before applying to present for the PMA seven years ago. Lynne Robinson's first major presentation was to an audience of 500 physiotherapists and orthopedic surgeons at a medical convention.

To get hired, you'll need to submit a résumé and photos, DVDs, published books and articles plus recommendation letters along with a detailed proposal on your workshop or lecture. If you're introducing a new prop or product, you must send the item or a DVD about it.



Once you've landed the gig, the hard work really begins. For instance, Black prepares detailed handouts for her workshops. "Writing an outline and objectives focus me on a working template to support my dialogue," she explains.

Peak Pilates senior program director Clare Dunphy chooses her communication method based on what she's teaching. "I outline major points and decide whether to illustrate through an activity, a handout or Powerpoint presentation. Then I layer in specifics," she says.

Most important is rehearsing. Leone writes out choreography and test-drives the presentation on her students, tinkering with her exercise and content order right up to the night before class. Michael and Ton rehearse to determine who says and teaches what to can keep their class flowing.

And keep in mind that no matter how good you are, even vets get the jitters. "I'm a seasoned presenter," says Robinson, "but watch closely during workshops and you'll spot my knees knocking."

Whether you present or attend,



there's no question that you'll learn techniques taught by the best in the biz and be introduced to the latest research and concepts in the industry. Oh, and one more benefit worth mentioning: You'll laugh—a lot. You'll find yourself giggling with your peers when you try a new move and can't master it off the bat. Or swap stories at the bar over a wine spritzer. Conferences are one of the best ways to learn more about Pilates, along with the people who enjoy it as much as you do.

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**visit these sites to learn more about top conferences around the world**

Australian Pilates Method Association  
[australianpilates.asn.au](http://australianpilates.asn.au)

Body Mind Spirit  
[bodymindexpo.com](http://bodymindexpo.com)

DCAC International Fitness  
[dcac.inc](http://dcac.inc)

ECA World Fitness  
[caworldfitness.com](http://caworldfitness.com)

Festival del Fitness [fitfestival.com](http://fitfestival.com)  
FIBO [fibo.de](http://fibo.de)

IDEA [ideafit.com](http://ideafit.com)

IHRSA (International Health, Racquet and Sportsclub Association) [ihrsa.org](http://ihrsa.org)

Inner IDEA [inneridea.com](http://inneridea.com)

Mondial Body Fitness  
[salonbodyfit.com](http://salonbodyfit.com)

Pilates Method Alliance  
[pilatesmethodalliance.org](http://pilatesmethodalliance.org)

Pilates on Tour [pilatesontour.com](http://pilatesontour.com)

Polestar Pilates [polestarpilates.com](http://polestarpilates.com)