

Learn Indian Dancing

I've always wanted to learn how to dance. When I was younger, I loved going to discos and I used to spend hours practising my moves in front of the mirror! I think I was quite good, but as I got older, I became less confident.

Recently I decided I'd join a dance class. The problem with most dance classes is that you need a partner, and none of my male friends ever wanted to come with me. I was beginning to give up on the idea when I came across a magazine article about Indian dancing. It sounded great and best of all I could do it on my own! So, I found a class on the internet and booked myself onto a course.

I turned up for our first lesson feeling very nervous. I needn't have worried though because everyone was really friendly. We were all female, the youngest was about eighteen and the oldest was forty something.

Our teacher came in looking fantastic in her traditional dance clothes and we soon all caught her energy and enthusiasm. She put on the music immediately which was a combination of western pop songs set to an Indian beat, and we started following her moves. Any nervousness soon disappeared because the moves are so complicated. There's no time to worry about whether you're doing them right!

I've noticed a lot of changes about myself since I started dancing. I'm much fitter and I feel more confident. I've also made some great friends at the class. If you're interested in dancing, or you just want to feel fitter, I'd recommend Indian dance!

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Allegro

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Just Relaxing!

Of course, there are lots of things I could do: collecting stamps or butterflies, photography or watercolour painting. Classical hobbies are still just as popular as they ever were, I am sure. But, for one reason or another, I have to be different. Even as a child, the idea of collecting something seemed pointless and a bit boring. And now as an adult I only feel really happy when I'm doing something useful. That's why I do what I do in my spare time.

I spend a good deal of every weekend picking up litter, tidying public spaces and generally working for nothing. I'm not paid and never thanked for the hours of work I put in, but I don't mind. To be honest, I enjoy it. The idea of sitting at home on the sofa watching another ridiculous programme on TV just makes me depressed. Instead, if I think about the next park I'm going to clean up, or the next children's playground I'm going to work on, I get quite excited. I like being outside, and nothing can beat the satisfaction of seeing the end product: a perfectly tidy village green, or a safe, attractive play area for kids. When I've finished I pack my things, take a last look at my work, and then go home for a shower. If people see me they think I'm from the local council: they never guess I'm working for fun.

You may think I'm mad spending my weekends and days off like this. But just consider this: what would it be like if we all did a little clearing up as a hobby? Our towns and countryside would be clean and pleasant, and a safe place for all of us to enjoy. I know I've got a rather peculiar hobby, but it would be nice if more people did something similar.

And there are other advantages, too. Occasionally a kind old lady will bring me a cup of tea while I work, or I meet friendly people who stop for a chat. I never tell them that what I'm doing is for fun, though. I know working is not the usual way to relax.

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A Place in the Country

I think every one of us would like to find a special, private place in the country, where no-one can disturb us, and where we can do whatever we like, any time of day. I'm lucky, because I've found my own little spot, and even if I can't buy it, I'm sure I'll enjoy it for years.

It's probably because I've lived in London all my life that I recognise the value of the country and love it so much. No traffic, no pollution, and hardly any people! What could be better? It's not that I'm shy or unfriendly, but sometimes I need to have some time on my own so that I can think and do my most important work. Being an author means having to find ideas and plan the books that they produce. And this requires space, time and quiet. Any noise is sure to reduce concentration, and so my new book will start badly. Instead, in the hidden little cottage I have found, I can sit at my desk and think for hours, without a single interruption. The window in front of me shows only a dark lake and a few trees, while the telephone never rings - because there isn't one here.

In the afternoons I go for long walks in the hills which are all around the cottage, enjoying the fresh air. The weather here can be as wet or cold as anywhere in Britain, but I'm not afraid of being out in the cold. I can be sure of being alone with my thoughts, and, anyway all I need is a good, thick coat and a hot cup of tea as soon as I get inside again. I do a lot of my best thinking outdoors. It must be the wind and the soft colours of the countryside. If I'm having difficulty with a story idea, you can be sure that an afternoon spent in the woods and hills will bring me the solution.

Once the book is planned, I'm happy to come back to the city and finish it among my friends and family. The slow work of actually writing a book is easy to me; it's the original idea and the planning that takes silence and effort. I suppose you're wondering where my hidden cottage is, and who owns it? Well, you can be certain I'll never tell you: it's too important for me to share with anyone!

Gentle