

DANCE FEVER

INSPIRED BY ALL THE REALITY DANCE SHOWS ON TELEVISION, GISELLE WHITEAKER MARCHED HER TWO LEFT FEET AROUND TOWN TO SUSS OUT THE BEST PLACE TO STEP ON SOME TOES.

PHOTOS BY KHOA TRAN



DANCING IS NOT ONLY A GREAT WAY to let loose, but it can also help you lose weight and gain confidence, and if you think that's pitching at women, think again. Every woman loves a man who can dance. When you dance you add joy to your workout as you twist and shimmy away the calories a la John Travolta.

A certain Japanese proverb says, "We're fools whether we dance or not, so we might as well dance." So, get ready to be a fool and get out there and tackle the dance venues of Ho Chi Minh City, from ballet to hip hop, and swing to salsa. Whichever style you choose, kick up your heels and dance like no one is watching.

THESE HIPS DON'T LIE

Nervousness set in as the Saigon Bellydance neon sign announced belly dance and sexy dance, but thankfully I signed up for the former. A little miscommunication meant I was injected directly into a level 2 class. Move over Shakira because the hips here were flapping and bouncing like Egyptian camels. The class is taught by demonstration, so despite the lack of Vietnamese belly dancing vocabulary moves were communicate to the body through the eyes. The entirety class is made up of entirely women but men with hips are welcomed to join.

Suitable attire: Comfortable clothing with a bare midriff if possible. Serious students invest in jangly belts

ALOHA HULA

Fortunately, hula dancing doesn't actually involve a hula hoop. It is a Polynesian-inspired dance combining swaying movements and expressive hand gestures into a story of island life. That may sound simple, but the entire dance is done with bent knees, which turns it into a leg workout. Teacher Kai was welcoming and led everyone through a series of routines where actions were paired with music to express a theme. Part dance class, part cultural expression, this is a particularly team-oriented class, reflecting the warm and relaxed nature of the Hawaiian culture.

Suitable attire: Shorts and t-shirt, with a sarong over the top

SPICY SALSA

The beginner salsa class at La Salsa started well enough, with instructor SinHan Tran Dao explaining moves clearly, and adding plenty of repetition to set them into muscle memory. However, when the class starts rotating dancers confusion sets in and students found themselves wandering around clueless as to who should be dancing with whom. We also learn turns and cross body leads, eventually moving on to the more intimate *bachata*. This is a close dance, so it can be intimidating dancing with a stranger, but it is also the men's chance for a bit of hip action. The basic is three steps sideways, lift the hip and wiggle.

After classes, social dancing takes over the floor and any attempt at being a wallflower quickly dissipates as everyone is encouraged to get their groove on.

Suitable attire: Jeans or dress and heels

ALL THAT JAZZ

It was difficult to know what to expect from a jazz ballet class. Apparently, it's a hybrid of dance and aerobics and was definitely harder than the soft sounding dance names. After 45 minutes of intense physical activity led by the ever-enthusiastic Rosie, everyone was ready to die.

"Right," said Rosie, our instructor, "that's the warm up done."

The next 25 minutes we practiced dance walks, breaking into teams of four and sashaying across the floor. No one in the class seemed overly confident in the moves, so I fitted right in. For the final 15 minutes we worked on a routine that flashed back to 1980s jazzercise.

Suitable attire: Loose fitting clothes or leggings are the norm. Think Flashdance, the movie

PLIE AWAY

Despite being named after a ballet, (*Giselle* is a ballet in two acts with a libretto by Jules-Henri Vernoy de Saint-Georges and Théophile Gautier), I have never taken a class. Shame, as it may

have helped. Luckily, the instructor was not only engaging, but also skilled at masking her horror at my pigeon-toed inelegance. We covered the five basic feet positions and plied in all of them, before moving on to *battements* and *rondes*. This was quite intense for a beginner. We loosened up with ballet stretches and even tried pirouettes and jumps. It's definitely recommended to brush up on the basics, as the class assumes some prior knowledge.

Suitable attire: Form fitting leotard and tights, with ballet shoes, or for those less committed, socks.

THOSE SWINGING CATS

Daniel and Thuy gave the history of swing and relaxed everyone with walking exercises, teaching us to get our groove on by sinking into the walk and adding some bounce. Next we covered basic East Coast Swing. The key step for the guys is left, right, then rock step on the left leg,