

# SUP YOGA 101

BY KAITLYN VITTOZZI

It is that time of year again! Standup paddleboard (SUP) yoga season in Canandaigua! We at Finger Lakes Yogascapes get a lot of questions from people hesitant to try it, so I wanted to give you the inside scoop on what to expect. I hope you visit us on the peaceful, crystal clear waters of Canandaigua Lake this summer but if you are traveling and want to try SUP Yoga somewhere else, this will still help! I've lost my fear of the water and it's allowed me to paddle and take SUP Yoga classes across the United States and Europe. The younger version of myself would have said "ARE YOU NUTS!?"

**What is SUP Yoga?** You paddle your SUP— which is essentially a very large, stable surfboard, out to the water (either on your stomach with your arms, or standing with a paddle), and anchor the board so it doesn't float away. From there you practice seated, standing, and reclined yoga postures. Enjoy a blissful savasana (final relaxation) on the water as you connect with nature and experience the gentle rock of the water.

**Will I Fall In?** I hope so! There's no harm in falling into the water. The north end of Canandaigua Lake is shallow enough that if you fall in, you can get back on your board. The water is also incredibly clean. The boards are stable so there is no guarantee you will take a dip but I encourage you to push yourself out of your comfort zone. You can stay dry in an indoor yoga class the other nine months of the year.

**What do I wear?** Dress to your comfort level, but don't wear cotton. Cotton gets heavy with even a little bit of dampness and can impede your range of motion. Why make your class more difficult than it needs to be? Depending on the weather, the temperature fluctuates from class to class. I recommend athletic clothing like gym shorts and a yoga top, but a comfortable bathing suit also works on those sunny days. Don't overdo it on the sunscreen on your hands and feet, you don't want to turn your board into a slip and slide. Sunglasses and hats are welcome but maybe consider an inexpensive pair of sunglasses instead of your \$300 Balenciagas. I've gotten pretty good at retrieving sunglasses over the past few years but glass and sand don't mix.

**Do I need to know how to paddle?** Nope! If there is any paddling in your class, instruction will be provided. If you really want nothing to do with paddling and are all about the yoga, sign up for Saturday morning's 75-minute class.

**Paddling Form:** Again, paddling is not a requirement where we launch, but I see some inefficient paddling form on the lake, so if you rent a board on your own locally or elsewhere, consider these tips. Stand in the center of the board with your feet slightly wider than your hips. Bend your knees, more than you think. In the world of athletics, you might hear this called ready position. Hinge at the hip, so you have a long spine. A lot of people complain their backs hurt after paddling but it is likely because they are rounding their spines and locking out their knees. Make sure

your paddle is long enough so you aren't hunched forward. Here's how to measure. If you are standing up and the blade of the paddle is in line with your feet, stretch your arm straight overhead toward the sky. The handle should meet the palm hand with your arm all the way extended. Any shorter is too short. Paddle with the blade close to the rail (the long edge) of the board. If you are paddling with the blade three feet away from you, you are working harder than you need to.

**Do I need to know yoga?** Nope! The board is a great equalizer in yoga. If you already have a yoga practice, this will challenge the balance element of your practice, and make you drop all those perfectionist tendencies. Instruction is provided so if you are new to yoga, your first class on the land will seem like a piece of cake! Every time you take a class on the water it gets easier but come to class with zero expectations except to have fun and enjoy the great outdoors. If balance is a challenge – make your stances wider. For example, in a regular fitness or yoga class lunges are usually cued hips distance apart – take your feet wider left and right here to make your life easier! As you get more comfortable, you can narrow the distance.

**Do I need to wear a life vest?** No, not for yoga in New York State. However, they're available if you would be more comfortable with one on. You will need a life preserver for paddling.

**What else?** Breathe and take breaks. Anywhere you go this summer, these are valuable tools but especially as

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you approach the board. If you feel particularly stressed, consider elongating your exhales. Can't focus? Sit in the middle of the board and drop your feet or hands into the water to center

yourself. Focus on the sensation of the water on your skin. Feel free to jump back into class or just stay and relax.

Did I miss anything? Don't hesitate to

reach out and ask! You can register for classes at [FingerLakesYogascapes.com](https://www.fingerlakesyogascapes.com) or call Kaitlyn at (585) 200-7209 with questions or to schedule a private class.

