

INTERNATIONAL FITNESS ROUNDUP

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Group Fitness Trends From Around the Globe

Global fitness fads come and go, but trends serve as the litmus tests of our industry, reflecting the current state of fitness affairs for any particular club culture, demographic or economics. Once per year, this author checks in with various clubs across diverse populations and continents to help all *American Fitness* readers put a finger on the pulse of which trends and programs most draw people in the group exercise arena. In addition, this survey also asks for any interesting tidbit about machinery or technology of customer service that a particular club or chain may be providing to its clientele.

To be sure, one of the most overriding new highlights in the fitness market for 2014 is how clubs implement technology and applications ("apps") to heighten the overall guest experience while away from the club, and even at the club entrance. The trend emphasizing intensity continues to rise, but only attracting the already fit and helping them become more so. Active aging programs are increasing in popularity on most continents, as this is the largest growing demographic worldwide, according to the International Council on Active Aging.¹ Where laws and weather allow, group fitness schedules continue to transcend the classrooms, taking people outside with special classes and in-house preparatory clinics.

The following report organizes the countries into Western and Eastern hemisphere order.

ECUADOR: CUMBAYA

Janine Mongardini owns Janine's Gym in Ecuador, and is an AFAA certified Spinning® master instructor. Weighing in on the state of fitness, she claims that "we have experienced a huge craze for 'Bailoterapia,' which means therapeutic dance, with a resurgence of nonstop cardio dance classes with many different rhythms." Beyond cardiovascular fitness, "functional training circuits boom now because they give total-body benefits in short amounts of time," reports Mongardini. "And mind-body is still growing."

Interesting Tidbit: Janine's Gym is built for those with disabilities—provides special club access and offers Krankcycle® circuit classes.

CANADA: TORONTO

Stephanie Williams is based in Toronto and works as a CanFitPro group fitness instructor, personal trainer, active aging specialist and nutrition & wellness specialist. "One of the most fascinating trends in traditional group fitness incorporates 'mind/body/spirit' components to become multidimensional, such as putting meditation into cycling and yoga stretching after boot camps." Canada continues to generate the boom of workplace wellness programs, which are "becoming more readily supported and facilitated by employers, who now understand the physical, mental, and stress-relieving benefits realized by participants and the resulting boost in productivity and job satisfaction." Given the emphasis on outdoor fitness in the north, Williams says that "Nordic Pole Walking is still booming" and, indoors, barre-influenced workouts grow.

Interesting Tidbit: The Community Health Centre in Toronto expands offerings to include mindful disciplines, nutritional counseling, smoking cessation classes and stress management, in various languages.

UNITED KINGDOM: LONDON

Greg Sellar, Nike Master Trainer and 2010 International Showcase's Fitness Leader of the Year, works as both a presenter and program developer based in London. "Hottest now in the U.K. are high-intensity interval training, small group training, PT studios, and body weight only movement conditioning because of its simplicity and lack of equipment." Unique classes permeate the U.K. scene these days, including "the official Tabata program, Orange Theory Class and the Animal Flow workout."

Interesting Tidbit: Many clubs now offer video screens and real-time group ex timetables [that also show advertisements for classes, using visuals via video walls to provide extra motivation or virtual classes] and fingerprint entry systems that eliminate the need for membership cards.

ITALY: ROME

Serafino Ambrosio, BEd in PE and dance, is an Australia-born gym owner and Polestar Pilates master teacher in Rome, Italy, who owns his own club. "Here in Italy the three big wellness trends are the Mediterranean slow food diet, outdoor health activities like walking, and spa thermal resorts. The most popular classes in clubs continue to be Pilates, yoga, suspension training, Zumba®, 30-minute toning high-intensity classes with no equipment and postural re-education."

Interesting Tidbit: "In some of the gyms where I teach, popular now is 'Slim Belly Workout equipment' [slimming belts from the '70s that we do not advocate anymore, now re-camouflaged as a cardiovascular workout on stationary cycles]."

TURKEY: ISTANBUL

AFAA certified Cem Üner is the president of Fitnessstürk, one of the fitness organizations that the Turkish government recognizes, partly because it sponsors fitness education including AFAA events. Üner says, "Right now Zumba is still growing, and men and women are leaving more traditional jobs to seek training to become personal functional trainers. Pilates is still booming, and boot camp-style training is popular, partly because military service is still obligatory here for men." To transcend the confines of the club, he shares, "a few chain clubs are organizing outdoor events for their members, such as running in the forest, or seaside yoga, in an effort to create a social life for their members and build the club as the place to be."

Interesting Tidbit: Üner states, "The better clubs here are judged in terms of apps; if there is a fitness app for the club you want to join, people think it's a desirable club."

GREECE: ATHENS

Dimitris Kandris, owner of Fitness Training Clinics in Athens, Greece, works as a group exercise instructor, Aqua Zumba® master trainer and personal trainer. "Although we have an economic crisis here," he begins, "we still care about getting certified and trained, although the price for foreign programs is oftentimes exorbitant for our current standards. We've just launched Zumba and have more than 700 Greek instructors trained." Also, an AFAA Primary Certification launched in May. Kandris states there's a healthy balance in group fitness offerings across Greece among the three categories of "intensity-driven classes, mind-body classes and aquatic classes for the less intense."

Interesting Tidbit: Many clubs now offer video screens and real-time group timetables, showing advertisements for classes using visuals via video walls to provide extra motivation or virtual classes.

ATLANTIC
OCEAN

CHINA: HONG KONG

Grace Wang, country group X manager for California Fitness based in Hong Kong SAR, says that people go to "classes in search of fat loss programs. As Korean fads catch on quickly in Asia [remember Gangnam style?], a current trend is people forgoing their club workouts for the downloadable routines of overnight Korean sensation Jung Da Yeon. Similarly, some are using their Xbox devices at home to download games as workouts." According to Wang the most popular classes in clubs now are "Zumba, Bodycombat and Bodypump." And AntiGravity yoga is "bringing back people to yoga."

Interesting Tidbit: "Instead of selling out to technology, our clubs have 'reference boards' at the entrance where members and instructors can leave notes for each other."

INDONESIA: JAKARTA

Andry Green (based in Jakarta), who works as a global SandBell® master trainer and group fitness manager for Celebrity Fitness, says that outdoor running is the hottest trend. "We're happy to count on our government's support every Sunday as it shuts off some main city road's access to promote sponsored running events to get people moving." Among inside group fitness classes, Green notes that "Zumba continues to rise, and kettlebell education means more classes on more schedules."

Interesting Tidbit: "Celebrity Fitness has rooms called 'the 3D Fun Studio,' with structures like monkey bars, TRX® hangers, hammock hangers, and many types of functional equipment: BOSU®, VIPR™, kettlebells™, and RumbleRollers®."

SINGAPORE

Tommy Yau, a PTA, TRX and BOSU master trainer based in Singapore, works as the National Fitness Manager for Fitness First clubs. "The hottest classes now for us are HITT training formats because everyone wants to work with intensity," he explains. "It's also the most popular time of all for our 30-minute classes that include Small Group Body Weight, BOSU, VIPR, TRX, kettlebell and SandBell classes. In the pre-choreographed arena, the Les Mills GRIT™ and CXWORX™ work the best here."

Interesting Tidbit: "Fitness First clubs have interactive television screens where members learn how to use equipment simply by touching the screen."

MALAYSIA: KUALA LUMPUR

Nael Chelliah is a physical transformation specialist based in KL, Malaysia, who created Malaysia's first outdoor daily boot camp business called DailyMuscle.com. He describes fitness in Malaysia now as "fast and furious," claiming "hot are outdoor boot camps, shorter and more intense group exercise classes, and the appearance of CrossFit-style boxes/gyms."

Interesting Tidbit: "Jatomi Fitness has dedicated stations where members can recharge their smartphones while they work out, but can't use them while the phones charge."

AUSTRALIA: BRISBANE

Ken Baldwin, master trainer for BOSU, VIPR, Twist Conditioning™, and Schwinn® based in Brisbane, Australia, tells us that the hottest trends "down under" are Pilates, heated yoga, and small group training classes on the gym floor with functional training emphasis. Baldwin says, "Kettlebells are growing in popularity, and CrossFit is still big here. Almost half of our classes are outdoors, such as boot camps, due to our warmer weather."

Interesting Tidbit: "In the gyms that I teach at, many are looking at digital programming and phone apps to send information directly to their members, which includes exercises and programming."

Does your club or facility include a unique aspect of technology for fitness consumers? Tell us about it via Twitter by sending a tweet to @yourfitplace and @findlawrence, and maybe we will publish your news! AF

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1. ACTIVE-AGING INDUSTRY GROWS SERVICES FOR OLDER ADULTS * WWW.ICAA.CC/MEDIA/PRESS2010/ACTIVE-AGING-INDUSTRY-GROWTH.HTM (ACCESSSED MAR 18, 2014).