

# THIS MAN WILL TEACH YOU HOW TO BREATHE

### Use your lungs to improve your mind – and get high. Susan d'Arcy takes a class with the Breath Guru



**W**e can, literally, do it in our sleep, but, according to Alan Dolan, we've been doing it all wrong.

Dolan – 55, from Manchester – is the Breath Guru, and his mission is to get people breathing better. So much better, in fact, that their memory will be improved, stress levels lowered and even depression lifted. There are City boys who've trained with Dolan who say he's helped them sharpen their focus. There are pop and rock stars who report that his breathing technique gives them a bigger buzz than drugs. The actress Naomie Harris is a past student.

Dolan is an advocate of "conscious connected breathing" and, earlier this month, I flew to his retreat on Lanzarote to see if he could put some puff in my pipes.

Varieties of so-called "transformational breathing" have been big among

Hollywood sorts for a while. I tried it in LA last year and loved it, but my instructor told me that it was too dangerous to practise at home on my own. Dolan, on the other hand, promises he can teach me all I need to know in a long weekend, setting me up for a lifetime of happy, connected inhaling and exhaling.

His retreat is an unpretentious three-bedroom villa in the well-to-do hillside village of Nazaret. When he first appears, I can't help thinking he looks like Noel Edmonds gone native: same beard, same cheeky grin, but wearing a Captain America T-shirt, low-slung shorts and a footballer's hairband to tame his flowing locks. He is unsmilingly cheerful, but like him, when I tell him I'm not interested in a spiritual awakening, thank you, just getting a better brain, he understands.

Fifteen years ago, he was bashing out press releases about military aircraft for

BAE Systems, driving a Porsche Boxster and deeply depressed. He resigned, retrained as a breath coach, regained his mojo and moved to Lanzarote. Now, 14 years on, he wants to share the secret of his happiness.

His white-walled Breath Room is only fractionally longer and wider than the two king-size mattresses on the floor. There is Buddha artwork on the walls, incense fills the air and Robbie Williams sings Feel through the speakers. I'm on edge, and not just because of Robbie's high notes.

I'm sitting with my knees raised, arms protectively hugging my shins. Dolan is sprawled across some scatter cushions, limbs so loose they could have been deboned.

He tells me babies breathe from their bellies, which keeps them connected to their root chakra and their inner selves. As the



appeal of Peppa Pig fades, so does our breathing technique, and we start to use only the upper chest. This is not good. He tells me that connected breathing will access my entire respiratory system, oxygenating cells more efficiently, thereby improving my general health, clearing out my emotional baggage and tuning me in to God and the universe. He stops and smiles: "Yeah, I know you think that's piffle."

He instructs me to lie back, inhale through my open mouth down into my belly and exhale gently, also through my mouth, as if I'm fogging a mirror. Crucially, I must then inhale again immediately, creating a continuous loop – ie, connecting my breath. I've flown 1,700 miles to be told to breathe in after breathing out?

This is not like relaxation exercises or yogic breathing. Almost instantly, my mouth is bone-dry. I panic, cough and protest that I need to swallow. Dolan gently insists that I don't. I keep pausing. I correct

**SIGH SOCIETY** Alan Dolan, left, and his retreat in Nazaret, Lanzarote, right



that, but then exhale too forcefully. Finally, I get the hang of it, mostly.

Thirty minutes later, Dolan says I can breathe through my nose again. Suddenly, I know what those hard-partying rockers are on about. My body is flooded with a wonderful energy. The sensation lasts for about 10 blissful minutes before being replaced by a sense of clarity and concentration, which remains for the rest of the day.

"You just hyperventilated," my husband sneers when I phone him after my first session. According to Dolan,

hyperventilation is about exhaling more than you inhale, decreasing levels of carbon dioxide and leading to faintness. The average person uses just 30% of their lung capacity when they breathe, he says. His strategy is about utilising the spare 70%. Either way, I'm counting the hours until my next session.

By my fourth session with Dolan, I can breathe through my mouth without yawning for 30 minutes, no problem. This doesn't affect my subsequent levels of euphoria and lucidity, but it makes getting there more pleasant.

My fellow students are similarly seduced. One is a fiftysomething property developer who realised he had to address his stress levels as he struggled into an ambulance with a suspected heart attack. He reports feelings of elation, vibrations through his body, and a few tears. By day three, he looks 10 years younger. The other is a twentysomething actress on her second visit in six months.

In between my two daily workshops, I laze by the pool or in the hot tub, looking at the distant volcanoes, go for excellent massages and eat the retreat's cracking vegetarian meals.

As I prepare to leave, I feel refreshed, focused and free from the computer ache that usually plagues my neck and shoulders. I am agnostic, however, to discover that there is no breathing session on departure day. "I don't want you in an altered state at the airport," Dolan explains. I beg for one more session. Duty-free never seemed so serene.

Back home, I'm now on 20,000 deep breaths a day and officially addicted.

*Susan d'Arcy was a guest of Breath Guru and Tui. A four-night break in Lanzarote with Dolan starts at £1,040pp, full-board (breathguru.com). Tui Airways flies to Lanzarote from 17 UK airports; returns from Gatwick start at £124 (tui.co.uk)*

**“I'm filled with a wonderful energy that is replaced by a sense of clarity”**



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