



Wednesday, February 25, 2009

Bring out the Latino in you with Salsa lessons *The Bermuda Sun's Helen Jardine gives it a whirl*

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What do Kentucky Fried Chicken, the Cuban side-step and, my favourite, 'the cuddle' all have in common?

They're just some of the moves you will learn at the beginner's level salsa class offered by Sabor Dance School.

After getting fed up with town, which, it has to be said, gets pretty lame in the winter, a couple of friends suggested that we take up some kind of evening dance class together.

I called one of my friends to see if she wanted to get "on board" when she informed me that she was already taking salsa classes at the Sabor Dance School.

In fact she had been (unbeknown to all of us) for a couple of months and was now a member of Beginners 3 salsa.

This also explained why she had not been "available" for our bar circuit on Friday nights - she was at Elbow Beach's Veranda Bar brushing up on her moves in time for her next class, and having an awesome time she said.

Salsa? I mulled it over. I wasn't convinced. Didn't you have to be at least half Latin to have any rhythm at all for salsa?

And have really good co-ordination, or, at the very least, a partner?

But my friend convinced me I needed none of these things - just an open mind and a comfortable pair of heels.

So I braved it and signed myself up for the seven-week Beginner's 1 class.

First-time dancers

The first thing I noticed was, much to my relief, most people there were first-time dancers who'd come, as I had, to try "something new."

And out of a class of about 15 or so people, only about half were already in couples.

Rhythm: You don't need much rhythm or co-ordination to take these classes - just an open mind and a comfortable pair of shoes. (Helen Jardine is pictured here with class mate Barry Brown)

And there was a real mix of people - accountants, government officials, lowly reporters (me), butchers, I.T. guys - all kinds.

The room is covered with ominous wall-to-wall mirrors, so there's no getting away from what you look like as you struggle through the twists and turns of salsa.

But, surprisingly, you are so busy watching your footwork (which is technically a 'no' 'no') that you don't even notice your reflection, and by the time you do you have semi-mastered the moves and actually don't look half bad.

However, a word of warning, try not to miss a class. Although the instructors are on-hand to catch you up it does dash the confidence factor when everyone else knows the 'reverse Kentucky' and you are still stuck in 'salsa basic.'

Catch up classes

Instructors recommend that if you do miss more than two classes, to get a private class to catch you up.

The moves are all well-explained and the instructors count your footwork, tell you to go left or right, and help you if you are struggling to 'get it.'

The satisfaction is almost instant with these classes as you are able to put together some semblance of a dance routine by Class Three.

In fact, to give you an idea of how quickly you can pick it up, last week (my fifth week of salsa ever in my life) Angela our instructor suggested some of us think about entering ourselves in the Mambo Nights dance show in the summer.

Popular

For anyone who has been living under a rock for the past few summers Mambo Nights is a hugely popular event in Bermuda where international salsa dancers fly over to shock us with their splits, twists and flips on the dance-floor - think ladies being twirled overhead.

As we all stared in horror at the Mambo Nights posters that adorn the studio showing ladies flipped backwards like a flexi-ruler, Angela promises us that 'people do it every year' and 'always surprise themselves with how much they can accomplish in just a few months of classes.'

We'll see. For now I am content with the Veranda Bar scene at Elbow Beach Hotel on a Friday night and the monthly 'socials' that Sabor holds in their studio - or, in other words an essentially additional class with drinks and nibbles and a great chance to mix with dancers of all levels.

And, unlike most exercise classes where members drop like flies, so far no one in our group has quit on salsa.

As we progress into Beginners 2 we have all agreed to keep the same time slot.

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