



The scenery has many moods in the Pacific Northwest. MICHELE M. WINNER



Inspiration is part of the decor. MICHELE M. WINNER



Sweet organic beet juice is a favourite at Fresh Start Retreat. MICHELE M. WINNER

Culinary Traveller: A journey to radiant health

A retreat vacation to restore vitality, aid introspection

By MICHELE M. WINNER

I love spas! The Vichy water baths, essential oil massages, sugar exfoliation rubs, and flower facials are a divine way to spend an afternoon away from the bustling world. I try to indulge in a spa treatment when I am travelling to undo the wear and tear my body processes while folded like origami into a plane seat.

It had not occurred to me that one day a spa and a rejuvenation program would be a destination until I crossed paths with Fresh Start Retreat.

'VITALITY VACATION'

Fresh Start Retreat, based at the tranquil Ocean Resort Spiritual and Wellness Retreat Centre in Oyster Bay on Vancouver Island, offers both a 10- and 14-day Advanced Whole Body Detox and a 5-day Juice Fast.

Hitting the downside of my fifth decade recently, I decided that no matter the obligations and deadlines I had, not one was more important than giving myself the gift of renewed vitality. So I headed off on what I dubbed my "vitality vacation."

It was a true journey of discovery to a different place: both in the outer world sense and the inner body sense.

Two weeks before the quest I was asked to follow a strict plan of increasing my intake of raw vegetables and fruit to 80 percent of each meal and to eat a dinner of only cantaloupe melon. I was also expected to hit the bed sheets by 9 p.m. to restore the energy I'd need to complete the cleanse.

A retreat vacation to restore your health and vitality focuses on a detox program with some spa benefits. Along the way you re-set your mind, your digestive tract, and your health goals. But you have to jump in with both feet.

The Fresh Start Retreat Program is owned and operated by Vasili and Ania Kastashchuk, a young couple from Ukraine and Belarus. Their fresh-faced demeanour belies the experience and dedication they have to their program. They know what results they expect and sincerely offer to do everything they can to help you succeed.

Although neither are medical doctors, they have a referral naturopath available for specific concerns. Their staff includes a raw food chef, office manager, a yogi,

and a meditation director, and they have colonic services and sauna and massage therapy in the spa as well.

Pre-cleansed as well as a travelling journalist can be (substituting Hawaiian papayas for melon), I was ready to subsist on fresh organic fruit, vegetable and wheat-grass juices, colon cleanses, blood cleansing tea, pro-biotic supplements, steam baths, yoga classes, and health lectures. I was genuinely looking forward to some "me time."

TAKING THE LEAP

I flew out of Portland International in Oregon on a commuter flight to Vancouver, B.C., cleared immigration, and took the shuttle over to the smaller South Terminal. There I awaited my Pacific Coastal Airlines connection to Campbell River Airport on Vancouver Island.

I like flying in small planes. Sure they can be white-knuckle thrill rides, but these pilots have seen it all. Pacific Coastal is a friendly, family-run airline that ferries residents, fishermen, cowboys, and visitors to the smaller airports all across Canada.

Vasili met me at the airport and we drove in a Pacific Northwest drizzle to the retreat a few minutes up the road. Ocean Resort is a small eco-friendly hotel with a small conference building.

Situated thoughtfully under towering firs along the sea, it is close to the mouth of the famous Campbell River that the locals boast has the best salmon fishing in the world. Just offshore in the Nookta Sound, seals, eagles, and great blue herons are spotted most every day.

At the door to the hotel, Ania greeted me with a friendly hug as Vasili spirited my bags up to my room. I soon settled into my simply furnished, comfortable digs overlooking the silvery waters of the sound and, warmed by a cup of herbal tea, I tore into a thoughtfully wrapped silky welcome package of hand-prepared organic soap, lotion, and salts.

"Prepared just for Michelle" the tag said. No doubt it was based on the pre-retreat information I had sent to quiet my dry skin, curb my short attention span, and enrich my sleep.

RAW AND REAL

The 10- and 14-day programs are purported

by Fresh Start to "have the biggest impact on your health; an all-in-one wellness program, lifestyle makeover, major degenerative condition reversal, advanced whole body systems detox, new habit formation and health renewal on a cellular level."

In addition to the juice fast, these two programs incorporate raw organic meals and healthy meal preparation workshops. The first evening, our 5-day juice fast participants joined another small group that was already working the 14-day program for a scrumptious raw food dinner buffet.

We feasted on veggie dip, flax crackers, guacamole, nut cheese, sunflower burgers, kale salad, sauerkraut, and a luscious cashew milk "cheese cake" with fresh berries. Tummies full, we could not fathom the real work that was to begin the next day.

LEARNING ANEW

My morning started in the dark and without my usual cup of coffee. Dodging raindrops, I hurried over to the yoga studio to greet the sun.

The studio faces directly east, and with instructor Nancy Moelaert, we did the Downward Dog and the Sun Salutation in the darkened room until the sun rose over the sea bathing us in the early light. Altogether a refreshing way to begin the day energized and yet with tranquility you can't get with a jolt of espresso.

At Fresh Start, our days were highly scheduled with classes, films, discussions about nutrition, and walks on fantastic trails along the sound through the woods. Concoctions of fresh vegetables, fruit juice and herbs were served at regular intervals during the day.

Many blood tonics, parasitic cleansers, and energy boosters later, I couldn't complain that I ever got really hungry—I was just starved for something to chew.

Hot herbal tea stations and the enormous amount of water we consumed filled our days and our stomachs. I grew to like the juices and came home with an armful of recipes. Just after our nightly essential oil steam bath we'd gather for a guided meditation with Gabriela Eikeland (also the lotion maker) to put us all into the la-la land of the dream world and eager for sleep.

A GREAT REWARD

On the last morning of our stay, Chef Carol Kopp created a magnificent breakfast. She is truly a magician with raw food. She created "crepes" from masticated fruit and nuts then, after partly drying them, she filled them with fresh fruit and dolloped them with cashew cream.

I have never been so excited to taste a fruit salad, crisps of kale, bowl of sauerkraut, carrot-sunflower seed patty or a dried date cookie. While the combinations might seem unusual, I assure you each dish was simple and superb. The magic is that they are highly nourishing raw foods.

During the meal, I confessed to the group that I had had dark chocolate squirreled away in my luggage. I acknowledged that the temptation was there but the drive to see the benefits I might derive if I stuck to the program, far outweighed the urges—so I never broke into it. In fact, several others made the same confession!

To experience maximum benefit, this retreat is for those who appreciate simple accommodations in a stunning natural environment, can open up to guided introspection, do not mind trying new things, can commit to preparing before the retreat, and will be able to prepare the raw foods at home to continue the program when it is over.

But as directors Vasili and Ania said, "Even if you only reduce your intake of meat per week and increase your vegetable intake per meal you will be on a healthier path."

I lost weight, trimmed off inches, my face glowed, my pulse lowered, and I looked and felt much better than when I went in. To free up my thoughts I wandered the labyrinth on the grounds, took time to write in my journal without interruption and, when I chose, was alone with me.

Give Fresh Start Retreat a try if you too feel run down, out of sorts, or have lost focus. Maybe it's time you too tried a "vitality vacation."

Michelle Winner has been writing as the Culinary Traveller for The Epoch Times since 2009 and has a flair for travel with flavour.



The ubiquitous, jade-coloured green juice is a nutritional punch of vitamins. MICHELE M. WINNER

KALE CRUNCHY MUNCHIES

When Carol Kopp, the talented chef at Fresh Start, or Director Ania "cooks" it's a treat for the eyes and the palate. The trick with raw "cooking" is to do a read-through at least a day before you prepare as there may be soaking times for nuts, grains, and dried fruits. Always use the freshest organic ingredients available. In fact, grow some kale—Ania says it's a super easy vegetable to cultivate in the cooler climes.

RAW FOOD KALE CHIPS

Here is an iron-rich kale recipe from Fresh Start Retreat that is guaranteed to save you from your potato chip craving.

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 heads kale, washed and torn
- 3/4 cup tahini
- 1/4 cup tamari
- 1/4 cup cider vinegar
- 1/2 cup water
- 2 scallions
- 1 clove garlic
- 1 lemon (juice of)
- 1/4 teaspoon sea salt
- 1/4 cup of nutritional yeast

PREPARATION:

Place kale in a large mixing bowl. Combine the rest of the ingredients in a blender and blend until smooth to get a thick consistency. You may have to add more water. Pour over kale and mix thoroughly with your hands to coat the kale. You want this mixture to be really glued onto the kale. Place kale onto a Teflex sheet, on top of a mesh dehydrator screen, and dehydrate for 6 hours at 115 degrees. You'll need to use two trays. Rotate kale occasionally to dry uniformly.

Sudoku

			7			3	6	2
5	4							
					8			9
		3		1	6	9		
	8						4	
		2	4	3		1		
8			2					
							8	6
2	1	5			3			

Fill in the boxes using numbers between 1 and 9 so that each column, each row, and each 3x3 square contain all nine numbers only once.

Exclusive Epoch Times puzzle by Sudoku Works. Sudoku puzzles and software at: www.SudokuWorks.com.

4	6	7	3	8	9	5	1	2
9	8	2	1	5	6	4	7	3
1	3	5	4	7	2	8	6	9
8	7	1	6	3	4	2	5	9
3	4	9	7	2	5	1	8	6
5	5	6	8	1	8	3	4	7
6	5	4	8	9	1	7	2	3
7	1	8	2	6	3	9	4	5
2	3	6	2	4	5	4	8	6

This week's solution

The Epoch Times Geography Guru™

"Growing your geography knowledge"

Quiz #304



SOUNDALIKES: The names of these two European nations both have eight letters. The first four letters and the last two letters of both names are the same. These nations were each part of other nations 25 years ago, then split off in the early 90's. Name the two nations.

Read The Epoch Times next week for the answer!

Answer for Quiz #303

DENSE ZONES: The most populous Canadian province is Ontario, with 13.2 million. The most populous American state is California with 37.0 million. But looking at a bigger picture of the two nations together, which time zone is the most populous? The EASTERN TIME ZONE contains about 63% of Canada's population and about 47% of the US population, putting it far ahead of number two, the Central time zone.