



# Fresh Start Retreat: a journey to radiant health

MICHELLE WINNER gained renewed vitality and weight loss through a health restoration retreat that included a programme of raw foods and whole body detox in a natural setting at Fresh Start Retreat, Vancouver Island

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 outside world. I try to indulge in a spa treatment when I am travelling to restore all of 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 programme would be a destination in itself until I crossed paths with Fresh Start Retreat.

**Starting 'fresh!'**  
Fresh Start Retreat, based at the tranquil Ocean Resort Retreat Centre in Oyster Bay, Vancouver Island, Canada, 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 per cent 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 programme 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 Programme 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 programme. 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-cleaned as well as a travelling journalist can be (substituting Hawaiian papayas for melon), I was ready to subsist on fresh organic fruit, vegetable and wheatgrass 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, British Columbia, cleared immigration, and took the shuttle over to the smaller South Terminal.



**DRINK UP:** The ubiquitous, jade-coloured green juice is a nutritional punch of vitamins

There I awaited my Pacific Coastal Airlines connection to Campbell River Airport on Vancouver Island.

I like flying in the 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 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. The Ocean Resort Retreat Centre 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 Nootka Sound, seals, eagles, and great blue herons are spotted almost 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 programmes are purported by Fresh Start to "have the biggest impact on your health; an all-in-one wellness programme, 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 programmes 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 programme 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. Tummys 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 Downward Dog-ed and Sun Salutation-ed 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 energised and yet with the tranquillity 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 lala 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 squir-

relled 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 programme 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 programme when it is over.

But as directors Vasili and Ania shared, "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 way 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. You deserve a "vitality vacation"!

[www.healthtreat.ca](http://www.healthtreat.ca)  
[www.pacificcoastal.com](http://www.pacificcoastal.com)

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

## 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.

Here is an iron-rich kale recipe from Fresh Start Retreat that is guaranteed to stop any potato chip craving.

## RAW FOOD KALE CRISPS

**Ingredients:**  
2 heads kale, washed and torn  
¾ cup tahini (sesame paste)  
¼ cup tamari (wheat-free soy sauce)  
¼ cup cider vinegar  
½ cup water  
2 spring onions  
1 clove garlic  
1 lemon (juice of)  
¼ teaspoon sea salt  
¼ 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 (non-stick flexible Teflon sheet), on top of a mesh dehydrator screen, and dehydrate for 6 hours at 115 °F (46 °C). You'll need to use two trays. Rotate kale occasionally to dry uniformly.



Sweet organic beetroot juice is a favourite of the participants



All part of the experience: raw food and raw natural beauty invite stark introspection