

High Life

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At Fivelements, fresh food and spa therapies form a relaxing ritual, **Joni Sweet** discovers



Raw, Natural Renewal in Bali

More than two weeks after my last trip to Bali, I feel that my life is more balanced, my levels of motivation continue to climb and my tastes draw me toward healthier foods.

Returning to the bustling city and its inherent noise and crowds bothers me less — it's been easier to breathe.

What was the secret that this last trip offered compared to other vacations?

In the past, heading to beaches and resorts certainly refreshed me — while I was there — but that rejuvenation evaporated as soon as the return flight touched down on the runway.

The overwhelming duties of life would flood my mind and it was back to counting down the days until my next getaway.

This sustained sense of renewal is something most of us long for on a vacation, but never seem to find. However, a trip to Bali's Fivelements resort in Mambal, just outside of Ubud, taught me that a weekend getaway can continue to nurture for more than just a few days if we consider it a retreat; a time to relax, contemplate in solitude, detoxify the body and ease the tensions of life.

Fivelements' lush tropical surroundings, sincere staff who have a passion for restoring their guests, and vast selection of healing and beauty treatments provide an idyllic setting to reconnect with our creative side and discover true tranquility.

Fivelements focuses on three aspects of healing — raw vegan cuisine, Balinese healing rituals and sacred arts — while following a guiding vision of learning to love and respect.

Its customized retreat packages, which range from three to 21 nights, include a personalized schedule of classes and treatments, while still leaving plenty of time to meditate in the intimate luxury huts, wander around the medicinal plant garden, take a bath in a private outdoor tub made from a hollowed-out boulder, or read on the edge of the Ayung River.

The intimate resort features just nine suites, each with a veranda facing the river, open-sky bathrooms, pillow lounge areas and bamboo walls.

With a touchscreen tablet in each room, it's easy to set the mood in the huts — guests can adjust the lighting levels from reading-conducive brightness to subdued romance, tune in to Fivelements' album of chillout world music in stereo sound and adjust fans and air-conditioning without even leaving the charming teak beds.

Floor-to-ceiling windows with sheer white curtains allowed just the right amount of sunlight to enter the room and let me wake naturally each morning.

If you've ever considered trying out a vegan diet (free of meat and animal by-



products such as eggs and dairy) or just want to surprise yourself with how good uncooked food can taste, executive chef Made Runatha's vast training and creativity in the kitchen make for an unforgettable experience.

Followers of raw food believe that a diet rich in uncooked, unprocessed fruits and vegetables allows the body to absorb the maximum amount of nutrients.

In a mainstream restaurant, raw food might mean solely salad, but in Fivelements' airy, thatched-roof dining area, familiar foods like pizza, pasta and ice cream take new meaning.

Chef Runatha layers zucchini — sliced so thin that its texture resembles al dente pasta — with cashew-based "ricotta" cheese, marinated shiitake mushrooms and baby spinach to create decadent raw lasagna.

Smothered with a tangy tomato marinara sauce and herb bechamel, the only way you realize that this satiating lasagna never entered an oven is the fact that it is served at room temperature.

Similarly, the zucchini pappardelle alfredo features zucchini noodles, tossed with cashew-cheese sauce, kalamata olives and cherry tomatoes.

The sprinkle of macadamia nut-based Parmesan cheese adds just the right amount of salt to the savory dish, which is strikingly similar to the ultra-rich alfredo sauce in Italian restaurants.

If you crave something hot, about 20 percent of the menu items are cooked.

A bowl of lentil soup, gar-



Top left, a priest performs a fire ritual; top right, a bedroom at Fivelements; left, a classroom; above, raw vegan lasagna; above right, a raw vegan dessert; below, a hot tub and materials for a facial.
 JG Photos/Joni Sweet



Fivelements

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nished with coconut-based yogurt, coriander and lime, serves as a hearty, spicy appetizer, while the egg-free scrambled tofu florentine bursts with fresh flavors and warm tomatoes, mushrooms, scallions, spinach and whole-grain bread.

As for drinks, Fivelements has developed a selection of hot teas, fresh juices and smoothies made with nut-based milk.

The chocolate shake — a blend of raw chocolate, almond milk, vanilla bean and maple syrup — was my favorite. The rich chocolate fared well with the slightly gritty nut milk, and the concoction was not too thick but pleasantly frothy.

For something slightly fruitier, indulge in the Himalayan Uplift with goji berries, coconut milk, vanilla, bananas and ginger.

End with a sweet treat from the dessert menu, which offers vegan ice cream, mousse, parfaits and chocolate cake.

The superfood raw chocolates stood out, with bite-sized truffles providing just the right amount of post-meal sweetness, infused with mint, nuts, cinnamon or chili.

Overall, eating all-vegan, mostly raw foods made me feel healthier and garner more sustained energy throughout the day.

The meals offered a welcome change from my Jakarta diet of nasi goreng, Italian take-out, fried tempe and instant noodles.

Taking home AsiaSpa magazine's eco-spa of the year award in 2012 and destination spa honor in 2011, along with more than half a dozen other achievements, serves as testament to Fivelements devotion to hiring highly talented staff and exclusively using natural products.

The spa menu ranges from body scrubs and massages to colonic therapy, hair and nail treatments and healing sessions with Balinese priests.

The two-hour Fivelements sakti ritual made for a blissful afternoon. A patient, warm masseuse started me off with a full-body massage so relaxing that I nearly fell asleep. Next up was a remineralizing body scrub, where she rubbed

my body with a sea salt exfoliant infused with basil and lemongrass, making my skin feel healthy and smooth.

The end marked the highlight: fresh orange and lime slices, pandan leaves and ginger tossed in a hot bath, along with a cup of tea to refresh with at my own pace.

Scheduling the superfood facial for the end of my stay was the right move. A member of the staff carefully applied a series of serums, creams, scrubs and masks — made of ingredients like Bali-grown neem, pineapple and aloe vera — to my face and offered me an aromatic floral steam bath.

This treatment made my skin look so healthy that I opted to refrain from wearing makeup on the journey home.

Sacred arts classes and rituals aim to boost creativity and energy, stimulating the mind and body.

The multidisciplinary options range from highly spiritual to down-to-earth secular, accommodating individual preferences for a sacred experience.

The selection included somatic therapy, vibrational healing music and a fire ritual. The chance to try out a new skill such as yoga, aikido or dance was also on offer.

A Balinese priest guided me through a fire-blessing ceremony, where we chanted and threw offerings of grains, lentils and other foods into a fire surrounded by flower petals on an altar.

The priest explained to me that it was a symbolic ritual to purify negative thoughts into positive energy and allow participants to let go of unwanted aspects of life and embrace new intentions.

While I did not feel too different afterward, the experience piqued my interest in the Hindu religion.

Whether it was the opportunity to read, relax and refresh in a beautiful environment, or the many treatments and caring staff at the resort, something at Fivelements changed me for the better.

The retreat cleared my head, rested my body and rekindled my creativity and motivation — allowing me to take home something more profound than a souvenir from my weekend out of town.

Joni Sweet was welcomed as a guest at Fivelements to write this review.

