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# A NEW KIND OF *Paradise*

BY SUZANNE KOCH

*The Sierra Madre Mountains loom in the distance over dense, verdant jungle that wraps around the crescent-shape Banderas Bay, the site of wandering peacocks, sunbathing iguanas and an all-inclusive resort introducing a fresh take on paradise.*



**T**HE  
INTOXICATING  
AROMA that fills  
the Grand Velas  
Riviera Nayarit is

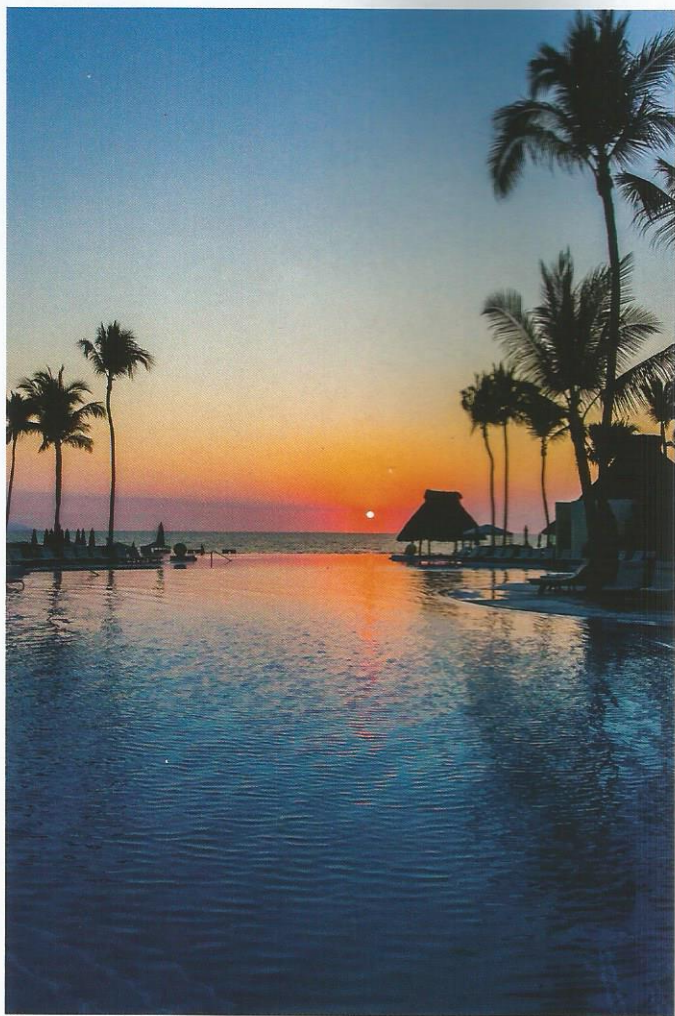
possibly reason enough to visit the sprawling resort. From the open-air lobby under the giant thatched-roof palapa to the peaceful spa, boutique and guest rooms, the air is thick with the scent of lime and orange, a special fragrance unique to the resort that even wafts through the air-conditioning units, amplifying the tropical paradise. But even without the citrus-scented air, the resort has plenty to boast. The all-inclusive 267-suite resort is located just 15 minutes north of Puerto Vallarta in picturesque Banderas Bay. While all suites feature a private terrace, an ocean view and Bali-imported furnishings, it's the 12 Wellness Suites that add an extra dose of guilt-free indulgence to your stay.

After sipping a chilled glass of the resort's welcome drink—an insanely addicting blend of cucumber and lime—while receiving a mini massage in the lobby, I was whisked off to receive a tour of my room, because, yes, it was big enough for a tour. I was booked in the new Wellness Suite, a deluxe two-story accommodation for the fit and healthy traveler. While the resort has eight floors, the Wellness Suites are located one floor above, each accessed by private staircase. Like castle chambers, each staircase is tucked in between the eighth-floor rooms, leading guests directly to the large wooden suite door that swings open to the first floor of the 1,750-sq.-ft. suite where a Life Fitness Activate Series Recumbent Lifecycle Exercise Bike first caught my eye, already begging me to put the margarita down (I didn't). Next to the bike, an in-suite exercise kit is loaded with necessities like a yoga mat, dumbbells and resistance bands. A peek inside the bathroom revealed all-natural amenities like *Manos que Curan* soap bars made from a combination of local Mexican plants, flowers and seeds in scents like cucumber and cactus, amaranth and mint and a showerhead complete with a built-in vitamin C sprinkler that rains down essential oils. The









*If hunger strikes while poolside, order the tasty taco trio from Selva del Mar that includes a seafood, pastor-style pork and skirt steak taco.*



king-size bed features a Nikken Kenko pillow and comforter and at night, an Alchimia Apothecary Aromatherapy Kit with scents including cedar, lavender, tangerine and myrrh help to lull you to sleep.

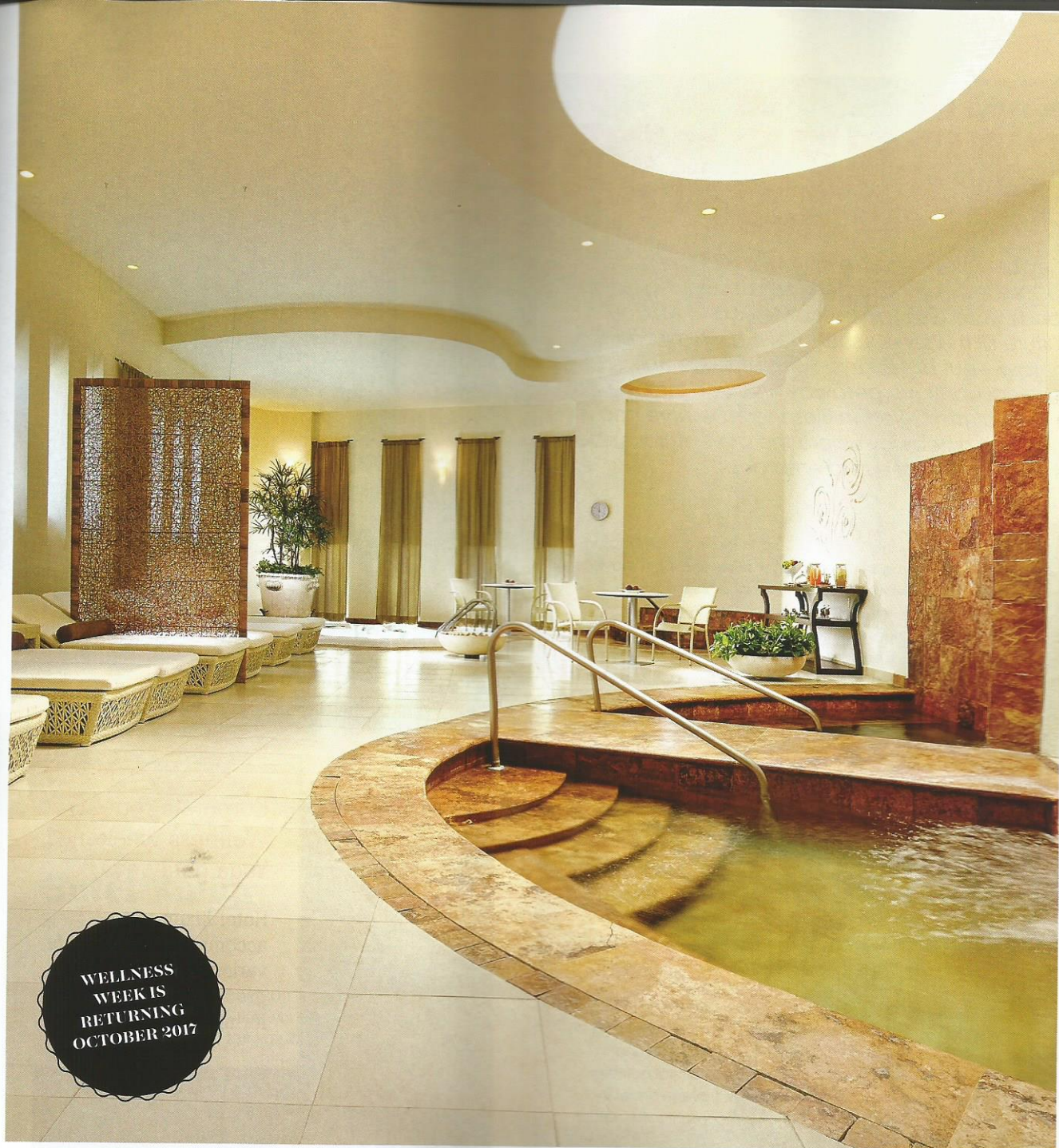
While there's a noticeable lack of hard liquor and pre-packaged cookies, the crudité's minibar all but makes up for it. Stocked with a rainbow of fresh produce, the minibar is complete with carrots, cucumber, jicama, celery, beetroot and pineapple along with mini mason jars of dried fruit and savory nuts to top off the heart-healthy snacking options. A bottle of Mexican wine and a mini-fridge filled with beverages like aloe water and coconut water coupled with the option of daily morning deliveries of all-natural, homemade fruit juices (choose from detox, antioxidant and energetic) that are as vibrant as they are good, made me consider embracing the trendy, fit life.

But before I made any life changes, I had an entire additional floor to explore. Following the staircase up another flight revealed an additional bathroom along with the suite's private upper terrace that features a massage bed, loungers, and a bubbling Jacuzzi that looks out over the resort grounds and stretching ocean horizon. Take a dip at night to savor the twinkling Puerto Vallarta city lights and crashing sounds of the waves or sprawl out during the day; the upper terraces are located at the very top of the hotel for full sun-soaking opportunity.

To appropriately complement my accommodations, I happened to visit during Wellness Week, the resort's first annual week highlighted by a slew of health-based activities and the beginning of Grand Velas' effort to incorporate new health-conscious elements into different aspects of their resorts. For me, the words "gluten-free" and "vegan" usually make me cringe with hunger, but after inhaling my all-vegan dinner prepared by Mexican vegan chef, Miguel Bautista, they don't—as much. Bautista is co-founder and executive chef of Vegan Planet and was the host of the evening at Frida, Grand Velas Riviera Nayarit's AAA Four-Diamond restaurant that serves up a novel menu of Mexican dishes that Frida Kahlo used to whip up for her lover, Diego Rivera. In keeping with the theme, the interior is warm and inviting with Spanish tile floors, glowing lanterns and live guitar music, transporting diners to an old-world hacienda.

In between vegan tastings, sunrise yoga and cooking seminars, I managed to slip down to the infinity-edged pool where I balanced out my healthful weekend with tacos and mojitos before venturing to the resort's main attraction—the 16,500-sq.-ft. spa, an oasis of relaxation and a member of The Leadings Spas of the World. With more than 30 treatments to offer, including the latest aromatherapy massage, I first took advantage of the hydrotherapy ritual (included with every treatment of 50 minutes or more), a journey through varying water elements like a sauna, a steam room, a pressure shower, a Jacuzzi, a hydro reflexology pool and hot and cold lagoons. Afterwards, I was led to one of 20 treatment rooms where the personalized 80-minute aromatherapy treatment filled my senses with crushed herbs and aromatic scents and was highlighted by a full-body massage, complete with hot stones and warm oil. Cozy robes, a quiet relaxation area, berry kabobs and flutes of fruit-infused water were added bonuses to the over-the-top spa and weekend, whose health benefits were unexpectedly indulgent.





WELLNESS  
WEEK IS  
RETURNING  
OCTOBER 2017

## Aromatherapy Massage

After breathing in the scent and learning the benefits of each fresh local herb and traditional Mexican plants—each plucked from the resort's on-site organic garden—the chosen ingredient is then crushed and blended with an odorless base oil, creating a custom massage oil used for the treatment.

**LAVENDER:** Helps unwind and relax the body

**ROSEMARY:** Stimulating effects

**CINNAMON:** Calms the mind and improves circulation

**BASIL:** Powerful antioxidant and restores the mind

**EUCALYPTUS:** Releases muscle pain

**CITRUS:** Promotes a sense of joy to lift spirits