



writer Rachel Oaks Ash

detoxing

at Gaia Retreat

I have never considered soup to be a meal. Anything non solid just doesn't cut it when it comes to nutrition in my book. The idea of seven days surviving on juice, broth and soup is akin to torture, add daily colonics and I might as well shoot myself.



Clearly I am a masochist for I have willingly signed up for seven days of hell with naturopaths Sarah Foley and Natalie Purcell from Byron Bay Detox Retreats. This mad juice fest is held three times a year at Olivia Newton John's swanky Gaia Retreat and Spa in Northern New South Wales so at least I will be starving in style.

DAY ONE

Gaia is known for its food. Lashings of super organic nutrients from Chef Todd Cameron served up with gourmet garnishes worthy of a Michelin star.

Knowing I won't be partaking in any of this I booked in a day early to make the most of the food on offer before it is taken away. Just to rub it in I chose to dine with the Gaia cook book as my companion, pouring through pages of palm sugar laden desserts and succulent salmon dishes. Back in my room even the cake of soap looked inviting.

Up early to meet my fellow detoxers I start the day with yoga. So far so good. A naturopath appointment with Sarah reveals my week ahead. Juice at 7.15, juice at 9.30, juice at 11.30, broth at 1.00pm, juice at 3.30pm,

juice at 5.30pm and soup at 6.00pm. Psyllium husks will be stirred in water three times a day with volcanic ash and ingested.

Then there's ten metal cleanse drops taken daily and five parasite cleanse drops three times a day plus chlorophyll to cleanse the blood and optional early morning yoga plus daily saunas. Did we mention all the juices are organic? Oh, and no fruit juices, detox fasts are about balancing the alkaline levels and anything acidic is not welcome.

I'm feeling confident, especially when Sarah mentions the ninety minute massage and steam body scrub at the day spa. When I suggest personal training to fast track the weight loss process she shuts me down. No stress forming exercise is allowed, it produces the stress hormone cortisol and the liver is supposed to be detoxing not retoxing. Damn.

DAY TWO

There are four of us doing detox and we nab a table for the week in the restaurant away from the standard guests lest we catch a waft of their food. Kim from Tasmania has health issues caused by insulin dependent Diabetes 1. She is allowed jelly beans should her

blood sugar drop, the three of us set up a live auction for the yellow ones. Linda from Texas via Perth is an executive living on too much stress and addicted to sugar. Kim holds on tighter to her jelly beans. Candace from Melbourne is a very fussy eater, there is little she likes and she states clearly that she will struggle through this week. You and the rest of us, honey.

My fellow detoxers are nowhere to be seen at yoga so it's a gold star for me. Not that competition is the point, according to Sarah the point is an individual journey but I'm getting lonely already.

I go for what I intend to be a 'leisurely bike ride' but instead channel my Lance Armstrong within despite Sarah's warning against high cardio activity. The others are still sleeping and it is hard to quieten my mind.

The first colonic of the week is 'administered' in the mobile colonic van. The girls have spent six figures building a custom made caravan that holds a soothing reception area complete with lounge and the colonic 'bed' though I defy anyone to fall asleep while having their colon pumped with water. All goes well, it's discreet, hygienic and strangely cleansing despite some minor cramping.

DAY THREE

It's d-day. Traditionally day three of detox is hump day when the liver, the organ of anger, goes into overdrive and irritability comes to the surface. Well I'm a star pupil and right on track wanting to hit anyone that comes near me. I can't cope with the non detox clients with their perky demeanour. When they make classic clay sculptures with a local artist I make abstract, anything to rock the boat.

The only good news is that my colonic loosened up a truck load of toxic mucoid plaque from the linings of my colon. How do I know? I saw it pass through the clear tube from the colonic bed to the toxic waste tank. Ewwwww.

We have meditation at 5.30pm and all I care about is being back at the restaurant in time for my soup. I tell the meditation teacher I am ratty and she suggests running around the room like a rat, I want to throw something at her head in the hope she will shut up. She does and we all sleep, I mean meditate.

I am not hungry, I haven't been hungry on the detox at all thus far. My blood sugar is kept even with regular juices but I am livid, frustrated, rageful and just want to cry.

DAY FOUR

I dreamt I ate a hamburger last night. Not just any hamburger, a hamburger on serious hormones, bigger than my head hamburger. Convinced I had broken my fast I woke up defeated until I realised it was a dream. A lymphatic massage with Angelica at the day spa makes my day. Best massage I have had in years and I immediately feel lighter. We have all cleared the hump day and the girls

eyes are looking whiter and brighter.

Natalie takes us on a 'circle of thanks' at sunset and we talk about how we are going. I'm still not missing food though I have an obsession with watching the chef cook. I am fascinated by the food around me but not tempted to touch or taste.

Sarah has given me the TAO of Detox by Daniel Reid and I haven't been able to put it down, disgusted by my own self inflicted toxic tissues.

DAY FIVE

I am having a hump day relapse. Not angry, just knackered, faint and tired. Can hardly walk or lift my arms. The other girls have already gone through the need to stop, relax, sleep and collapse. It must be my turn. When I get a text from the outside world I foolishly read it and go into a spin. I have been without television or computers or even a landline in my room. Now my head that was finally starting to relax has gone into overdrive. I breathe, I breathe deeply, I try to focus on the nature around me and I hand my phone over to reception lest I am tempted to check it again.

Sarah prescribes a Kahuna massage which she kindly gives me herself. In a word – amazing. In two words – deep stillness. In three? Must have more.

A new person arrives to join our detox, though she is starting hers on our day five. It feels weird to have another person in our group dynamic and I'm not sure if I like it. Was I that apprehensive at the beginning of the week?

DAY SIX

Insomnia. I'm still not hungry and feel I

could continue the detox for another five days if I had the time but am very tired and can't sleep. I have a long hot bath with Espom salts which aid detoxification through the skin. I almost faint when I get out of the bath but not sure if that is lack of food or too long in a hot tub.

Colonics are ridding my body of so much gunk and my stomach feels the flattest it's been in years. According to the TAO of Detox we hold two to seven kilos of crap in our colon. Gross.

Today we have an indigenous blessing, a smudging ceremony with a Whale Whisperer who paints our faces at sunset on a circle of stones around an open fire. He burns precious leaves designed to rid the body of bad spirits and plays a large healing didgeridoo style instrument around us before singing a whale song that has us under the water eye to eye with the mammoth creatures.

It is truly an incredible experience, very spiritual and I feel myself tear up for the umpteenth time this week.

DAY SEVEN

Food time, though I don't really feel like eating. Papaya pieces with lemon juice for breakfast, miso soup with tofu for lunch. My body feels cleansed, very cleansed and I am almost puritanical about what I will and won't put in it.

My final colonic and I step on the scales. I have lost five and a half kilos of toxins. Wow, wow, wow. On the plane home my eyes swell up and my throat itches. I have serious allergies to the plane whether it's mould in the air, dust in the seats or jet fuel, either way my pure body reacts immediately.

I have since bought a juicer, invested in organic produce from the weekly markets back home and introduced protein powder to manage my hypoglycaemia. I am still off the caffeine and gluten and vow to do a juice fast once a year, if only to reduce my chances of cancer, calm my allergies, and quieten my mind.

For the record Kim, the diabetic, reduced her insulin intake by 40 percent and has maintained that since returning home and Linda has stopped baking sugar treats.



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