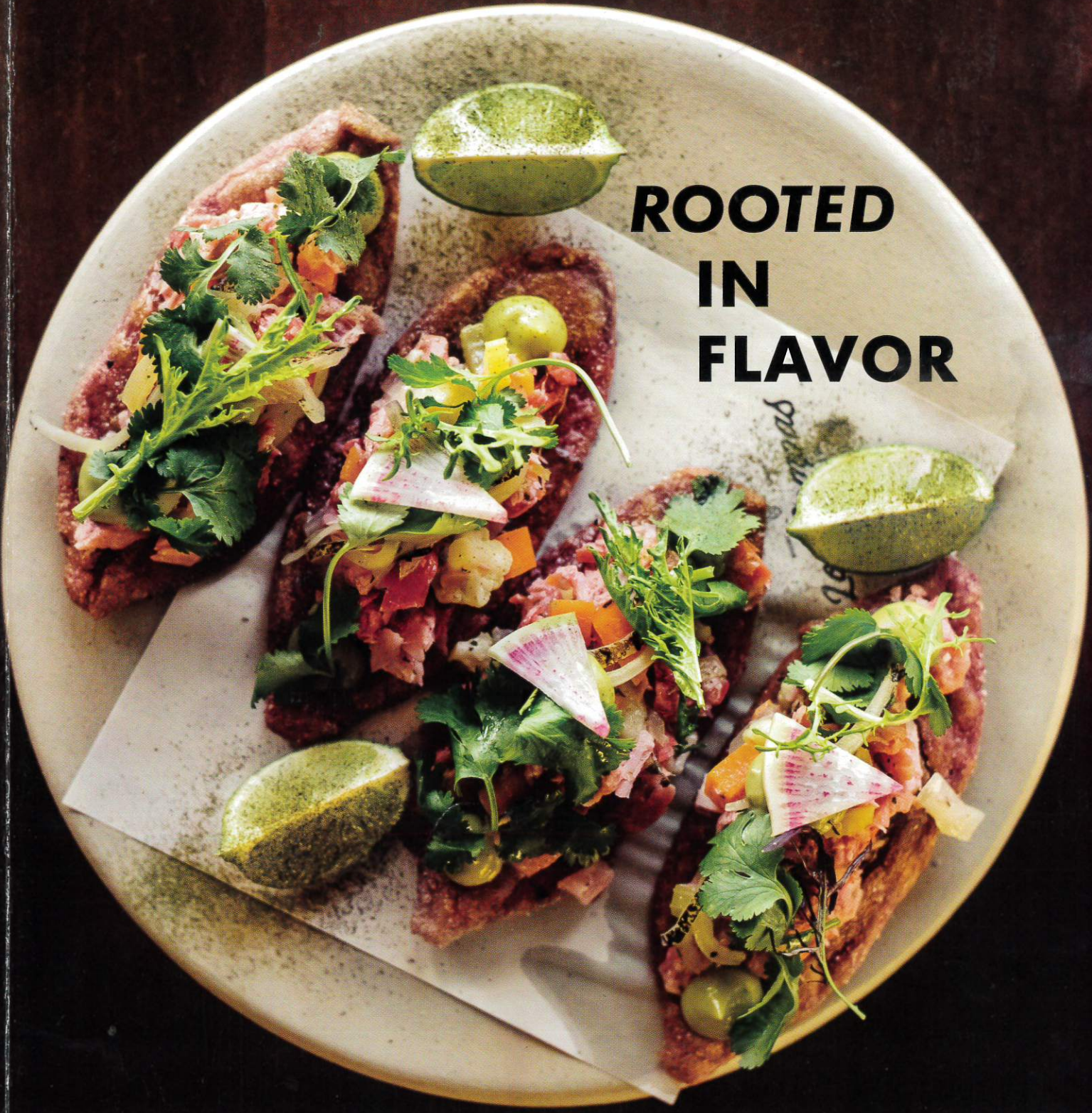


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# A Luxurious Day Trip to Tecate Beckons

BY DEBRA BASS

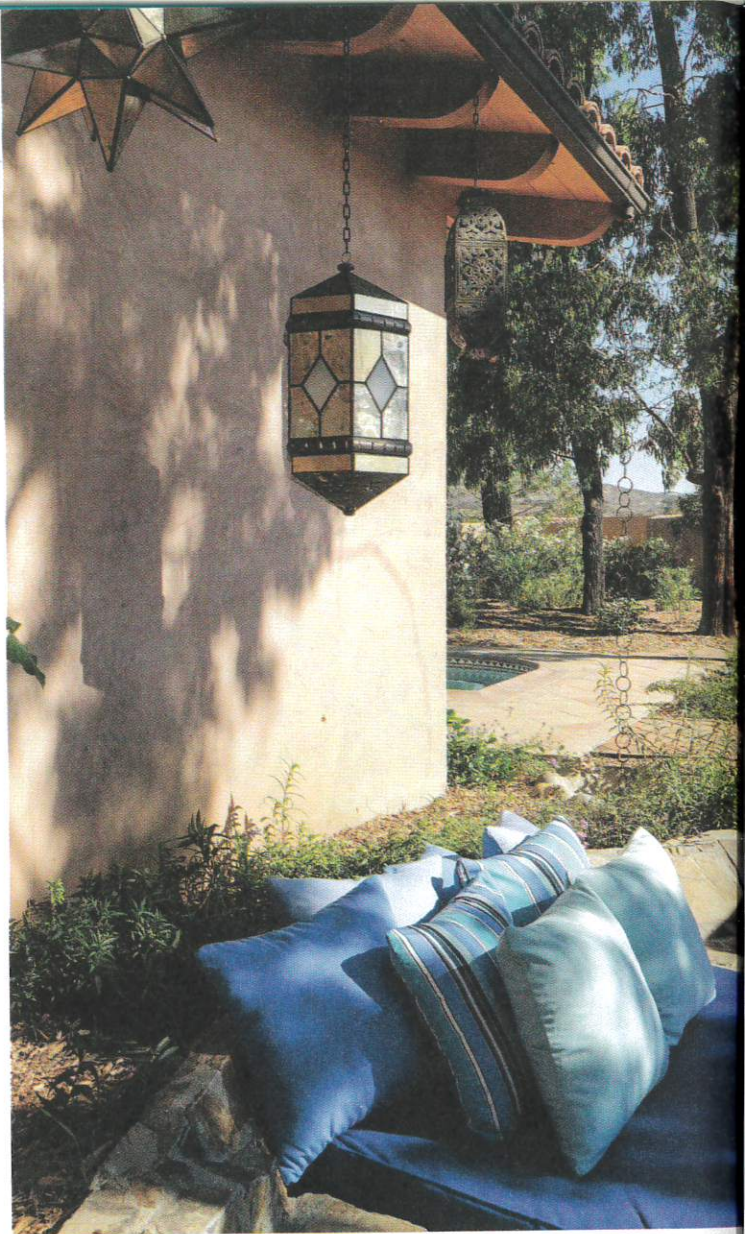
If you've ever had any trepidation about crossing the border, this might be the perfect local excursion for those who want to be spoiled. Rancho La Puerta is located in Tecate about an hour east of the Otay border. The spa and health-centered resort renowned for its luxurious weeklong accommodations offers single-day excursions on select Saturdays of every month. The day trip includes a 50-minute classic massage, fitness classes, free time to get in touch with nature or relax by the pool, healthy morning snacks, Mediterranean lunch, a tour of the organic garden, and a cooking demonstration and buffet at *La Cocina Que Canta*. Round trip transportation to and from San Diego is included for \$345.

My day started with a 7:30am bus ride from the Mission Bay Visitors Center, and within two hours I found myself seated on the second floor of a rustic dining hall nibbling on a breakfast snack buffet of breads and muffins (with and without gluten or dairy), seasonal fruits, and freshly squeezed juices.

I indicated my food preferences as non-dairy and pescatarian, and servers and supervisors attentively directed me to the most suitable choices on the buffet line before I even had to ask. Ingredients and preparations were readily communicated at every meal, making it clear that dietary restrictions are addressed with genuine concern.

We split into groups for a tour of the grounds after breakfast. It seemed a bit overwhelming and sprawling at first, but once I learned to make the loop I realized the property is a series of circuitous paths that make getting lost nearly impossible. Rancho La Puerta is designed with accidental exercise in mind and the amenities are purposely sprinkled throughout to incentivize wandering.

Following the morning tour, the itinerary in my welcome packet described a schedule of fitness classes ranging from intense core workouts to gentle meditation. I selected the abs class, followed by yoga—and then it was already time for the



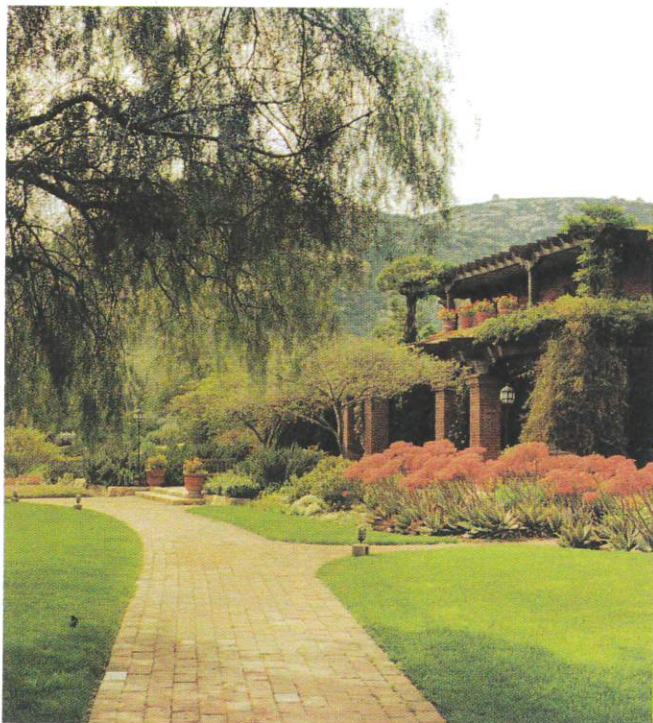
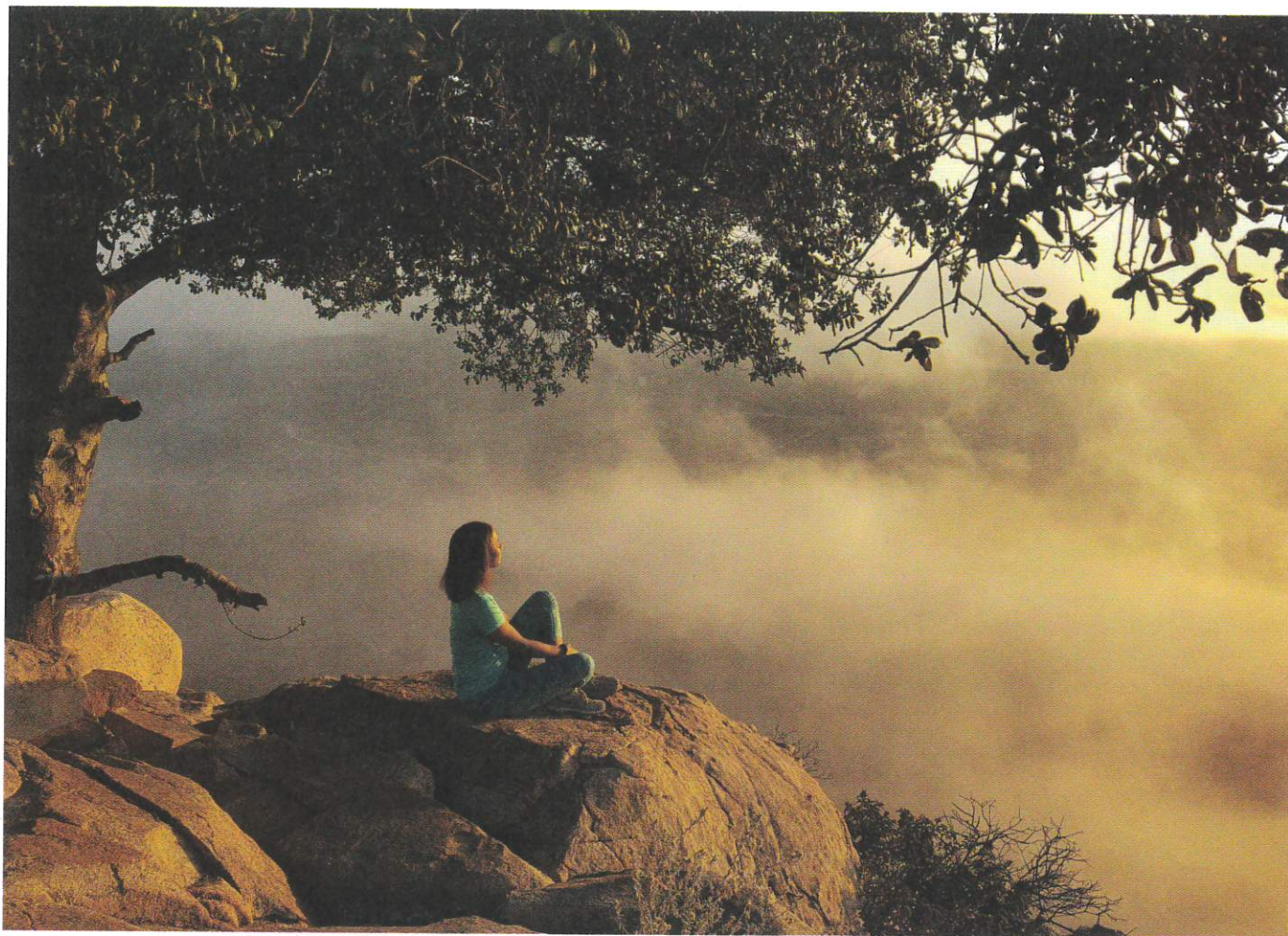
Mediterranean lunch buffet. The maître d' recognized me from breakfast and guided me to accommodating dishes. I ended up with a plateful of salads and vegetables that included a blend of roasted eggplant, bell peppers, carrots, zucchini, snap peas, tomatoes, and sweet potato, plus a side salad topped with spicy garbanzo beans.

There was just enough time after lunch for a massage and nap under a blanket in a quiet lounge area, so I decided to skip the two-mile hike up Alex's Oak Trail.

At 3pm we were whisked off to the resort's culinary center, *La Cocina Que Canta*, which translates to "The Kitchen That Sings." It was named after the delightful bird songs from the property's morning visitors.

We toured the six-acre organic farm attached to the culinary center and cooking school and got a lesson in devotion. The farm uses no commercial or animal fertilizers, and we were introduced to an abundance of happy worms working through compost. Chef Denise Roa, who has been with the ranch for eight years, said that the worms are just one of the many things that make the soil so fertile and the produce so unparalleled.





As we sauntered through the farm rows, she encouraged us to bend down and snap off tiny stalks of broccoli and leaves of different varieties of arugula, spinach, and mustard greens. We stopped often to sample and almost everyone smiled in surprise at the pleasant flavors of the raw leafy bits. The arugula was spicy and the broccoli sweet. The real selling point was when Roa tugged up a bulb of celery and passed around pieces of it. It was vaguely peppery, earthy, and faintly sweet; certainly not your typically bland, crunchy stick used as a delivery system for something with actual flavor. This was celery you could snack on cheerfully, even if you weren't on some torturous diet.

The evening meal was made largely from the garden and included Moroccan sweet potato lentil stew, citrus-marinated kale with apple and pepitas, arugula salad with quinoa and avocado, and roasted shrimp and turnips served on cedar planks with lemon-cilantro chimichurri.

Dessert was a chocolate coconut ginger mousse. We all agreed that the cups for this heavenly concoction were much too small—and like the day—ran out too quickly.

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