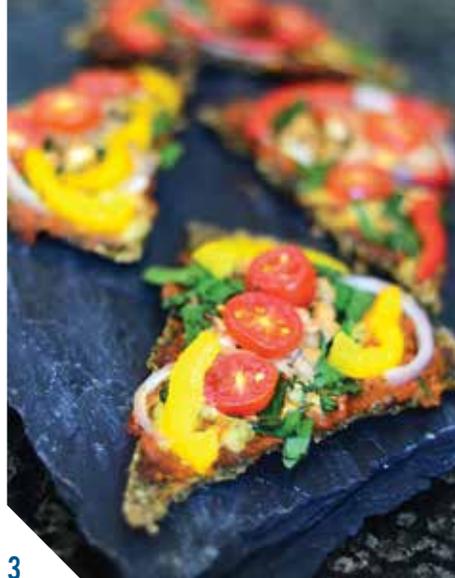


GOURMET



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OUT OF THE FRYING PAN

In Phuket, Thailand, an emerging raw food scene is presenting a new type of Thai cuisine

WORDS | LEAH ALLAN

Bangkok does street food well. Stroll down most roads and you will smell the scents of the city's many markets: meat roasting over open fires, fish doused in lime, and sticky sweets bubbling in oil.

For years, Phuket, an island off the west coast of Thailand, sang a similar tune. Street markets offered all that a traveller would expect.

Yet times are changing. Increasingly, as Phuket seeks to rebrand itself from a party destination into something more wellness-focused, a new type of food is appearing: healthy, fresh, entirely raw and completely vegan.

"We've personally trained a lot of the raw food chefs in Phuket," claims Stanton Procter, a bearded man with endless energy. Stanton and wife Melanie Procter have launched Phuket Cleanse, a detox resort nestled in the Rawai district of Phuket that emphasises exercise, mental wellness and nutrition.

As comes with the territory of raw vegan food, most dishes at Phuket Cleanse are never heated above 40°C and are free from animal products. At the resort, focus is on high-fat and low-carb, meaning vegetables, oils and seeds play the starring roles. Fruit is used only as a rare garnish. In an open-air kitchen, chefs – many of whom are previous resort guests – whip together

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themed dishes for lunch and dinner. A meal might feature raw vegan pizza, a combination of dehydrated seeds topped with cashew-nut cream, fresh vegetables and a hint of basil; Mexican enchiladas made with dehydrated wraps, marinated kale, a vegan cheese sauce and mango salsa; or any other number of playful raw dishes, all served buffet-style beneath the slowly rotating ceiling fans.

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The challenge to dining at Phuket Cleanse is you have to be a detox guest. Head west across Phuket, and you'll find another option: Santosa Wellness Center. Crisp and minimalist, Santosa features an open-to-the-public restaurant with ocean views and an outdoor pavilion. The relaxed ambience makes the spot popular for Phuket's in-the-know locals. On the menu is a mix of cooked and raw vegan food.

"I was raised in a family where food was very important, and where there was a certain kind of knowledge: we take our protein from meat. We need to drink cow's milk, and so on," explains Head Chef ►►



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Susanna Eduini, a raw food author. After an illness, Eduini decided to become a vegan raw foodist. “Ingredients can be marinated, dehydrated and blended, so the uncooked foods retain their good nutrients.” This, she adds, can lead to a vibrant, healthy and happy state of mind. “After two days on raw food, I felt full of energy.”

Eduini’s creations span the makings of a three-course meal. An appetiser of sun-kissed tomato tartare features the aforementioned vegetable with mango and foamed nut-milk sauce. A main of raw vegetable pasta is particularly noteworthy for combining courgette so finely shredded it echoes angel hair pasta with a rich marinara. And for dessert? A raw tiramisu, which mixes almonds, coffee, raw cacao and dates, served atop a bed of dusted chocolate. The total bill doesn’t top US\$17.

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1. “Spaghetti” at Phuket Cleanse.
2. Sunset dining at Santosa Wellness Center.
3. Raw pizza on stone and salad at Phuket Cleanse.
4. Seaweed wraps at Santosa Wellness Center.
5. Santosa Wellness Center’s exterior-steam, plunge and detox rooms.
6. Earth Eats vegan cake.

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The coastal edge of Phuket is increasingly dotted with raw food and vegan venues, like Santosa and Phuket Cleanse, which serve their dishes with a side of yoga. Head inland to Chalong, an area known for its many Muay Thai gyms, and you’ll find a different type of raw cuisine: one that emphasises all things protein.

It’s here you will find Unit-27: Muscle Bar, a tiny venue associated with the nearby Unit-27 gym. Uncooked protein shakes of every variety are available, as is a regularly changing selection of raw protein nut balls. For those after a lighter dish, the menu boasts things like a papaya superfood breakfast bowl with coconut water, goji berries, flaxseed, chia seeds, and almonds – yet judging from the plates of egg-white omelettes and steamed chicken breasts that feed even the morning crowd, fruit isn’t the main attraction.

Just down the street is the bohemian, bean-bag filled Earth Eats Phuket. Decorated with hand-painted murals, this café is popular for its health-focused sweet treats.

“When I moved here in December this was my eighth visit to the Fitness Hub in Chalong. Cooking has always been a huge passion of mine, and so has fitness,” explains Bek Carroll, the owner and founder. “I saw the potential for a raw venue that combined both.” With that, Earth Eats was born. Like Unit-27, there are raw protein balls of every variety on the menu, spanning “raw bounty balls” with cashews, coconut cream and coconut oil, to raw peanut butter balls. These are offered alongside raw desserts of the slightly less healthy variety, like caramel-rich layered cake or creamy lemon-infused cheesecake.

Throughout Phuket, from fitness-focused Chalong to the detox-directed south, tastes are increasingly turning raw. “I was one of the first raw food chefs in the ‘90s,” says Melanie. “The world just wasn’t ready for it.” Today Phuket’s raw food scene has developed drastically, becoming enough to tempt any traveller into kitchens where cooking never occurs. ▲

IMAGES: Earth Eats; Phuket Cleanse; Santosa Wellness Center & Unit-27