

# SIMPLY GLUTEN FREE

magazine

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also including vegetarian, vegan, and paleo diets

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essential supplements  
stem cell therapy  
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slow cooker stews  
freezer meals

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## VALENTINE'S DAY

*the health  
and wellness  
issue*



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### *Almond Flour Waffles*

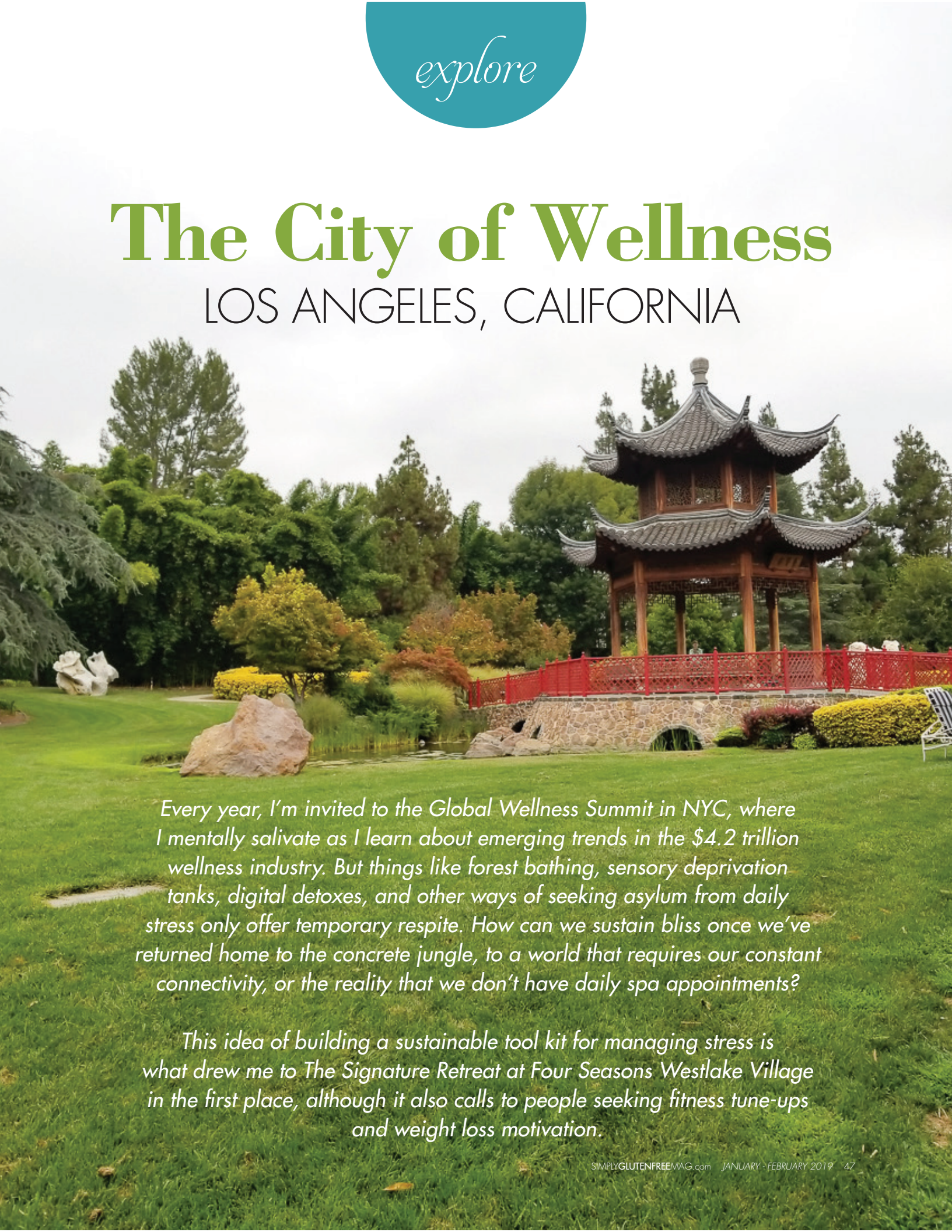
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America's #1 Allergen-Free Publication

explore

# The City of Wellness

## LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA



*Every year, I'm invited to the Global Wellness Summit in NYC, where I mentally salivate as I learn about emerging trends in the \$4.2 trillion wellness industry. But things like forest bathing, sensory deprivation tanks, digital detoxes, and other ways of seeking asylum from daily stress only offer temporary respite. How can we sustain bliss once we've returned home to the concrete jungle, to a world that requires our constant connectivity, or the reality that we don't have daily spa appointments?*

*This idea of building a sustainable tool kit for managing stress is what drew me to The Signature Retreat at Four Seasons Westlake Village in the first place, although it also calls to people seeking fitness tune-ups and weight loss motivation.*

## What is The Signature Retreat?

Helmed by the California Health & Longevity Institute, The Signature Retreat (just outside Los Angeles) focuses more on facts than fluff, and aims to arm retreat-goers with the oft-ignored science behind wellness and practical tools to thrive long after you've left the property.

The point is not to replace feel-good spa treatments, but to elevate your level of feeling good on a day-to-day basis through better understanding of diet, exercise, and stress management. A team of pros guides the way, from the chefs in the Wellness Kitchen, to registered dietitians, licensed psychologists, and exercise physiologists.

## What to Expect

While fun and engaging, the schedule is intense, with some mornings starting at 6 a.m. Our mornings began with group meditation, followed by breakfast, and an average of three workshops and two exercise activities. While there were workshops on body image and dining out (which we put into practice one night at the hotel restaurant), courses on stress management, chronic disease prevention, and exercising for health resonated most with me. Exercise classes are optional, and vary between stretching, hikes, and high-intensity interval training (HIIT).

Big value points are the full body composition and resting metabolic rate analyses, which are the best indicators of your health and how to set goals.

Again, the schedule is very dense and stretches over four days, leaving little time for personal reflection and even less for exploring the gorgeous grounds of the hotel itself.





### What You'll be Eating

Simple, delicious, plant-forward menus with lean proteins and easy prep dominate the meals here. Discovering new, healthy ways to dress up your standard grocery items was one of my favorite things. Still, I found it hard to have scheduled meal times, though they do offer snack packs, and meals are usually self-serve, family-style setups so you can load up.

Unfortunately, while this program is familiar with gluten-free participants, they don't have a lot of experience with celiacs. Don't be afraid to double-check on ingredients and ask to see labels; Chef Andy in

the Wellness Kitchen is extremely willing to listen and accommodate.

### My Takeaway

All four of us left with our own unexpected lessons from this retreat. For me, a workshop finally helped me make the connection between my growing anxiety (and waistline) to the near-constant stress and fear I have around being celiac. A separate lecture spelled out just how devastating this behavior has been on my physical health, while a private one-on-one session with the team's food psychologist, Alison Ross, gave me a few helpful tools to help manage and reduce my stress.

### Mini-Guide to Los Angeles

If you're planning to explore Los Angeles before or after your venture to The Signature Retreat, here are some suggestions.

#### Stay

Los Angeles is so spread out and full of traffic that it's crucial to coordinate where you're going to stay near the places you want to visit. Spots like Hollywood and Downtown L.A. are pretty walkable and well connected to public transportation.

#### Eat

Brunch is a big thing here, and luckily spots like plant-based **Kitchen Mouse** in Highland Park, the healthy and hearty **Square One** in Los Feliz, and the intrinsically gluten-free **Honey Hi** in Echo Park all offer great breakfast/lunch options. Los Angeles is a goldmine for Asian foods, and I felt blessed to have pigged out at **Mandarette** (dedicated fryers and gluten-free ingredients) and **Tatsu Ramen** (lab-tested). **Stuff'd Dumpling Shop** also offers hybrid Asian-European-style dumplings made with gluten-free dough and fillings (they don't even let their employees eat gluten-containing foods in-store). If you're craving American grub, head to the Valley for a huge selection of gluten-free goodies (like fried pickles and mac 'n' cheese!) at **Hugo's Restaurant**.

#### Be Well

Los Angeles doesn't mess around when it comes to health and fitness. **Runyon Canyon** is probably the most famous hiking spot (and where you're likely to see famous people on the path), but there's a special place in my heart for **Debs Park** in my old neighborhood of Highland Park. You'll find easy trails, gorgeous views, and an off-grid education center. The aerial aerobics, silks, and trapeze classes at **Hollywood's Cirque School** are a fun change of pace, while **Beverly Hot Springs** (near Koreatown) gives guests a chance to soak in the city's only natural mineral springs. Be prepared for slightly rundown facilities, celeb sightings, and a *very thorough* body scrub.



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

**Katherine Alex Beaven** is a travel and food writer and photographer. Whether on assignment or on vacation, Alex can usually be found at the nearest food cart or restaurant sniffing out the local gluten-free goodies. Her photography site, [katherinealex.com](http://katherinealex.com), features some of the wildlife, landscapes, and portraits she's photographed along the way.