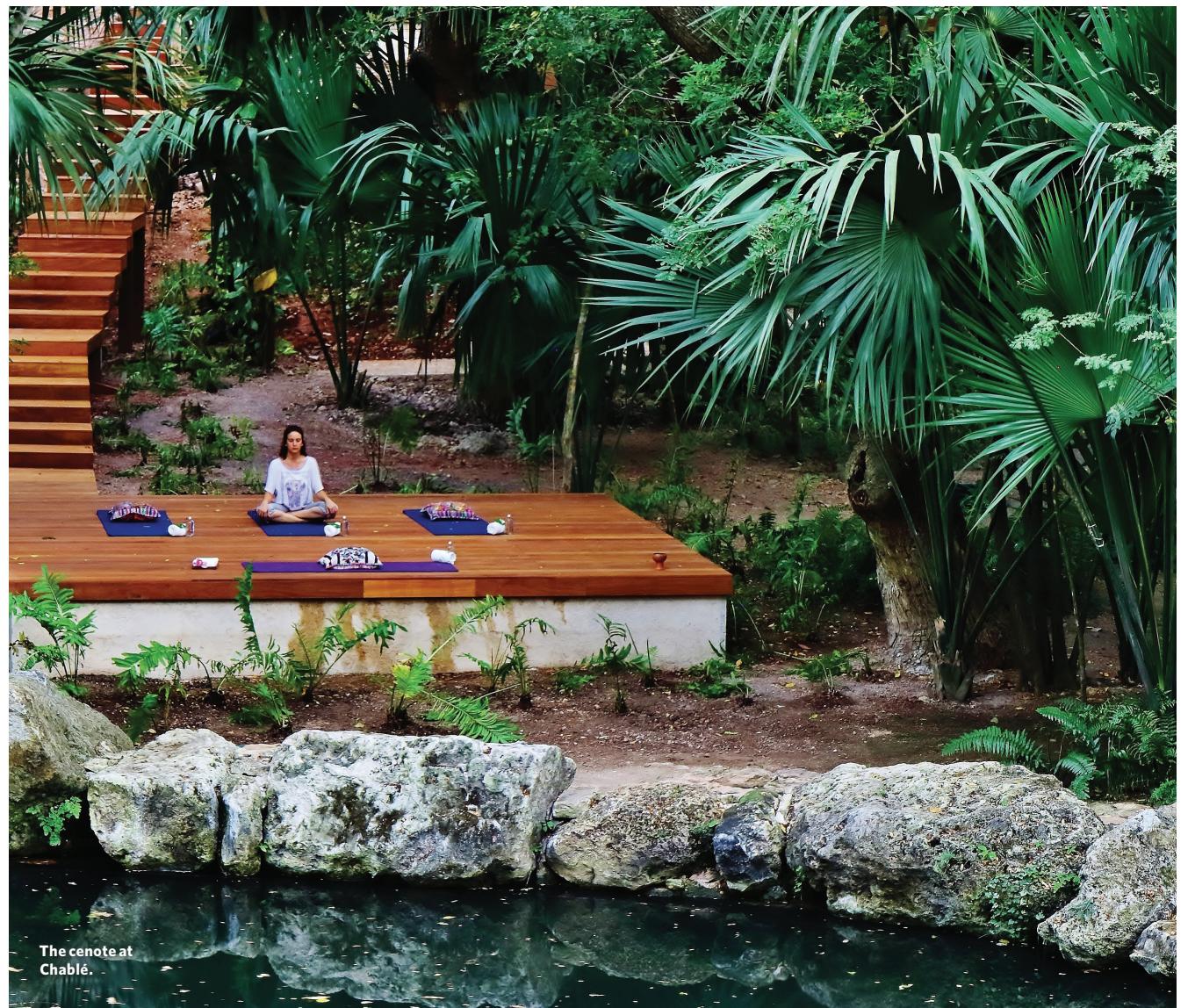


MIDWINTER MAGIC IN MEXICO

Finding rest and relaxation (and a little bit of tequila) in the Yucatán jungle. **BY JENNIFER BUEGE**



IT'S DARK when I make my way across the resort grounds, little more than a sliver of moon lighting my path. As I enter the garden courtyard, my eyes struggle to adjust: It looks as if the sky has fallen. Hundreds of votives flicker on the grass, softly illuminating the intimate space, while a candle-filled chandelier hangs from the branch of a towering tamarind tree. Underneath, a table is set for dinner. The romance of the scene is overwhelming.

Despite the fancy ambiance,

however, the meal is a relaxed affair. Dish after dish highlights ingredients plucked from the resort's *ka'anches*, Mayan raised-bed gardens. I sample stone crab and jicama tacos; a simple yet remarkable salad of melon, tomatoes and purslane drizzled with a vanilla dressing; and a rich and tender duck and bean stew accented with pickled onions and radishes. The finale? A sour prickly pear tart topped with ice cream and a hibiscus foam.

The experience is one of the many surprises that await at Chablé Resort and Spa, located about 45 minutes from Mérida, Mexico. Spread over 750 acres in the Yucatán jungle, the property is the result of a 10-year odyssey that began with the purchase of a rundown 19th-century hacienda. The main house, now the reception and lounge area, has been gorgeously restored—dark wooden beams, colorful handcrafted floor tiles, a wraparound veranda—while each guest casita has risen out of the bones of the former agave plantation's smaller buildings.

Chablé is a wellness resort, but not one that has you counting almonds or steps. Instead, it focuses on holistic wellness—think healing your body with meditation and spa treatments during the day, then treating your palate to high-end cuisine and tequila at night.

While it's tempting to sequester myself in my room, lazing in a hammock with my feet dangling in

the private plunge pool, the menu of activities is too tempting to resist. First up is a yoga class alongside the resort's cenote, one of the freshwater sinkholes considered sacred by the Maya. Birdsong and sunlight filter through the trees, helping set the stage for a little soul R & R.

The cenote is also the heart of the spa, which blends ancient Mayan techniques with modern services. One morning, I meet the resident shaman there, who leads me through a chakra balancing and cleansing. I had been warned that this could be a very emotional experience, but I leave feeling incredibly at peace.

Lunch the last day is hands-on: Doña Eneida has traveled from a nearby village to teach guests how to make tortillas. "Bien, bien," she says as I pat masa into what could be interpreted as a flat round and put it on the hot griddle next to her perfect circles. Regardless of shape, they're a delicious partner for the main course, turkey in a black chili-based sauce.

As I take the final sip of my mezcal cocktail, a Mexican saying that the resort's host had shared during a spirits tasting comes to mind: "Para todo mal, mezcal; para todo bien, también." Roughly translated, it means, "For everything wrong, mezcal; and for everything right, too." After my long weekend of rest and rejuvenation, I feel the same could be said of Chablé. ▶

EDITORS' PICK

Graduate Minneapolis

"We are all students," spelled out in neon lettering, hovers over the lobby of the newly opened **Graduate Minneapolis**. Situated on the University of Minnesota campus, this is the 10th and largest of the hotels in the Graduate's portfolio, each set in a university town. The 304 übercozy rooms boast Norwegian- and Northern Minnesota-inspired décor, while keycards feature notable locals, such as Prince and Judy Garland. Three lobby food carts offer quick bites, or visitors can nosh on pub grub at the onsite restaurant, The Beacon. graduatehotels.com



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