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Inner PEACE

A NEW APPROACH TO WELLNESS, BASED ON SELF LIBERATION AND SLOWING DOWN, BY SANARA TULUM FOUNDER DANIELLA HUNTER

by ALEXANDRA LEE

When holistic healing leader Daniella Hunter made the move from gloomy England to the ever-sunlit beaches of Tulum, opening a barefoot luxury hotel and cult-favorite restaurant wasn't part of the plan. As life would have it, the property fell into her hands and became an unexpected opportunity to spread a philosophy of nutrition, health, and wellbeing to the greater community, and eventually the world. As hotel Sanará Tulum approaches its 10-year anniversary as a celeb-frequented Riviera Maya retreat, Daniella reflects on healthy habits, healing, and what it means to be truly "well."

Thanks to the internet's rising blogger-influencer culture, we live in a wellness-obsessed world. This term wasn't really on the radar until the 2000s—now, it's the media's favorite buzzword. It's everywhere, from your eucalyptus bedsheets, easy-absorption vitamins, and organic skincare to your adaptogen-supplement smoothie—but how do we achieve an end goal? With the motivational energy of a new year, there's no time like the present to deconstruct one fundamental question: *what in the world is wellness?*

Daniella Hunter's philosophy on true wellness is unique, yet broken down it's ultimately basic. There are no three-week

workout plans, no apple cider vinegar shots, no CBD oils or juice cleanses. Wellness, according to Daniella, is not something you can buy or achieve. It's something *you already have*. "We all have access to true wellness, in our sense of being and perspective." All it requires is a mindset shift, liberating ourselves from who we are to where our souls are leading us. She doesn't support forceful manifestations or ultimatums for self-achievement, as our desires are constantly changing. True wellness, or what Daniella refers to as "ultimate healing," is actually "the cure from the delusion of separation of self from spirit."

Daniella had grand manifestations of daily meditation on the beach before her move to Mexico, but she was wrong. "I'm not drawn to the beach, I'm not drawn to needing to sit," she says. Instead, she's drawn to helping indigenous communities in Tulum Pueblo, creating plant-based recipes with Mexican ingredients to eliminate importation. Why? She followed her heart. "I learned more and more that meditation, or the idea of being in true peace, can be anywhere," she says. "It's incredible how liberating it is when I detach myself from what I want, and I allow my spirit to flow." Her philosophy posits peace and healing *beyond* the constraints of identity, where

we are more easily detached from unfortunate circumstances or challenges that may come up.

Mexico's Tulum, known for its eco-chic yogi retreats, whimsical tree-nest restaurants, and detached, nomadic lifestyle, made it the perfect setting for Daniella's holistic wellness hub Sanará. The luxe boutique hotel, whose name translates to "it will heal," is an ultimate destination for those craving proper nourishment, sunrise vinyasa flows, and sound healing in a less-intensive form of retreat. Sanará's tagline is "Welcome Home," because in true Daniella fashion, home is wherever you feel most at peace with yourself. Graced by high-profile visitors including Italian fashion sweetheart Chiara Ferragni, Sanará quickly gained a cult following, majorly due to its sustainable, vegan-friendly restaurant Real Coconut Kitchen.

Without a chef or a plan, Daniella built a restaurant around the motto "nourish yourself, nurture our world," with foods she personally wanted to eat. "I honestly didn't believe that anybody would like the food, I thought we'd have to bring somebody in or change things," she remarks. The restaurant is 80% vegan and entirely gluten, grain, dairy, and corn free, a rarity in a country with many dishes based on tortillas and cheese. "But we didn't really tell people," she jokes, and the visitors kept arriving. "We started realizing that people *wanted* this type of food, and they were appreciative of the alignment of what was on offer."

Real Coconut has a real meaning—the restaurant's vegan cheese, tortillas, chips, and even veggie patties are all derived from coconut, in an achievement of modern sorcery. Nutrition-lacking bread is replaced with plantain or cassava. This menu alone formed the basis for Sanará's wellness packages and treatments, after establishing that people with all dietary preferences and needs, meat eaters and vegans alike, could dine comfortably without leaving the resort. Now, Real Coconut Kitchen has expanded to popular locations in Malibu and West L.A., as its following continues to grow. The goal? Saving the planet, while fueling and nourishing its people. This approach could be the future of food.

Daniella's philosophy on wellness largely stems from a childhood plagued by illness, having suffered from severe asthma and connective tissue disorder. Frequently sitting out

of sports, school, and playdates was her reality—but what anyone else would view as a weakness became her greatest strength. "I would always sit on the sidelines and watch. That helped me to get very, very good at observing and being patient, and looking at the big picture." Even through serious breathing experiences, Daniella would continue to play, unbothered by her own condition. "I didn't experience it as something bad, and that was probably very defining for me. It shaped me, and I was at peace with whatever the process I was going through."

In her definition of true wellness, Daniella points out a common misconception. "Ultimate healing" doesn't have to mean looking for solutions, which constantly implies there's something wrong. Our highly innovative society conditions us to believe that there's always room for improvement, but through her work with indigenous communities in Mexico, Daniella has recognized a fundamental difference in our perspectives. "We're starting to come back to these ideas that working the land, or sitting peeling cassava or being part of a group that's producing flour...that is *honorable* work," she remarks. "That's work that brings peace and community, it keeps people together. There's a sense of beingness which brings forward healing in those types of scenarios." It's all about slowing down and appreciating the often-overlooked role of community in wellness.

Her advice for maintaining healthy habits? "It's all about how you're feeling, and trying to make continued better choices," she says. "It's a very holistic process, and it all stems from that centeredness, because in moments of peace and quiet everything becomes easier." She also recommends one unusual daily supplement: phytoplankton. The tiny single-celled plant is responsible for 50 to 80% of the world's oxygen, and is packed with vitamins, antioxidants, and amino acids beneficial for human consumption.

While Daniella isn't a doctor or therapist, her philosophy on nourishment, slowing down, and searching for inner peace offers insightful answers. For those seeking a wellness refresh, her solutions simply suggest "looking at their overall systems, the way they live their life, and the choices they make, because those are the most important things." She ends on a note of sage advice: "everything else falls into place once you address the core foundation." *

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