

>> TRAVEL

# Disconnecting from wireless distractions

Destination spa in Mexico restricts Wi-Fi so guests can reconnect with themselves

JENNIFER ALLFORD  
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

TECATE, MEXICO—I guess I didn’t read the brochure that carefully. I knew it was a sprawling spa in Mexico with pools, massages and dozens of fitness classes.

I knew there was no booze or meat at dinner and no TVs in the rooms, but when I heard Wi-Fi was restricted at Rancho La Puerta, I began to twitch.

I was on the bus heading south from San Diego and started gorging on my \$5 U.S./day plan, frantically scrolling through Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

I was going to send my kids a Snapchat photo with the rolling hills in the background, but ran out of time before we hit the Mexican border — the land of Wi-Fi or bust.

I took a deep breath and put my phone away.

Rancho La Puerta bans phones everywhere except in your room and in a few lounges where there is Wi-Fi.

Disconnecting is the latest in a long line of health and wellness trends you’ll find at the ranch.

Since it opened in 1940, the spa has done it all, offering the “grape cure” (no, not that one), exercise and breathing classes, and even shallow “Sumerian baths” for sunbathing.

Seventy-five years ago, the spa founders, an eccentric fellow known as ‘the professor’ and his wife Deborah, couldn’t have imagined putting cellphone ‘sleeping bags’ in every room. But there they are.

Deborah Szekely, now 94, advocates putting your phone away and spending time “just you and you.” She spends 20 minutes doing absolutely nothing every single morning.

“You’ll be amazed at what happens when you allow your mind to speak to you,” she says during her weekly presentation.

I’m amazed at how hard it is not reaching for my phone when I wake up. I tell myself I’m too busy for Twitter. Especially in the face of roaming



RANCHO LA PUERTA

Rancho La Puerta, a healthy retreat southeast of San Diego, Calif., offers an array of mindfulness, meditation and fitness classes.

charges outside the Wi-Fi lounges.

The weeklong spa schedule has six or seven options every hour, on the hour. The adventurous select things they’ve never heard of, such as gyro-kinesis (a mash of movements taken from dance, yoga, swimming, t’ai chi and gymnastics), feldenkrais (gentle movements and stretching) or rope class. Others stick to yoga, hiking, pilates or tennis.

Being a Canadian in Mexico in February, I obviously choose activities in the pool. You’d be surprised how much fun it is slapping little life jackets around your ankles and cross-country skiing in the deep end — just ask the couple in H2O Boot Camp with me who are celebrating her 40th birthday.

I also meet groups of sisters and friends, moms and daughters and a guy, about 50, who has been coming every year since the 1980s and admits, a little sheepishly, that it’s a

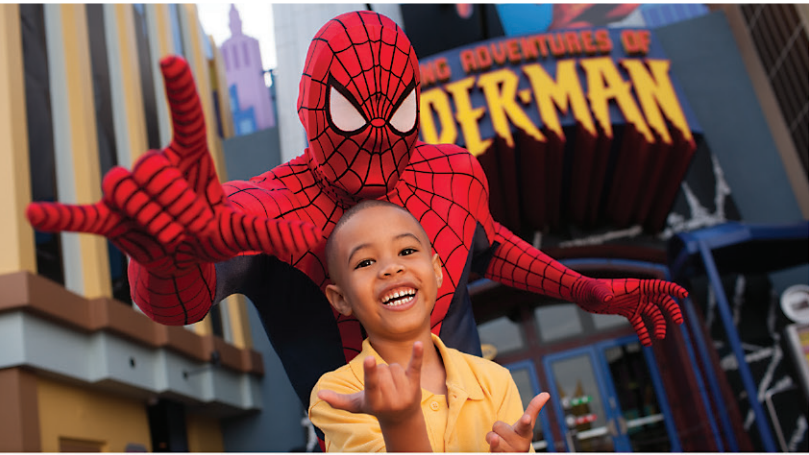
## > WHEN YOU GO

**Getting there:** Fly into San Diego and get on the Rancho La Puerta shuttle at the airport for the hour-long drive to the border. You walk into Mexico and get in a van for the five-minute ride to the spa.  
**Prices:** Weeklong stays at Rancho La Puerta (including three meals a day, dozens of fitness classes, and transportation to and from the San Diego airport) range from \$3,200 to \$4,500 (U.S.), depending on season and type of room. There are also three -or four-day stays available.  
**Details:** rancholapuerta.com.

great place to meet women. It’s like luxury summer camp. You eat with different people in the dining hall. (The food is great, with plen-

**Packing:** If you go in the winter, pack a few extra layers for the early morning hikes. And don’t forget a hat for the hot sun later in the day.  
**Pace yourself:** You could work out 10 hours a day every day, but if you do, you will run out of gas by “Tired Tuesday” and likely collapse in a heap by Thursday. Pick and choose your activities and be sure to save time for doing nothing at all.  
**Don’t worry if you forget a book:** There are magazines, newspapers and books galore.

or Mexican history. You also get to know people on the early morning hikes or wandering the pathways between the gyms and pools. It’s amazing how quickly you adjust to seeing faces looking up instead of down at tiny screens. A few days in, I discover there’s a wine bar tucked away at the top of the property and pencil in time to get to one of the Wi-Fi hot spots. I write a few emails, fake cry on a Snapchat to the kids, and answer a couple of texts. Maybe I’m waterlogged, but I don’t bother checking in to see what people are doing on Facebook or posting on Instagram. I don’t think I care anymore. Besides, the ankle life jackets are waiting for me at the pool. Jennifer Allford travelled as a guest of Rancho La Puerta, which didn’t review or approve this story.



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