

Rancho La Puerta Review

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By [Irvina Lew](#) - April 10, 2018

Since 1940, Rancho La Puerta has been a haven for guests who prefer a fresh, farm-grown, organic, mostly vegetarian diet. For more than 75 years, fitness, wellness and the serenity of nature lured guests to The Ranch, as it is affectionately called. Although there are countless activities, media access is limited and WiFi is only available in four public lounges. What's new since October 2016 are three Villas Cielo (which translates to "heavenly villas") specifically designed for those who need to be connected 24/7.

Founded by Deborah Szekely and her professor-husband Edmond Szekely, The Ranch, located three miles south of the U.S. border in Tecate, Mexico, earned a formidable reputation as one of the world's best destination wellness resorts. During my fourth visit, there this past January, I was delighted to see Ms. Szekely, the 95-year old activist and philanthropist dubbed the "Godmother of the Wellness Revolution," still inspiring guests at her regular weekly talks.



The 4,000-acre venue, of which the Szekely family set aside 2,000 acres as a permanent nature preserve, includes about 150 exquisitely landscaped acres. About 90 Mexican-styled, red-tile roof villas are reached via geranium-bordered, clay-tile paths, over stone bridges and by sculpture-studded sage, rosemary and lavender gardens. Much of the artful design is credited to Ranch president Sarah Livia Szekely Brightwood, daughter of the founders. The village-like complex also houses reception, the dining room, spa facilities for men and women, pools, gyms, pavilions and lounges. Plus, there are other venues: an art studio, library, museum, market, a juice bar plus an espresso and wine bar.

Many villas are secluded, stand-alone structures and measure 1,000 square feet or more. Ours boasted saltilla tile floors and colorful fabric decorations and featured a curved fireplace (tended daily), two sleeping corners, a colorfully tiled mini-service counter (with a filtered water spout, sink and mini-refrigerator), plus a large dressing area and bathroom, both with colorful hand-painted tiles; its sunlit terrace faced Mount Kuchumaa, a National Historic site of sacred importance to Native Americans.

I was able to tour Villa Verde, one of the executive villas, which accommodates a spacious, high-ceilinged living area, a master bedroom and an open second bedroom area furnished with a desk and equipped with a computer, WiFi, a printer and an impressive, in-wall Residential Gym (which folds out Murphy bed-style.) The wrap-around walled terrace boasts an outdoor shower, fountain, a dual lounge and a plunge pool. In addition to all the typical Ranch experiences, Villas Cielo guests enjoy an en-suite spa treatment and en-suite dining on demand.

Meals are predominantly vegetarian with 40–80 percent of the produce grown on site at Tres Estrellas, the six-acre organic farm. There are also eggs, some dairy and catch-of-the-day options from the Pacific, just 25 miles west. The state-of-the-art culinary center, La Cocina Que Canta, is located at the farm and where cooking classes with guest chefs and regularly scheduled breakfast hikes (trek two miles each way or take a van) take place.

Rates (\$3,500–6,000 a person) include transfers from San Diego International Airport; all meals and snacks; and about 50 daily activities. Personal spa services, private training and some individual modalities and cooking classes are priced à la carte.

Rancho La Puerta

Tecate, Baja California,

Mexico 91980

tel 800 443 7565

rancholapuerta.com