

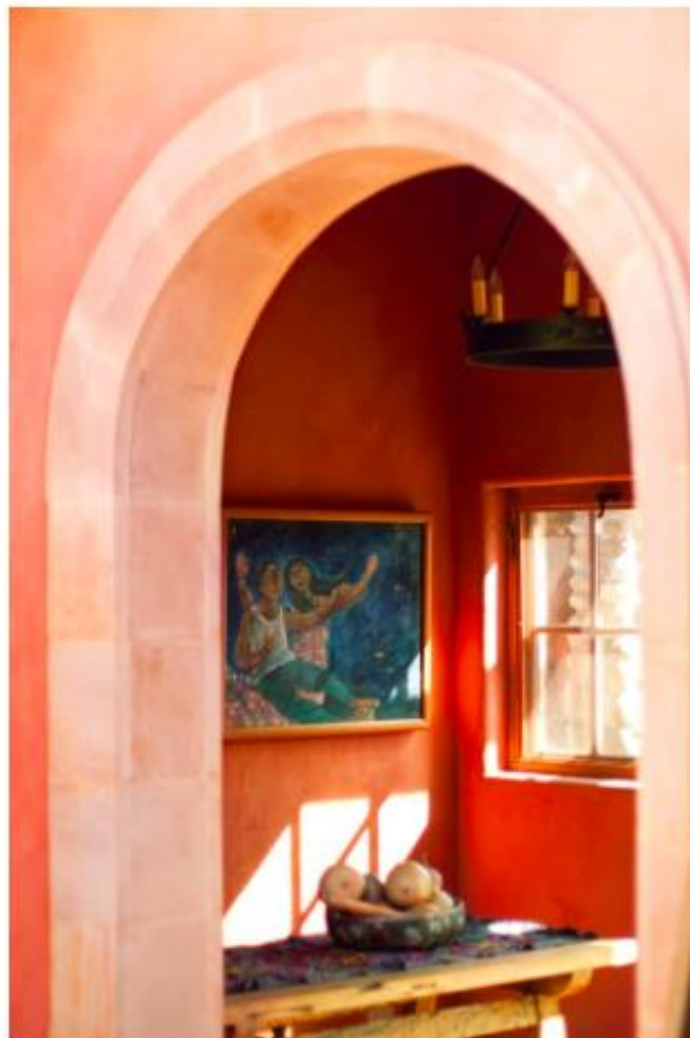


Body-rocking fitness regimes with old-school vigour

The lowdown

When the ranch opened 77 years ago, it cost \$17.50 to pitch your tent and meals were eaten under the Baja Californian skies of the Tres Estrellas kitchen garden. The latter is still there, though now it's a cookery school where you'll learn to make the dishes that 95-year-old founder Deborah Szekely created: jalapeño frittata with courgette flowers and goat's cheese; salads bursting with coriander, squash and the turnip-like jicama, and ricotta cheesecake with wild strawberries. The tents, less surprisingly, have disappeared, replaced by sprawling casitas tucked into a sun-bleached hillside studded with cacti, tall cypresses and succulents the size of small children. Tricked out in local fabrics and bathrooms with hand-painted tiles, their terraces are a sneaky spot for a nightcap (bring a bottle, or perhaps two, as wine is only served at the final fiesta dinner).

Some guests have been returning since shortly after it opened, which gives a clue to the demographic (the same goes for the staff, one of whom has been at the ranch for 67 years). Still, you'll be hard-pushed to find a more energetic and adventure-thirsty bunch. Most come for the hiking, which is out-of-this-world spectacular: dusty, undulating tracks that snake through 300 acres of scrubby, sun-scorched wilderness, bleak and beautiful in the early morning light. New to the offering are the four- to seven-mile running trails, flanked by rosemary, lemon verbena and flannel-soft sage. They're challenging, but a breakfast of picante eggs, slaw and the ranch's famous granola afterwards is a good incentive. Back on site, you can fill your day neatly with 45-minute classes, from tennis and 'pickleball' on pristine hard courts to circuits in a charmingly retro gym.



Rancho La Puerta in Baja California, Mexico
CREDIT: JULIE MIKOS

For something gentler, there are all disciplines of yoga, reformer Pilates and barre, which take place in pretty studios overlooking the vineyards. (Book the 'stretch and mobilise' class, which involves massaging and releasing sore muscles using a tennis ball and feels surprisingly good). By this point you'll probably be shattered, in which case there's yarn painting, sound healing and interesting talks from creative writing to nutrition. Otherwise you can collapse in one of three low-level spas, which feel distinctly Seventies but are perfectly cheery, with tapestries hanging on the walls and murals of birds and flowers. Treatments are no-frills but all the better for it, performed by local therapists who have a polite grasp of English and whose skills lie in traditional techniques (mind-bendingly good reflexology and proper massages using herb-infused oils) and a little bit of what feels like magic – the same quality that weaves around the pergolas, carries the scent of jasmine through the night, sings from the just-picked vegetables on your plate, and which keeps everyone coming back year after year.

INSIDER TIP

You'll live in your gym kit, so pack all the tops, leggings and spare trainers you own. And SPF for those morning hikes.

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BOOK IT

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