

Re-Opening a Destination Spa in the Wake of COVID-19

By [Herve Blondel](#) General Manager, Rancho La Puerta | July 26, 2020



The pandemic has been a wakeup call for many of us. It is a new world where health is more important than ever. People are seeking self-care practices, healthy lifestyles, and green living spaces. They realize that they can no longer put their own wellbeing on hold, or continue to say things like, "I'll start my new fitness regimen tomorrow morning."

Individuals now recognize that taking care of themselves is long overdue, and that they must stop postponing their own wellbeing. I believe people want to listen to their bodies now more than ever. The good news is that going to a resort is like pressing a reset button for your health. Wellness resorts and spas help people become more attuned to

themselves. Before the pandemic many people did not want to take the time to press their reset button, and now they realize they need to do it.

Customization is the key to an unforgettable resort experience. Teach your guests how they can feel their best by providing them with a customized health profile. At Rancho La Puerta, we offer wellness consultations and have a fitness concierge, spa concierge, and nutritionist to help guests create and fulfill their goals. Have guests meet with your team of experts and point them in the direction of what they should do to in terms of fitness classes, spa, diet, and holistic healing treatments to create a personalized list of suggestions to maximize their time on property.



The pandemic has inspired many people to get in shape, and two pillars for success in this arena, include an individual fitness assessment and a healthy diet. Have your fitness concierge assess guests to find out exactly where they are and what they need to do to achieve their goals. One-on-one attention will help guests narrow their focus to get the best results. It is also important to encourage guests to start where they are. They don't need to be like Superman or Superwoman and start their first day of yoga in a level three class.

Encourage guests to ease into the program and grow at their own pace. Make sure that guests do not burnout or injure themselves. Food also plays a critical role in getting in shape. Not one diet is universal and works for everybody, however it is ideal to eat organic and farm-fresh foods. Rancho La Puerta caters to all types of diets, whether it be

pescatarian, gluten free, or vegan. We offer hands-on cooking classes, nutrition lectures, and Ayurveda sessions. My advice for resorts is to encourage guests to find foods and a fitness program that is specifically tailored to their individual bodies.

Always stay in touch with your guests. Even if your hotel or resort is closed, I recommend that you provide guests with meaningful takeaways. Guests have repeatedly told me, "We want to learn something new each time we come to The Ranch and bring it back home with us." It is great to go to resorts, to feel better, and have a vacation to help you get in shape both mentally and physically, but guests should be able to take what they have learned and implement it in their everyday lives. Staying in touch with guests by giving them informative content will keep your property top of mind.

Since the start of the pandemic, The Ranch has been sending out emails filled with everything from self-care tips to fortifying recipes to meditations. We started [Voices of The Ranch](#), a regular Zoom livestream where our Co-Founder, Deborah Szekely, and our Director of Guest Relations and Programming, Barry Shingle, have powerful discussions with Ranch presenters who are experts in a variety of fields. We now bring The Ranch into our guests' homes, and encourage them to keep learning and continue to take care of themselves, even when they are not on property.



In these uncertain times, maintaining a healthy mindset is essential. The Ranch has a rich guest presenter program which covers a range of interesting topics such as history, psychology, psychiatry, music, and culture. It is a melting pot of fascinating information,

and includes a vibrant team of inspirational coaches who lead our Inner Fitness Program. This program guides guests through personal growth and creates meaningful shifts in their lives. Numerous guests have made life changing decisions while at The Ranch: some have chosen to go into early retirement, and others decided to get divorced.

The Inner Fitness Program supports guests along their journeys. In the spirit of offering continued guidance during the pandemic, we launched [The Inner Fitness Online Program](#). Our expert team offers five 90-min. transformational coaching sessions for small groups of eight guests. This creates a community amongst the group members and offers individual attention. It is another way people can experience The Ranch at home in a time when mental health is paramount.

When it comes to preventing the spread of COVID-19, my advice is to put yourself in your guest's shoes and a doctor's shoes. We asked what are our guests fears and desires? How can we go above and beyond the CDC requirements? My team considered what guests will see on a daily basis, and what guests will not see. We have to strike a balance between showing the guests what we do to keep them safe, while keeping other procedures behind the scenes.

For example, we will deep clean gyms, spas, and all spaces around The Ranch every night. Guests will not see the ultraviolet lights we added to the air conditioning systems or ice machines. Rooms will be sanitized with a nebulizer while the guest is not present, and this can be done on a daily basis if guests requests it. All high-contact items (i.e. room keys) must be sanitized, but it does not mean guests need to watch us sanitize them. We considered these factors as we reimagined the entire guest journey, starting from the minute we greet guests at the airport.

Before we bring people to the property we will take guests' temperatures, but what happens if they have a fever? Our team is ready to provide individuals with information about local urgent care centers. When we transport guests from the airport to the border, we will have limited capacity and social distancing of 25 people on a 45-person bus, and everyone will need to wear a facial covering. Once in Mexico, we will take guests directly to The Ranch and sanitize their luggage. We will have special seals on the casitas to indicate that the room has been thoroughly cleaned, sanitized, and disinfected before guest use. When we take guests to their casitas, they will break these seals.



The Ranch experience will be different yet quintessentially The Ranch experience; we no longer will have an open buffet, and we will have socially distanced meals. Guests will notice 17 new touchless hand-washing stations installed around The Ranch so everyone can easily wash their hands for the famous 20-seconds. Using hand sanitizer 20 or 30 times a day is not ideal for skin, and we felt that these hand-washing stations were better and more efficient. Our staff will do its part in a respectful way, and we expect guests to do their part in terms of social distancing and hygiene. It is a new way of life, and everybody has to step up into that.

Spa is another part of The Ranch experience that has been transformed. Guests will fill out their spa consultation forms before they arrive on property. There will be 30-min. between spa treatments to allow time to sanitize the treatment rooms. Lockers will be sanitized after use, and spa facilities will be socially distanced. Guests will need to sign up for the saunas, and our staff will sanitize them after. The steam rooms will be closed, and the hot tubs will be socially distanced. Our spa therapists will wear masks, face shields, and/or gloves, depending on the treatment. The Ranch is currently closed, but when we reopen we plan to follow the spa requirements for both California, USA, and Mexico. At that time we will fine tune our procedures to ensure our guests' safety and comfort.

My advice for hotel leaders it to always take excellent care of your staff; treat them like guests. Everyone is important and deserves respect. I believe that when you take care of your staff, they will give it back. Recognize each individual; do not miss even one person,

because this will impact you. In this new world, ensure that staff are aware of the new protocols and have the right tools to do their jobs. Our staff are eager and excited to return to work. They miss their community and even guests whom they consider friends.

Rancho La Puerta has been in business, with success, for 80 years, and our culture has always been to listen to the guests. When guests want to see changes, The Ranch changes. We adapt. All that has come with this pandemic has inspired a rebirth for Rancho La Puerta. I look forward to seeing how our guests react to The Ranch 2.0.



Mr. BlondelHerve Blondel is the General Manager of Rancho La Puerta. He brings 28 years of multicultural hospitality experience to the Ranch from numerous properties including Mandarin Oriental, Hotel Nikko, Starwood Luxury Collection and Accor Hotels in Europe, as well as boutique hotels including Joie de Vivre Hospitality and Leading Hotels of the World. Mr. Blondel has worked in many countries including Spain, France, England, Mexico, Venezuela and the US. He speaks English, Spanish, and French fluently. He holds a cooking degree from the Ecole Ferrandi in Paris, as well as a degree in computer sciences and management from the Ecole de la Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie in Paris. Mr. Blondel can be contacted at 619-255-7069 or rlp@jpublicrelations.com Please visit <http://www.rancholapuerta.com/> for more information.Extended Biography