



Courtesy Rancho La Puerta

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## As Travel Returns, Wellness Retreats Are Focusing on a Major Luxury: Sleep

*Programs dedicated to improving sleep aren't new—but travelers' need for them is more acute than ever.*

BY DEBRA KAMIN

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Guests traditionally arrive at [Rancho La Puerta](#), a fitness and spa retreat in the mountains of Baja California, on a Saturday, and settle in for a full week of vegetarian food, sunrise hikes, and classes to sharpen both their physical and mental fitness. But lately, they have another goal: getting a good night's sleep.

As a working mom of twin girls, I'm no stranger to a lack of sleep. But the past year has been different: With preschool shut for my girls, now 5, the fragile lines dividing family and work dissolved completely; at night, the swirling vortex of my mental load woke me on the hour. And I'm far from alone. [COVID-19](#) has wrecked our sleep schedules, with [studies showing](#) that we're tossing and turning more than usual thanks to stress generated by the pandemic. Experts have even given the anxiety-induced wakefulness that we're all feeling its own name: *coronosomnia*.

Hotels and wellness resorts are responding in turn, forging their own strategies to help travelers figure out how to fix their sleep schedules. Not only are they doubling down on pre-pandemic offerings—like kitting out guest rooms with custom bedding and incorporating aromatherapy spa rituals into their slate of treatments—they're also rolling out new programs specifically designed to soothe our pandemic-rattled psyche so that drifting off becomes a breeze.

“We've experienced a level of stress that on a global scale has never been experienced before,” says Natalie Moore, LMFT, a holistic therapist in [Los Angeles](#). “Everyone was affected one way or another, even if they didn't get sick or lose a loved one. And with so many people working from their beds or bedrooms and not as much separation between work and home life, the mind and body have become confused, which can cause our sleep and wake hormones to not release at the times they should.”



Rancho La Puerta Courtesy Rancho La Puerta

While the search for repose has been top of mind during the pandemic, says Jill Thiry, a life coach and teacher who works in guest services at Rancho La Puerta, guests have been coming to the resort to reset and rejuvenate for 80

years. In February 2020, just before the pandemic shut down travel in both [California](#) and Mexico, the ranch debuted a 21-Day Perfect Balance Sabbatical, an intensive three-week program that offers guests a chance to experience the full range of the resort's signature wellness offerings with a personalized guide—with the added luxury of time to help it all sink in. “It takes 20 to 30 days to form a habit, and three weeks gives you time to really change the practices in your life,” says Thiry.

The offering came in response to a growing cadre of guests looking to extend their stays beyond the traditional week-long stint. When the ranch reopened in September 2020, after the initial wave of lockdowns, they reworked its programming so that sleep-aid was a top priority, adding classes like “Computer Vision and the Effects of Blue Light and Sleep” to help guests reset after a year spent on Zoom calls and email. Thiry, who says she wasn't at all surprised by the outpouring of need, sits down with each sabbatical attendee to set an intention for their stay, then checks in weekly on their progress.

“When you go on vacation, usually you're just getting settled in and it's time to leave,” says Teri Levin, a paralegal and mom of two, who was one of the first guests to participate in the sabbatical program. “With the sabbatical, I spent time meditating and healing my psyche. I've always been a caretaker. Spending three weeks totally focusing on myself enabled me to cope better with the pandemic.”

My own detox started in my ranch-style casita room, where I was directed to tuck my iPhone into a “cell phone sleeping bag” left on my night stand, adorned with a note encouraging me to disconnect completely. It's not mandatory, but the experience at the ranch is meant to be screen- and distraction-free.

I'll admit it: I cheated, sneaking regular peeks at my WhatsApps and emails. But after a day with significantly less screen time, I slept more soundly than I have in months. And good thing I did, because mornings at Rancho La Puerta start with 6 a.m. mountain hikes, followed by classes like pilates, pickleball, and meditation. The ranch's philosophy is that sleep is connected to all aspects of wellness: physical, mental, and spiritual. For nights of deeper and more restorative slumber, guests should fill their days with classes that address each of those tenets.

Rancho La Puerta isn't alone in padding its wellness offerings with programs to help guests restore the sleep they lost during the pandemic. This past February, San Diego's [Rancho Valencia Resort & Spa](#) unveiled "Sleep Suites" outfitted with Bryte beds that track a guest's sleep and have a gentle-wake feature with temperature and light to simulate natural sunrise. And as of late 2020, [The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island](#) now offers Yoga Nidra, an ancient practice that is often referred to as "yogic sleep."



Montage Palmetto Bluff is hosting its first sleep-focused Well Living Weekend this summer. Courtesy Montage Palmetto Bluffs

"After the stresses of last year, many people can't sleep because they can't slow their body and minds down," said Gary Virden, the spa director at The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island. Yoga Nidra, which puts guests in a deep meditative state, is taught to guests as a tool to combat this. "With practice, guests can train themselves to enter a state of relaxation to stop the mind from racing, which hinders sleep."

[Montage Palmetto Bluff](#), meanwhile, a sprawling luxury resort in South Carolina's low country, has called in author and New Age figure Deepak Chopra, who will headline a first-ever Well Living Weekend this July; the line-up includes lectures, sound baths, and more, designed to reset the mind and restore the body's balance.

"People are scared all over the world, so it's really important to address mental wellbeing," Chopra told me over the phone. "Everybody needs help."

I called Chopra from Rancho La Puerta, where I had just finished an acupuncture session. I had to dial out from the ranch offices—one of the few spots with a cell signal and WiFi. And to my own surprise, I couldn't wait, as soon as we hung up, to click off my phone and slip it back into its sleeping bag.