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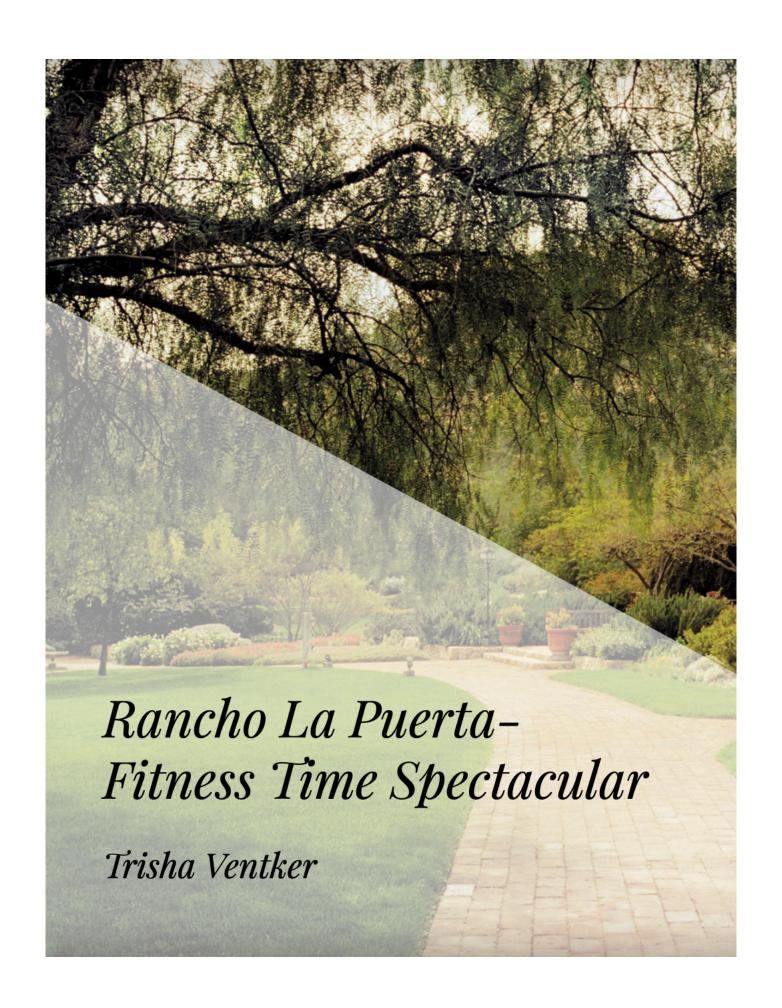
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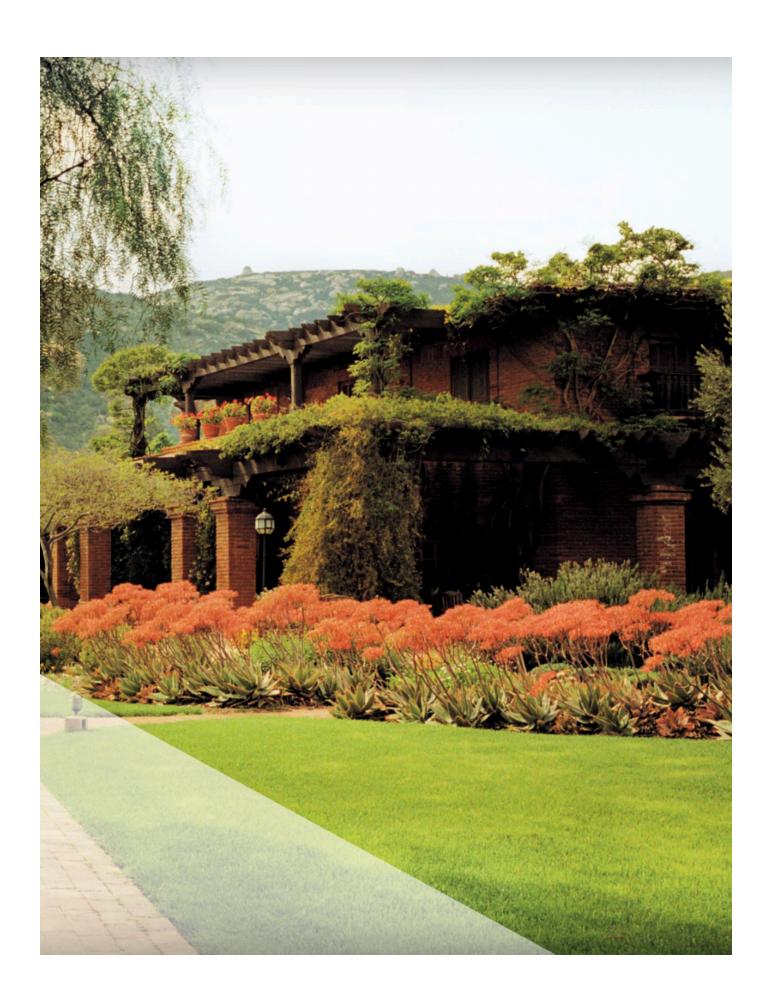
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Rancho La Puerta - Fitness Time Spectacular

Trisha Ventker

Amongst the steamy world of fitness centers, Rancho La Puerta proudly stands alone, not on a fancy pedestal, but in a yoga position gathering her eager guests in a warm embrace, offering them a light assuring kiss on the neck, and heart-warming encouragement while instructing them to breathe deeply, expand the rib cage, tighten the waistline, and make their minds and bodies better places to be.

I had read about the famed Rancho La Puerta and greatly excited, I will finally experience the queen of fitness centers. The Ranch is a short three miles from the U.S. border in Baja and 45 miles southeast of San Diego. With my magazine's creative and talented beauty expert, Tiaja Pierre, we flew to San Diego where transportation was waiting to drive us to the border, passports required. We drove past Tecate, an earthy, easy going Mexican border town noted as the home of Tecate Beer, and entered Rancho La Puerta. My first impressions of the fitness center is it's not a Ranch at all but a glorious desert garden, appearing as if an artist magically swept a paint brush saturated with the colors of the rainbow across the high desert landscape leaving a living work of art to be cherished.

Finding A Sense Of Solace

The magnificent and sequestered 4,000-acre oasis of gardens and pastures is tucked away at the base of Mt. Kuchumaa. Straddling the U.S. Mexico border, the summit rising to 3,885-feet, the mountain is the first physical geological feature in the United States to be recognized as a National Historic Site. But most importantly, considered a sacred site for healing and peace by the Kumeyaay people. Boulder-strewn, the mountain is flanked by an astonishing 40 miles of hiking and walking trails, a six acre working organic farm delivering garden-fresh fruit, herbs, and vegetables to the Rancho La Puerta kitchen, and appropriately the location of the Culinary Center and the Ranch's admired Cooking School. We shared a garden-like hacienda-style casita that was carefully placed with a view of Mt. Kuchumaa, designed with tile floors, beamed ceilings, Mexican art, wood burning fireplace, and two beds draped with quality linens and comfy robes too. I adored the patio where you can sit quietly, reflect and meditate, and feel the goodness of the setting. A perfect sanctuary for me and a world removed. Thankfully, a television and radio are not to be found, fluttering songbirds, owls, and roaming coyotes, supply the desert night music, which is a lovely timeless serenade. The Ranch, as the fitness center is affectionately called, has a sweetness that permeates the air, and a warm feeling of community. For the guests, many of whom are repeat visitors, the emphasis is not on losing weight during the week but improving eating habits, and lifestyles. A week here avoids a month in the hospital, and it's a pause in time to find yourself, and reset your body and mind.

Rancho La Puerta - Fitness Time Spectacular

The World's First Fitness Spa

In 1940 founders Edmond and Deborah Szekely named the spa in Spanish, "Ranch of the Door" for two massive oak trees that were once the door and entrance to the original meager beginnings. Ingenious health and spa visionaries, and eons ahead of their time, the Szekely's built what is often referred to as the world's first authentic and far-reaching spa. The Ranch has been a smash throughout the years with more awards than walls to display them. They also opened the upscale and acclaimed Golden Door in 1958 in northern San Diego County as a sister spa.

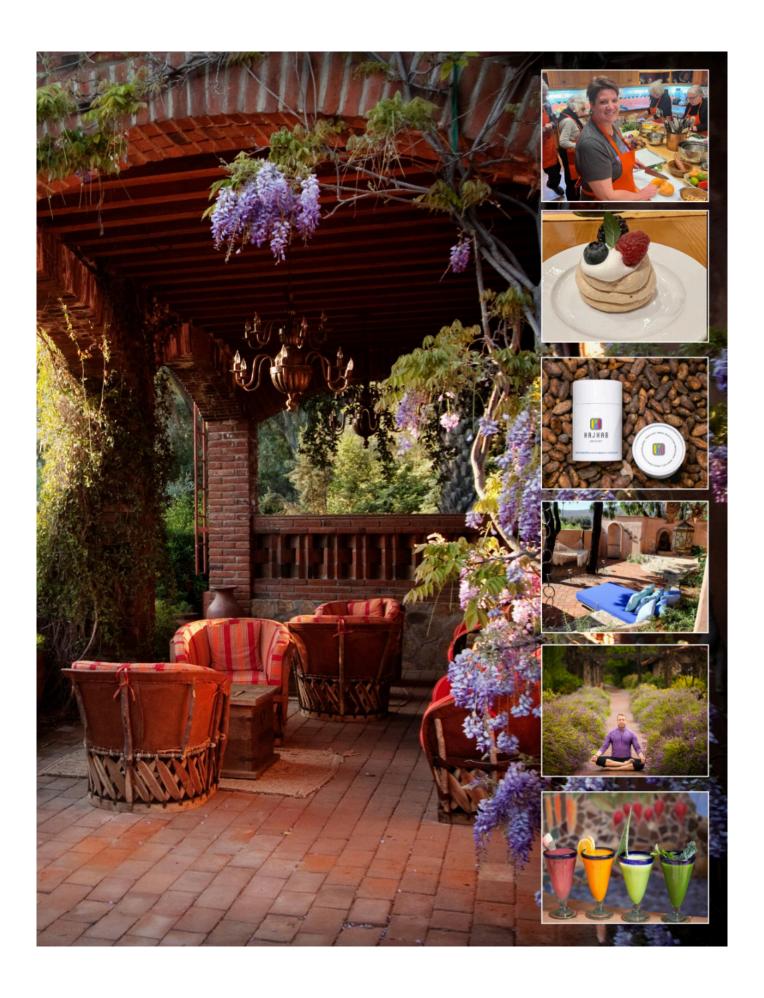
When we checked in for the week we received a Programming Sheet listing classes and activities, with times and locations, and hiking choices for all levels. With fresh confident spirits we interpreted the character of a new day. I quickly realized that Rancho La Puerta is far removed from the typical spa. They offer wide-ranging organic and holistic skincare and spa treatments with highly trained masseurs, their own line of sustainably harvested plants and herbs, 47 treatment rooms for wraps of heated linens immersed in indigenous herbs, aromatherapy scrubs, facials and scalp therapies, but the spa treatments are only a touch of the modern day Shangri-La. The Ranch is a nature-lovers dream geared towards guests who want to unplug, decompress, and focus on health and fitness within a natural venue.

Movement Uppermost

An instructor shared with us that movement and an active lifestyle is a top component for a lifetime of good health. There is a voluminous selection of fitness classes, hikes, and water programs such as Water Jogging, Holistic Water Therapies, and Swim Clinic in addition to Pickleball, presentations about psychology, activities and consultations.

Throughout the Saturday-to-Saturday week there are 50 different indoor and outdoor innovative classes, such as Pilates with Reformers and mats, yoga, T'ai Chi, aqua exercise classes, strength training with or without weights, cardio-cycling, circuit training, dance classes, stretch and posture, breathing, and so much more. We were informed that the Ranch offers five classes every hour on the hour from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., each day of the seven-night booking, if you so desire, and some are sequential to advance a guest's skills. Each day, with movement in mind, we walked three to four miles, the sun beating a quick ceaseless tempo. With the turn of a leaf, I could smell rich streams of scents in the yielding soil, the air tasting spicy and fresh. A bird sending a song faraway in the silence, while the mountain secretive against an intense deep blue sky. One morning with brilliant threads of sunlight, Tiaja raved about her three hour, Seven-Mile Mountain Breakfast Hike over steep, mountain terrain, with a delightful breakfast break.

We both enjoyed numerous classes and presentations. Among those were a fun and easy to follow Hip Hop class and a presentation titled "It All Starts With You" by Denise M. Dudley, a trainer, author, business consultant and founder of Skill Path Seminars. Additional highpoints were a chocolate class titled Bean to Bar, by Diego Ceballos, originally from Caracas, Venezuela, and with years in the world of chocolate, he enlightened us the intricate details of how cocoa is grown, harvested and processed.



Rancho La Puerta - Fitness Time Spectacular

One evening at La Cocina Que Canta, the Ranch's large cooking school and culinary center set in the heart of their organic farm, we joined a cooking class led by Chef Palma Bellinghieri, born in Mexico City, who studied in Montreux, Switzerland. and the daughter of famed Sicilian born Chef Alfredo Bellinghieri who cooks in "Alfredos", his renowned Mexico City restaurant. Chef Palma, award honored, specializes in vegetarian cooking and shares her expertise both at the Ranch and in San Diego. Palma is a delightful teacher with tips and technique to remember.

Fearless Dining

The Ranch's cuisine, breakfast, lunch and dinner, was another feel-good experience for me, my body frequently whispering to me, thank you. Most of the food is grown on the ranch farm and hand-picked. Everything was fresh, healthy, and quite delicious although my body did go through a little sugar detox. The entree servings are mostly organic vegetarian with a choice of seafood, five times a day, sourced from the local Ensenada, Mexico fish market, a two hour drive from the Ranch. An unusual event is the weekly Silent Dinner, meaning no conversation at the table, not even, pass the water, but with background sounds from crystal bowls that focus on the physical and mindfulness center of the body.

I found the balance of mind, body and spirit is truly in place at the Ranch, and it's exhilarating to report Rancho La Puerta deserves it's high ranking and many awards. For me it was a week of well-being and healthy thoughts that hopefully I can retain for a lifetime.

Of Note

The Ranch is planning to build on their 4,000-acre land, 108 custom, Mexican-style private homes encompassing sustainability, lush landscaping, and following a legacy of health and wellbeing.

rancholapuerta.com

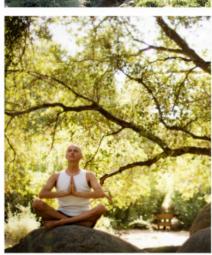


















Connect with what really matters

Pack your sun hats, bring your hiking boots, and leave your stresses behind. Rancho La Puerta is the perfect place for outdoor adventures with friends and healing spa treatments. Here, each glorious day offers an array of fitness classes, entertainment, introspective discoveries, farm-fresh cuisine, and relaxation.



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