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Inside Rancho La Puerta, The Baja California Resort That Pioneered The Wellness Movement

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Aug 4, 2023, 08:00am EDT



Rancho La Puerta has four swimming pools to help guests relax after a day full of fitness classes ...

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All the online research I did before a recent weeklong stay at [Rancho La Puerta](#) left me a bit skeptical. After encountering one glowing review after another, I wasn't sure how an all-inclusive resort serving mostly vegetables (and no alcohol), offering peculiar-sounding activities like Feldenkrais, and mostly absent of Wi-Fi and other modern-day comforts like televisions maintained such a high repeat guest rate.

Here's the thing: to understand the enduring appeal of the Ranch, as the regulars call it, you need to be there. Because as with countless others, it didn't take long to see why the 4,000-acre retreat cradled at the foot of Mount Kuchumaa founded by Deborah Szekely and her late husband Edmond in 1940 has been a haven for generations of people seeking peace, privacy, and a lifestyle reboot.



Rancho La Puerta's 86 casitas are thoughtfully decorated with cooling ceramic tiles, handmade wooden ...
[+] RANCHO LA PUERTA

My shoulders dramatically dropped as I stepped into Luna 12, my home for the week and one of [86 casitas](#), tranquil abodes done up with cooling ceramic tiles, hand-carved wood furnishings, and colorful local artwork for a distinct sense of place. I also was pleased as punch to be set up in one of the few accommodations with Wi-Fi—like most freelance writers, I don't have the privilege of not working for a week—and impressive air conditioning, a must in Baja California's searing summer heat.



Aerial yoga is one of Rancho La Puerta's more unique fitness and wellness offerings. SCOTT DRAPER

Any fears about going solo melted when I saw how friendly the staff and fellow guests were. During the second day, I met three radical women from the Bay Area (25-time-visitor Lee, Cyndi, who was on her seventh stay, and two-timer Laura) who immediately welcomed me into their friend group. The trio couldn't be any more different in terms of personalities, but kept coming back to Rancho La Puerta for the same reason: to disconnect from the stressors of everyday life, and tap into a more healthful rhythm that suited their individual needs.



The Organic Garden Breakfast Hike is one of Rancho La Puerta's most famous activities. RANCHO LA PUERTA

Herein lies the magic of the Ranch: your way is the right way. The [daily calendar](#) may be jam-packed with classes, lectures, and activities, but you're encouraged to move at your own pace, which can change from day to day. Lee, for example, rose at the crack of dawn for the famous Organic Garden Breakfast Hike and other hikes, while Laura preferred leisurely afternoons at the resort's [spa centers](#) with locally-inspired treatments like the Mountain Sage Hot Stone Massage. I found my sweet spot combining pre-lunch three-mile jogs with a couple of low-intensity classes, like the previously mentioned Feldenkrais (a gentle reminder to listen to my body more) and foam rolling recovery sessions, before rewarding myself at the spa to end the day.



The fresh fruits and vegetables served at Rancho La Puerta are sourced from Tres Estrellas Organic ...
[+] RANCHO LA PUERTA

Because 101-year-old Szekely is a lifelong vegetarian and believes whole, plant-based ingredients are the key to longevity, the [kitchen](#) cooks up simple, homey, and nutritionally-dense meals based on a lacto-ovo pescatarian diet. Expect a ton of fresh fruits and vegetables from the Ranch's Tres Estrellas Organic Farm, some sustainable seafood, and slow-burning carbs. Everything is served in the main dining hall, with breakfast—I especially loved the beans, corn tortillas, and fresh salsa bar—and lunch prepared cafeteria style, while dinner is a sit-down affair of a starter, salad, choice of two entrees (ask for a combo if you want to try both), and dessert. Though alcohol is not permitted with meals, the resort lounge Bazar Del Sol pours wines by the glass from neighboring Guadalupe Valley.



Meals at Rancho La Puerta are the perfect way to meet and connect with other guests. LYNNE HARTY

If eating here sounds a tad restrictive, you're not alone. But as someone who very regularly enjoys pizza, desserts, and alcohol, I was surprised at how easily my body adjusted to the Ranch's way of life. While I definitely had cravings beyond what the kitchen served, they were totally manageable. On top of that, I can't remember sleeping as soundly—and early, which is rare for me as night owl—as I did those first few nights. But it's the people I met and the conversations we shared that were my biggest takeaways.



Rancho La Puerta's 4,000-acre grounds offer a stunning mix of flora and fauna, and plenty of space ...
[+] RANCHO LA PUERTA

Meals with Liz, an attorney from Alaska, were especially memorable. She proudly served in the Army, lived in Korea for several years—we bonded over our love of Seoul and Korean cuisine—and was a fellow progressive. In between handling cantankerous divorce negotiations and fighting for women's reproductive rights in our nation's capital, Liz didn't just need, but deserved a place of rest and renewal. And that's exactly what Rancho La Puerta is: a singular destination that defies definition and trends, and allows you to invest in yourself in a deeply personal and profound way.

** 2023 rates for [one-week visits](#) kicking off each Saturday start at \$5,150 per person plus tax for solo travelers, and \$4,650 per person plus tax for double occupancy. In addition to three-, four-, and seven-night stays, there are seasonal and promotional savings packages and group rates.*

There's also themed weeks like Culinary Week—this year's event just wrapped, but is being held annually—and [Detox and Cleansing Week](#), which is occurring November 4 through 11.