Condé Nast Traveler



Scott Draper

WELLNESS & SPAS

If a Silent Retreat Is Too Much, Ease Into the Trend With a Silent Dinner

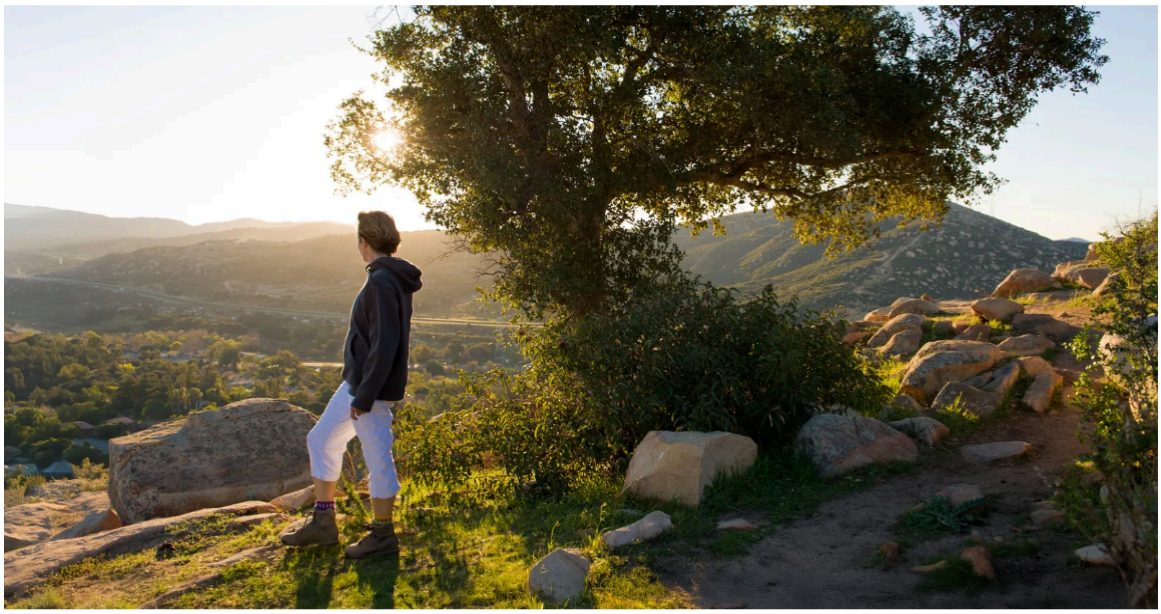
During a five-course silent dinner at Rancho La Puerta, travel writer Lara Kramer learned to settle into the silence.

BY LARA KRAMER

October 13, 2026

The awkwardness settled over the room almost immediately, heavy enough to suppress the uncomfortable smile tugging at my cheeks as I looked around from stranger to stranger. I had, after all, signed up for a seat at this 90-minute, five-course meditative meal with 16 people I'd never met, and had agreed to do it all without sharing a single word. But knowing you're about to break bread in absolute silence and actually finding yourself seated at a rectangular table that looked vaguely reminiscent of a *Game of Thrones* feast, with the sounds of forks scraping plates, throats being cleared, the seconds ticking by on the wall clock—and most importantly, nothing else—are two very different things.

While this might sound like torture to some people, all 16 of us had willingly volunteered to participate in Rancho La Puerta's iconic Silent Dinner, a complimentary event the wellness hotel has been hosting for at least 15 years. And we're not the only ones intrigued by the idea of adding quiet experiences into our vacations. Hilton's 2026 Trends Report identified "hushpitality" as one of the year's emerging travel trends, highlighting a growing desire among travelers to seek out destinations and experiences that help turn down the noise of everyday life and embrace moments of quiet. At the Ranch, that philosophy has long been woven into the guest experience, from onsite labyrinths and silent meditation sessions to sunrise mountain hikes, all free of man-made noise. In our small private indoor dining room in the mountainous countryside of Tecate, Baja California, the absence of noise wasn't simply the backdrop to dinner; it was the main course.



Lynne Harty

Once our guide rang the bell, the rules of the evening were officially in effect. To request something from our waiter—more butter, a straw—we had to find other ways to communicate. (When I wanted an extra slice of bread, I raised my arm and mimed slicing a loaf across the palm of my hand; thanks to my incredible thespian skills, the waiter understood.) Some guests closed their eyes throughout the meal. Others ate with their hands. Phones, already highly discouraged outside of your private guest room at the Ranch, were not allowed at the dinner at all. Instead, the various knickknacks sprinkled across our communal table offered a form of entertainment. At one point, I turned to the three-eyed ceramic creature nearest me and swiveled it around so that we were watching each other, the extra company a welcome distraction from fighting my nervous laughter that was desperate to give any explosion of sound to the evening.



Courtesy Rancho La Puerta



Scott Draper

It wasn't until the third course was whisked away, a delightful black bean soup, that I started to settle into my chair, less interested in whether my neighbor was cringing at the sound of me slurping from my spoon and more attuned to the way my mind started to pleasantly wander. As a mother with a toddler at home in New York, my life is rarely graced with stillness. Usually, I like it that way. However, in this pocket of reprieve, where nobody needed anything from me, nobody could reach me, and I had only the vantage point of my own self for 90 whole, consecutive minutes, part of me started to shift. My shoulders fell away from my ears, I breathed deeper, and the voice in my head went from rattling through my endless to-do list to something closer to reflection. Without my brain sprinting forward, I recounted a favorite line from a book I'd read last summer that I'd written down in my Notes app and promptly forgot entirely. A montage of images of my daughter's childhood sauntered by, and the ending to an article I was working on simply came to me, my writer's block annihilated so immediately that the moment felt anticlimactic. I wasn't trying to do anything in particular, I just *was*. And in that was-ness, silence became an opportunity to listen, make connections, and offer surprises. When the bell tolled 90 minutes later, I wasn't the only one to involuntarily jolt from my cocoon of calm.



Courtesy Rancho La Puerta

Rancho La Puerta

READERS' CHOICE AWARDS 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2025, 2026

Located on 4,000 acres in Tecate, Baja California, Mexico, just a few miles from the US border, Rancho La Puerta has been a wellness destination since 1940, when founders Deborah and Edmond Szekely set out to open a summer health camp near San Diego.

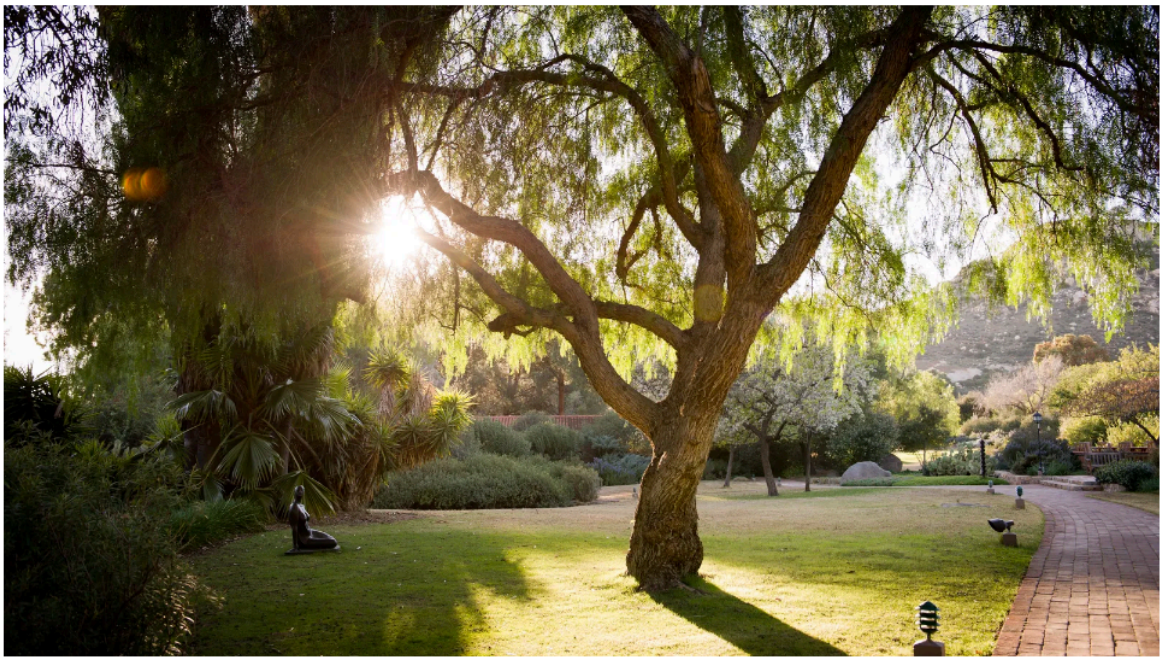
Read Full Review

CHECK AVAILABILITY AT EXPEDIA

CHECK AVAILABILITY AT HOTELS.COM

All of us stayed after to share our observations with the group. One of the women said she'd never smiled at so many people in a room before. An older gentleman said he had pretended like he had been sharing a meal with his late wife, which prompted his neighbor to lean over and give him a hug. Our guide thanked the person next to her who helped interpret her request for salt, the two having worked together to signal the desire to the waiter. Without conversation to fill the space between us, we became more attuned to each other—and to ourselves. Silence, it turned out, wasn't isolating us; it was offering us a different way to connect.

As our evening concluded, nobody rushed to leave. People lingered, trading observations and phone numbers. During the dinner, we had all retreated into our own little worlds, but we left having, somehow, shared one.



Lynne Harty

Other hotels where travelers can embrace the quiet:

- **Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise**: Quiet the noise at Basin, the property's thermal bathing facility, and run, do not walk, to book the transformative Aufguss experience led by the on-site sauna master. It's a multisensory sauna experience designed around heat, scent, breath, and ritual. Their guided silent hike around Lake Louise is another highlight.
- **Olympic Spa Hotel:** Go for the Dolomites Sleep Retreat where the absence of noise, reduced light pollution, and pure mountain air are designed to help you improve your natural sleep cycle.
- **Eremito:** At this contemporary hermitage in the Umbrian countryside, there is no Wi-Fi, television, or mobile signal in the rooms. Instead, the experience is built around reading, nature, reflection, and—perhaps most radically—nothing in particular.