

This Wellness Retreat Is the Best Thing for Burned-Out Workers

A mental health must.



Written by

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As a full-time freelance journalist, my work-life balance is admittedly lopsided. (Or non-existent? Honestly, your call.) I absolutely love what I do and am always enthusiastic to say an emphatic yes to new assignments and opportunities; however, that often makes it hard to step away from my laptop and just be—*especially* when I'm traveling. Whether it's for business or personal, I'm often traveling and you can usually find me holed up somewhere with a strong WiFi connection. ([A pool!](#) A cute café! From the comfort of my Airbnb!) I don't mind working on-the-go—the flexibility is one of the best parts about being your own boss—but I often wonder if there could be a better way to strike an actual balance. My stress levels and [mental health](#) would certainly appreciate it!



So when I was invited to attend a four-day stay at [Rancho La Puerta](#), I was excited, but admittedly nervous. Nestled 46 miles southeast of [San Diego](#) in Tecate, Mexico, the wellness retreat prioritizes connection: With the mind, the body, others... but not exactly with the internet. In fact, in order to keep its attendants feeling present, the 4,000-acre property only has a few spots with WiFi connectivity including the lobby and a business center. (Not even the dozens of hotel rooms, or "casitas," had a connection. "Shoot," I thought to myself as I looked at my laundry list of assignments and emails to complete during my stay.

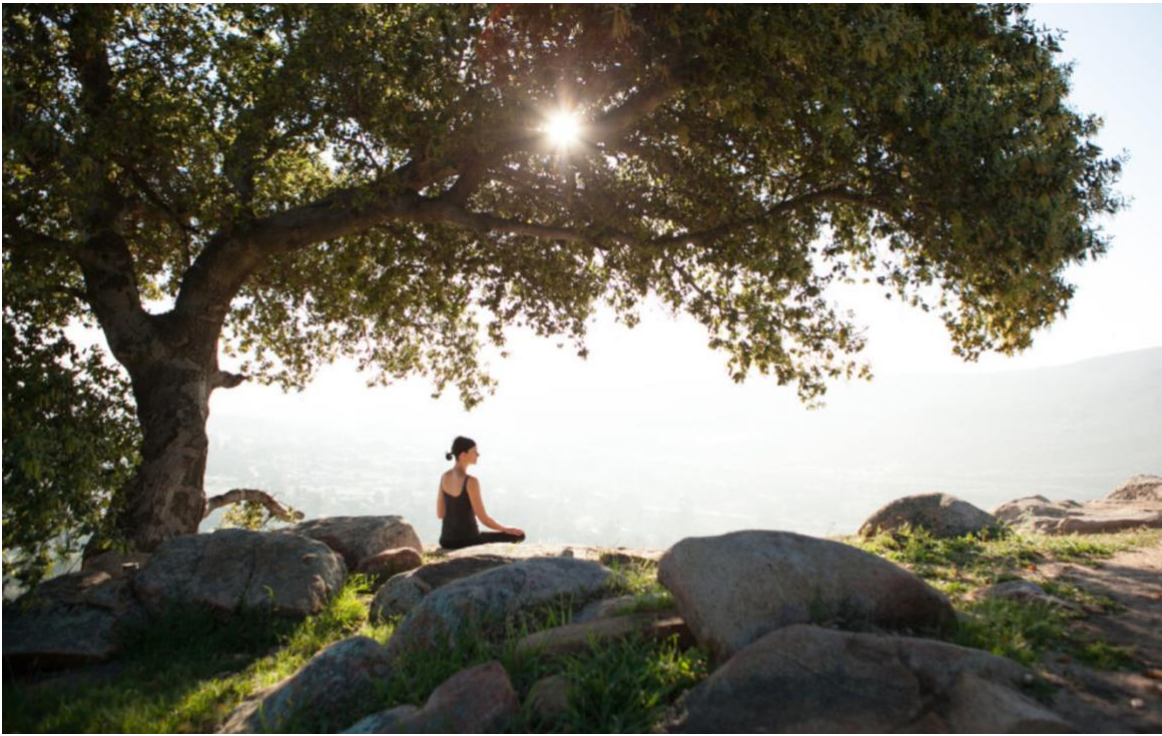
As soon as my husband and I stepped off of the shuttle the retreat provided from the American-Mexican border, I immediately sensed an unmistakable feeling of dread in the pit of my stomach. "Am I *really* going to spend this entire trip holed up in a dark business center?" I asked myself. "What other choice do I have? I have too much to do to take time off, and I can't leave my clients hanging." At the same time, I felt sad: Here I was at this gorgeous, bucolic Mexican paradise, and I'm focusing on *work*? So much for YOLO.



Shortly after we checked in and got settled in, my husband and I ventured to the Dining Hall for dinner, where guests took a seat at large round tables and connected over [plant-based fare](#). It was fun, but I was still feeling a little bit anxious about the work days ahead.

But something transformative happened: After dinner, my husband and I were invited to join an orientation session, which an employee at Rancho La Puerta *insisted* we attended a few short hours ago. There, we were walked through the week's itinerary: A rigorous schedule with multiple activities to choose from during each time slot, ranging from cardio, to yoga, to crafts. We were given pro tips about the classes; for example, Pilates was a hot commodity and there were limited spaces available, so get there early.

Then, we were given blank pieces of paper and walked through an intention-setting exercise. At first, I thought the whole process was too woo-woo for my liking but, you know, when in Mexico. However, as we were guided through each step of the exercise, it became abundantly clear what I wanted—and, quite frankly, *needed*—to get out of this trip: Balance. I wanted to be able to stay on top of my work, but I also wanted to make the most of everything this gorgeous property had to offer. At the end of exercise, we were asked to write one word in big block letters on the other side of our paper. And, as soon as I etched “balance,” I knew I had to find it.



Once we returned to our hotel room, I studied the weekly itinerary and annotated my copy based on what I *wanted* to do. Trampoline cardio and water aerobics sounded right up my alley, so I would make it to those classes one way or another. But for the time slots that had activities I wasn't crazy about such as chair yoga and chanting? Well, I was okay with hanging back.



Come morning, my PTO-blessed husband packed his days with [pickleball](#) and TRX training, and I took my gentle approach: Attending the classes I wanted and working through my freetime slots. Since I was working with a strict schedule and zero service, I was laser-focused on the work at hand. What struck me most was what happened once I left the business center for a class.

Whether I'm working abroad or from the comfort of my own home, I often feel guilty about stepping away from my computer. (What emails or Slacks are going unresponded? How will I ever work through that story that's giving me major writer's block.) But at Rancho La Puerta, I noticed those feelings of dread were surprisingly absent: I was present and felt even more refreshed to go back to my hotspot. By the end of my first day at the retreat, I was already starting to feel a sense of balance I hadn't experienced in a long time.



It wasn't just a one-day-wonder: The rest of my time at the retreat followed suit. I would work during some portions of the day, but meet my husband for other activities: I crushed tower Pilates, he channeled his inner gymnast with aerial yoga, and we both nailed our hip-hop class's dance routine. But perhaps our favorite time of day was the sound bath, which took place in a sun-drenched room with floor-to-ceiling glass windows. We would gather blankets and pillows, claim a little spot on the carpeted floor (preferably by the roaring fireplace), and listen to a medley of crystal bowls. Generally, laying for 50 minutes with nothing about my thoughts would be a prime time to panic about everything I should do, but here? I felt this inexplicable urge to clear my mind and just... well, *be*.



When it was ultimately time to go home, I felt refreshed, renewed, and totally ready to go back to my full-time work schedule. I might have walked into the retreat feeling nervous about attempting to manage a work-life balance, but I left feeling like I actually got the hang of it.

My stay at Rancho La Puerta was an integral part of my work-life balance journey, and I try to bring those principles of prioritization and presence into my [daily routine](#)—be it at home or traveling some far away. (Sure, the wireless backdrop of the retreat might be a great place to rethink my work-life balance, but these lessons *can* be applied elsewhere.) But, when it feels like that balance is getting a little out of whack, I look into a sound bath session in [San Francisco](#) so I can be brought back to my personal paradise.