

# EAST

THE REFRESHING *side* OF AUSTIN

## Checking In *At Rancho La Puerta*

Words Ashley Bowling | Photos from Rancho La Puerta



*Imagine a world where the rhythms of nature intertwine with the serenity of self-discovery, where the soul finds rest amidst the rugged beauty of Baja California. This kind of bliss exists at Rancho La Puerta, where every breath is infused with the essence of wellness and renewal, heightened by a sense of fun and friendship.*

Rancho La Puerta is a sanctuary where the embrace of wellness and camaraderie awaits just over the San Diego border in Baja California—Tecate, Mexico, to be exact. Upon arrival, visitors are greeted not only by the warm hospitality of the staff but also by the remarkable friendliness of loyal guests who make this wellness resort and spa their cherished retreat each year.

“How many times have you been to The Ranch?” as the regulars lovingly call it. It’s a question that echoes daily at the community dining hall, followed by gushing conversations over a favorite activity of the day. No matter whether you’re indulging in a delicious organic meal grown in their ancient garden, sweating it out in a unique fitness class, relaxing in the spa, or getting lost on the lush grounds, the inclusive spirit permeates every corner of The Ranch. Whether it’s your inaugural visit or your thirtieth, the sense of community is palpable, with guests forming lifelong bonds and traditions of returning each year over a course of decades.

For me, I had no expectations for a week spent in the mountains of Mexico. Little did I know that I was about to embark on a journey of wellness and renewal unlike any other. Rancho La Puerta encourages guests to step away from the WiFi; in fact, only a few places on the sprawling 4,000-acres are equipped with the modern technology. Wrongfully, I assumed that I would need the likes of this connection with a demanding workload back home. The reality, though, is that a connection to a device is hardly missed at all. In fact, I find myself in the shoes of many first-timers who yearn to stay longer as the week comes to a close. But as they say on The Ranch, “You can’t come back unless you leave!”

Opting for a shorter stay from Saturday to Wednesday, I soon realize the luxury of choices that await me. The daily schedule brims with an array of fitness classes, activities, and spa treatments, each promising its own unique, alluring satisfaction and relaxation. From morning hikes with breathtaking views to aerial yoga, from water workouts to culinary adventures, the possibilities are as diverse as they are enticing.



Navigating the multitude of offerings becomes a delightful challenge, with each experience promising its own rewards. Among the favorites are Samba Yoga, Cardio Drum Dance, Sound Healing, Yarn Painting, an early morning Breakfast Hike, Latin Dance, Stretch, Warm Stone Deep-Moisture Facial, Scalp Treatment, Samba Barr, Aqua Board, Pickleball, Watercolor, and last but certainly not least, a Culinary Class with guest chef Tonya Holland. Special themed weeks are also offered throughout the year, such as Water Week, Culinary Week, or Family Week. Though the options to workout the body and relax the mind are endless, there's still ample room for pause at this upscale adult version of a fun childhood summer camp.



Amidst the whirlwind of activities, it is the sense of community that leaves the most lasting impression on me. Whether dining with new friends engaging in brilliant conversation, realizing the kindness of strangers, napping in Sound Healing class, or simply sharing in the memories of stories and friendships formed here over the years, even solo guests find connection and camaraderie that transcends age, background, and borders.

Throughout my stay, I'm continually reminded of The Ranch's legacy, founded in 1940 by Edmond and Deborah Szekely. Their before-its-time vision of tending to the mind, body, and soul remains as relevant today as ever, upheld by their daughter, Sarah, and a dedicated team committed to the motto of *siempre mejor*, "always better." Mrs. Szekely, at 102 years old, still makes her way to The Ranch one night each week to welcome guests and share her story.



The beauty of Rancho La Puerta lies not only in its quiet picturesque mountain vistas but also in its commitment to holistic wellness and sustainability. With acres of pristine landscape, an organic farm, and mindfulness practices, The Ranch and its team of experts they bring in each week embody a deep reverence for the earth and its healing power. It's truly a magical place where every visit promises new discoveries and connection.