

seattle



The hills surrounding the resort provide a gorgeous, rugged setting for hikes matching all athletic abilities.

COURTESY OF RANCHO LA PUERTA

The Power of a Long Weekend at Rancho La Puerta

A transformational stay at the wellness industry's original holistic retreat.



BY RACHEL GALLAHER JULY 21, 2026

“You have to go on the breakfast hike; it’s one of my favorite experiences here.” I was about 15 minutes into my orientation at [Rancho La Puerta](#), a pioneering wellness resort in Tecate, Baja California, Mexico, when that week’s docent, a woman with gray curly hair and chic, dark-framed Gucci glasses, made this pronouncement. We were sitting on the red-brick dining hall patio on a sunny Thursday afternoon, shaded by a ring of monumental olive trees. “If you want, I can get you signed up for the hike.”

Little did I know—until after my name was already on the list—that the 4-mile breakfast hike, which takes guests to the resort’s organic farm and kitchen for a fresh, start-the-day meal, kicked off at 6:05 a.m. There are very few things that I am willing to wake up early for, and hiking generally isn’t one of them. But I am also someone who follows through with my commitments, so I decided to suck it up, try to go to bed early, and set my alarm for 5:30 a.m. It was cold when I woke up the next morning, a misty gray light permeating the grounds as I walked to the meeting point, where coffee, tea, and fruit were laid out for a pre-hike fuel-up.

As we trekked along a scrubby dirt trail, the sun emerged brilliantly from the hills, and my mood lifted: the fresh air, movement, and enthusiastic chatter felt like a gift. I was surrounded by two dozen women from around the country (nearly 130 guests were on the property during the week I visited) who were drawn to the ranch for reasons ranging from milestone birthdays and opportunities to reconnect with old friends to the pursuit of healing, personal growth, and spiritual expansion. Many of the women I met had been before—some as many as 10, 15, or even 20 times. When I first heard this, I couldn't believe it. *How great can a wellness spa be to draw someone back that many times?*



The Rancho La Puerta kitchen, where the morning breakfast hikes end, is located two miles from the main campus. Add-on cooking classes also happen here.

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Accommodations at Rancho La Puerta range from single rooms to larger multi-person villas, such as the Luna units (seen here) that feature elements of traditional Mexican architecture, carved wood furniture, and wood-burning fireplaces.

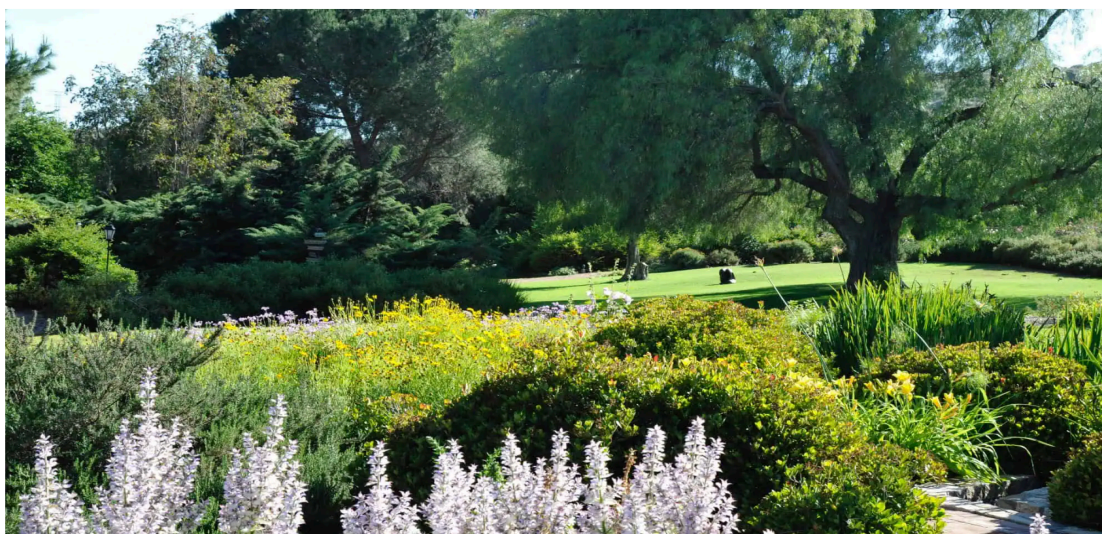
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Fresh-squeezed fruit and vegetable juices are part of the daily healthy snack offerings.
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Over the next four days—through yoga classes and sound baths, hikes, Pilates, cold plunges, and reading by pool, not to mention deep and meaningful conversations with smart, accomplished, creative women—I discovered the magic of Rancho La Puerta, which sits not only in the incredible list of activities available each day, but in an intangible energetic spirit that seems to permeate the place. There is an ease and openness that encourages you to try new things, and a welcoming camaraderie that facilitates connection. Just walking from your room—guests stay in charming, tiled-roof, Mexican-style casitas—to any point on the campus elicits a genuine smile and enthusiastic greeting from almost everyone you meet.

“No matter what you’re going through, the ranch has what you need,” says Barry Shingle, director of guest experience, who has been working at Rancho La Puerta for 26 years. (This is not uncommon. Many of the ranch’s 500 or so employees have been there for decades; some are even second or third generation staffers.) “If you got a new job, if you lost someone, if you’re going through a transitional time, you’ll come here and leave changed,” Shingle reflects. “The ranch really meets you wherever you are.”



The grounds are meticulously landscaped, with brick paths leading through lush greenery. Moments of surprise and delight—a grove with hammocks, benches tucked under flowering shrubs, art installations—dot the paths to create a truly exploratory experience.
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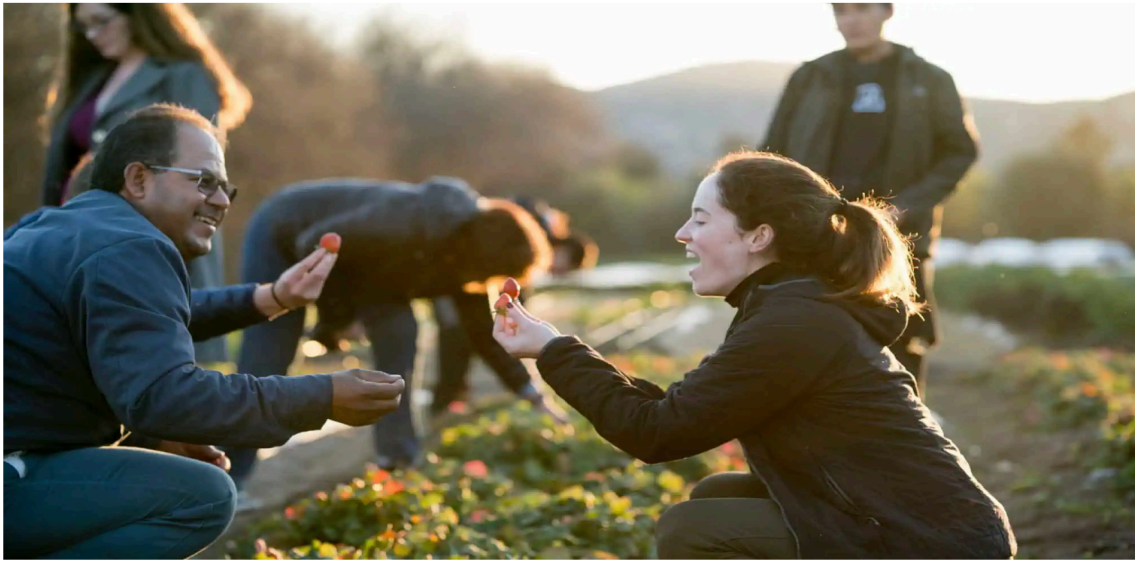
Rancho La Puerta was founded in 1940 by Edmond and Deborah Szekely, a professor and his wife, both with an enthusiasm for holistic living, who planned a summer health retreat for friends. (Deborah, now 104, and once dubbed the “Godmother of Wellness,” still visits the ranch every Wednesday to participate in a Q&A with guests.) When World War II broke out, and Edmond’s U.S.-issued papers expired, he was given a choice: leave, or be returned to his “country of origin.” For Edmond, a Romanian citizen with Jewish heritage, returning to Europe meant facing imprisonment, or worse, death.



Four pools across the 4,000-acre property provide plenty of opportunities for swimming, relaxing, and participating in water activities.
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To avoid that fate, the couple headed back across the border, returning to the arid land beneath Mexico’s Mt. Kuchumaa. What started as a scrappy plot with a small shed, makeshift tents, and a homespun garden, grew over the next eight decades into one of the most sought-after and emulated wellness resort experiences in the world. It’s a popular celebrity reset—the likes of Madonna, Oprah Winfrey, and Kate Winslet are big fans.

If I’m honest, I wasn’t familiar with Rancho La Puerta before my trip. I didn’t know about its storied history, holistic approach to food, exercise, and mental clarity, or the almost overwhelming choice of activities. It’s a place to learn and relax, to stretch and grow. If it hadn’t been for the docent advising me not to “try to do everything because you will burn out by the second or third day,” I almost certainly would have made the rookie mistake of overpacking my schedule. Instead, I mindfully picked between two and three classes each day, trying to balance things I already knew I liked to do (yoga, Pilates, time at the spa) with new experiences like a sound bath and the aforementioned early morning hike.



Rancho La Puerta's head gardener Salvador Tinajero has been with the resort for decades. He gives garden tours to the guests who participate on the breakfast hike, frequently offering tastes of produce straight from the ground.
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A funny thing happened while I was at the ranch. I spent the first day and a half getting in my own way thanks to unexpected nerves and a bout of self-consciousness, which is unlike me. I'm normally great at traveling solo, meeting people, and starting up conversations. I'm a reporter, after all. But for some reason, the idea of going to dinner by myself and sitting with a table full of women who likely already knew each other felt so overwhelming that the first night, I skipped the meal completely, worked in my room, and ate the bowl of fruit left in my kitchenette. It feels ridiculous and embarrassing to admit that, but part of visiting Rancho La Puerta is being honest, recognizing the things about yourself that need/want to address, and working to overcome the obstacles blocking you from living your best life.

The next day was my morning hike—which helped push me out of my shell and reframe how I was approaching the entire experience. I realized what a gift this opportunity was. Did I judge things like meditation and sound baths to be a little “woo-woo”? Okay, I'll admit it, yes. But what was it going to hurt to give them a try? I might even enjoy the experience. (Spoiler alert, I did.) Once I shifted my mindset and opened myself up to other people, to trying new things, and to not being so afraid of “looking stupid” or doing something “wrong,” I found a beautiful, supportive oasis spread across 4,000 acres of land. As much as the programmed activities proved to be trip highlights, the spontaneous in-between moments—like holding a weeks-old baby goat, seeing a small, red fox dashing across my path, or eating a spicy slice of radish pulled from the dirt moments before by the ranch's head gardener, Salvador Tinajero—that really cemented the magic of Rancho La Puerta.



Aerial yoga is one of the dozens of weekly activities, which range from education lectures and book talks to water aerobics, meditation, and art classes, available for guests.
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At one point, during a restorative yoga class, the instructor told us to “stop doing and just be. Stop doing and just breathe.” In that moment, she was talking about settling into lotus pose, but her words struck a chord with me. In a world where we are always on the go, always rushing, always checking our phones or trying to hack productivity, taking a beat to “just be” is a powerful reclamation of time. At Rancho La Puerta, those moments aren’t always big and monumental. Sometimes they come in walking over a sun-warmed stone bridge, catching a whiff of rosemary in the air, or glimpsing a colorful hammock swaying gently in the breeze.