

Worth the Flight: Rancho La Puerta

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A lot has changed in the wellness industry since Deborah Szekely and her husband founded Rancho La Puerta 85 years ago. The kinds of classes offered, the accommodations, the food and even the roads to the property are different. But what's endured is the commitment to a healthy lifestyle, a reset and the motto "siempre major" (always better).

Today, Deborah, who also founded the famous Golden Door spa, is 103 and has clearly found a way to keep evolving. She still provides inspiration to the guests and staff who come to her 4,000-acre oasis, though her daughter Sarah Livia Brightwood is now president of the company.

Most guests come for a weeklong retreat, where they choose from more than 50 daily activities that emphasize connection to nature in a seamless, luxury environment. Activities could include tennis or pickleball, hiking 40 miles of trails, Watsu water therapy, aerial yoga, meditation, Pilates, Spanish lessons and more, with some weeks featuring guest instructors and specialty classes. There are four different pools and 11 gyms, and the total number of guests is capped at 170, so there's plenty of elbow room.



While the idea of RLP — or “the Ranch,” as most guests call it — is to embrace wellness, this isn't the kind of place where you'll count calories or have weigh-ins. Instead, you'll find your reset from the sayings and mottos written throughout the property, the surrounding mountains, the evening lectures, and the community of people who dine, hike and meditate together.

The Mexican architecture — including a communal dining hall, casitas, villas, art studios and fitness studios — is connected by pathways dotted with sculptures and colorful gardens. This makes the Ranch feel like a neighborhood, where you're dashing across campus to meet a friend or make a class, rather than a resort. The result is a community feel that goes beyond the traditional luxury hotel. As many as 60% of people who visit the Ranch return for a second (or third or fourth) visit, reconnecting with friends and building on their experience. Service is attentive, but not obsequious.



What's nearby

Rancho La Puerta is in Baja California, Mexico — about an hour from San Diego. Most guests fly into San Diego (yes, there are direct flights from Nashville), and the RLP arranges transportation to the resort and provides instructions on crossing the border. You can pop into Tecate if you want a meal out and a beer, but most guests remain at the serene resort for the length of their stay.



What to do

Take in the sunrise on a morning hike, try a new cardio class, play tennis, or explore different kinds of meditation — including sound baths or walks in the labyrinth. There are 32 garden acres to admire, art studios, and a spa that offers healing therapies like acupuncture and energy medicine.



Where to eat

You'll eat your three daily meals in a communal dining hall, where you can talk with other guests in a screen-free environment. The dishes are made with organic ingredients and locally grown produce. (You can even help work in the garden if you choose.)

Unlike some wellness resorts where your calories are counted, at Rancho La Puerta, seconds are encouraged. The menus are big on legumes, vegetables and whole grains. There's some limited sugar, dairy and seafood, but no red meat. Take a cooking class to learn how to maintain a healthy eating plan when you return to your own kitchen.



How to get a good night's sleep

RLP's 86 casitas offer no distractions. There are no TVs in the rooms — and no WiFi. If you need to check in on work, there are designated rooms where you can do so, but the idea is to maintain a digital detox during your stay. Instead of scrolling, take in the views of Mount Kuchumaa from your patio, curl up in front of your fireplace and read a book, or admire the folk art in each casita and villa.