

008 Recommends

RANCHO LA PUERTA SPA, TECATE, MEXICO

RANCHO LA PUERTA, the world's first destination fitness resort and spa, is located southeast of San Diego on 3,000 private acres in Tecate, Baja California, Mexico. Founded in 1940 by Edmond and Deborah Szekely, it's the ultimate vacation for those seeking health and wellness for mind, body and spirit.

Wanting to escape my hectic life, I joined the 140 guests who arrive each Saturday for the Ranch's famed seven-night stay known as "Fitness Week." It was a decision that would change my life.

A CASITA OF OUR OWN

At the San Diego airport, I boarded a comfortable bus for the hour's drive to Rancho La Puerta, affectionately known as "the Ranch" by repeat guests. Once there, I found the grounds to be breathtaking, landscaped with Mediterranean-style gardens, native trees, fountains, and ponds.

Nearby, Mt. Kuchumaa stands guard, its slopes strewn with huge granite boulders that jut through a sea of blue when the wild lilacs bloom. In addition to its beauty, Kuchumaa has a rich spiritual history. The Kumeyaay Indians believe that a holy power, for healing or harm, emanates from these boulders. Oral tradition relates that peace conferences were held on Kuchumaa's summit. My lodging, a free-standing casita I'd chosen to share with two roommates, fit into its surroundings beautifully. Decorated with Mexican folk art, its large, picture windows allowed magnificent views of the hills.

I bonded quickly with my roommates—Ange from San Francisco and Sarah from Los Angeles. As we walked to the dining hall for lunch, though, I began to worry about eating a semi-vegetarian diet for a week. Would I like it?

DELICIOUS, HEALTHY CUISINE

Lunch and breakfast are served buffet style at the Ranch, and can be eaten outside on a beautiful brick terrace shaded by olive trees. My worries disappeared the minute I saw the mouth-watering array of foods. Luscious fruit, fresh-picked salad, and a variety of soups tempted me, and I knew I'd have no problem.

Dinner is a sit-down affair, served inside the grand Spanish Colonial dining room. Seafood, brought in fresh daily from the port of Ensenada, is served five nights a week, but there are always alternatives for those who don't eat fish or shellfish.

The Ranch grows its own food at Tres Estrellas, its organic garden. There, La Cocina Que Canta, the Ranch's cooking school, offers guests a hands-on cooking experience. This involves picking the day's ingredients, then working alongside top chef instructors to create a banquet of delectable dishes they enjoy together.

MIND, BODY, SPIRIT

Each day the Ranch offers guided hikes on more than 25 miles of wildland trails. Each hour, about five classes—a mix of fitness, yoga, dance or Pilates—are taught. These classes cater to all levels of fitness and a wide age range. Guests can also enjoy treatments at the Ranch's three spas or take nutrition or health workshops.

I planned my days with a mix of activity and relaxation. As the week wore on, I found myself walking more, sleeping better and worrying less. In the evenings, we watched movies or superb performances by entertainers. Some nights, after an especially long day, I simply fell asleep.

On the last evening, Ange and Sarah joined me for the farewell dinner. Afterward, everyone pushed back their chairs, and Yuichi, a movie and musical choreographer, got us all up and dancing.

As we joined in the festivities, I realized I felt relaxed and refreshed, ready to go home filled with positivity and the motivation to add a better diet, more activity, and a sense of spirituality to my daily life. My visit to Rancho La Puerta turned out to be an investment I'd made not just for a week, but for a lifetime.

BY AGENT MELODY MOSER



The nature-preserve grounds of Rancho La Puerta



Guided hikes are an integral part of each day



Trails wind through granite boulders and mountain lilac



Luscious, ricotta cheesecake is a healthier alternative to traditional recipes



Cooking class at La Cocina Que Canta