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I travel luxe but smart: I know what's worth shelling out for.

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A New Quick Fix From America's Top Weight Loss Retreat: The Ranch 4.0 In California

After the tough-love [Ranch at Live Oak](#) opened in Malibu three years ago, it quickly became known as the country's most luxurious, most results-oriented and most difficult detox and weight loss program. (I was part of the media chorus [singing its praises](#): Nearly three years after I visited, I still tell people that my week there was one of the hardest things I've done and one of the most satisfying—and that I had to buy new pants afterward.)

Its popularity is one reason the founders decided to take their effective, no-options formula on the road: The place books up months in advance, and they needed somewhere to accommodate the overflow.

There are other reasons for the new [Ranch 4.0](#), which is held in partnership with the California Health & Longevity Institute at the Four Seasons Westlake Village in the Conejo Valley near Malibu (about 90 minutes from LAX). One is that the original Sunday–Saturday program requires being cut off from the world—there's no Internet access or cell phone signal—for a full week. The other is that it's, quite simply, *hard*—and daunting to anyone who isn't already in decent shape or a complete masochist.



The Greenhouse at the Four Seasons Westlake Village, where Ranch 4.0 guests eat their vegan meals and gear up for long hikes

Launched last month, the Ranch 4.0 is a four-day version that's a bit kinder and gentler. It's less of a time commitment. It's easier to get through. It's less expensive (but still an investment of \$3,800). There's connectivity to the outside world, cushy Four Seasons beds and bathtubs in the guest rooms (sorely missed at the original). There's also a little more food and, when I visited a few weeks ago, more leniency about showing up for fitness classes. (Both of my stays were comped.)

As at the original, days begin with a 5:30am wakeup knock, followed by a yoga/stretch class and light breakfast, then four hours of hiking with terrific and encouraging young guides (they go for time, not distance, but the faster hikers can easily log 12 miles), a modest lunch, a blessed nap, an afternoon of barefoot fitness classes, a welcome massage, dinner and an early bedtime. It's paired with a strict detox diet that's meant to be 1,400 calories a day and contains no gluten, dairy, soy, sugar, caffeine, animal protein, alcohol, artificial sweeteners or processed anything. Basically, you eat vegetables, especially cauliflower, broccoli and kale. (I say "meant" because they'll give you seconds if you ask—though one day's suggested mid-hike snack was six almonds, and another's was the second-best apple I've ever eaten, the best being at the original Ranch, where I was *really* hungry.)

The resort setting has advantages and disadvantages. The Internet can be seen either way. The bathtubs are great. There are spa treatments to be booked before or after the program, and diagnostic body composition and VO₂ Max testing. But it takes more willpower to stick to the regimen when temptations abound—there’s nothing stopping you from having a second dinner, or a drink, or a cupcake or a cup of coffee at one of the hotel’s dining outlets. (That’s likely one reason for the new leniency with food: Better a second helping of zucchini “pasta” with cauliflower “Bolognese” than a Four Seasons steak, though I still heard rumors of some cupcake cheating.)

As the program came to a close, I felt almost as energized and “clean” as I did after the seven-day



A sunflower seed “risotto” with butternut squash and mushrooms, one of the more popular dinners during my visit

version, but still felt that the Ranch 4.0 was half as difficult and half as satisfying as the original. Then I

got weighed and measured, and my results were nearly as impressive as my first go-round. I’m seeing if it sticks—but for now I’m liking the extra room in my pants.