

## Fitness Vacations: These People Lost Tons at Weight Loss Resorts

As the New Year begins it's a time of reflection and introspection and a time for rebirth. Travel helps us with that, and nothing more so than traveling to a spa or resort to makeover our bodies and our minds. These inspiring people did just that. With fierce discipline and enviable determination they came, they exercised, they exercised some more, and they conquered. "This isn't just about dieting or weight loss," said Francine Roberts, one of the travelers who changed her life. "This is about becoming a better and stronger me."

**Jack Ezon, 43**

**Where: [The Ranch at Live Oak Malibu, Malibu, California](#)**

**Weight lost: 50 pounds**



When I arrived at The Ranch at Live Oak Malibu in May 2011, I weighed 195 pounds. I'm only 5'7". I was fat.

I have four kids, I was tired, I working hard, eating wrong, drinking six cups of coffee a day. I was skipping breakfast and not in shape. I couldn't run a single block.

I did all these fad diets like the Atkins diet and South Beach Diet. I went to a few other "spas" to try and get in shape, and I ended up getting more massages than fitness classes. I signed up for the gym multiple times but it always faded out after a month or so. Nothing motivated me. It got boring. I would lose 10 pounds and then put on 11. It kept going in circles.

Then I went to the doctor for my annual check up. I had high blood pressure. My cholesterol was through the roof. My triglycerides were not pretty. My doctor sat me down at the time and said, "Jack, you're 38. You've got four kids. You're medically obese. It's a really bad thing."

That day I also happened to meet with Alex Glasscock, the owner and founder of The Ranch at Live Oak Malibu. (I work in the travel industry and we were introduced by a colleague.) He was telling me about this new concept. I said, "I think I need something like this because I'm falling apart, and I'd love to try it."

What makes this program different is the intensity of it. It's for Type A people. The program is really rough. It's not a typical spa. It's boot camp and it's about 15 hours of fitness a day with a 1500-calorie diet.

The Ranch does not expect you to show up and go through hell. They expect you to prepare and, in fact, send you a whole kit with daily and weekly goals to get yourself ready for the experience. Knowing that there was no option and I would be in a very rigorous program pushed me through the preparation. I prepared for three months for this one week. I began exercising because I knew I'd never make it up the mountain if I didn't.

I recall going spinning for the first time and wanting to give up... but then thinking "I just plunked down almost \$6,000 for this and if I don't get through this class I am going to die on the mountain..." And little by little, it became more bearable. Every day and every week it was a little easier to run or spin or lift a weight. I lost 20 pounds following The Ranch's program even before I got there. I also stopped drinking coffee and alcohol and eating meat for about months before I went. So by the time I got there, I had already invested so much into the program that there was just no turning back.

Still, my first day, scared the crap out of me. I knew I was going to get whipped but I was ready to be the iron that goes through fire to become steel.

The way the Ranch at Live Oak Malibu works is that it's a set program. Everybody arrives at the same time. Everybody leaves at the same time. Everybody eats every meal together. So you're with the same 15 people all day. There are no options. It's not like a spa. You can't sleep in. If you don't show up for an exercise class you don't get your next meal.

A typical day was waking up at 5:30 a.m. I'd have about a 10-minute breakfast, which consisted of a half a cup of granola or a shake. Then it was time for about a four- or five-hour hike. Sometimes it was six hours and I only brought water. No food. The staff would hand out two or three almonds with sea salt along the way (seriously).

The hikes, were the most challenging part of the day, actually. The goal was to keep my body at 60 to 70 percent of its maximum heart rate for an extended period of time. The longer I kept going the more I would burn. The first day was utter torture. To play with the psyche, the staff started with the most difficult hike which lasted nearly six hours and never seemed to end. I was completely numb after. Every muscle ached. I could barely walk back to my room.

The redeeming factor about the hikes is that they are truly magnificent. Every day was a different location that delivered varied topography and views. Some days were steeper than others, some days were longer than others, but every day presented a gorgeous panorama.

After the hike, it was a little lunch, which was basically some chick peas and kale. There were no options here either. Everything was pre-portioned. The chef carefully measured everything that goes into each recipe to comply with our strict diet code, which was between 1,200 – 1,500 calories a day. I was set a portion and I had to eat it – no more/no less. I ate every morsel with such care... every chick pea and every leaf separately, savoring every bite. The thing is though, that while it is certainly dietetic, every single thing I ate was unbelievably delicious and presented like I was at a Michelin star restaurant. And though I would lick my plate clean (literally), I was actually never starving – a bit hungry (like “sure I could eat”), but never to the point where I was dying for food. It was the strangest thing. They say that is what happens when you feed your body the right stuff.

The diet was purely vegan (with the exception of eggs), organic, gluten-free, and specially formulated to detox the body – so much so that we had to brush ourselves with this body brush to remove the detox agents from our skin every morning.

In addition to the meals, we had to drink some protein shakes and one ounce of water for every pound we weighed daily, which also furthered the detox process. At the advice of some people who went to the ranch, I brought some granola bars and popcorn for emergency, but I did not dare eat them. I was working so hard to lose the weight that I did not want to ever do it again.

After lunch, it was an hour of [TRX training](#), an hour of core exercises, and an hour of another workout. Then there was an hour-long massage, which I really needed because my body was burned out. Then dinner.

And aside from 15 carefully allotted minutes to make a phone call or check emails daily, there is no connection to the outside world. No newspaper, no television, no radio, nothing. They even discourage using your iPod. And not having access to internet and email, detoxified me even more than I would have expected. That was very hard. It was harder than not eating.



Because of the strict rules, you end up getting really close to the people in your group. From the first session at 6:00 a.m. to the five- to six-hour hike, the three meals, and four afternoon classes, you get to know a lot about each other. You also become really great friends with those on your fitness level as you end up hiking together for almost 50 hours that week.



*Ezon after (Photo: Jack Ezon)*

I also learned to focus on nutrition and not calories. I learned so much about eating for nutrition. Your body sends pangs of hunger when it does not have the vitamins it needs. They also taught me 100 calories of kale is not equivalent to 100 calories of potato chips. I can have a bag of potato chips, but it won't fill me for more than an hour. And if I eat a bag of kale, which might not be as exciting, I'll be full for six hours. And healthy food need not be bland. I had some of the most delicious food I ever had.

Keeping up was really tough, but during that intense week at the Ranch at Live Oak Malibu I got through it and learned so much about health and staying fit. Obviously, what they do there is not a way of life and they don't want it to be. But it's supposed to be more of a jumpstart and an inspiration. And that's what it was. When I came home, my wife didn't recognize me. My pants were falling down and she's like, what happened?



The Ranch at Live Oak Malibu cost me about \$5,800 for the week. I saved up for it. It includes everything you would ever spend. It's an investment. People spend more in medical bills. My blood pressure went down. My cholesterol went down significantly, like 148 percent. I ran the New York City marathon last year. It's giving yourself a new lease on life. So what price can you put your health, your longevity, and your wellness of life? How do you put a price tag on that? People spend that kind of money on just sitting on a beach for a week at a luxury hotel. You have to decide if you really want to jack it up and really improve yourself. It's a small investment compared to what you're underpaying to try to fix yourself. In fact, I loved it so much I saved up again. Me and my siblings sent my mother there for her 60th birthday. She loved it.

I don't want to have to go back myself though. I remember hiking up that really hard mountain one day. I said to myself, "It's not worth the cookie." It's not worth it. I don't want to come back. I think about that all the time.

Luckily, the Ranch provides you with a program for "re-entry." I must admit I was nervous going home lest I ruin what I had accomplished. I basically continued on five hours of fitness a week and stayed on a vegetarian diet which I pretty much continue until today. I learned to be a B+ in life; never try to be an A+ since it is not sustainable. So have that glass of wine or pizza, or even indulge on Thanksgiving, but pop right back up the next day and compensate. A+ addicts tend to just give up after 2 days of gluttony and just stop watching themselves. The Ranch philosophy allows for a reasonable way of life and something I think about every day.

My advice for others is that experience is not just about the seven days at the resort, it is about the whole journey. Go there if you're really focused on changing yourself, and if you are, embrace it. Don't fight what they're doing. Don't lazy out. Just stay on course.