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RECONNECTING WITH NATURE & BODY

at The Ranch Malibu Plant-Based Fitness Retreat

by Courtney Garza

I try to stay away from cliché sayings, so when I say, "This experience was unlike anything I've ever done, and it truly changed me for the better," I don't mean it lightly.

When I first heard about an all-plant-based fitness retreat, I thought it was simply too good to be true. The Ranch Malibu was described to have everything I loved in an adventure: artisan, healthy plant-based food; well-rounded fitness classes; extensive, beautiful nature hikes; and a focus on growing your body and mind.

As it turns out, The Ranch Malibu was truly all that I could have imagined, and more. I was sent on a journey of resetting, learning, challenging, and growing myself in a peaceful environment that set me up for success.

In just a matter of 4 days in their 4.0 Program, I was able to tune into my body, learn how to use it more efficiently, and nourish it more effectively. But it certainly didn't come easily! There was much work behind the magic that came after the 4 days ended.

PREPARATION

Once I set out to go on this retreat, I was given a fitness regime to prepare me for the extensive 4 days ahead. All guests begin their journey 30 days prior to arrival through a



series of suggested exercise, diet, and healthy living assignments, intended to prepare them for their time onsite. Many guests start their health transformation during this period, gaining strength and losing weight before they step foot on the ranch property.

As a seasoned vegan and fitness enthusiast, I felt prepared upon arrival. It turned out that I was the only vegan among the guests and one of very few that took the preparations seriously. Some of the main factors the Ranch

wanted us to have in place was implementation of a meat-free, alcohol-free, and mostly sugar-free diet beforehand, to make the detoxing process less painful. Since I'd already made these practices norms in my lifestyle, I felt ready to dive right in.

THE 4.0 EXPERIENCE

The 4-day "weekend" is a condensed version of The Ranch Malibu's award-winning 7-day wellness program. Although I was a solo traveler, I was among couples, mother-daughter duos, families, and friends of all ages that came along for the experience. Modeled after the same active fitness schedule as the full The Ranch Malibu experience, our days were filled with four intense 4-hour group hikes, 8 hours of low-impact activity, nap times, afternoon fitness classes, and daily massages.

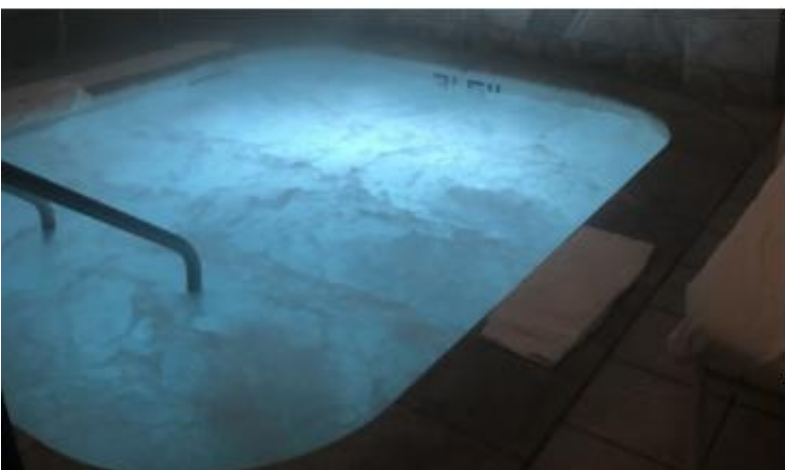
The program was designed to allow us all to connect with Nature's healing elements while experiencing unique wellness modalities. Every day truly felt like I was pushing through a marathon, but in the best way. I enjoyed the strict hour-by-hour schedule, as the staff was never militant, but encouraging and kind. Every night when I hit the pillow I was completely exhausted, but honestly super-excited for the 5:30



a.m. wakeup call from one of The Ranch staffers over our group walkie-talkie radios. I was eager and ready to do it all again!

DATA COLLECTED

The Ranch 4.0 Program partners with the adjoining California Health & Longevity Institute to offer specialized diagnostic testing that includes a comprehensive Integrative Lifestyle Physical for those desiring an in-depth look at their overall health. This insightful medical testing included measuring our body fat, with a machine called the "Bod Pod," and our resting metabolic rate with what's called the VO2 test. I was fascinated to learn about my overall body fat and muscle percentage, along with my cardio strength, and to find out what it all meant. After the tests, which are typically taken on the first day, the Ranch staff helps us break down the data and learn how to improve or maintain it, based on our fitness goals.





HIKES + FITNESS CLASSES

We hiked a total of 37 miles! That might sound like a lot, but we were actually slated to do more! Unfortunately, due to heavy rain and thunderstorms, we could not take 2 of the 5 hikes scheduled. In fact, the 3 hikes we did endure turned out to be quite rainy, cold, and muddy. This made our mountain adventures more difficult, but I felt it challenged us more to push through and truly appreciate when the sun did shine to unveil the incredible mountains below us.

After starting a day with a hike, we would return to lunch, follow up with a nap, and then take on more fitness challenges to strengthen and test our bodies. Although the option to rest longer during the classes was tempting, I managed to go to every afternoon class offered and was able to learn about proper weight-training techniques, new yoga poses, and even the incredible power of guided meditation and healing sound therapy.

HOTEL STAY

Although I was sad that I wasn't able to experience the actual Ranch for myself, where the longer programs (7.0, 10.0) are held, I was happily content with the elegance of the Four Seasons Hotel Westlake Village. It was a quintessential Southern California luxury resort that provided an ideal environment to relax and reset after all of our long, active days. While our mornings started at 5:30 a.m. and were spent on the Santa Monica Mountains, we were able to enjoy the hotel through the afternoon classes, which took place in the full-service private gym.

My personal favorite part was the in-room massages we had every afternoon. It was no surprise that the Ranch employed some of the best massage therapists that I've ever had the pleasure of meeting. It was here that I truly had the best massage of my life thanks to Dirk, one of their tenured therapists. I would go back just to have another healing massage!

Between the scheduled programs, I was able to spend quality time unwinding in my private room, which included a king-size bed and lush bathroom with separate shower and bathtub. I loved all the attention to detail, such as the Ranch-branded gifts that were waiting for me on my bed upon arrival, including a gym tote, picture frame, soap, baridaria, socks, and even Epsom salts for our nightly baths. I found it especially amusing that they even removed the coffeemakers and minibars so that no one would be tempted during their "detoxing." We all also had access to the hotel's award-winning spa area, which included a sauna, steam room, meditation area, and indoor and outdoor pools. I, of course, explored and enjoyed every bit of it, with the exception of the outdoor pool due to the bad weather.

AND, OF COURSE, THE FOOD

Although we were all "restricted" to a 1400-calorie-a-day meal plan, I certainly never felt as if I was missing out on flavor or substance. All of the food was wholesome and clean, with vibrant colors and rich flavors, and all purely from plants! The Ranch team has been cooking with plant proteins for more than 20 years, and their passion shows abundantly. We all came to the lovely Greenhouse space, where all our meals were served, famished from our activity, and always left satisfied and ready for the next adventure ahead.

The Ranch team uses ingredients sourced from their onsite certified organic garden and nearby local farms. Their chefs took classic comfort foods, like chili and



cornbread (my personal favorite meal we had) and made it clean and highly nutritious without stripping the dishes of their flavor. All meals were made of the finest fruits, vegetables, grains, pulses, legumes, and seeds while excluding alcohol, caffeine, dairy, soy, processed sugars, diet sweeteners, and gluten, to aid in the cleansing and revitalization process. I loved talking to each guest, as none of them was vegan, and hearing how amazing they all felt and how they want to continue this diet at home to feel like that all the time!

It was wonderful to use the mealtimes as an opportunity to discuss all of our goals and be educated by The Ranch staff on the tools for maintaining the healthy habits learned from our adventures. Along with being an avid foodie myself, the mealtimes were my favorite part to connect with my temporary community over our wonderfully nourishing meals.

RETURN

It almost goes without saying, but most of my peers on the trip were returning guests: The Ranch has a return rate of nearly 45%. With all the thoughtful measures The Ranch takes, it's clear why guests build a trust in them to provide a memorable experience that impacts both their physical and mental health. Many guests I spoke with took away not only weight loss but also increased mental clarity and energy, healthy recipes, and new ways to keep to an active lifestyle in a sustainable way.

Many, if not all, of the returning guests told me that they try to come at least once a year!

If time would allow, I would happily do the same.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Courtney Garza is a passionate vegan who brings her love for journalism, creativity, helping local businesses, and animals together with her compassionate social media agency, Sprinkles Creative, which she co-founded with her business partner Christina Bluford to aid businesses with their branding strategy. Courtney also owns and operates **VEGWORLD Magazine**, an international vegan lifestyle publication, as the Editor-in-Chief to curate and promote plant-based stories about vegan products, services, and individuals from all walks of life.