

ES MAGAZINE

AWAY GAME: TEAM EXTREME

Not all wellness resorts are the same, as Hamish MacBain and Joanna Taylor find out at two of the world's finest



Palazzo Fiuggi

THE MODERATE ONE: THE RANCH ITALY

‘And don’t forget to pick up your snack before the hike. It’s...’

Glimmers of hope spread across the faces of those sitting around the breakfast table at Palazzo Fiuggi, a tiny bowl of granola each down. It’s just after seven am. Our first daily hike — four hours, largely uphill — begins in an hour.

‘...six almonds.’

The smattering of disbelieving laughter that follows comes as a relief. It tells me that it’s not just me and the 21 Gwynnies you might expect at the European outpost of Malibu’s most chattered about wellness mecca. It reassures me there are like-minded souls present at The Ranch Italy, to whom the concept of single figure almonds seems... outlandish. Or whatever the opposite of outlandish is.

Later, before dinner (a kind of aubergine parmigiana, with macadamia nut purée in lieu of cheese), one woman will suck dry three lemon slices from the herbal tea station, chop the rinds in half, then douse them in salt. ‘Cheat fries,’ she whispers.



This, though, turns out to be an isolated incident. By day two everyone is settled into a routine that starts with a 5.30am wake-up call, takes in a morning hike and afternoon fitness classes, yoga and massage, with meals in between. One evening there’s even (cauliflower) pizza. We are in Italy, after all.

By day six I’m having a marvellous time: to the extent that even being asked to write a letter to my future self — to be posted in six months — seems totally fine. The people are great. The hikes in the hills not far from Rome are stunning. Key to the success of The Ranch, I **think**, is that a) you are always doing things, which means you don’t miss food as much, and b) that it’s far from *Full Metal Jacket*. Should you wish, you could skip a hike, or a class, or even sneak off into town to skull a bowl of carbonara, and nobody would mind, except probably you.

The Ranch Malibu opened in 2010 when husband and wife Alex and Sue Glasscock, as the former puts it, ‘were in our 40s. We noticed our friends were getting heavier. They were doing more of the things they shouldn’t, and less of the things they should.’



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Their friends sound quite a lot like me. Or dare I say the... old me? Living my Ranch life is obviously not sustainable long term, but a few weeks on, back in London, I have kept up a lot of the good habits. I may be drinking. I may be eating almonds by the dozen, and even having thick white bread and a cigarette sometimes. But my portions remain small, and full of nutritious food, and exercise no longer feels like a chore.

Alex seems pleased when I tell him this. 'It's not all or nothing,' he says. 'The intention is never to send people home, like, brainwashed into shunning friends because you don't drink, or you don't eat something. It's just having more consciousness and the ability to adjust some things.'

More Ranches are coming. One in Hudson Valley, an hour outside of New York, where you can stay for three or four days rather than a week (an option that the Italian branch will also soon be offering). This, it seems to me, is aimed squarely at the not-small, burnt-out city office worker demographic, of which I am a card-carrying member. I imagine you are too. If you need a reset, I have the place for you.

HM A week at The Ranch Italy starts from £8,250 (theranchmalibu.com)