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The Ranch Italy Is Reinventing The European Wellness Scene With US Pizzazz

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Driving out of Leonardo Da Vinci airport on the one-hour ride to the installation of renowned Malibu health resort The Ranch in the venerable surroundings of the Palazzo Fiuggi carries you through a landscape that defines this region of Italy. From the hulking industry of Rome's outskirts past Santiago Calatrava's extraordinary abandoned Olympic ghost stadium, metal gray warehouses morph gradually into stone and wood homes painted and flaking in muted yellows and soft terracottas. Giant infrastructures are replaced by rows of elegant Cypress trees jutting eagerly skyward, flat lands roll into undulating hills and mountains, towns perched defiantly atop them.





Fiuggi is a classic example. Long famed for the healing powers of its mineral-rich spring water, this small town has attracted those in need of tonic from far and wide since the 14th century. Crowning it is a grand Art Nouveau villa set in 20 acres of landscaped gardens: the Palazzo Fiuggi, built in 1910 to cater to that growing throng of rich and aristocratic visitors.

It's acquired quite the history since then as the retreat of choice for Italian kings, international artists and movie stars, and as the Allied Forces HQ in Italy during World War II. Recently it has been reborn, subject to a complete 2021 overhaul of its historic interior paired with a brand new bells-and-whistles wellness medical retreat employing the latest technologies in diagnostic assessment and consultation to tailor make holistic therapies.



The grand environs of the Palazzo Fiuggi belie the relaxed approach of the Ranch Italy. THE RANCH ITALY

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The setting, then, is five-star grand. But within these opulent Carrera marble-clad and unmistakably European walls, a ray of Californian sun

casts its own light (albeit through Murano chandeliers) in the shape of [The Ranch](#), whose US Malibu resort is a regular atop “world’s best” lists.

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At first glance it’s an obvious pairing. Both are focused on the “wellness” concept, both make use of the same high-tech facilities; so why not work symbiotically rather than in competition? But in reality their approach couldn’t be more different. Rather than the austere primness (while still being very friendly and welcoming) of the Palazzo Fiuggi setting, the Ranch rooms carry a completely different vibe – deep lounging couches; a long, minimal dining room that lets the views rather than the frescoes do the talking; a parquet floored fitness room and wall daubed with Ranch Values that urge you to “connect”, “allow awareness” and “get a little dirty.”

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Neighborhood To Watch: Astoria, Queens, New York

Joining the Ranch program is to join the group within – the cool kids in school, the rebels in college. It's impossible when marching across reception, muddy and buzzing from a four-hour hike, not to feel alien to the fluffy white robe-clad Palazzo guests padding silently, singularly from treatment to treatment. Ranch meals are taken not in the frescoed glory of three-Michelin-starred chef Heinz Beck's on-site restaurant but are instead tailored to Ranch guests, plant-based and nutritionally dense with a daily 1500 calorie limit focused on fueling up, ready for the challenges ahead. There is not, as one Rancher enquired hopefully, room service.

To be clear, this is a great thing. While most European wellness retreats focus on calm and balance to extend life, the Ranch introduces connection and exercise to achieve the same ends. You may come alone, but a solo retreat this is not. Meals and activities are taken together, the enthusiastic (and Italian) Ranch team mix, hike and eat with guests, a sense of camaraderie is gently and inevitably curated.



militarian clock watching such timetables can often incur. A 6am wake up call is followed by 30-ish minutes of stretching before breakfast – Ranch granola with berries and almond milk, zucchini banana muffins, homemade jams and bottomless caffeine-free teas. The granola is an easy winner.

Post breakfast is the main event. Following the Ranch Malibu methodology, the daily hike is measured in time rather than distance, departing in the early morning light and returning at least four hours later depending on the drive, which often twists and turns high into the surrounding Apennine Mountains.



Long hikes are often rewarded with spectacular settings and the chance to cool off in chilly ...
 [+] TYSON SADLO HERD

The region's natural beauty helps hugely. Walks vary, traversing rocky and undulating pilgrimage routes like the Cammino di San Benedetto that takes in Roman archways, medieval mountainside villages and herds of free roaming cattle, whose bells provide a bucolic soundtrack to exertions. Others go higher, in winter above the snowline, to hike and snowshoe through whisper quiet forests of ancient Beech trees peppered with cave mouths that beckon local speleologists deep into the mountain's heart.



The Ranch Team adapts walks to suit all conditions – with snow shoeing a highlight during winter ... [+] THE RANCH ITALY

Lunch back at the Ranch follows, this time soundtracked by rumbling stomachs. Plates are sizable and vary from day to day – fresh tomato and lentil soup, turmeric hummus with quinoa and pickled vegetables, black rice bowl with veggies. Some days are more filling than others but if you're still starving, asking for more is never out of the question. Getting too full would be a mistake though, as afternoons are also activity packed with fixed hour-long strength and core training sessions, restorative yoga and a massage.



The vast Movement Lab offers cutting edge tech in unashamedly classical surrounds. Quite the ...

[+] TYSON SADLO HERD

Final energy reserves are spent on the walk from room to dinner at 7pm sharp, although Ranchers inevitably drift in at varying times – especially those with later massages in need of time to gather their senses. Meals are again substantial – cauliflower pizza, eggplant parmigiana with macadamia ricotta, and various dishes maximizing that most Italian of ingredients, polenta. Salt, pepper and chili pepper powder are spread liberally about to add a kick to proceedings.

Throughout, the Ranch team are on hand to offer encouragement and support – always with a focus on that magic last day where results are revealed, muscles remeasured and weights taken (surreptitiously, for those who prefer). Diagnostic consultations offer a wider view of overall health: private sessions to highlight the good and the bad and set guests on a path towards future health.



Long hikes and dedication undoubtedly deliver results - and the rewards aren't bad either. TYSON SADLO HERD

The Ranch is, undoubtedly, a results-oriented program that focuses as much on the short term gains (“Look at how much you’ve achieved in just four days!”) as the long term potential to sustain these good practices with healthy changes to daily lives. Over the last meal Ranchers are invited to write a letter to their future selves and sign a commitment to stay on the path to healthy living – whether you choose to stick to it or not as you head for Rome and the many culinary temptations therein is, of course, entirely up to you.

The signature **seven night eight day program** at the Ranch Italy costs from \$9,100 including accommodation, all food and activities, medical diagnostics and transfers from Rome’s Leonardo da Vinci-Fiumicino

Airport. The four night, five day [Ranch Italy 4.0 program](#) costs from \$4,950 per person.

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