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Body & Soul escapes

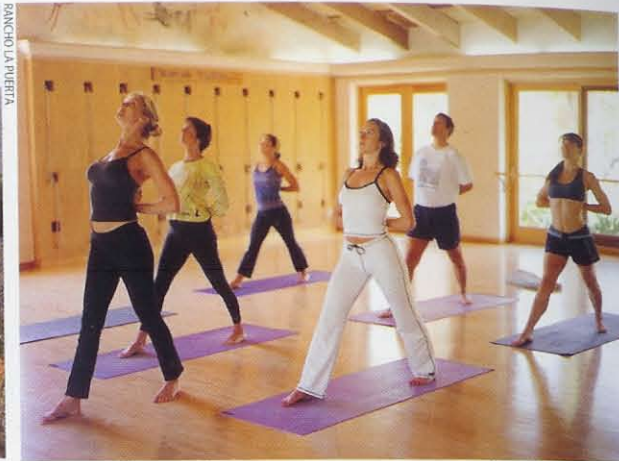
Caroline Sylge



Where to retreat and replenish around the globe



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g, or you can use the space to do practice. Hatha yoga classes are available with a local teacher, and yoga and other personal retreats led by visiting teachers throughout the year. Mexican-style fish or chicken with vegetarian options. Beer, wine and glasses of home-made energy fruit also on offer. Your fellow guests are alternative types in their thirties, forties, and from the US and a lot of groups use Encantado for retreats, so check in advance if you prefer to be here alone, when Mallina can organize bespoke spa weeks. Fly to Belize City, or take an internal flight from Cancun to Chetumal - pickups can be arranged. At the time of going to press, Encantado was up for sale, though we had no intention of leaving.

FITNESS RETREAT

Rancho La Puerta



Guadalupe Id. La Puerta, Baja California
 Tel: +1 858-764-5500
 www.rancholapuerta.com
 From US\$2535 per person per week

Rancho La Puerta, founded by Edmond and Elizabeth Szekely in 1940, is the original

destination fitness resort and spa, and welcomes 125 guests each week to its 1200 ha of gardens, mountains and meadows.

Its 87 rooms are remarkably spacious and private with a distinctive collection of Mexican folk art. The facilities are impressive and include a charming art studio, heated swimming pools, various gyms (including three set in the vineyard), tennis courts, a theatre, three health centres, and a labyrinth set in the ranch's ancient oak groves for meditation.

A typical day could start early with a trail, mountain or breakfast hike. After which you can pick from a variety of fitness classes including yoga, pilates, tai chi, and African dance. Afternoons are for spa pampering – try the 'Happy Hands & Feet' (a combination of reflexology and paraffin) or the Thai Massage, which is popular. There are terrific outdoor whirlpools with clothing-optional sunbathing decks.

La Cocina que Canta (The Kitchen that Sings), which opened in spring 2007, is a cooking school comprising a hands-on classroom/kitchen, cookbook library, and culinary gift shop, all set in the heart of Tres Estrellas, the Ranch's 2½-ha organic farm, where you can learn how to combine fresh, organic ingredients in inspiring ways.

For meals, chef Jesús Gonzales prepares delightful semi-vegetarian cuisine featuring organic fruits and vegetables (many grown

on the ranch), and fresh seafood driven in daily from the port of Ensenada.

The ranch attracts mostly Americans from New York and California, especially girlfriends and mothers with their daughters. Plan your visit around weekly themes that interest you – the African dance week might also feature photography classes and a full guest lecture series, for example. Weeks run from Saturday to Saturday. Free pickups are provided to and from San Diego airport.

NATURAL SPA RETREAT

Rio Caliente Hot Springs Spa



Primavera State Forest, Guadalajara
 Tel: +1 (1)800-200 2927
 www.riocaliente.com
 From US\$152 per person per night

Nestled on the slopes of an ancient volcano in the heart of Mexico's beautiful Primavera Forest, Rio Caliente is an unpretentious and very affordable restorative retreat. Its four swimming pools and steam room are fed by mineral-rich thermal waters from a volcanic lake deep underground, and towering palm trees give the place a tropical, almost primordial feel.

You stay in comfortable en suite bungalow-style *casitas*, each with its own fireplace, some with private terraces. The two



Resolve to be yourself –
 he who finds himself,
 loses his misery.

Matthew Arnold

main thermal pools are refilled in rotation every week; one is always exquisitely hot, the other refreshingly tepid. There are male and female plunge pools, and a naturally heated Aztec-style steam room, kept fragrant with fresh bunches of eucalyptus and sage.

The waters here are alkaline and rich in salts, minerals, and lithium, famed for its antidepressant properties. Visit the steam room to detox, then bathe to soak up the benefits through your skin. Drink as much of the spa's water as possible – it's said to restore your body's pH balance and combat the acidity of modern life. It tastes peculiar, but you can feel it doing you good.

Spa treatments include massages, reflexology, facials, manicures and pedicures, micro-dermabrasion, cellulite treatments, mud footbaths and clay mud wraps. Bio-resonance therapy is also available (see glossary). There are guided hikes with breathtaking mountain views, including a steamy waterfall and a blissfully hot natural jacuzzi. There is a daily yoga class, a water exercise class, and an evening programme of lectures and activities such as self-hypnosis or transcendental meditation. For US\$28 an hour you can ride the spa's own horses.

Dining is sociable, with fantastic views of the surrounding scenery. Exotic birds flock to feed from a bird table just outside. You eat generous organic vegetarian buffet-style meals, served with freshly squeezed juices.

The spa's delicious recipes are available to take away in a book entitled *The Whole Enchilada*. There is a daily stall selling indigenous arts and crafts on the patio, and day trips to nearby destinations such as the market town of Tonalá, the brewery in Tequila, or the recently archaeological discovery at Teuchitlán.

Guests are mainly American professionals, who come alone or with a friend, partner or family member. It's an unpretentious place where most people will feel instantly at home. Bring hiking boots, a torch, and insect repellent. Rio Caliente is a 45-minute drive from Guadalajara airport – a taxi costs US\$45. The rainy season is from July to September, but even then it's mostly sunny and doesn't rain for long.

COASTAL RETREAT

Verana



Jalisco
 Tel: +52 (01)322-200 5107
 www.verana.com
 From US\$380 per room per night

Californian set decorator, Heinz Legler, built this secluded hideaway with his French wife Veronique Lièvre, an interior designer. Their collective creativity is instantly striking; the eight houses have individual designs and combine modern architecture with traditional Mexican features.

Yoga practice includes hatha and a mix of vinyasa, ashtanga and iyengar. Classes are taken overlooking the ocean and mountainside. Spa treatments include



Left: Rancho La Puerta. Above and right: Verana.

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