

Take a ‘soulful’ vacation

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By definition, a vacation should add to your life with a mixture of fun and relaxation designed to take you gloriously away from day to day living.

However, when you combine a wellness retreat and drop-dead gorgeous scenery with your getaway, you might just come back with some unique and lasting “souvenirs.”

If this is the year you want to bring home more than sunburn, think about a getaway that lasts awhile and rewards with a slightly better version of you—both physically and mentally.

Choose from one of these wellness escapes, all wrapped up in days filled with scenic splendor. You absolutely deserve it!

Catch more than waves in Malibu

Tucked away in the scenic Malibu Mountains—just three miles above the glittering Pacific Ocean—is an empowering self-improvement program that is also a hidden retreat of the celebrities whose sand-touching estates line the shoreline below. The Ranch Malibu offers a seven-day wellness escape that melds the picturesque landscape of a working ranch together with chef-crafted organic cuisine, rigorous fitness classes and rejuvenating massages to create an empowering, authentic experience for its guests. Also, when you combine the week-long session with the newer four-day program, The Ranch 4.0, the retreat becomes a perfect 10-day escape from our chaotic lives and hectic schedules—a beautiful journey to mental and physical wellness.



Choose a wellness escape combined with scenic splendor such as the Big Sur coast. (Photo: Kerrick Jame/sseemonterey.com)

With just 16 cottages, the retreat is very intimate with only 16 guests per week. The list of amenities at The Ranch Malibu is long with more than 200 miles of hiking trails, an open-air kitchen and great room, organic farm, Yoga Pavilion, gym, outdoor pool and spa and private treatment rooms for massages. Because The Ranch does not have Wi-Fi or cell phone reception (guests have limited access to computer and phone), the setting encourages guests to focus their energies on being present in the natural, serene surroundings with others on the same wellness journey.

No fudging on this program. Guests of The Ranch Malibu actually 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 on-site. The Sunday to Saturday stay delivers sustainable results through a strict, “no-options” philosophy designed by several doctors to insure the most weight and inches lost in a safe and sustainable way. It’s now wonder that since opening in 2010, The Ranch has won a series of awards and accolades including #2 World’s Best Destination Spa by Travel + Leisure (2013), SpaFinder’s Best Weight Loss Spa and Favorite New Getaway Spa (2011), as well as #2 Best Luxury Boot Camp by Lonely Planet (2013).

Art & Soul seekers head to Big Sur

Ventana Big Sur has long been a favorite retreat for celebrities and others relishing the luxury and privacy afforded on its 243 acres of ocean bliss. The unique one- and two-story buildings blend into the natural surroundings filled with meadows and wooded hillsides, set 1,200 feet above the Pacific and a mile away from Pfeiffer Beach. The focus here is on relaxation and it is easy to do with pools, Japanese hot baths and the first-class Spa at Ventana. One of the few resorts that offer daily complimentary neck massages, the resort also offers complimentary guided property walks, yoga and pilates classes, as well as an evening wine and cheese

reception. All rooms have a deck or patio (some with private hot tubs), redwood floors, glass tiles and bronze and bamboo touches; most have cozy wood-burning fireplaces. For centuries, the rugged beauty of Big Sur has inspired artists, authors, musicians and spiritual leaders—many seeking inner wellbeing and personal transformation. Ventana Big Sur's new Art & Seekers program takes the resort's spiritual and mind-body-soul experiences and workshops to a magical level for those seeking a deeper communion with nature and art. Through the program's uniquely designed workshops and activities, couples are encouraged to develop a deeper connection to themselves, their partner and the natural world some playful ways, although single guests are also accommodated.



Ventana Big Sur's new Art & Seekers program takes the resort's spiritual experiences to a magical level. (Photo: courtesy)

Choose from glass-blowing, drum circles, quartz bowls and cymatic resonance sessions or create your own couple mandala. The resort also offers music therapy and charcoal drawing classes. In the program's photography/hike workshops, you can literally capture the beauty of this astounding slice of nature in the photography workshop and guided hike around Ventana's wilderness with the resort's resident photographer. Included in the workshop is a professional print of your best shot delivered to your room at the end of the day.

Sleep well at Carmel Valley Ranch

Nestled in lavender fields not far from the Big Sur coast is Carmel Valley Ranch, the perfect destination to relax, golf, spa, eat epicurean delights—and even learn about beekeeping. The 500-acre resort recently emerged from a multi-million dollar revitalization and is abundant with offerings, from archery to horses, and possesses its very own sustainable, four-acre pinot noir vineyard. Two fitness centers, two outdoor salt swimming pools, nine tennis courts and a full-service spa will keep you happily entertained. Winding through the core of the resort from the valley floor through the foothills is the Carmel Valley Ranch Golf Course. As the only Pete Dye design in this part of California, the 18-hole, par-70 course has earned a reputation for its stunning views, friendly wildlife, tactical challenges and playability.

The Spa Aiyana at Carmel Valley is focused on more than relaxation these days. Its new Hypno-Health and Wellness offering with Dr. Bee Epstein-Shepherd is designed to create a good night's sleep. Aimed at combating the stress that interrupts our sleep and compromises our ability to feel and perform at our best, the program uses hypnosis to de-stress in a matter of minutes, leaving you relaxed, calm and tension free. This is a program that you can take home with you—a recording of the session is yours for future sleep reinforcement.

'Fall' into health at Rancho La Puerta

A beautiful way to be fit and healthy is waiting for you year-round just over the San Diego border at Rancho La Puerta, a 3,000-acre healthy-living paradise with flowering meadows, landscaped gardens and breathtaking vistas all nestled at the foot of Mount Kuchumaa, also known as

Sacred Mountain. However, fall is a special time with warm days, cooling nights with cozy fires in the fireplace, golden sycamore leaves under your feet and the fall harvest delights straight from the organic farm. Special fall “flat rates” for the Saturday to Saturday one-week stays make fall an even better time to escape just south of the border.

Guests arrive at Rancho La Puerta for one-week stays via a ranch shuttle bus that picks them up at one of several terminals at San Diego Airport. A 45-minute trip that enters Mexico over the Tecate border is swift and effortless. Upon arrival at the resort, guests are escorted along meandering paths lined with abundant nature to their deluxe cottages situated privately about the grounds.



Couples are encouraged to develop a deeper connection in the many workshops and activities in Ventana Big Sur's Art & Seekers program. (Photo: Alfonso Corona)

Rancho La Puerta's secure and tranquil estate includes gardens, hiking trails, an organic farm, several pools, extensive spa and fitness facilities, a salon, a spacious dining hall, gift shop and an intimate library — as well as numerous inviting lounges and conference rooms. Activities, classes and spa delights abound on a daily basis, with lots of special lectures and classes tossed in. Most activities do not require a reservation—just drop in if you feel like it. Guests pretty much do as little or as much as they like.

Everything, other than spa treatments and cooking classes, is included in the stay including three gourmet spa meals and snacks, use of all fitness and recreational facilities, spa and library, as well as scheduled group classes, guided hikes and walks, activities and workshops. Also included are evening programs and entertainment. Self-awareness classes, from yoga to Tai Chi are plentiful, as well as daily hikes, from strolling a meadow to a demanding 11-mile trek. Freshly picked produce from the resort's organic garden go into its recipes that are low in fat, sodium and refined flour and sugar, while being high in energy, fiber and complex carbohydrates. No starving here—portions are plentiful thanks to the menu's low calorie content and your activity-abundant days. The semi-vegetarian fare employs lots of fresh seafood from nearby Ensenada. Although not a weight-loss facility, many guests lose weight due to the healthy diet combined with the bounty of exercise choices.