

The Ranch Malibu's Wellness And Weight Loss Retreats Come To New York



The Ranch Malibu is famous for its hiking-based fitness, wellness and weight loss retreats, and now ...
[+] THE RANCH

I have a good friend in California who is a loyal customer of the Ranch Malibu and goes to their hiking and health weeks in Southern California at least once a year.

Now I understand why.

Reset. Cleanse. Recharge. Detox. These words mean different things to different people, but they are words you hear a lot at [The Ranch](#), especially from the many repeat customers. When I visited the recently opened New York campus, there was a gentleman who had been going to Malibu annually for ten years, without his wife, for what he called his annual solo “reset.” The concept of disconnecting from work, eating very clean healthy food with no alcohol, hiking, working out and doing yoga while getting daily massages and basically diving into round-the-clock self-care is extremely appealing, and having done it, I can say that reset is a pretty good way to describe it. Or recharged, which is how you feel when you leave.

The original property in Southern California has been acclaimed for years, has a long A-List celebrity following, was *Travel + Leisure* Magazine's Number One Destination Spa in the country in the 2023 World's Best Awards, is currently ranked in the Top 3 Destination Spa Resorts in the country by *Conde Nast Traveler* magazine, the 100 Best Spas Worldwide by *Vogue*, and just won Best Wellness Retreat in California (which has plenty of competition) from the 2024 World Spa Awards and Best Wellness Retreat in the World from *Yoga Journal*. But the satellite New York campus, across the country, just debuted this spring and quickly also won Best Wellness Retreat New York at the 2024 World Spa Awards.



The new Ranch Hudson Valley is based in a J.P. Morgan mansion on a 200-acre waterfront estate. THE RANCH

For those who have done Malibu, there are some major differences with [the new Ranch Hudson Valley campus](#), besides the setting, most importantly the retreat length. While weeklong has been the standard in California, New York offers either 4-day/3-night or 5-day-4-night sessions, Monday to Thursday and Thursday to Monday respectively.

Besides the amazing health program, the “resort” itself is worth a conversation, as it is a big part of what makes the place so special, and just earned a Hotel Great Design Award from *Architectural Digest* magazine—a far cry from most spas. Guest rooms, meals, massages and fitness classes are all ensconced in the main house of Table Rock Estate, a robber baron-esque 40,000-square foot mansion that was built 120 years ago by financier J. P. Morgan as a wedding gift for his daughter, who married Alexander Hamilton’s great grandson. It is everything the happy couple could have desired, and you could film scenes from *The Great Gatsby* in the place, which has preserved or restored almost of all its opulent detail, including fireplaces big enough to roast whole cattle in (but unlikely given the vegan menu), impossibly high ceilings, lots of detailed glasswork, moldings, ornate carved wood paneling, period furniture and stunning architecture everywhere you look.



The workout studio is housed in the mansion's ballroom. ELLEN MCDERMOTT FOR THE RANCH

The workout classroom was the estate’s ballroom, and while we’ve swapped ball gowns and tuxedos for gym shorts and Fitbits, it’s probably the most beautiful weight room or yoga studio you will ever sweat in. The bathrooms in each of the unique guest rooms are fully modernized, and those who were veterans of Malibu told me that the Hudson Valley lodging was markedly more upscale. It’s even dog friendly, though not on the hikes.

It had most recently housed a religious order and is absolutely perfect for a boutique fitness retreat (there are a maximum of 25 guests in each session, often less), and it's almost unbelievable that Ranch founders Alex and Sue Glasscock were able to find and purchase such a property so close to the stunningly high-priced real estate of New York City. It is located fairly low in the Hudson Valley, considerably less than an hour from Manhattan (without traffic), and there's more than just the huge mansion. The estate is 200 bucolic acres on a huge lake, and when I visited the dock project was still underway to add stand up paddleboarding and other aquatic pursuits. Immediately next to the main house is a huge stone and glass solarium with gorgeous indoor pool, hot and cold plunges, and large infrared sauna.



Hikes are very varied in terms of terrain. ELLEN MCDERMOTT INTERIOR PHOTOGRAPHY, NYC

Shorter hikes on the half-days of arrival and departure go right from the estate, while the main day hikes are short (less than 15 minutes) transfers in the Ranch's fleet of. There are two- and four-hour options each morning, and they make a big deal out of measuring time, not distance, with every hike deigned so regardless which you choose, there's some sort of turn around loop, so you get the full time in regardless how much ground you cover, yet magically without the repetition of a straight out and back hike.

Much of the hiking is in State Parks, and in an especially high-touch move, they have a guide go out in advance and mark the entire route with small flags so it is impossible to go astray. There are five or more guides out at any time, with the front hiker, back hiker and scattered in between, a much higher ratio than I've seen in the dozens of guided active travel trips I've participated in.



The Ranch Hudson Valley has a huge solarium with heated pool, hot and cold plunge pools and sauna. THE RANCH

While I have not been to the Ranch Malibu, I have hiked on much of the same terrain they use, and this is much different. The Southern California trails are more open, like dirt paths, with straightforward footing and expansive views. This is more mountainous, in the woods, with some steep inclines, and a lot more rocks and roots. It's very similar to the hiking I do regularly in Vermont, so no surprises for me, but some of the participants found it more challenging and you definitely have to pay attention. The Ranch will operate all year long and in winter they will have traction spikes for hikers as well as snowshoes available, though with climate change recent years have seen very little snow in the New York area. I imagine when they get the fireplaces going and colder weather sets in, winter will offer its own charming "reset" option here—at discounted prices.

The hiking is the backbone of the exercise program, and the afternoon classes offered, strength and yoga/stretching, are fairly low-key affairs—one regular called it a kinder, gentler version of California. There are no high-intensity classes after hikes, but for self-motivators or those seeking more of a boot camp experience, there is a gym, or you can double up on strength or yoga classes, as multiple sessions of each offered daily, and they make a point of varying each one. Other self-guided extra workout options are a walking loop around the large property and the watersports.

Rates include a massage every day for each participant, an indulgent luxury, as well as laundry, which is very unusual in this country. You also get the option (free) to take a Bod Pod analysis, in which you sit in a device that measures your body composition to detail how much muscle and fat you have and where that puts you in the public spectrum. If you fly, even a private transfer to Newark Airport at the end of your stay is included. On top of this there are optional add-ons, many of which I have not seen at any other fitness retreat I've been to, choices that run the gamut from hypnotherapy to colon hydrotherapy, plus IVs, acupuncture, reiki and more. Rates run from \$2,250 to \$3,950 per person based on length of stay and seasonality.



Each guest room in the mansion is unique but luxurious. ELLEN MCDERMOTT

The other half of the equation is the food (all meals included), and the Ranch follows a strict vegan diet, which to be honest, was my biggest worry before attending. I am most definitely not cut out to be vegan, but the food was much better than I expected, and thanks to small group size and advance detailed questionnaires, it is customized for every taste, accounting for likes and dislikes. Those who are not interested in losing weight can also request double portions, and there is a fascinating cooking class on the penultimate day. In what is apparently a very recent concession to popular demand, the Ranch (both) now serves coffee in the mornings, though they have not relaxed their stand on alcohol.

The non-double diet is limited to 1,400 calories daily, and you will lose weight on that amount, especially if you do the 4-hour hikes (I did not go to lose weight, but nonetheless dropped about a pound a day). But weight loss is not as much a focus as it is in Malibu, with its longer sessions where guests are weighed and measured on arrival and departure (here you have to choose to do that). The majority of attendees were not there for weight loss, but if you were looking to jump start such a program, this would be a great place to do it.

The cornerstones of the program are very clean, nutrient rich vegan food in limited quantities (but surprisingly I was never hungry), daily hikes that are fairly strenuous, optional strength and yoga classes, massages, and white glove treatment throughout. Luxury means different things to different people in different settings, but I have been to a number of destination fitness resorts and this one definitely is at the luxury end of the spectrum. There's built in down time for napping, reading, pool or plunges, and a lot of mindfulness—all of which adds up to deliver the promised reset.

Bottom line? [The Ranch Hudson Valley](#) delivers physical and mental results quickly, and is an easy experience to immerse yourself in: you show up, put yourself in good hands, and dive into the program. It's easy to get to, especially for the millions of people in the New York tri-state area, though many of my fellow guests flew from as far as California (also easy, given New York's three major airports). The resort is wonderful, the hiking varied and a lot of fun, the food tasty and healthy, the entire experience educational, and the recharge inevitable.