

VOGUE

GLOBAL SPA GUIDE

The Ranch Hudson Valley



Why go here?

The Ranch Malibu is legendary among seekers of wellness. Who hasn't heard tales of its miraculous power to reset mind and body via grueling hikes, portion-controlled vegan menu, and a manic insistence on *water, water, water*? Famously beloved by Rebel Wilson, Michelle Obama, Selma Blair, and other Hollywood habitués, the company's Malibu location has long been trusted for results—a euphemism for weight loss. Now anyone in search of exhilarating hikes, flawless vegan meals, incitements to hydrate, and *results* can choose between the Malibu and Hudson Valley locations. The latter is only about an hour north of Manhattan, providing easy access to celebrity-style pain and gain—or loss, in this case.



What's the vibe?

Arriving at The Ranch Hudson Valley feels like showing up at the country estate of a distant cousin who still has blue blood circulating in their veins. That is, until one meets the staff (clad in athletic gear, walkie-talkies affixed to their hips, and smiles affixed to their faces). At which point, Downtown Abbey turns into a deluxe sleepaway camp for wealthy grown ups. The Ranch staff is eager to serve. Within a minute of my arrival, I'd had my car keys whisked away, my bags had disappeared, and I'd been complimented on my fitness. One trainer, Kevin, remarked that I looked like I could run the Boston Marathon —while in truth, I don't know if I could've run the Boston Turkey Trot. Flattery aside, it's hard not to immediately start breathing more deeply at The Ranch Hudson Valley. The airy interior is swathed with

neutral tones of white, gray, and beige. Ceilings—original and intricately carved—soar. Interior designer Stephen Gambrel’s color choices were “inspired by nature.” In his words, “modern art, lean shapes, and comfortable, relaxed furniture set the tone.” Expect linens from Vivre Luxe, slippers from Frette, art by Hayley McCrerrick, Morgan Stokes, and Inese Bernate, and lots of earth-toned pottery. Meals are taken communally in the orangery (real orange trees grow inside) at a long wooden dining table. Dinners begin with a moment of silence and end with bonding exercises like going around the table to list objects of gratitude—a sort of collective healing. A sideboard offers homemade ginger-turmeric tea and hot water, and loose teas in enticing flavors like chamomile and apricot escape around the clock.



The history?

The Ranch Malibu was founded by Alex and Sue Glasscock 14 years ago. The couple have piloted several variations since: The Ranch 4.0 at the Malibu Four Seasons, The Ranch Italy 4.0 at Palazzo Fiuggi, and others. But The Ranch Hudson Valley is their first foray into a brick-and-mortar sibling to the Malibu original. “Brick-and-mortar” is a figure of speech here. The Ranch’s main building is a newly renovated 40,000-square-foot stone mansion built by J.P. Morgan for his daughter in 1902. Intervening years have seen the mansion occupied by the Sister Servants of Mary Immaculate—an order of nuns who still have an outpost on the property. Locally quarried tile, wood paneling, and intricate molding remain. A new solarium—featuring an indoor pool, hot tub, and sauna—and an outdoor pool (both under construction when I visited) will be open by the summer. Abutting Harriman State Park, down the road from Bear Mountain and situated on its own rolling 200 acres, The Ranch Hudson Valley—like its West Coast counterpart—offers intense physical exertion amid mountainside beauty, massages, and services like energy healing, reiki, and body composition analysis.

The Ranch Malibu advertises “transformative fitness programs” designed to promote weight loss—an outcome nearly guaranteed by the mandated six-night minimum stays and small portions. The Ranch Hudson Valley, on the other hand, offers three- or four-night stays. And there are other changes. “Portions used to be smaller,” one alumnus I met at The Ranch Hudson Valley told me. “And you would come off the trail genuinely not knowing if you could take another step,” she said. These austerities are things of the past on both coasts. Founders Alex and Sue have listened to feedback requesting shorter programs and less restrictive diets. Both spas now offer a two-hour hike option. Mid-morning snacks, once limited to six almonds or apples with “ranch caviar” (Hawaiian sea salt), are healthy but filling treats like homemade date cacao bites and raspberry oat bars. Fitness classes and yoga are optional, with some, myself included, spending afternoons catching up on work.

And hallelujah, instead of luggage searches for contraband (caffeine and alcohol), now there's coffee on the sideboard from 5:30 to 6:30 a.m. (no sweetener, and the milk is almond). At meal times, double portions are provided on request. And there's no shame in asking—several people requested more food on my visit. Patrons are offered the option of being weighed and measured on arrival and departure, but they can decline.



What should you try?

Mornings at The Ranch Hudson Valley are taken up with intense four-hour hikes. These are the heart of The Ranch experience. I didn't find the hikes unusually grueling, hiking at the front of the group, but a fellow fast hiker tracked our mileage: We hiked 10.5 miles the first morning and 8.5 the second. It's a workout. It's worth attempting the full hike—after all, it's what you're there for. The daily included massage is a necessity. The masseurs took me at my word in a request for firm pressure: I had to clench my fists occasionally at the sweet pain, and I instantly regretted not having booked a double massage (an available add-on service). An add-on I took advantage of was a visit with the chiropractor, Renee, and was almost worth the price of admission by itself. Renee hadn't even been given a permanent treatment room during my stay, and still was the highlight of my visit. Within 30 minutes, she relieved the hip pain I'd accepted as irreversible and fixed my hamstring. Other things make the high price tag feel reasonable: vegan meals by Chef Michael Caruso are fantastic. A "shepherd's pie" of wild mushrooms in wine topped with whipped sweet potato elicited audible moans from diners. A lunch of roasted cauliflower with kitchari was deceptively rich and filling. I was never moved to lift weights to booming gym music, but did like ending my day with restorative yoga. Definitely do not snooze on the daily morning stretch at 5:30. Stretching with the sunrise and a hot cup of coffee nearby is a practice I brought home with me.



How environmentally friendly is it?

The Ranch Malibu has an extensive garden, from which much of its produce comes. Currently, The Ranch Hudson Valley buys all its vegetables. But its head chef is already focusing on buying locally and regionally, and a greenhouse that will supply its kitchens should be operational within the year. Excess food will go to a local food pantry. A compost operation is on the horizon. Gentle reminders to use energy sparingly make it clear that The Ranch is aware of its larger environment.

What else do we need to know?

A few cautionary notes: Communication is done by walkie-talkie, which all ranchers are supposed to have on them at all times. After feeling, alternately, like I was at the Kellerman's Catskill resort from *Dirty Dancing* and being lectured by the pilot on an airplane, I turned my walkie-talkie off for the duration of my visit. If you're auditorily sensitive, as I am, be prepared to break the walkie-talkie rule, or go crazy. I would also warn anyone who's suffered from disordered eating. Between the measuring, the body composition tests, and the calorie-restricted meals, there are places to slip down a slippery slope here. Self-awareness about what's safe for you is vital. Along other lines, if you're terrified of getting dirty, absolutely need wide choice in foods, or know you're addicted to television, another spa is a better option. You can't avoid dirt on hikes, there's no menu, and there's no TV.

Who can go?

The Ranch Hudson Valley is only open to guests.