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spa special

As the DAWN of a new year approaches, it's time for a FRESH start. Whether you want to plant the seeds for healthier HABITS, rethink how you EAT, or reset a STRESSED-OUT body, mind and soul, PORTER's global spa guide is your first step towards making CHANGES that LAST

Photography by Alexandra Nataf
Beauty editor Danielle Fox

turning point

From Miami Beach to a Maldivian island, PORTER discovers the habit-changing retreats that will kick-start you onto a healthier path

THE 360-DEGREE REBOOT

The Ranch, Malibu

What are you made of? The Ranch's four-day wellness program (The Ranch 4.0) will tell you exactly what – in the usual sense of gumption and stamina, but also how much of you is fat and how much of you is all the rest: muscle, organs, bone. You'll also learn how small tweaks to your regime can greatly enhance your prospects for health and longevity, while your body is individually and scientifically analyzed to give you a concrete baseline to help you create your most effective and efficient program for change.

WHAT TO EXPECT The Ranch is very low-key and espouses a simple plant-based diet; nevertheless guests are heavily scheduled, forever dashing to catch a meal or a class. You have few options (none at all in the eating department, which is vegan and low-cal). I found this relaxing: your energy goes into completing the task at hand, not grazing menus of food or treatments.

On arrival, you are weighed and measured before entering the amazing machine known as the Bod Pod, which measures fat. You will also do an endurance test,

known as the VO2 test, to calculate your use of oxygen.

Wake-up calls are at 5.30am and after breakfast you are driven to the gorgeous Santa Monica Mountains for a four-hour hike. The distance you cover will depend on your level of fitness. The rest of the day consists of three 45-minute, back-to-back classes in circuit training, core strengthening and yoga, all very good, before a tiny dinner at 6pm (and then in my case collapsing at 9pm). The 1,400 calories worth of food was enough for me and I lost a couple pounds in four days and enjoyably bonded with fellow survivors. We had several Ranch recidivists, which speaks volumes about the results and enjoyment gained from the program, which many say offers a useful reset – especially because most activities take place outdoors.

NEED TO KNOW I somehow failed to look at (let alone fulfill) the 30-day pre-arrival program so, as a result, suffered caffeine-withdrawal headaches. The Ranch program is mostly about hiking so hard-wearing hiking shoes, rather than fashion sneakers, are essential. Summer in southern California can be very hot so if you don't enjoy the heat, it's probably best to go in autumn or spring – the latter in particular for its beautiful display of wild mountain flowers.

THE MUST-TRY The outdoor hot tub is the ideal remedy for hike-sore legs. Also, in keeping with the open-mindedness that such wellness journeys engender, I tried a session with charming Brooklyn native Barbara Savin, positive thinker and energy healer to the stars. In hindsight, I felt that an extended massage with Mickey was a better use of my short stay here. *Isabel Fonseca*
From \$3,900 per person for four nights, including meals, treatments and fitness programming; theranchmalibu.com





THE KICKSTARTER

Lefay, Italy

The handsome young Italian couple in the open-top Ferrari that glided past us on the way to Lefay was the first sign that this was not your typical European spa. Yes, you can stay cocooned in your dressing gown all day, drifting between treatments, but you can also join the elegant Eres-bikini-clad European crowd by the infinity pool for a cocktail as Hôtel Costes-style music fills the air.

WHAT TO EXPECT Don't be fooled by the gently sybaritic atmosphere, for Lefay is a serious spa boasting impressive medical and aesthetic credentials. I was overwhelmed by the sheer variety of plans, so let them know my goals before I arrived: I wanted to lose a few pounds, rediscover my energy and get help with my psoriasis. After my initial consultation, the doctor prescribed the spa's biolite menu, but advised me not to focus on losing weight, instead scheduling in relaxing treatments, plus a few Qi Gong sessions, as she felt severe stress lay at the root of my various complaints.

NEED TO KNOW Having previously thought that any exercise that didn't leave me sweating was a waste of time, I found the Qi Gong sessions transformative, both mentally and physically. And despite not following a hardcore program, I lost 6lb in just a few days. But the real takeaway was identifying how deeply stress has been affecting my life. I now find myself breathing more consciously and following a more balanced exercise routine. Since my return, I have also had several counseling sessions to address my response to stress and I feel much more relaxed for it.

THE MUST-TRY The extraordinary salt pool where you float in near darkness and feel the stress melt away. *Lucy Brooks*
From \$4,280 for seven nights, including full board, treatment program, flights and transfers; thehealthholidaycompany.co.uk

Making Habits Happen

Bestselling author Gretchen Rubin reveals the secrets to forming habits

Making positive habits as convenient as possible is very effective. If you want to exercise, pay for a trainer to come to you. Equally, the brain is amazingly sensitive to even small inconveniences. If you're practicing a 9pm smartphone curfew, for example, put your phone in your handbag, zip the bag, put the bag at the back of a closet and close the door.

Pre-plan for failure. You intend to meditate every day, but what happens when you're traveling for work, have a packed schedule and a noisy hotel neighbor? Anticipate as many challenges as you can and specifically think about what you'll do and say to overcome them.

Avoid making life-affirming excuses, like "life is too short not to...", and false-choice scenarios such as "I'm too busy, I'll have to cancel training today". Being aware of them allows you to refute them. Also, devise a routine that doesn't allow time for such thoughts to take hold – for example, exercising immediately after work rather than two hours afterwards.

Times of change, such as a new job or moving house, are opportune moments to shape new habits. Smokers who quit at the same time as moving house are often more successful as they have fewer triggers and associations to hamper them. *Rubin's latest book, The Four Tendencies (Two Roads, \$20), is out now*

THE QUICK FIX

1Hotel South Beach, Miami

Vacations to Miami Beach, with its pulsing strip of buzzy restaurants and vibrant nightlife temptations, don't often inspire healthy behavior, but at the 1Hotel's recently-opened wellness wing – comprising a state-of-the-art gym, a plant-based vegan café and the first stateside version of the reputable British Bamford Haybarn Spa – there's no shortage of virtuous options.

WHAT TO EXPECT This is the ideal city pit stop for those who want to maintain their healthy habits – or even challenge themselves to try something new. The Mind & Movement package incorporates gym classes, spa treatments and dietary recommendations at the aptly-named Plnthouse café (spelling intentional) and other dining venues throughout the area into a personalized, expert-guided experience.

NEED TO KNOW Set aside the time to have your consultation with a member of the wellness team before your arrival so that you can check in and hit the ground running with a pre-booked itinerary. In my case, this included a fast-paced, obstacle-course-inspired gym class, morning power yoga and an afternoon spa day. After three days, I left feeling well-rested, relaxed, and satiated from the abundance of clean-eating options. I've even taken more circuit-training classes back home, as I've found it's a great boost for my energy.

THE MUST-TRY The Spartan Circuit class I took the morning after my arrival was a 50-minute drill through a series of 15 or so obstacle-based exercises – a great intro to high-intensity interval training. A few hours later, the morning's rigorous workout had all but faded after my soothing foot soak and full-body massage. *Laura Neilson*

The Mind & Movement package costs \$450 per guest (room not included), for a two-night minimum stay; 1hotels.com/South-Beach



Photography: Alexandra Natsif at Bridge Artists; Fashion editor: Ilona Hamer at Bridge Artists; Hair: Conrad Doman; Model: Adela Stenberg at IMG Models; Production: Bridge



THE WELLNESS RE-EDUCATOR

Amilla Fushi, Maldives

A home gym with your own personal trainer is always going to make exercising more appealing. Throw in a private pool, a secluded spa and a healthy eating regime, all in the comfort of your own tree house on a beautiful Maldivian island, and you will quickly become addicted. Masterminded by Bodyism, the London-founded exercise movement based on the Clean and Lean philosophy, the secluded one-bedroomed Wellness Tree Houses at Amilla encourage a holistic approach to fitness, wellbeing and diet that is truly bespoke.

WHAT TO EXPECT A Bodyism personal trainer will come to your tree house at 9am each morning. Under a canopy of palm trees, on the totally private fitness platform next to the pool, the trainer takes you through 60 minutes of circuits, using a combination of a resistance band, weights, TRX straps and exercise balls. After a rest and post-workout clean-and-lean breakfast, your dedicated therapist will visit you in your tree house's private spa for a treatment of your choice, from a body-tone massage to an indulgent, rejuvenating facial.

NEED TO KNOW Pack a lot of sportswear, for as gentle as some of the Bodyism exercises may initially feel, at the end of an hour-long session in high humidity you will need more options. After five days, I felt stronger and healthier and could see the difference just four sessions made to my body in terms of muscle tone and posture.

THE MUST-TRY After two long-distance flights, a sea plane and a speedboat, I can highly recommend the on-arrival, anti-jet-lag, re-energizing massage. *Katy Barron*
From \$1,958 per person for seven nights, based on two people sharing on a half-board basis, including flights and transfers; destinology.co.uk