

# Rancho La Puerta

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The first and foremost thing to know is that Rancho La Puerta, aka "The Ranch" is a "*fitness resort and spa*", not just a "spa".

Rancho La Puerta was founded in 1940 by the same family who still own it. At the time it was considered a 'cult' by the locals and people brought their own tents! They know what they are doing and they have kept up with the times as evidenced by their many, ongoing awards such as Travel+ Leisures "Top 10 World's Best Spas". Deborah Szekeley is now 86 and still the Creative Director. She usually comes to the ranch once a week and gives a talk in the evening. This family also owns the Golden Door in Escondido, California.

The Ranch accommodates up to 150 guests and has 440 staff. The fitness staff are Americans and top notch. The gardeners, wait staff, spa services etc are locals. Many have been there an incredible number of years – 30 years is not unusual.

Arrival is easy – fly into San Diego and they pick you up. They have several shuttles per day. It took 1 hr 20 minutes to get there including the border stop where everyone gets out and gets their passport stamped. They provided snacks and bottled water. We did not have that many on our coach so the time would vary a little due to numbers. The ranch is located in Tecate, Baja, about 1700' altitude, and encompasses 3000 acres. The organic farm is two miles away - most people do the round trip breakfast walk at least once during the week as at the end there is now a million-dollar kitchen and a great breakfast. The property is wonderfully kept up – buildings and landscaping. It is very natural and there is a bird walk and landscape garden walk. There are several pools and these are spread out.

Although co-ed, the majority of guests are women - lots of friends traveling together and mothers with daughters. It is also known for being a spa that is comfortable for solo travelers. There is even a cluster of Rancho units where they usually put solo women and there is a small lounge area and hot tub just for that area too. There are five categories of accommodations and these vary even within the categories.

You set your own schedule from the huge and varied list of activities. It is a great opportunity to try new classes. There are a few things that because of the nature of the equipment or the activity require reservations. The only physical activity that had a fee when I was there was Pilates Reformer. And, of course, the spa services are extra as well as the cooking classes (usually). At night there are complimentary movies and guest lectures with a variety of topics depending on the week. There is really something for everyone and you can do as much or as little as you like and vary from day to day. Those who want to be very active all day can do that whereas those who want to enjoy the spa and not do as much are fine too. And every degree of activity in between. It is a casual, relaxed and accepting atmosphere. People go there to learn and to get or stay on the right track. There are people in lots of different stages of fitness and the instructors are very knowledgeable and can modify exercises too. Also there are private sessions available for additional cost for some things.

The food is mostly organic and vegetarian. Breakfast and lunch are buffet and dinner served with two entrée choices, one usually being fresh fish from Ensenada. You can modify the calories as you wish.

Cooking: they now have a cooking school and several times a week there is a hands-on class that is 3.5 hours and a demonstration that is a bit shorter. They do charge for this normally. However, they are starting to put together some packages. In the past it has been Saturday to Saturday only, but now they have some packages that are 3 or 4-night as well as 7. Some may include a cooking class and a massage for example. They also have one-day (Saturday) packages primarily for those in the San Diego area. The seven-day stay is the best for maximum benefit.

Departures: for those driving (basically those from So California) it would be better to go to San Diego Airport and use the ranch shuttle. The line on Saturday morning to get to the border was very long. Our bus passed the cars and basically went to the front of the line. We got out of the bus, passed through passport control and put our carry ons

through security. It probably took half an hour. Total time from the ranch to arrival San Diego Airport was two hours. They run several shuttles per day each direction. On the way back they packed small sandwiches for us (no fruit because of the border).

It is a great place to recharge, relax, learn and come home refreshed!