

Business Traveler



A Coast-To-Coast Tour of America's Best Health and Wellness Resorts

by Jason Oliver Nixon | Posted on August 5, 2022

Being cooped up for the past two years was challenging for the mind, body and soul. Collectively, we packed on the pounds, drank too much, and spent too much time worrying and watching Ozark. With the fog finally clearing and the world reawakening, it was time to address my mental and physical well-being. Sure, I put on some pandemic weight, but I also found myself seeking something of a North Star in this troubled world. How to find my bliss?

I don't travel with cold-pressed juices in a cooler like my Angeleno pals. I am neither gluten-free nor down with dairy, but I have tried my share of colonics. Chia seeds on my salad? Absolutely! Self-help books bore me, but I do pick up Cosmo in the supermarket checkout line sometimes.

Yoga is not my forte. Besides, handstands give me vertigo.

But did I hear that a new blender is on the market? I am sort of Auntie Mame when it comes to fitness. You know, the high-flying bon vivant in the classic movie who dives deep into Japanese cooking at one moment and then sculpture and weaving—not to mention horseback riding—the next. I dabble.

Layer travel into the wellness equation, and I am all in. I have hiked far-flung mountains and survived on purloined produce. I have attempted Pilates and sampled exercise equipment that was surely the devil's spawn. I have lapped up Swedish massages in South America and suffered through Thai treatments in SoHo. I have been sprayed with water jets in West Virginia and had my liver analyzed during a head massage in Monte Carlo. River rocks have marched up and down my back, and clay has been slathered vigorously into all sorts of crevices. I have taken the waters and been given Vichy showers and plumeria-scented baths.

With all this empirical knowledge under my belt—literally—why is it that my weight and stress levels yo-yo up and down and then up again? Self-control. And I am working on that.

"You need to get your head and heart in line," my life coach tells me regularly. Moms can be so annoying.

Still, I am mad for a good health and wellness excursion, and while a weeklong dose of an alternate reality might not be an eternal panacea, why not? We all could use a break right about now.

Here are a few American escapes—some more resort-style and others full-on weight-loss and wellness retreats—to help you recalibrate, reorient and rejuvenate. So dive in and find your own bliss. For a weekend, for a week, forever.



Great room at The Ranch / Photo: Mark Adams Pictures, Courtesy of The Ranch

The Ranch

Malibu, California

Recently, I decided that it was time to address my dad bod, so I signed up for a week at The Ranch, tucked into the atmospheric mountains high above Malibu, California. "It's tough," whispered an in-the-know friend. "And expensive. But you will probably lose ten pounds. Maybe 12." After checking in (and settling into a charming cabin), prepare for a body-fat analysis, a depressing activity that involves an egg-shaped chamber and stripping down to skivvies. Mornings begin at 5:30 a.m. with stretching and intense, six- to 15-mile hikes up and down the stunning Santa Monica Mountains (six salted almonds are gifted during the hike to keep you going!), followed by lunch and several hours of yoga and weights. The day ends with a much needed massage in a cozy casita before dinner. Meals are organic, plant-based affairs, and portions are tiny (think 1,200 to 1,500 calories per day). You can ask for seconds if you grovel (à la Oliver Twist), and I broke into The Ranch's vegetable garden late one night for a heaping handful of arugula. Truly. There's no coffee, wine or wireless (happily, I encountered a heaven-sent wireless signal on the trails for Instagram updates). I loved the hiking, but the afternoon workout sessions just weren't for me, so I figured out (a.k.a. finagled) how to relax by the underutilized pool with a stack of magazines. My dozen-plus fellow Ranch-goers were an amazing bunch of alphas, and I left with several new pals.

Ultimately, I lost eight pounds during the week and 11 inches in all sorts of places. But that was before I braked at the nearest Mexican joint on the PCH for a celebratory post-Ranch meal. Paired with a margarita. Or two.

theranchmalibu.com



Alaska's Stillpoint Lodge is only accessible via boat, helicopter or floatplane / Photo: Courtesy of Stillpoint Lodge

Stillpoint Lodge

Halibut Cove, Alaska

Ah, wilderness! If you seek to commune with nature with a capital "N," hightail it to Alaska's Stillpoint Lodge, a retreat that's only accessible via boat, helicopter or floatplane. There are no roads in, and that's half the magic. Think serenity and absolutely no noise—except maybe the sound of otters slurping fresh-shucked oysters on the rocks. Choose a room in one of the nine stunning, salvaged-wood cabins—surrounded by birch, spruce and endless flowers—and lap up the rustic luxe and spot-on vistas. The one-bedroom deluxe cabin offers especially stunning mountain and water views from the covered deck. Explore Halibut Cove's charming arts community and nearby Kachemak Bay State Park, or take advantage of the lodge's endless activities—from whale watching, helicopter rides and glacier-lake kayaking to boating, yoga and hiking. The wellness experience at the Lodge is about embracing the great outdoors, so we absorbed the gorgeous environs deeply—i.e., stargazing and forest bathing. The morning stretch and deep-tissue massage reenergized me, too. Plus, there's tide pooling, bear watching, paddle boarding and mountain biking, among myriad other activities. Stillpoint is also a terrific spot to bring the kids while you wind down (tyke-friendly activities include fishing, beach picnics and crafts). Finish the day with a sustainably sourced dinner that might include a roasted beet napoleon with local goat cheese and black currants followed by smoked sablefish with rhubarb chutney and Alaska barley risotto. Happily, these folks appreciate a good tippie, so sample an Alaskan craft beer or locally distilled gin and tonic as the sun sets in full Technicolor splendor. Open late May through mid-September.

stillpointlodge.com



Great Stupa shrine at Drala Mountain Center / Photo: Karen O'Hern Photography

Drala Mountain Center Red

Feather Lakes, Colorado

Meditation and soul searching has never really been my thing. It's sort of like skydiving and swimming with stingrays. But how quickly things can change! The pandemic taught me to embrace silence and celebrate ways to turn off the noise. To cement my newfound appreciation for a quieter, more introspective world, I booked Drala Mountain Center, plunked high in Colorado's stunning Rockies. Friends had told me that this is the place if you seek a beautiful, restful and restorative property, and that is true. But be warned that Drala is not about luxury and the finer things: This is a nonprofit educational retreat, after all. "Pack your own high-end toiletries, hair dryer and maybe some booze," advised a friend. "And some peanut butter." Perusing the Center's website, I made a note to opt for the lodge junior suite rather than tents with shared bathhouse and roommates. I figured I could probably find satellite Wi-Fi. Just to be safe, I stashed some gin and olives in the Rollaboard. Drala offers more than 100 retreats per year, each led by a distinguished group of teachers and practitioners, ranging from "yoga and wellness" to a "meditation kick-starter" and "mindful living." "Learn to Meditate: An Introduction and Retreat for Everyone" takes place from August 26 to 28 and "Silent Meditation Intensive: The Cradle of Loving-Kindness" in mid-October. (Goodness, whatever could that be?) Happily, I learned some basic meditative techniques that worked wonders as I returned to my frenetic daily life. The sly cocktails on the side helped.

dralamountain.org



Bellefontaine Mansion at Canyon Ranch, Lenox, Massachusetts / Photo: Courtesy of Canyon Ranch

Canyon Ranch

Lenox, Massachusetts

On the list of fabled wellness retreats, Canyon Ranch invariably appears at the top of the heap. "I go every year," notes a savvy New York friend. "I think of the Ranch as my annual tune-up." Choose either the original outpost in Arizona or the East Coast offshoot that sits in Western Massachusetts' postcard-perfect Berkshire Mountains. Housed within the historic 19th-century Bellefontaine Mansion, Canyon Ranch Lenox is the perfect fall pick-me-up. Think stunning forest vistas paired with plenty of opportunities for realignment and readjustment. Canyon Ranch offers 100,000 square feet of fitness activities, so I broke out the tennis racket and hit the courts before sampling the forest bathing, a guided meditative experience. There's a high-ropes course, heaps of spa treatments (the Hungarian scrub left me glowing), and cooking and nutrition classes (try a private hands-on lesson), but I found myself especially enjoying my daily post-activities retreat to an Adirondack chair on the Great Lawn with a book and a blanket. Granted, the book was a Jackie Collins bodice ripper, but so what?

canyonranch.com



Equine experience at Miraval Austin / Photo: James Baigrie

Miraval Austin

Texas

Miraval offers a trio of wellness resorts scattered from Arizona to Lenox, Massachusetts (just five minutes from Canyon Ranch's Berkshires outpost). The Texas locale, Miraval Austin, smack in the state's atmospheric Hill Country, beckoned as I had already visited Miraval's Tucson branch, where I fell under the brand's spell. Situated some 30 minutes outside downtown Austin, Miraval occupies 220 stunning acres that look onto blissful Lake Travis and the surrounding Balcones Canyonlands Preserve. On the Experiences menu are yoga, hiking, Pilates, challenge courses and myriad fitness classes. I threw a hatchet (curiously fulfilling!) and tried my hand at archery. The equine therapy didn't do it for me as my horse followed my every lead without hesitation (apparently, I am a good leader), but I lapped up the honey-tasting offering. I splashed about in Lake Travis and attempted stand-up paddleboarding. Meals were terrific, so I visited Miraval's Cypress Creek farm to meet the convivial farmers who grow the kitchen's stunning produce. I rounded out my experience with a few spa treatments including a neck and scalp massage and a vitamin C facial. Bliss, bliss, bliss.

miravalaustin.com