

*active travel*  
By Daniel Scheffler

# go west

108 | LONGEVITY edition IV 2017 | [www.longevityLIVE.com](http://www.longevityLIVE.com)



## TO CALIFORNIA, WHERE THE RANCH MALIBU LIES IN WAITING

Sometimes you might want to venture west... as exotic and far west as Malibu, California. In my ongoing quest to experience meditation, health and wellness, my travels have taken me mostly to the East: Bali, Japan, India, Indonesia, China and Mongolia. But, let's be honest, another day of sun in California is already a good start to almost anything.

This part of America, with the peaceful canyons and dramatic mountains as a backdrop – and an icy Atlantic Ocean as a scene-stealer – offers a quiet lull of something I'd like to call happiness. You sense it, even before you get there – a little tingle in your mind's eye.

As you leave the huff-puff of spread-out Los Angeles and drive out on the Pacific Highway, the chimera appears. Lucky for me, it's much less mirage and much more just lovely sea mist. Malibu, in all its glory, is real and waiting for me to change into flip-flops (or maybe a muumuu).

The Ranch, a true working farm, is hidden from the world. I

jamboree up the steep hills, admiring the horses and blooms, to arrive at this wellness retreat, which focuses on a holistic idea of how you want to be tackling wellness in your life – every single day.

Yes, it's a detox from the world, with a goal of not checking your emails much – or at all. It's also a reset on everything I've been gorging on – so, food and drink too. My initial thought of having to go totally vegan for a few days is met with some urgent resistance, having been a cheese- and charcuterie-lover my whole life.

Oh, and naturally there is a weight-loss element here, and lots of immersive fitness routines. But it's a whole lot more that's going to take you from zero to some kind of hero.

At times, while lying on a hard mattress-free bed in India, I wondered about a more comfortable option of detoxing and tapping into my Zen-self. Not that I wanted to opt out there, as I lay listening to the Mother Ganges River on a cement floor; I was merely wondering.

And so, I was rather pleased, if not completely surprised, by how beautiful, elegant and plush The Ranch is. White linen beds, rooms with views of nature and massage beds under trees... oh, I could go on! OK, maybe just a little more: pools where you can float under that forever-sunny sky and meals that some of the finest restaurants





Organic garden



Exercise room

I have been to in my life couldn't imagine how to replicate. Enough, enough!

Life at The Ranch is relatively unadorned. It's not that ashram bareness, true, but it's not The Ritz either. This is perhaps that perfect way to bridge the divide between the West and the East.

Some of the East's finest teachings of food consumption (less is more) and yoga classes (it's not exercise, it's a lifestyle) are ever-present. There is also the science part that is more of a Western thing, with nutritionists, smart thinkers and fitness specialists aiding me along the way.

The genius is rather simple, really: just take me away from distractions. I don't do social media, but still there is a very active newsfeed, texts from friends, so many things I could Google, and then all that binge-watching I still want to catch up on – *House of Cards*, *Orange Is the New Black*. So, something a little stricter is obviously necessary.

Early mornings, when the sun is not quite ready to reveal itself, are perfect for stretching, drinking some herbal tea and heading out for the spun-out hike of the day. Here, the idea is to get fully into nature for exercise, which I might point out is an extreme improvement from having to sweat for hours in my New York City basement gym (we even pay for that). The air is too fresh even; my body almost doesn't understand what to do with such glorious rawness.

Across 200 acres in the Santa Monica mountains is where I have now disembarked. As I spend the next four hours just walking up mountain paths, taking in the views, I feel strangely remote – like being on another planet, with just me on it. Walking as a form of meditation has an effect on the mind.

That hike is a mighty personal achievement, the beauty notwithstanding. Reaching an end point with sweat dripping off you – well, that simple action is what makes it all worth the effort.

Returning to the retreat, it's time for eating again. Over the next few days, the food ranges from artichoke "crab" cakes, cauliflower pizzas with kale pesto and sweet potato burgers with red quinoa, to millet tabbouleh and white bean hummus. And when a miso eggplant lands on your plate, nothing has ever tasted this good. I even wanted to slow down to just understand what eating could be like. Who knew even this could be a meditation?

My afternoons are spent working out, to combine conditioning and restoration, with a group of enthused folks. There is, of course, some yoga, too, and a daily massage. It's a strange thing when you start paying full attention to your body in this way. At first every muscle, every hair, every molecule seemingly perks up and starts to respond in distress. But soon you realise that it's not actually agony or torment; it's a sun salutation to yourself. My body was saying: "Hey, thanks for being so active, and fuelling me with the best ingredients on the planet." Finally, I was listening.

Evenings are pretty much early to bed after a special meal. Was I left hungry, ever? Perhaps my body was adjusting to the



right amounts and I was not just eating because I thought I needed to.

Who knew that I would learn all of this in a little beachside town in California? Maybe that's what attracts the cognoscenti here, searching for a better style of life. Away from city crime, growing pollution, the usual stress and bad attitudes of neighbours – this is a small reminder of what we could be cultivating at home for better wellness.

That is always the trick: taking the lessons you've now accumulated and loved back home with you. At the ashram you're totally disconnected in a foreign land, with only the sound of the gong guiding you. It's easy to fall into the trap of just wanting to stay right there; it's the perfect place to be your best self and tap into the finest wellness available to humankind. The Ranch approaches this a little differently; it doesn't take you too far outside of your normal life.

Life at The Ranch, you could argue, isn't polarised with my normal life. I try, every day on every journey, to incorporate wellness and nature. With the lessons – let's call them Western ones – I can see the implications and how to take these tools and make them work for me in New York City. Then again, I have just moved to Southern California, so perhaps The Ranch inspired more than just little tufts of wellness in me; it's reminded me that the lifestyle is available, if you choose it.

The city will always be there; the rat race can always galvanise you and sip on you slowly. But space, time and some kind of thing we want to call freedom isn't that easy to come by. So, when you see it, whether at a wellness retreat or from the comfort of your couch, you should jump right down that rabbit hole and believe that it can become part of your every moment.

## HOW TO PLAN THIS TRIP:

- If you have some time to devote to The Ranch, make sure to book with them here: [www.theranchmalibu.com](http://www.theranchmalibu.com). You have some options. You could do the shorter version that takes place at Four Seasons West Lake (just up the canyon from The Ranch) for four days, or do the full week at The Ranch Malibu. Or double up and do both, if you have the time.
- British Airways is the easiest way to fly to Los Angeles from Cape Town and Johannesburg. Book at [www.britishairways.com](http://www.britishairways.com) and make sure you check out its latest "yoga on the plane" suggestions. **L**