

LIFE ON THE RANCH

Come to Canyon Ranch for a life reboot, or to just enjoy a memorable hike, spa treatments and food. BY DINA MISHEV

“Find the joy in the world,” says the yoga instructor with a silk flower tucked into the back of her smooth ponytail. Elizabeth enunciates and intonates so that these six words stretch out like reverberations from a gong. And the way she says them makes them sound like the most important, profound sentence in the world. A minute later, in case we’ve forgotten what we’re supposed to be doing, she reiterates.

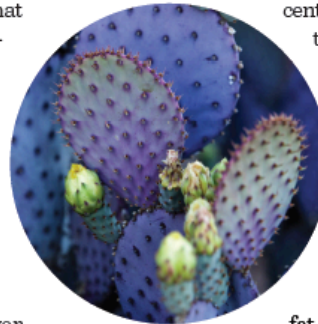
I begin to find joy in the idea that she sounds like a benevolent dictator of some far away fairyland. I’ve never heard anyone speak like this. Elizabeth takes joy very seriously. Another minute in, our assignment changes, but the voice does not. “Find the joy in this moment.”

Lying in corpse pose at the beginning of a yoga class at Canyon Ranch in Tucson, finding the joy in this moment isn’t hard. Canyon Ranch’s campus, which is about 3 miles up the road from the Sabino Canyon National Recreation Area—where many, but not all, of the Ranch’s morning hikes go—is full of signs, elegantly carved into sandstone slabs, directing you to everything from a labyrinth to a spiritual wellness center, two restaurants, a medical center, a golf performance center, “serenity,” metaphysical offices, an aquatic center and a spa, among other things.

Also contributing to my present joy, the clouds waltzing across the bluebird sky look like cotton candy at the county fair. Cacti and wildflowers are just starting to bloom. The 150-acre campus is a desert Eden, with hummingbirds flitting between cholla and barrel cacti and roadrunners darting around under mature eucalyptus trees. And, an hour earlier in an Intermediate/Advanced tennis clinic with Susan at the Ranch’s tennis center—six courts, four hard courts and two artificial grass, all lighted—I had a major breakthrough with my forehand.

Flush from the glow of finding my joy, I sit down to lunch and am pleased to find dining at the Ranch is not about sacrifice, but moderation. Yes, all menus include the number of calories and amount of carbohydrates, protein, fat, fiber and sodium, and you have to ask for things like salt and butter. But, if you ask for salt or butter, they’ll happily bring either—or both—without judgment. Ricotta cheese is made fresh when the ranch serves its Mediterranean-focused “Trattoria Locale” menu and chocolate chip cookies and several flavors of ice cream are made daily. All of the food is delicious and you can order as much or as little of it as you want.

The only place I find the Ranch doesn’t seem to support moderation is in its variety of fitness classes and learning opportunities. There are close



ARIZONA, UNITED STATES

COURTESY CANYON RANCH (2)

TOP SERVICES:
WITH SO MANY TO CHOOSE FROM, YOU MIGHT WANT A LITTLE HELP

Spa:
Muscle Melt for Road Warriors

Gentle stretching combines with warm herbal pouches firmly pressed into muscles and traditional Thai massage for a treatment that's as relaxing for the mind as it is for muscles.
From \$170

Spiritual:
Your Sacred Body

Look at the relationships between your body, soul and spirit and how bringing them into alignment can increase your well-being.
From \$225

Wellness:
Integrative Medicine Consultation

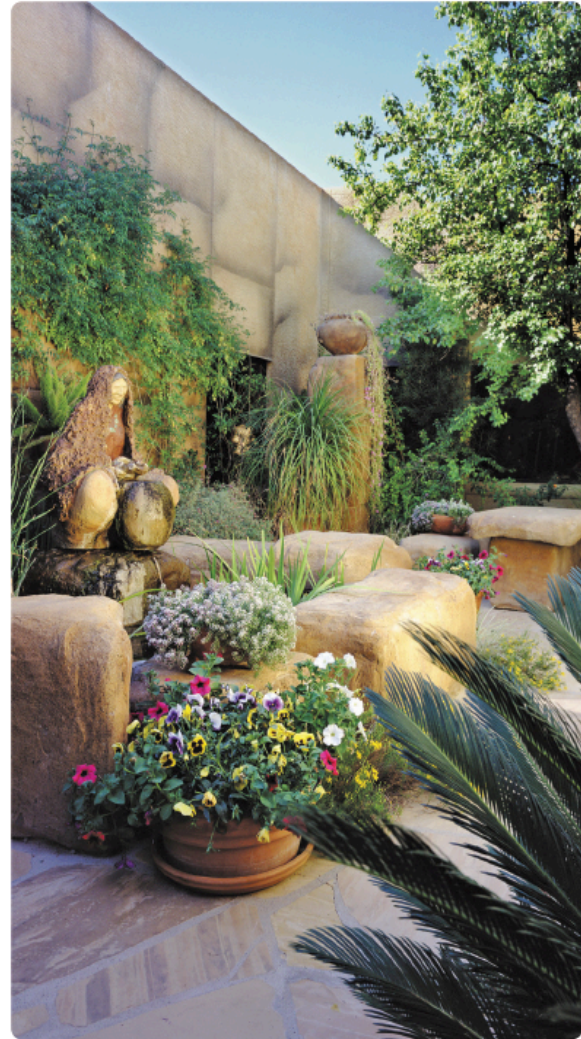
Unhurried, uninterrupted and personalized, this assessment will give you a new baseline to judge all other medical care against, tackling everything from heart health to sexuality, as well as suggestions for follow-up by addressing nutritional, metabolic and psychological factors.
From \$465

Mental:
Animal Tracking

Learn how to follow and interpret animal tracks on a three-hour workshop in the Sonoran desert landscape.
\$100

Physical:
Desert Hike

Sign up for guided, off-site morning hikes at the Outdoor Activity Center in the spa.
Free



ACTIVITIES FOR ALL

(Clockwise from top left) Resting at Windy Point; the Life Enhancement Center; one of the many fitness classes available daily.

to of 50 classes every day, from Aerial Yoga to Wallyball; Don't Worry, Bead Happy; photography hikes; Abs Express; Drumming Circle; golf clinics and indoor cycling. Also the class I'm in, Yoga for Balance.

Elizabeth again: "Find the joy in this moment." If I keep looking for joy I'm going to explode, or at least render myself incapable of doing the balance-y things this class requires. How can I hold a warrior pose when thinking about my Muscle Melt for Road Warriors massage scheduled for later in the day? (The Spiritual Wellness Center is the newest building on campus—built last year—but the spa is easily the biggest: 80,000-square feet including 26 massage rooms, one spa suite, four facial rooms, two rooms for body treatments, nine separate gyms and the yoga pavilion I am presently in.) Thankfully, before I can dwell too much on that treatment Elizabeth calls us back to reality. Or as real as time at Canyon Ranch can be.

Sixty-five percent of guests here are repeat. I meet a gentleman from Toronto whose only vacations for the last decade have been to Canyon Ranch. This time, his eighth trip to the Ranch, he's

staying for two weeks. "Every time I come, I stay longer and longer," he says. "It's like camp for adults, but better, and it's the only place I can really disengage from work and the world. Every time I come I focus on something different. But I always hike."

I DON'T HAVE MUCH EXPERIENCE WITH NON-WESTERN medicine—acupuncture is the usual upper limit of my comfort level—and I don't have any kind of regular spiritual or meditative practice, but I'm here to truly improve my overall wellness, so over my four-day stay I resolve to be open-minded. I promise myself I'll explore the Ranch's spiritual and gentle options in addition to its hard-core workouts. If left to my own devices, the latter is all I'd do—join one of the Ranch's daily 8- to 10-mile, 5-hour morning hikes and call it good. But I'm self-aware enough to know that I do need help learning how to treat my body with kindness.

My second night there's a talk by one of the Ranch's acupuncturists, "The Yin and Yang of Sleep." Stressed by work and health issues, I have had serious sleep issues for the last month.

COURTESY CANYON RANCH (3)

So I go. Walking into the Catalina room, adjacent to the formal dining room—white linen tablecloths and reservations required at dinner—in the Ranch’s historic clubhouse, I’m given a pen, a clipboard and a handout. For the next 40 minutes, I take notes about such things as points on my wrists, ankles and ears I can pressure for a couple of minutes before bed each night to help bring my yang more in balance with my yin, which should help me sleep better.

That night I try to pressure the wrist and ankle points as instructed: simultaneously. I feel like a Cirque du Soleil acrobat. And then end up on the floor, twisted and laughing.

An appointment the following day with Dr. Nicola Finley, one of four board certified physicians at the ranch’s Medical Center, is more my speed. Finley is a specialist in internal medicine who did a fellowship in integrative medicine. I leave wishing she were my regular physician. In 50 minutes, she not only gets my complicated health history, but also checks in on my emotional well-being and asks how happy I am with my spiritual life. “I’m an integrative physician, so I look at the whole picture,” she says. She supports the use of pressure points to try to help me sleep but also likes the prescription sleep drug cocktail my oncologist prescribed.

Later I meet a guest who does use the Ranch’s doctors as his primary care physicians. Over a side of mashed cauliflower and an entrée of butternut squash risotto topped with fresh Alaskan salmon (me) and an appetizer of tuna tartare, a side of roasted onions and an entrée of Moroccan stew (him) at the captain’s table in the dining room, he says, “It gives me a reason to come back at least once a year. I haven’t found any doctors in San Diego [where he lives] that spend half as much time with me and, when they’re with me, actually listen to what I’m saying.” After talking about doctors, we both order crème brulee for dessert.

DAY THREE I RELAPSE INTO MY REGULAR HABITS, taking a break from the spiritual and educational to get my fitness on. Tucson is surrounded by mountains, and I’m eager to get into them. Every morning the Ranch has three different off-site ➔



COOKING CLASS

Learn to make simple, healthy meals at home in the Demonstration Kitchen.

INSPIRATO RECOMMENDS



Tucson

Choose from 20 different pillows and enjoy sweet dreams in a one- or two-bedroom accommodation.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT INSPIRATO’S CANYON RANCH, ARIZONA SIGNATURE STAY, TURN TO PAGE 107.

COURTESY CANYON RANCH



Jorge Silva’s picks
Inspirato Personal Vacation Advisor

DESERT ESCAPES:

After dark, take a hike into nearby Sabino Canyon wearing **night vision goggles**. The next morning, **join a naturalist** for a hike to learn about the landscape you trekked through. **Birders** can try and spot more than 500 species of birds that call the area home.

Take a short walk to the nearby De Grazia Gallery to learn how to **sketch or paint** the beauty of the Sonoran Desert.

Canyon Ranch leads **guided bike tours** up to 33 miles long along the Santa Catalina foothills

or through Saguaro National Park. Bike use is free.

Horse lovers can saddle up for an hour-long ride through the cool desert morning at nearby Rancho Bosque.

GAME CHANGERS:

The **Golf Performance Center** at Canyon Ranch puts you under the watchful eye of PGA pros, who can dissect your swing through video and the center’s computerized swing analyzer. It’s all part of Canyon Ranch’s signature Golf Physical. Or, sign up for **Boot Camp**

Golf, a six-hour intensive focus on one aspect of the game such as the short game, long game or general golf conditioning.

WATER WORKS:

Canyon Ranch features four pools, one **indoor pool** at the Aquatic Center, one **unheated outdoor pool** where you can escape the desert heat, a heated **25-yard lap pool**, and the heated L-Pool which features three **underwater treadmills** available to those looking for a low-impact method to strengthen their legs.



TRANQUILITY
 (Left) Architecture is open
 and desert modern;
 (Right) The Watsu dome
 in the Aquatic Center.



hikes at various levels. The short hikes cover 4 miles or so. I sign up for the longest one at roughly 8 miles, which is slated to leave the ranch at 7:30 a.m. and return around 1:30 p.m.

The prior day I did one of the group morning walks—there are 40-, 50- and 60-minute walks to choose from every morning. These are around the campus and surrounding neighborhoods though; you can marvel at the Santa Catalina Mountains a stone's throw to the north, but you're not in them.

Also, I had done several laps on a 2-mile loop that meanders around the campus. Some of it is on pavement and other bits are a wide, flat trail through saguaro, prickly pear, cholla and barrel cactus and different species of agave. It's more wild than the neighborhood walks, but you're still looking at the mountains instead of hiking through them.

I expect our off-site hike to be in nearby Sabino Canyon—you can check out a hybrid bike from the outdoor center and ride there yourself in 20 minutes—but we go to Mt. Lemmon in the Coronado National Forest instead; our trailhead is a 45-minute drive away, up the Sky Island Scenic Byway. If we follow this highway to its end, we would reach 8,200 feet and Mt. Lemmon Ski Valley, the southernmost ski area in the country. We stop about halfway up.

We set off with guides Jim at the front and Mark bringing up the rear. About two hours later, our group reaches a rocky outcrop with vistas of Thimble Peak, a crumbly rock feature that comes by its name honestly. The pace is leisurely, with numerous water and snack breaks, and we all agree we feel like we're a million miles from any city. For most of the trail, there's nothing in sight but cacti, grasses—green and lush this early in the season—and mountains that look rolling and welcoming until you get closer. Then you see their sides are blanketed with all sorts of plants that want to hurt you and the hillsides are actually as loose as a pile of kitty litter.

Finding a seat on a flattish sandstone boulder at the overlook, I dive into the snack box—yogurt, pretzels, a hard-boiled

egg and a banana—which the Ranch packed into the loaner backpack all hikers receive. Between bites, I take pictures for some of my fellow hikers and do a 360-degree panorama shot for myself. The sprawl of Tucson is only visible in about 5 percent of it; the rest is wilderness.

Hiking back to the van, Mark and Jim switch places—every fitness activity at the Ranch, whether a yoga class or a hike has at least two guides or instructors—but the pace stays comfortable. At the end of the hike Jim leads us all in a short stretching session, but it's not enough for me to consider giving up a restorative yoga class at 4 p.m. I've never before done restorative yoga, but it sounds like a kind thing to do for my body, which was one of the many recommendations Dr. Finley gave me, and one of the things I promised myself I'd do while I was here.

Of course, first comes lunch. At the Double U Café, named for the guest ranch originally on the site and the more casual of the two on-site restaurants, it's lemon raspberry bar day. I'm hoping my restorative yoga teacher will again be Elizabeth, so I can focus on the serious joy these bars will bring me.

HOME A WEEK LATER AND SETTLED BACK INTO MY usual routine, I can report some of Canyon Ranch's influences have stuck: I've done two restorative yoga classes on my own. With my boyfriend's help, I pressure the sleep points on my ankle and wrist most nights. (I still don't know that they work; but what's the harm in trying?) And, as much as I laughed at how seriously Elizabeth took joy, I'm thinking about it, and looking for it, in more places than I did before. Of course I haven't traded hikes for yoga, but when I'm out on the trail in the morning, instead of speeding along, I focus on what a gift it is to be out hiking at all. And also on when I might next be able to return to Canyon Ranch.

Dina Mishev is Inspirato's editor.