

TRAVEL

The Ranch Italy at Palazzo Fiuggi: the luxury retreat 'not for the faint-hearted'

Tatler's Creative Director visits the latest outpost of the famous Californian detox spa offering a programme of wellness like no other

By Sophie Pera

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THE RANCH ITALY AT PALAZZO FIUGGI Courtesy of The Ranch Palazzo Fiuggi

I feel I should preface this review of The Ranch Italy at Palazzo Fiuggi with a disclaimer. I love nothing more than being sent off to some luxuriously punishing wellness retreat. The promise of emerging fully cleansed and rejuvenated is music to my ears, enabling me to happily accept any kind of restrictive programme with open arms and an open mind.

Of course I had heard of The Ranch in Malibu, a fabulously revered holistic health retreat high up in the California hills promising to unlock a deeper level of wellness and body and mind awareness through very healthy vegan eating and vigorous early morning hiking. I knew that the programme had a major fan base, with people positively obsessed with its zen philosophy and of course its amazing results.

Fortunately for me, I didn't have to endure the transatlantic flight and inevitable killer jetlag to experience the benefits of this mythical place for myself. The Ranch programme has brilliantly set up camp in the ancient thermal town of Fiuggi about an hour outside of Rome. Renowned for its magical waters rich in all kinds of healing minerals, the town of Fiuggi is home to the Palazzo Fiuggi, a gorgeous hotel that's focus is on medical wellness. A retreat for people looking to immerse themselves in the restorative properties of the famous water as well as receive proper medical attention and overhaul their entire health system.



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Recently given a fabulous facelift, its imposing white façade screams peaceful rejuvenation and serenity. The spa is of course the pièce de résistance, a vision of white marble and blue waters. There is a sumptuous golden Turkish bath, a Himalayan salt room and a wonderful thalassotherapy room where you are taken on a journey dipping in and out of various pools.

Now onto the Ranch programme. They suggest arriving on a Sunday by 3pm in order to get organised for the week ahead. I am not usually one for group holidays, especially not with 20 strangers. I like to enjoy my body overhaul with a side of silence and utter solitude. I was very pleasantly surprised. The mentality at the Ranch is reassuringly 'you do you' and the group serves as a wonderful support system for the more treacherous times. The food is vegan and deliciously so. Kept at 1,400 calories a day, you eat three square meals with two snacks, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. I was never hungry but when I felt I needed a little extra, especially after a gruelling hike, asking for more food is not frowned upon.

For the first full day, you start your morning by doing a blood, urine and ECG heart test. You'll receive your results two days later and go over them with a doctor. I found it immensely helpful to go over vitamin and mineral deficiencies with a professional and take an overview of my current health state.



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Your schedule is the same every day and establishing a routine is strangely calming. Wake up at 5.30, prep your hiking backpack with everything you need (including a filled-up three-litre water bag), breakfast at six and then you set off for the four-hour hike of the day. Thankfully you hike for time and not distance. This is not a boot camp and no one is following you, counting your steps or monitoring how quickly you ascend the ever-steepening roads. They take their encouraging mentality very seriously and there are no barking orders here. This is your journey and however long it takes you to climb those hills is what it is. And thank god for that, because let me tell you, some of the hikes will test what you think you can do. They will push your limits and challenge your body and mind in ways I didn't think possible. This is not for the faint of heart but again, not every hike was difficult and you can certainly take it easy if need be.

Post-hike we returned to the hotel for a shower and perhaps a quick nap, lunch and then onto my favourite part of the day: the massage! Invigorating and therapeutic, it's like a strong hug to your aching muscles and you walk out floating - almost forgetting the pain of a few hours earlier.

There are also additional exercise classes in case you want to work yourself even harder. The strength core training class was fabulous, focusing on arms and abs and thankfully leaving your sore legs alone, followed by very gentle yoga stretches.



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You can of course add additional treatments to your schedule but I found the programme to be the perfect amount of activities.

At the end of the week, I was a convert. I felt lighter, stronger and more relaxed. They strongly encourage letting go and switching off which I highly recommend. I barely looked at my phone and my week was the better for it.

At the Ranch, you will push the boundaries of what you thought you could do. And the bonding spirit of the community is contagious. I met wonderful people from all over the world. Bottom line is, would I go again next year? 100 per cent.

Healing Holidays (healingholidays.com 020 7529 8551) can arrange a 7-night programme from £7,599.00 per person sharing including transfers, full board accommodation and inclusions of the programme, including daily guided hikes

theranchmalibu.com