The Best Weight Loss Spas in America

The Focus Now Is On Healthy Weight Loss

BY ANITRA BROWN | Updated 02/06/18

SHARE PIN EMAIL



Want to lose eight pounds in a week? Who wouldn't? The problem is that *fast* weight loss is not the same as *healthy* weight loss. Rapid weight loss often includes muscle tissue, which is denser than fat and which helps burn calories. Losing muscle also slows down the body's metabolic rate so that it is more efficient at holding onto the calories you do take in.That causes people to gain all the weight they lost, and then some.

American spas learned this the hard way. In the sixties, they started out as "fat farms," where women went to lose weight fast by eating 800 calories a day, exercising for hours, and obsessively measuring. While a few programs still offer this model, it is truly not advisable. The emphasis now for short-term stays at destination spas like Canyon Ranch Lenox and Rancho La Puerta is not so much on losing pounds, but on eating delicious, healthy food, getting plenty of exercise, and attending lectures and classes on healthy living and personal expression.

Further, not every guest wants or needs to lose weight. In the last few years, most destination spas have started letting you order as much food as you want–and it's often so good that it's easy to gain weight! The people around you might not be focused on losing weight. So where do you go if you are overweight and need to tweak–or even overhaul your approach to food and diet–and be surrounded by other people who feel the same way?

Skyterra Wellness Retreat

One of the best new examples of a weight loss spa is Skyterra Wellness Retreat about an hour from Asheville, North Carolina. It's a small program that encourages longer stays (one to four weeks) where everyone eats the same delicious, healthy meals at communal tables. They exercise together, attend lectures together, even go into Asheville for a bit of chocolate and coffee at French Broad together!

A talented staff on the cutting edge of fitness and healthy living teaches guests the latest in wellness thinking: keep moving; eat real food; cultivate connections. They debunk the "calories in-calories out" myths, i.e., the only way to lose weight is to eat fewer calories and exercise more. In fact, compulsive over-exercising might just be undermining your health.

The interesting thing about Skyterra is that no matter what shape you're in, the program is scalable. Someone who is obese or a triathlete can be in the same exercise class because the movements are adapted to make it a challenge, no matter what your level of fitness.

Fitness Director Jeff Ford evaluates guests on the way in, testing your strength, flexibility, and balance. You also get a scan that reveals not just your weight, but how much muscle and fat you have. At the end, maybe you "only" lost two pounds, but you gained one pound of muscle and lost three pounds of fat, which means your body is closer to becoming a fat-burning machine.

Skyterra also talks about the emotional aspects of eating, the importance of stress management, not denying the pleasures of food. You have so much interaction with amazing talents like Amber Chadwick, B.S.

in Kinesiology and yoga teacher extraordinaire. Skyterra simply can't be recommended highly enough.You will learn a lot about yourself and have a great experience. All-inclusive rates are $3,500 per week in high season, single occupancy.

Green Mountain at Fox Run in Vermont

Green Mountain at Fox Run in beautiful Ludlow, Vermont, has a long history of helping women develop a healthier relationship to food–and themselves. While more casual wellness-seekers and even athletes could fit in at Skyterra, this is a women's-only program for people who have struggled with binge and emotional eating. Most come for four weeks because it takes that long to change the habits of a lifetime.

The program is highly structured, with an emphasis on three key areas -- behavior, nutrition and physical activity. This is where you come to let go of the "good food/bad food," diet and deprivation model and learn how to love yourself.

The focus is not so much on weight loss, but on health.

There are plenty of exercise classes and time for walking (called "Vermonting") on an old logging trail. As you cycle through the program you have fewer lectures and more activity. The facility itself is a sixties-era motel that has been nicely remodeled–simple, comfortable and clean. All-inclusive rates are $3,700 for the first week, single occupancy.

The Oaks at Ojai

The Oaks at Ojai was founded by Sheila Cluff, a wellness visionary who created cardiovascular dance in the 1950s (later known as aerobics) and inspired Mel Zuckerman to open Canyon Ranch back in the '70s. It calls itself "America's best spa value" with affordable rates that include overnight accommodations, three delicious and calorie-conscious meals a day, your choice of 15 fitness classes per day, and evening entertainment and seminars.

The 1920s Mission-style hotel-turned-spa has 46 guest rooms, including private rooms and courtyard suites, double lodge rooms and double cottage rooms. Classes include walking, hiking, swimming and fitness classes such as stretching, dancing, cardio sculpting, yoga, and Pilates. Guests are encouraged to take as few or as many classes as they would like.

The Oaks at Ojai pioneered the concept of the modern destination spa in the 1970s and still encourages a 1200-calorie a day diet with lots of exercise. Mind you, some people have been known to head down the street for supplemental ice cream. All-inclusive rate starts around $2,000 for six nights for a single.

Canyon Ranch Life Enhancement Center, Tucson

Canyon Ranch is a big place with people who have lots of different interests. The smaller Life Enhancement Center is where people with a specific interest, including weight loss, can find each other, learn together and support each other. In a small-group setting, you are surrounded by supportive peers and consult with our wellness professionals to plan a customized strategy to attain a healthy weight.

The seven-day weight loss program is just $500 above your package and includes sustainable weight loss strategies; the first-hand experience in nutritious dining and meal preparation; encouragement to become more active; medical advice and support; guidance in establishing healthy habits; supportive setting; and personalized take-home plan for sustainable weight loss. You're also encouraged to take advantage of all the fun and activity that Canyon Ranch has to offer, everything from yoga and meditation classes to its exciting High Ropes Challenge Course and much more. All-inclusive rates for a single start around $1200 per night; the seven-day weight loss program is an additional $500.