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Long weekend getaway

By Fran Miller



Participants in a Signature Retreat. Photos
Evelyne Gaudin

Several weeks have passed since I returned home from my Signature Retreat at Four Seasons Hotel Westlake Village, and the effects of this transformative health and wellness weekend continue to reverberate. In partnership with the on-site California Health & Longevity Institute, the immersive four-day, all-inclusive experience provided a much needed nutrition and fitness wakeup call. Too much wine, too many sweets, and not enough weight-bearing exercise had taken their toll and my BodPod body composition scan (part of the retreat itinerary) proved it. It was time to get serious.

The retreat provides a winning combination of the Four Seasons brand of luxury hospitality and CHLI's personalized nutrition and fitness services. Over four days and three nights, participants are led through an hour-to-hour itinerary of curated workshop experiences, cooking classes, life balance exercises, and personalized workouts that inspire optimal health, weight loss, and

lifestyle changes. The retreat is customized to each participant based on a pre-program health assessment and phone consultation with an expert nutritionist.

The shocking result of my BodPod scan was enough to lead me on a path to proper nutrition and exercise, and the wise counsel of renowned nutritionist Paulette Lambert (California's first private practice registered dietitian) proved invaluable. Regaling our group with practical and scientific nutrition knowledge, Lambert led us through hands-on culinary experiences while conveying her passion for healthy foods. She taught us how to weather media and marketing misinformation storms and demonstrated that nutritious meals can be delicious and satisfying. She listened patiently to our incessant questions, and thoughtfully answered each and every one. She even hiked Malibu Canyon with us. And at the end of the program, each of us left with her cookbook, "The Wellness Kitchen," having already mastered several of the recipes within.

Mental and physical fitness played just as large a role throughout the weekend. The early start to morning mediation proved challenging to some, but those of us who set our alarms were rewarded with calming tools we can use in our daily lives. We giggled at first over the unconventional 'sound bath mediation' and the practitioner's manipulation of quartz bowls to elicit supernatural sound waves, but in the end, the gentle snores from several in our group substantiated the serenity of the practice. And some of us struggled with the option of a glass of wine with our Coin & Candor dinner, the hotels' signature restaurant, where we learned to order healthy options off of the menu. Did we really want or need that glass of wine, equal in calories (we now knew) to a scoop of ice cream? Maybe not.

Perhaps of equal importance to the enjoyment of the retreat was our group's camaraderie. Ours was a wildly varying-in-age flock of 10 - the fellowship of which was as soul-fulfilling as each of our well-planned activities. Strangers at the first Friday afternoon gathering, and friends exchanging phone numbers and email addresses by the Monday end, we shared with each other our individual food vices, our body fat percentages, and our personal wellness goals. Side by side we practiced mindfulness and new forms of mediation. We worked out, cooked, ate, and hiked together. And during our scheduled 'personal time' we continued to gather, chatting on chaise lounges by the posh Four Seasons pool while foregoing the guacamole, chips, and margaritas enjoyed by those seated near us, opting instead for ice water and the seasonal fruit plate, and feeling good about the choice.

Alive. This was my word choice when our group was instructed during our initial welcome circle to imagine our 'happy places' and to describe how we feel when there. We were encouraged to elicit during the retreat the expression of our selected words. End result? Four Seasons Hotel Westlake Village Signature Retreat is apparently my new happy place; I'd never felt quite so alive, in such a healthy way.

Travel Tip: Fly JetSuiteX out of Concord to Burbank and then Uber or Lyft (about a 40-minute drive) to the hotel. Free parking, snacks, drinks, no baggage fees, and ample leg room? Yes, please.



Paulette Lambert conducts a cooking class.

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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