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## Expand Your Reach

Benefits of Offering a  
Total Wellness Menu





# Reboot Camp

An upscale So Cal health retreat helps clients stay true to their wellness resolutions. *By Lesley McCave*

Often, the biggest motivators come from personal experiences. That was certainly the case with the Chapmans, self-confessed workaholics and parents to two young children. Feeling exhausted and increasingly exasperated with their lives, the San Diego couple knew something had to give. Wyatt, president of a thriving architectural practice, was being “eaten away by stress” according to his wife Melissa, who herself was avoiding the gym and surviving on junk food. She attempted to jumpstart her workout regimen by attending fitness boot camps but, she reflects, “They consisted entirely of workout sessions for eight or nine hours a day. There was no cognitive or behavioral support afterward, so I went right back to my old habits as soon as I left.”

In a bid to find a longer-term solution, the couple decided to open the type of place that they’d want to visit: a retreat that would include a weight-loss component but also be fun—and would benefit generations to come. It would provide drained and depleted clients with the tools necessary to reboot their lives. The Chapmans recruited fitness and wellness experts and researched

properties with facilities and accommodations to match their projected retreat’s high level of care.

By August 2013, VeraVia—a name chosen by Wyatt that loosely means “true path” in Latin—was ready to open at the Park Hyatt Aviara in Carlsbad, California. The retreat consists of packages that last from three nights to four weeks, and focus on four key lifestyle areas: fitness, medical, nutrition and wellness.

It’s undeniable that the five-star, oceanside resort’s gorgeous backdrop is a major draw. But with so many other luxurious health retreats operating these days, what distinguishes VeraVia from the rest of the competition? *DAYS SPA* spoke with the founders to get the skinny on this new wave of “wellness vacations”.

## CLIENTS ON A CRUNCH

One thing that stands out about VeraVia is its all-inclusive, “wraparound” approach. “There are some amazing retreats out there,” acknowledges Wyatt, “but their guests have to seek out and pay extra for medical or psychological services, if they’re even offered at all. We wanted



VeraVia's agenda includes yoga, medical tests and healthful cuisine.

VeraVia to be a one-stop shop, where clients can access everything in a limited amount of time, and where staff is working together as a team.”

Although the retreat is concentrated, it's far from superficial. Its naturopathic doctors strive to identify the underlying causes of clients' unhelpful behavioral patterns, and aim to equip them with tools for achieving greater self-awareness and eliminating self-defeating thought processes. Customization and tweaking are key: If a trainer notices a client struggling in a workout, he'll ask the nutritionist to increase that person's food allowance. (Guests enjoy several organic, farm-to-table meals daily, as well as healthful snacks and juices.)

VeraVia's detailed medical module sets it apart from other retreats. Guests complete an in-depth, pre-arrival questionnaire and, once on site, they're given a battery of tests—everything from complete blood work to neuromuscular assessments. “Some of our guests are quite sedentary—they may even be amputees,” explains

keep our client list to a maximum of 10 per week so we can accommodate all levels of mobility.” The programs' fitness offerings include hiking, tai chi, yoga and guided meditation; guests also receive one complimentary signature massage at the resort's 15,000-square-foot Avira Spa (with preferred rates on other spa services).

### THAT NAGGING FEELING

As anyone who has attended this type of retreat would agree, the hard work starts *after* you leave. Melissa points out, “It's all very well for people to lose weight, take hikes and break old habits while they're here, but as soon they get home they think, ‘Now what?’ And if they fall back on those habits, they feel ashamed and mad at themselves, having just invested money and time in the program. We're very sympathetic to that. Yes, we want results from day one at the retreat, but what we focus on is success at home. We want guests to feel accountable long after they leave us.”

PHOTOS COURTESY ERIC LIEB



Gorgeous guest suites and villas welcome VeraVia clients.

Hence, the program includes highly structured after-care, which consists of follow-up phone calls by its nutritional, fitness or behavioral experts—or “polite nags” as an article in *The New York Times* dubbed them.

Accountability exists in other forms as well, thanks to the retreat’s Complimentary Companion component, by which a guest can invite a partner or friend to stay in their room for free—and enjoy the resort’s facilities—without signing up for the retreat. They’re even allowed to drop in on a fitness or therapy class. “They see their partner go all-out for self-change: not only does it inspire them to keep their partner motivated after they leave, it inspires *them* too,” notes Melissa.

## WINNING FORMULA

In the two years since VeraVia opened, it has enjoyed huge success, including an 81% repeat or extension rate (the longest stay to date is eight weeks). Online testimonials rave about the “real, passionate and enthusiastic” staff and “life-changing experience.” Many guests come for weight loss; others seek stress-management solutions. “They’re burned out—something in their lives has to change or they’re going to keep going downhill fast,” notes Wyatt.

The clientele varies from married couples to mothers and daughters to “type-A tough people.” When asked who the typical VeraVia client is, he quotes director of nutrition Lisa Mittry, who always responds: “Anyone who eats!” Wyatt adds that he’s particularly proud of the high numbers of men who attend the retreat. “I was concerned they’d be too shy,” he explains.



He needn’t have worried. “When people are here, they’re like little kids again!” says Melissa. “They’re happy: giggling, joking and playful. They’re eating well, they’re moving well, they’re mindful. No one’s hiding behind his or her profession, car or house. It’s just them and their determination—and their sweatpants! Everyone’s equal, and shedding their outer layers to reveal who they really are.”

And if all that soul-searching in the company of strangers leaves clients feeling vulnerable, that’s only a good thing. The bonding goes deep. Email addresses and phone numbers have already been exchanged before the “beautiful and emotional” graduation ceremony. “Men, women, old, young—everyone’s holding hands and hugging,” says Melissa. “They know about each other’s problems. It’s hard. With food detox and elimination, it can be unpleasant. There are tears. At VeraVia, our visitors’ bodies are going through rapid changes. If people just want to sit by a pool and drink lemon water, this isn’t the retreat for them.”

*Lesley McCave is DAYSPA’s managing editor.*