

Home on the Ranch

A true haven for the body, mind *and* soul, Canyon Ranch's latest venture in idyllic Kaplankaya, Turkey, is a sanctuary for those seeking wellness from the inside out. *By Yi-Hwa Hanna*

"I was once was lost, but now I'm found"—those words never really held much meaning to me, at least associated with a place rather than people, before I visited Canyon Ranch Kaplankaya.

I'll be honest—before I visited, I scoffed a little at the idea. Sure, it looked absolutely stunning (from the website anyway), but wasn't Canyon Ranch the place where celebrities always went to cure their "exhaustion" (which I read as a code word for other ailments, despite the fact that I myself have actually suffered from a very real case of exhaustion in the



past)? I had heard of Canyon Ranch countless times before—and not just mentioned on TV shows like *The OC*—and clearly it was a household name in health and wellness circles, so when I was invited down to check out their newest digs in Kaplankaya in the south of Turkey, I decided it couldn't hurt to give it a shot. After all, my lifestyle is one that most people would consider more hectic than the average, and I was truly in dire need of some serious R&R, so I figured what did I have to lose?

A Personal Dream

First, let me give you a little bit of background. Like most of the world's best wellness ventures, Canyon Ranch was an idea born out of personal

experience. Finding himself desperate to change his sedentary lifestyle, founder Mel Zuckerman checked himself into a fat farm back in 1978. It took just 10 days of physical exercise and healthy eating to make him realize how much better his life could be if he could maintain this newfound knowledge upon his return home—and indeed, how much he wanted to help others in his shoes discover the same thing. So, in a quest to help the rest of the world discover what he had—and really, feel like he had started to feel—Mel and his wife Enid founded the very first Canyon Ranch resort in Tucson, Arizona. The location was chosen thanks to the core requirements of the dream: The place had to be big enough to

handle all of the staff and guest rooms that they wanted. It had to be close to enough natural resources that they would be able to access the best in fresh and healthy ingredients, particularly in terms of food. And the place needed to be beautiful, of course—not just because it would be more aesthetically pleasing, but because they wanted the kind of place that was so full of natural beauty that it could make guests feel at peace in the lush surrounds, fresh air and general serenity around them. That was back in 1979. The Canyon Ranch brand now boasts locations in Tucson, Las Vegas, and Lenox in the USA, along with a number of cruise ships that are basically a health spa on a luxury boat, and this

summer, they will be opening their very first international destination on solid ground, in Kaplankaya, Turkey—a location that embodies everything that the very first Canyon Ranch ever stood for, and more, but now refreshed with an entirely modern outlook that sees the brand's core philosophies adapted to the requirements of life in the current day, all with an entirely luxurious touch.

Located in the south of Turkey, along the coastline of the Aegean Sea, Kaplankaya was an undiscovered treasure. While the island boasts some truly spectacular historical sites, such as the Temple of Apollo at Didyma—a site where Apollo was said to have been conceived, and the fourth largest sanctuary in the Ancient



dock, the fishermen hauling in their daily catch. At the dock, a private boat awaited, smiling staff with refreshments in hand. I knew we were in for something special, and a half hour later, we had arrived.

Canyon Ranch's newest destination is set at the top of a hill, overlooking the Aegean Sea to one side with the lush green landscape of the rolling hills to the other. In a word, it is spectacular. As the hotel itself hadn't opened yet during my visit—it's due to open this July—we stayed at The Clubhouse, a charming hotel-cum-office that features plenty of art and basically acts as the throbbing heart of the soon-to-be main Canyon Ranch hotel, which is just down the road. The Clubhouse—which will eventually be turned into a boutique hotel that Canyon Ranch guests and Kaplankaya locals alike will be able to access—boasts the same fresh aesthetic that the brand is proud to call a signature. Fresh light wood finishes, extremely clever, functional, minimalistic modern design made with natural ingredients, high-end gloss thanks to its high quality finishings, and the kind of interiors that make you pause

what might be out there. Atop it all, the skies were so luminous it looked endless, like a direct route to the sun, the perfect setting for the kind of sunsets that looked as though the very heavens were bursting open in a golden outpour of light and warmth. If you don't already know that you're standing on the precipice of two worlds, on the watery borderline of Turkey and Greece, the view will make sure of that.

East Meets West

It's an apt parallel for what the place represents, since Canyon Ranch is just that: The coming together of two worlds. Blending the ideas of both alternative and more holistic medicine with traditional, hard-hitting science, they seem to have achieved the perfect marriage of both. The result is a harmonious top-to-toe experience that sees visitors healed from the inside out. Whether it's psychology, dentistry, aesthetics, physical issues such as weight or fitness and mobility, or health problems from your heart to your lungs and more, there's someone here to tend to that. During our stay, we had but a

they speak to each guest prior to their arrival, in order to come up with the best programme they can, to help them get the most out of their stay. First, they'll want to know what your purpose is—and if you don't know, they'll help you find it. Once that's determined, they'll direct you to the experts, building you a custom-made itinerary for the duration of your stay. It's easy to see how the place appeals whether you're going alone or with a partner, friends or family—your days will be so filled that loneliness and boredom simply aren't an option here, but with one key difference from many places that claim to offer similar programmes: Here, they're careful not to overwhelm you or jam-pack your days so much that you can't actually enjoy your surroundings. After all, they also firmly believe that your personal time and emotional needs are just as important, and they're not intent on packing your schedule with back to back consultations with no room to actually employ either what you've learnt, or the amazing way you're starting to feel with your newfound energy. Instead, they're keen to have guests take advantage of as much of the local landscape as possible, offering hiking, long walks, fitness training both inside and outside the gym—which is an absolutely enormous space spanning an entire dedicated section of the hotel—in addition to yoga everywhere from the studios to one of their many terraces offering stunning views of the landscape surrounding them.

The property, which will have rooms for guests in the main hotel in addition to villas available for longer-term visitors, in addition to homes available to buy for those lucky enough to, will encompass a few beaches: One for activities such as paddle boarding, kayaking and other non-motorised water sports, one that will be accessible by

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Greek world—along with an abundance of natural beauty and resources, it's the neighbouring city of Bodrum that had, until now, demanded most of the attention. And that's where we headed, a short flight from Dubai via Istanbul on Turkish Airlines. Upon landing in Bodrum, we instantly felt a million miles removed from the hectic urban landscape of Dubai—skies so blue that they practically merged into the sparkling sea beneath it, colourful buildings and countless boats sat at the

in appreciation. Each time I threw open the curtains to my balcony, I had to catch my breath in wonder at the view: It's the kind of vista that painters and poets can only dream of, with the Aegean Sea stretching out as far as the eyes can see—from here, in places you can actually look out onto Greece and it's possible to take a boat out to Mykonos just a hop and a skip away—with misty mountainous islands peering out softly in the background, teasing their audience with the promise of

taster of the services that would be on offer, and it's easy to see how guests would want to stay forever. Aside from the beautiful surrounds, here it's easy to fill your days with consultations and treatments that each focus on how to make you eat, sleep, move, and feel better, and in sum, leave your body and mind at their best.

All of the medical, health and wellness consultations and treatments at Canyon Ranch are carried out by highly qualified staff that care so much about your state that



families and people from the surrounding areas, and one that's for relaxation and adults only: In an effort to ensure people are at peace without having to compromise on their "me-time" whether they are parents or not, children are not allowed in a majority of areas in Canyon Ranch, including a majority of the eateries, save for certain designated zones. Over time, they hope to work with local operators to provide everything from fishing trips (that will involve guests being able to cook their catch) to, possibly, horse riding—with a landscape like this, the possibilities seem endless.

Once you've sweated up a storm, a little pampering is in order, and that's where their amazing and extensive spa comes in: In keeping with the philosophies of the brand, the spa uses organic products and nature-based options where they can. Aside from a full range of wellness- and beauty-focused spa treatments, from massages and facials to soaks, they'll also be offering salon services to make sure guests

can access anything they need, be it nails to hair treatments.

If you're looking for a little culture, there are plenty of areas to explore outside of the resort grounds, and Canyon Ranch encourages its guests to head out and see the nearby areas. The Temple of Apollo at Didyma is a must-see, not least because of its historical significance, but also because

the site itself is so impressive you'll walk away marvelling at the fact that it isn't more talked about. We had the opportunity to visit an olive pressing plant, which was one of the most idyllic-looking cottages we've ever seen, growing everything from organic herbs and flowers to making their own bread alongside some of the freshest olives we've ever tasted,

producing olive oil right from the region. It's just one of the many amazing resources that can be found locally, and the area is also renowned for producing excellent cheese and fresh produce from vegetables to fruit, as well as seafood. In short, everything you could dream of for the optimal Mediterranean diet is found here, and that's also one of the

foundations of Canyon Ranch's Kaplankaya venture. The chef and his team utilise the local produce to its best advantage, working with the philosophy that natural is always best, and that keeping things as fresh, locally-sourced and simple as you can is healthier. The result is a delicious selection of food, boasting recipes such as grilled calamari served alongside rocket tossed in a lemon-olive

oil dressing, seared fish and light, homemade desserts such as grilled pineapple. At Canyon Ranch, you'll never go hungry —although it's light on the meat (if you have any at all), and the menu boasts a low sugar and carb intake with no alcohol, everything you're taking in is good for you and flat-out delicious. Upon arrival, or even prior to arrival, guests will have

a nutritional consultation. Meals are then served to each one according to your needs, rather than just your tastes, like a doctor's prescription —which is exactly what you'll start to seek once you understand their philosophy that food should be thy medicine, as Hippocrates once said. One thing that is evident from the moment you arrive, from the nutrition to the

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medical departments, is how passionate the staff are about ensuring that you take your lessons home with you. Not only can you take cooking classes, heading back armed with recipes for dishes simple enough for you to actually recreate at home, along with tips for substitutions for what's locally available in your home town, but your doctors will actually ask if you can share the details of your own doctors at home—particularly if you have a specific or more serious health concern—so that they can communicate with them, exchanging feedback, wisdom and, essentially, work together to help you achieve your best.

Body, Mind and Soul

It's this 360 mentality that I found so intoxicating upon my visit—even with the hotel having not even opened yet, the way everyone from Managing Director, Markus Iseli, to the restaurant staff believed in the Canyon Ranch lifestyle would have any guest immediately convinced. After all, we could see it in all of their faces, in their movements, and the way they think and talk. Perhaps one of the most illuminating conversations we had was with Dr. Michael Thorp, Canyon Ranch Kaplankaya's incredibly charismatic and incomparably



talented Medical Director. Dr. Thorp, who not only makes an endeavour to meet with every individual guest he can, is so passionate about his work that he even cares about following up once you've gone home—“My emails might be short because I'm so busy, but I genuinely will read them and would love to know how you're getting on,” he said. And I believed him, utterly—in one short conversation we had on the beautiful, sunny terrace overlooking the sea, that quickly went from a 30 minute meeting to an hour and a half long chat, I felt as though he were a human X-ray that could see not only into all of my health habits practically at a glance, but that he could virtually look in to my soul.

Within an hour, he had already managed to get me to confront some of my demons—and discover some that I didn't realise I had—while teaching me invaluable lessons on how to deal with some of my problems, giving me tips on how to improve both my mental and physical health, and, in short, completely changing my outlook on key aspects of my life that I will never look at the same way again. The months of feeling lost, stressed out and, to be frank, somewhat depressed, melted away in mere days, and at Canyon Ranch, I had found myself again. If that's how profound a single chat before the hotel has even opened can be, I can only imagine what we could have accomplished had

I met with him for a formal consultation once the resort was up and running. By the time I returned home, with endless notes on everything I'd learned both about my body and diet to my thought process, I had a lot to think about.

Despite the fact that I've already been an advocate of a healthy lifestyle for many years, always striving to live my life in an exemplary manner, it was as though someone had pulled the covers out from over my eyes, and I'd never be able to see things the same way again—and for the better. The real measure of success, however, was in the way I carried on once I returned home. Since then, employing all of the things that I learned, my physical fitness has never been more fired up, my nutritional habits have finally settled into a comfortable pattern that I'm finding manageable (with the results to prove it in a matter of weeks), and mentally, I've never felt stronger or more grounded. As my friends put it, my visit not only gave me my mojo back, but also gave me a level of stability and confidence that I never even knew I had. If that's what Canyon Ranch Kaplankaya could achieve in a matter of days, I can only dream of what I'd be able to achieve once they've fully opened. I already can't wait to go back. ■