

# Eternal springs

Inspired by a flurry of openings, **Laura Millar** heads to Greater Palm Springs to sample the region's growing wellness scene

**T**his is yoga unlike any I've ever tried before. I'm suspended from a wall by just a set of straps and a waistband, stretching my whole body out in front of me like Superman in flight. The straps help me lean in to stretches and poses I've often found tricky in other yoga classes, but thanks to their support, my muscles can be pushed further.

It's my first experience of wall yoga – a phenomenon that hasn't yet taken off in the UK but one of many innovative offerings at Sensei Porcupine Creek, a new US retreat in California located a two-hour drive from Los Angeles or San Diego.

#### HEALTHY HABITS

Set within almost 100 hectares of flower-filled grounds – including an 18-hole golf course – the retreat's combination of wellbeing, luxury and tech was dreamed up by billionaire entrepreneur Larry Ellison, alongside research scientist and oncologist Dr David

Agus. The first Sensei opened in 2019 as part of the Four Seasons Resort in Lanai, Hawaii; this one, which opened in November 2022, is a standalone.

The aim is to inspire people to live longer, healthier lives, and you can choose from a range of packages, from two nights to 30 days. Dr Vishal Patel, Sensei's director of wellness research, explains: "We're here to help deconstruct guests' goals and design a practical plan to make attainable lifestyle shifts that will help them achieve the results they want."

#### TAILORED TREATMENTS

Translated, the idea is that you essentially choose your own wellness programme. Based on a pre-arrival questionnaire and phone consultation, Sensei's team can put together a daily itinerary around what you feel you need. That could be an insight into nutrition or fitness, or simply trying something you're curious about – which is why I'm pulling on that set of ➤



## DESTINATIONS

### WELLNESS HOLIDAYS | CALIFORNIA



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Wall yoga and swimming pool at Sensei Porcupine Creek; salt cave, The Spa at Séc-he; sculpture by Keith Haring in grounds of Sensei Porcupine Creek PICTURES: Sensei Porcupine Creek; Chris Simpson; Austin John

straps into a downward dog, then taking part in a vigorous session of circuit training.

Afterwards, I take a break for a healthy fish and vegetable-rich lunch from a menu overseen by world-famous chef Nobu Matsuhisa, then join a one-on-one session with a 'guide' – the word Sensei uses for their experts and therapists – to analyse how my breathing patterns can help me combat stress.

And that's just day one. By the end of my two-night 'Discover' programme, I've also had an introduction to meditation, undergone a reiki treatment and done some resistance training. If I wanted, I could also play tennis or go on a hike that skirts the imposing Santa Rosa mountains, bordering the resort. Colourful sculptures by renowned contemporary artists such as Keith Haring also dot the grounds, showcasing Ellison's personal art collection – from giant numbers to a towering fibreglass

white dog – with guided tours available to take you round them.

But the idea here is that you can do as much or as little as you want. "We see this as a gentle gateway to wellness," says general manager Julie Oliff. "We want to encourage guests to try things they wouldn't normally try."

I started out here as a wellness cynic; by the time I leave, I feel like I've learnt several practical tools and techniques for sticking to healthier lifestyle habits.

#### HEALING WATERS

My next stop involves a more traditional wellness experience, in downtown Palm Springs, a 20-minute drive away. The newly opened Spa at Séc-he (the name means 'sound of boiling water') is overseen by the Cahuilla people, who first discovered the hot springs in the region in the 1800s.

Séc-he harnesses these thermal waters in the form of a large

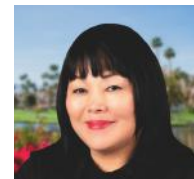
central pool, as well as a series of private baths that can be booked for short sessions. I spend most of the day here; as well as the pools, there are gym and fitness facilities, a cryotherapy suite, salt caves and float pods. I enjoy a session of soundwave therapy in the 'acoustic room', where you recline on a leather lounger with headphones on and listen to a programme of 'binaural beats and gamma soundwaves' – basically, soothing noises – which aims to relax and destress. It's all so fabulously Californian.

Then it's on to my treatment. Séc-he offers dozens, from massages to body wraps and scrubs

to pedicures. Many use ingredients from the local area, such as prickly pear, blue sage and desert clay, and the treatment beds feature a healing layer of heated quartz. I have the JetPeel Facial, which is so good my skin still feels soft and downy a week later.

With a new Surf Club opening in Palm Springs later this year – a body of water in the desert where people of all ages and abilities can learn to surf or improve their skill – Greater Palm Springs is becoming quite the wellness hub. As an add-on to a trip to LA, and a place to take in the clean desert air and leave revived and refreshed, I'd put it on every client's agenda. **TW**

### ASK THE expert



"These additions are bringing greater recognition to the area.

They're helping to enhance what's already here – a mix of hot-spring resorts and high-end hotels – which we hope will attract a different type of traveller.

Being so close to LA, Greater Palm Springs is easy to get to, particularly by car. There are also domestic and international flights to Palm Springs airport."

**Joyce Kiehl, director of communications, Greater Palm Springs Tourism**