A HIDDEN GEM

Nestled in Laguna Canyon, The Pearl Laguna offers wellness retreats that will leave you feeling rested, restored and better than ever.

By ASHLEY RYAN | PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE PEARL LAGUNA

Whenever a new year rolls around, we find ourselves making lists, setting goals and asking, "Who do I want to be? Where do I want to go in life?" The answers may change from one year to the next, but one thing that stays constant is the desire to grow. And few places are better suited to transform your overall wellness than The Pearl Laguna.

Designed as the ultimate haven for relaxation and growth, this Laguna Canyon sanctuary combines what founders Geo and Katresha Moskios say are the four pillars of health: nutrition, exercise, rest and positive, loving energy. "We work with the body, the mind, the spirit, the emotion—naturally," Geo says.

Discover how the couple's weeklong retreat—set within a warm, welcoming space for those of all ages, ethnicities and backgrounds—is designed to help visitors delve into wellness as well as the numerous benefits you can reap from the peaceful program.

Beach yoga is one fitness option at The Pearl Laguna.

LIVING WITH INTENTION

Before The Pearl opened 15 years ago, Geo and Katresha were already well-known yogis. The pair met during a yoga teacher training program in Mexico in 1975 and married three years later. Geo was already living in Laguna Beach at the time, having moved here not long after serving as a sergeant in the U.S. Marines during the Vietnam War. "I started really getting into yoga after Vietnam," he notes. "It changed my life. I like the fact that it keeps me mentally, physically and emotionally in pretty good shape. I can handle things like nobody else seems to be able to—I don't get stressed. I'm fearless; things don't scare me. If an incident happens, I deal with it. I don't run from it."

Katresha is originally from Perth, Australia, though she traveled the world as a model in her youth before landing in England, where she studied health and nutrition. "I decided to be a faith healer and I moved to the Philippines and lived there for a while," she notes. "I learned a lot about energy, about sending energy to people—things that, really, I've continued to this day."

After hosting periodic retreats in Mallorca for 10 years, they decided to look for a more permanent place where they could share their love of yoga and health with others and The Pearl Laguna was born. Individuals can sign up for single sessions, which are held each week, and can even schedule them back to back if they wish to stay longer. The space can also be reserved exclusively for groups, whether it's a corporate buyout, family reunion or birthday celebration.

Guests arrive on Sunday afternoons and undergo a private consultation for Geo and Katresha to learn more about what they're hoping to gain from the experience. Then, Monday through Friday, the schedule is set: Those staying at the 12-bedroom ashram wake up at 6:30 a.m. and do yoga at 7 before breakfast. After eating, they set out for a daily hike and return in time for lunch.

In keeping with their four pillars of health, visitors enjoy a vegetarian diet—from salads to zucchini noodles and sushi—while at The Pearl, with plenty of fresh-squeezed juices, vegetable broths and aromatic herbal teas mixed in.

In the afternoon, they do a fitness class—typically weight lifting, Pilates or a session in the on-site saltwater pool—and enjoy a massage treatment with plenty of time for rest and relaxation built in. "We work quite hard the rest of the time," Katresha notes. "In the afternoon, it's like a release and that makes it really, really powerful."

When the evening rolls around, it's time for a fireside chat about things like balancing blood sugar levels or how to make certain recipes offered at the center followed by another yoga class and then dinner. "We use power yoga in the morning to bring you up and gentle yoga at night to bring you down, which is great," Geo adds. "… If you come here at 9 o'clock at night, everybody's out. Their circadian rhythms get back into sync."

Before leaving on Saturday, participants head to the beach for a picnic on Friday afternoons and, that night, Geo checks their chakras as well.

PEACEFUL PROPERTY

Trickling fountains, greenery and sitting areas are scattered throughout the property, ideal for outdoor meditation, while a gym with weightlifting and cardio equipment is open to all.

The Pearl also has a deck for outdoor yoga when the weather is nice (though they sometimes visit the beach for yoga on the sand), but its indoor yoga room is a sight to behold. With high ceilings and colorful Tibetan rugs that line the floor in front of a stone fireplace, it offers a sense of peace. Statues from Bali, Tibet and Thailand are expertly placed

Yoga sessions (above) and massage treatments (below) are part of The Pearl's health-focused program.

Left: Organic vegetarian food is prepared for guests in the on-site kitchen. Right: The retreat's peaceful setting allows for rest and relaxation.

Hikes with scenic vistas are part of the daily schedule.

for a touch of tradition while vibrant lights—typically, red in the morning and blue in the evening—add to the ambiance. Plus, Geo and Katresha lead most of the classes themselves.

Aside from the yoga space, the property's saltwater pool doubles as a whirlpool spa and there are two saunas: a traditional space with healing green light that heats from the outside in, and an infrared option that warms you from the inside out. Four rooms are reserved for the daily massages, and Katresha also launched an organic product line called Katresha Pure Skin Care that is available in her office for guests to use throughout their stay.

When it comes to the accommodations, each guest room is unique, with some containing large beds, ideal for couples or male guests, while others are quaint spaces for solo travelers. One offers two beds for siblings, mothers and daughters, college roommates or close friends to stay together, and nearly every space has its own bathroom. A few also have wooden decks, where you can unwind and immerse yourself in the towering pine trees that surround The Pearl. Katresha also makes sure that each room is filled with fresh flowers when guests arrive for the week. "And all are named after beaches in Laguna," Geo adds.

BUILDING BETTER HABITS

Everyone that comes to The Pearl is seeking something, whether it's to lose weight, improve mental health or simply build healthier habits that can be carried over into their everyday lives. "We get amazing results," Geo notes. "And it's just about living naturally, you know?"

He says that the most anyone has lost during the retreat is 32 pounds over the course of two weeks, though men usually lose between 7 and 12 while women typically lose 5 to 7. While there are more females visiting The Pearl, the geographic locations from which they come vary drastically, with visitors hailing from Newport Beach, Chicago, New York, Australia, England, Saudi Arabia and beyond.

Each dish served is made entirely with organic ingredients, delivered to the on-site kitchen where the meals are prepared. Katresha herself developed the recipes and also decorates the tables so that each meal has a different design and vibe. "Because the eyes, as you know, are the windows to our soul," Katresha says, "and when people make a change with everything that goes inside [the body], the beauty is very important."

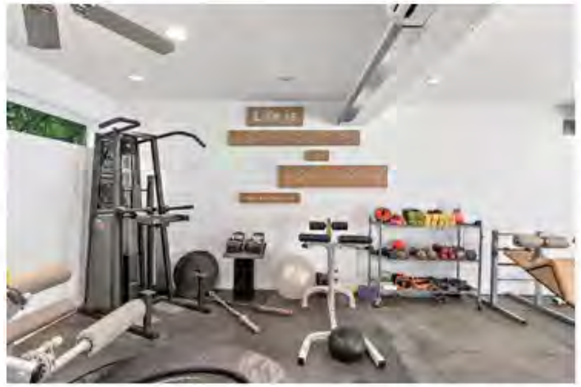
Those staying at the property eat as a group, cultivating a sense of connection as well. "We like everybody to eat together, [because] they get to know each other and they become a group," Geo says. "It's really nice. Sometimes we have groups that come back … together again."

Because The Pearl is located right across the street from the Laguna Coast Wilderness Park, hiking is easy as can be. Large vans escort visitors to the day's hike, with the particular spot changing daily, and guests are able to choose whether to opt for the harder trails or select an easier option, depending on their comfort and abilities.

"It's so good for the spirit to be in the wilderness," Geo says. "We're so overcivilized. We're always on flat surfaces, but the feet aren't designed to be, … so walking out in the hills is … really, really good for you."

Rest and recovery is also crucial to the success of the program, as it allows visitors to decompress, unwind from the stressors of daily life and settle into a more natural way of living. "There's no rest, it's just push, push, push; go, go, go," he explains of our modern daily lives. "But you have to rebuild. You have to recover. Take rest out and it doesn't work. … It's the same way that, without positive thoughts, there's just too much negative out there. So positive energy and positive, loving thoughts are very powerful."

While Geo, Katresha and their staff spend a lot of time and energy ensuring that everything at The Pearl is in line, he says that what they are really doing is just helping people rediscover what they already know they need. "We're human beings, … and we need rhythm," he explains. "We need to get up at the same time every day and we need to get out and get moving and we need to pass out at night. … Our whole world—simple things like walking in the wilderness instead of walking on flat surfaces—that's all natural. That's normal. And[, here,] we try to get people back to normal."



A fitness center provides equipment for workouts in between yoga and hiking.

A LASTING IMPACT

For Kelly and Tobey Tick, sisters originally from Long Island, New York, their experiences at The Pearl have been impactful enough to keep making the trek west: Kelly's fourth visit, and Tobey's third, came at the start of 2024. Though their mom typically visits with them, this time it was a siblings-only trip.

When she first came to The Pearl in 2014, just her and her mom, Kelly says she had no idea what to expect. "Coming in, not knowing a single thing, you are kind of thrown in … and it's people from all different walks of life," she explains. "… For me, it's all about coming and resetting and feeling good about myself, and then that translates into what I'm doing after I leave."

Once, Kelly visited after having knee surgeries and was having a hard time even walking, yet alone hiking. But, two days in, she noticed she already felt more powerful and comfortable on the trails. "And then, we're like halfway up and Geo's sitting there, watching and cheering everyone along and it was just awesome to see that paired with the pain going away. … It's a very magical experience. You're in your head a lot [while you're there], but in a good way."

For Tobey, the retreat at The Pearl taught her the importance of taking time away from the craziness of college life to ensure that your mind and body feel good. "I came [for the first time] my senior year of high school and yoga was not my thing, hiking was not my thing. … but it changed my perspective on a lot of it," she says. "… You could come for a week and feel good for a week, but it kind of changes your life after … [and inspires] just a clearer, healthier lifestyle. That's really why we keep coming back."

In fact, the majority of The Pearl's visitors are repeat clients, with some having attended the retreat more than 60 times. Some of the appeal is likely the fact that everything is planned out for you, so you don't have to develop your own itinerary. "You don't have to make a single decision here," Tobey notes. "… I love the structure."

Although they've been multiple times already, the Tick sisters plan to keep returning, with Kelly noting that she hopes to one day bring her own family and friends to introduce them to this special place, in the same way her mother introduced her. And she says that, even when she's back home in Manhattan, she finds herself using tools she's learned during her time in Laguna.

"Geo has these 'I ams,' so you think about what you want to be and then take that little mantra as you're walking," she explains. "… I totally find myself doing them all the time in the city, too."

And, truly, that's what the program is all about. "[Being at The Pearl] allows people to rediscover themselves, think about things, meditate, get back in shape," Geo says. "And the program works. We get amazing results and people go away from here feeling fantastic in a week—a week to change your life. … If they change even one thing [when they go back home], it changes everything." ■