

A little pain, but big gains

At Texas resort the living isn't exactly easy, but it's rewarding

By SOPHIA DEMBLING
Travel Arts Syndicate

RIO FRIO, Texas — Houston jewelry designer Rebecca Lankford thought she was spending the weekend at a spa and came to Hart & Hind expecting to be pampered, buffed and polished. Instead, she encountered Angela King, a pretty, petite drill sergeant with washboard abs.

"Eight more, ladies," Angela barked as 10 of us groaned and grunted through leg lifts and strenuous stretches.

GETAWAY

"I'm not good at reading instructions," Rebecca admitted with a rueful laugh, keeping the pace gamely.

The full name of this place is unwieldy: Hart & Hind, a Fitness Ranch Featuring Star Cuisine. And it's a spiritual cousin of old-fashioned fat farms, with more emphasis on fitness and healthful eating than facials and feel-good treatments. The indulgence at Hart & Hind is in the dining and location, on more than 5,200 exquisite, privately owned acres in Texas' Hill Country northwest of San Antonio.

Hiking in these spectacular acres is the cornerstone of the Hart & Hind brisk fitness regimen. Clad in identical gray Hart & Hind-provided sweats, we spend ours hiking up and down hills wooded thickly with juniper, cherry, live oaks, pecan and sycamores. We pass creeks — some tumbling, one dry — and swimming holes. Hawks circle above, finches twitter and flutter in the brush, and fields of golden grasses rustle gently in warm breezes. Evenings under a sky full of stars, we spot armadillos, deer, antelope and wild figs. It's Texas at its best.

And in between, there are those leg lifts, because it's all about the exercise.

The concept for Hart & Hind (a British expression meaning buck and doe) was born after ranch owner Kit Detering visited an ashram in California where, she says, they fed us brown rice and talked us to death in national parks. "When she returned, she told her husband, Carl, about the experience while they walked on the family ranch." He listened to me, then stopped in his tracks and said, "You're going to work," Ms. Detering says. After all, he pointed out, who needs national parks with all this glorious Texas acreage in the family? So Kit started with the ashram concept, pushed it up and added Texas flair, and Hart & Hind was born. Although it started as a women-only getaway, men now are welcome.

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Visitors at Hart & Hind stretch before exercising — again.

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COLORADO

Heroes' tracks

The mountain troops of World War II left a skiing legacy in the Rockies. 41



PHIL MARTY/Chicago Tribune

Spaniards chat with English speakers, who get free food and lodging in exchange for talking in English.

By PHIL MARTY
Chicago Tribune

VALDELAVILLA, Spain — This has to be one of the most stressful dinners Victor and Juan have ever had.

"One of my last consulting jobs was with McDonald's," Bob Lemker, a retired computer consultant from Richardson, Texas, tells Victor, who does computer consulting in Barcelona. "When I told people I worked for McDonald's, they thought I flipped hamburgers," he adds with a laugh.

Victor looks puzzled. "Flipped?" he asks, weakly.

I turn to Juan, who works in information systems in Murcia, in southeast Spain. "You said when we were talking outside, that you had taken English for about 20 years, you guessed. Is that right?" I ask him.

Juan's furrowed brow tells me I might as well be speaking Martian, rather than English.

Back to Bob: "What do you need? What type of feedback do you need to know that we understand?" he asks Juan.

"To know what?" Juan says. "I don't understand."

Hmmmm. This is going to be tougher than I thought.

Welcome to Englishtown, a psychology course masquerading as an English-language class masquerading as a travel destination, held in a resurrected 14th-century Spanish shepherding village.

Sound confusing? Not half so confusing as it is for the Spaniards who are dropped into this total-immersion experience hoping to improve their English listening (not speaking).

Englishtown is the creation of Richard Vaughan, an American who came to Spain in 1979.

A translation into friendship

Learning is a two-way street for language program in Spain

he was 21 to improve his Spanish, returned home, then came back again and never left. Since then he's been teaching English (and other languages) to Spaniards, building a business that counts many big-name corporations among its clients.

Along the way, though, he discovered a flaw common to all language schools: People in the real world don't talk the way they do in language schools.

In a school, the teacher will ask, "How many children do you have?" and the student will understand. But if the student goes to a business meeting and talks with someone whose native language is English, the question is more likely to be, "So tell me, Juan, how many children do you have?"

That leaves the Spaniard thinking, "So tell me, Juan? What does he mean, 'So tell me, Juan'?"

The biggest complaint from Spanish professionals who have studied English is that they go abroad to attend meetings or negotiate contracts and don't understand what's said, observes Richard. "They tighten up. If you don't understand, it's an agonizing experience."

How to loosen them up? Put 'em in a pressure cooker.

Here's the formula: Take 15 to 20 Spaniards who speak English (but don't necessarily understand English speakers), 15 to 20 native English speakers (who, preferably don't know any Spanish) and put them together for 10 days. Make them eat together, talk business together, room together, talk families together, play games together, talk politics together, walk together, talk values together, party together, talk dirty to-



JUAN PEREZ

On walks in the fields around the village of Valdelavilla, Spaniards practice their English with visitors. When classes are over, they often stay in the village.