

Weight-loss resorts are a boon for developers

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Story Highlights

The U.S. has only five true weight loss resorts with 360 guestrooms.

Instead of temporary fast results, resorts are designed to provide long-term nutrition and lifestyle tools.

Two types of resorts cater specifically to guests interested in weight loss: destination spas and weight-loss resorts.

Though numerous destination spas periodically offer weight-loss retreats and health-and-fitness programs, few resorts cater exclusively to obese guests by providing year-round, high-intensity weight-loss programs.

Despite recording revenue per available room well above the national average, the U.S. weight-loss resort market segment is surprisingly undersupplied. The U.S. has only five true weight-loss resorts with 360 guestrooms. This disproportion bodes well for the future of the weight-loss resort industry, which offers only one brand: The Biggest Loser Resort.

Destination spas versus weight-loss resorts

Two types of resorts cater specifically to guests interested in weight loss: destination spas and weight-loss resorts.



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Destination spas

Destination spas are hotel facilities primarily designed to encourage healthy habits to their guests. Over a seven-day stay, these facilities provide a comprehensive program that includes spa services, physical fitness activities, wellness education, healthy cuisine and special interest programming.



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Destination spas host the majority of the weight-loss programs offered in the U.S. These spas offer the latest in food, fitness and spa services, and they have a low guest-to-staff ratio. Nutritious, low-calorie meals and fitness classes are available, but the guests choose how much to eat and in which classes they wish to participate. Because each guest determines their level of participation, the weight-loss programs offered at destination spas lack the level of camaraderie experienced at more structured weight-loss resorts.

The following table lists destination spas in the U.S. that offer weight loss programs. Because nearly all weight-loss programs are sold as plan packages, we show the average weekly published price, which includes three daily meals, fitness programs and education. We also show the equivalent daily price.

U.S. Destination Spas Offering Weight Loss Programs

Name of Resort	Location	# of Rooms	Avg. Weekly Price *	Avg. Daily Price *
Canyon Ranch Hotel & Spa	Tucson, Arizona	259	\$3,642	\$520
Miraval	Tucson, Arizona	118	\$2,093	\$299
Cal-a-Vie	Vista, California	24	\$8,484	\$1,212
California Health and Longevity Institute	Westlake Village, California	270	\$4,830	\$690
Camp Technique/ Live In Fitness	Playa Del Rey, California	12	\$3,103	\$443
La Costa Resort & Spa	San Diego	610	\$3,115	\$445
Golden Door	San Marcos, California	41	\$7,750	\$1,107
The Flamingo Resort & Spa	Santa Rosa, California	170	\$2,149	\$307
Ranch at Live Oak	Malibu, California	15	\$5,600	\$800
The Oaks at Ojai	Ojai, California	46	\$1,393	\$199
Eden Valley Institute Lifestyle Center	Loveland, Colorado	24	\$1,610	\$230
Canyon Ranch Hotel & Spa	Miami	150	\$4,900	\$700
Pritikin Longevity Center	Miami	75	\$5,225	\$746
Marriott Delray Beach	Delray Beach, Florida	269	\$3,140	\$449
Heartland Spa	North Gilman, Florida	16	\$2,520	\$360
Canyon Ranch Hotel & Spa	Lenox, MA	212	\$4,760	\$680
Rancho La Puerta	San Diego	84	\$4,350	\$621
Wellspring at Structure House	Durham, North Carolina	4	\$2,975	\$425
Birchcreek Retreat	Pine Hill, New York	50	\$3,276	\$468
The Ithaca Zen Center	Ithaca, New York	50	\$1,220	\$174
Copperhead Resort and Spa	Shandaken, New York	17	\$3,063	\$438
Honor's Haven Resort & Spa	Ellenville, New York	232	\$2,300	\$329
Hunter Mountain Hotel & Spa	Hunter, New York	25	\$2,352	\$336
Kerr House	Grand Rapids, Ohio	4	\$3,640	\$520
Deerfield Spa	East Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania	20	\$1,375	\$196
FitRx Weight Loss Retreat	Brentwood, Tennessee	12	\$3,500	\$500
Tennessee Fitness Spa	Waynesboro, Tennessee	50	\$1,263	\$180
Cooper Wellness Program	Dallas	62	\$3,359	\$480
Lake Austin Spa Resort	Austin, Texas	40	\$6,473	\$925
Rancho Cortez	Bandera, Texas	17	\$1,999	\$286
Green Valley Spa	St. George, Utah	51	\$3,880	\$554
Red Mountain	Ivins, Utah	104	\$1,995	\$285

* Prices include three daily meals, fitness programs, & education

Source: Hotel & Leisure Advisors - 2012

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With one exception, all of the destination spas listed are independent properties. Canyon Ranch, an established resort brand that focuses on health and wellness, is the only multiple location destination spa brand. Canyon Ranch operates three U.S. resorts in Lenox, Massachusetts; Tucson, Arizona; and Miami Beach, Florida.

Additionally, Canyon Ranch operates several SpaClub locations with day spa facilities, fitness classes and workout facilities. These are located at The Venetian and The Palazzo hotels in Las Vegas and on various cruise ships.

Weight-loss resorts

Modern weight-loss resorts evolved from the 1950s-era camps that were commonly referred to as "fat farms." Geared toward wealthy women, these grueling programs combined extremely low calorie diets and excessive vigorous exercise to produce rapid weight loss.

Instead of temporary fast results, today's resorts are designed to provide long-term nutrition and lifestyle tools. Programs range from a few days to more than eight weeks, with one to three week stays being the norm. Although guests experience some weight loss during their stay, the primary goal at most weight-loss resorts is long-term fitness. Programs at these resorts not only focus on weight loss but also on changing behavior to ensure that sustained weight loss occurs after guests return home.

Some guests complain their lack of will power prevents them from following programs that allow them to choose their level of participation, such as those offered at many destination spas. In such cases, the highly structured programs at weight-loss resorts are preferred because of their strict regimentation and the camaraderie of fellow participants keeping them on track.

The following table lists weight-loss resorts in the U.S. We show the average weekly published price inclusive of three daily meals, fitness programs and education. We also show the equivalent daily price.

U.S. Weight Loss Resorts

Name of Resort	Location	# of Rooms	Avg. Weekly Price *	Avg. Daily Price *
Hilton Head Health	Hilton Head, South Carolina	50	\$2,780	\$397
Green Mountain Resort at Fox Run	Ludlow, Vermont	25	\$2,555	\$365
Biggest Loser Resort	Malibu, California	60	\$2,495	\$356
Biggest Loser Resort	Ivins, Utah	40	\$2,495	\$356
Biggest Loser Resort	Java Center, New York	85	\$2,495	\$356
Total/Average		260	\$2,564	\$366

* Prices include three daily meals, fitness programs, & education. Tax & gratuity excluded.

Source: Hotel & Leisure Advisors - 2012

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Hilton Head Health prides itself on delivering an exceptional experience in fitness, nutrition and stress management, empowerment, longevity and fulfillment through personal and interactive sessions designed for individuals ready to embrace a lifestyle change. Program features include health assessment, daily intense exercise, three healthy gourmet meals and daily snacks, nutritional classes and cooking demonstrations. This 35-year-old resort was featured on A&E's weight loss based reality TV documentary "Heavy." In addition to weekly stays, the property offers an "Extended & Intensive" 26-week program designed for those individuals looking for a structured, long-term program to support sustainable weight loss and weight management. With more than 60 individualized sessions, this program starts at \$43,700.

Green Mountain Resort at Fox Run is located on 26 acres overlooking Green Mountain National Forest in Ludlow, Vermont. This resort caters exclusively to adult women and has been called "the most experienced educationally based weight-loss program for women in the country" by "Prevention Magazine." Pioneers of the non-diet movement, Green Mountain's credentialed, multidisciplinary staff teaches intuitive eating and healthy living strategies that have been developed for more than 38 years. The resort also offers specially focused programs for adult-onset diabetes, Type 2 diabetes, polycystic ovary syndrome, metabolic syndrome, binge eating and more. In addition to daily intense exercise, the weeklong programs at Green Mountain include cooking classes, nutrition classes and lifestyle counseling. Weight management programs are offered in one-, two-, three- and four-week sessions year round. The resort benefits from its excellent reputation, upscale facility, well-trained staff and idyllic location.

Biggest Loser Resorts is the only multi-destination weight-loss resort brand in the world. "The Biggest Loser" is a reality TV show that first started in the U.S. in 2004 on NBC. The show centers on overweight contestants who attempt to lose the highest percentage of weight (or most weight) to win a cash prize and become the "Biggest Loser." Founded on a four-point philosophy of fitness, nutrition, education and relaxation, guests of the Biggest Loser Resorts enjoy a nutritionally balanced, boot camp-style experience. Because these resorts recognize that the health and wellness of [corporate employees leads to greater efficiency](#) and optimal performance in the workplace, Biggest Loser caters to companies searching for ways to reduce weight-related health-care costs by offering packages, programs and team-building retreats intended to boost morale and encourage healthier, happier and more productive employees.

Established in Ivins, Utah, in October 2009, Biggest Loser Resort opened its second location in Malibu, California, in September 2010 and its third location in Java Center, New York, in May 2012.

Weight-loss resort locations

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, obesity rates doubled between 1980 and 2000 to nearly 30% of U.S. adults, or approximately 60 million individuals. No state has a prevalence of obesity less than 21%. According to 2010 state obesity rates, the states with the highest rates (Alabama, West Virginia and Mississippi) do not offer any weight-loss resorts. Weight-loss resorts are instead positioned in some of America's least obese locales (California, Utah and the mountains of Vermont), which are traditional resort locations.

Weight-loss resort operators report that they accommodate guests from throughout the U.S. and Canada. According to Hotel & Leisure Advisors' research, most guests choose to drive to these resorts because they are either uncomfortable flying or do not care to purchase two airline seats, if the airline requires it for obese people. Judging by the location of existing weight-loss resorts, many guests are driving hundreds of miles for the opportunity to participate in their programs.

Demand for weight-loss resorts

All five existing weight-loss resorts are privately operated, and none publish specific usage or revenue figures. H&LA's research indicates that guests need to make reservations approximately one month in advance at the Biggest Loser Resorts because of strong demand. All of the resorts impose a seven night minimum length of stay, which contributes to average occupancy levels well above U.S. national averages. Some program participants come for just one week, some come for a month or more and still others book one week at a time up to four times per year (in an effort to stay motivated). Averaging just 52 guestrooms, the relatively small size of the existing resorts also contributes to their high occupancy levels.

Average rates at these resorts, which include three daily meals, supervised fitness activities and educational programs, range from \$2,495 to \$2,780 per week, or \$356 to \$397 per day.

Our nation is attempting to quell its obesity epidemic. Perhaps because they are unaware of the untapped demand, resort developers have been slow to enter the weight-loss resort market. Meanwhile, the few existing weight-loss resorts continue to benefit from the supply imbalance, achieving RevPAR well above an average U.S. resort.

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