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This Longevity-Focused Retreat Helped Me Reconnect to My Youth

I returned to my home state to get some much-needed beach time *and* learn all about aging well.



Photo: Courtesy

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Written By Allison Forsyth

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In This Article

I've never really understood the phrase, "Youth is wasted on the young." Plenty of people I admire—those in their 40s, 50s, and beyond—would say otherwise, often calling their later years the most fulfilling of their lives. But what keeps them feeling young at heart isn't necessarily a daily green juice or intense workout; it's staying connected to the things they enjoyed as a child. And for me, that's the beach.

I grew up near the Gulf, on Florida's west coast, so naturally, many of my childhood memories are set against a backdrop of sand and saltwater. I remember weekends spent searching for seashells, swimming with friends in the warm waves, and spending lots (and lots) of time in the sun. Looking back, I realize how lucky I was to grow up in that kind of place. It's no wonder vacationers, families, and retirees flock to my hometown. And even though I live in the Pacific Northwest now, being near the ocean still feels like tapping into the fountain of youth—so I'm always looking for ways to get back to that feeling.

So, when I received the opportunity to visit The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island for its 2025 spring wellness retreat, I couldn't say no. The two-day retreat centered on longevity (i.e., living a longer, healthier life), which felt like the perfect theme for someone trying to reconnect with their youth.

Here's a closer look at my weekend getaway to the east coast of Florida, and all the longevity-focused activities I enjoyed at The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island's Longevity Wellness Retreat.

retreat was in late February, so the weather all weekend was sunny but *cold*—so I thanked my past self for packing some layers. Once we arrived, I checked in, cozied up in my room, and reviewed my jam-packed itinerary for the following few days.

I'll admit I was nervous I wouldn't have a lot of downtime, especially since I'd be with a group of new people on the retreat (introverts, you get it). But I actually found moments of peace during the yoga and meditation sessions, spa treatments, and nutritious meals throughout the weekend. Most Ritz-Carlton retreats include a variation of the above and cost about $630 per person (excluding suite and dining charges).

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I stayed in a deluxe coastal king suite ($1,107 per night at the time of publishing) and woke up to a beautiful sunrise outside my balcony each morning. While this stay looked nothing like my average low-profile beach trip, I couldn't wait to reconnect to my Florida roots and enjoy all the resort had to offer. I even set an intention for the weekend on the first night of the retreat, with the help of our meditation and yoga instructor, Kalindi Hoffmann: What did I want out of this experience?

Sure, I wanted to unwind, but I also wanted to explore what longevity meant to me. I wanted my definition to include "doing things that connect me to my youth," and I'd say this was fulfilled—with the help of a few key activities I enjoyed during my stay.

4 longevity-promoting activities I tried at the retreat

My first full day at the resort began with exploring the property. I had a few hours to spare before my afternoon of spa treatments, so I decided to walk around outside. After ordering a delicious oat milk latte in the lobby coffee shop, I walked out to the pool and then the boardwalk, which led me right to the shore. The salty air and crashing waves brought me right back to childhood; it was the perfect nostalgic start to my day. Next up: A red light therapy session.

1. TheraLight 360+ red light therapy

Thanks to social media, I've learned a lot lately about red light in the form of LED face masks to help reduce fine lines and wrinkles. But until this trip, I hadn't known much about *full-body* red light therapy. The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island is currently the only resort spa in Florida that offers sessions with the TheraLight 360+ Full Body Photobiomodulation System, an FDA-registered red light therapy device that looks like a cross between a tanning bed and an MRI machine.

The TheraLight 360+ works by emitting low-level laser technology (LLLT) at different wavelengths and frequencies—about 1,000 to 5,000 Hertz—to help activate your skin cells' mitochondria (as you may know, it's the powerhouses of the cell). Studies have shown this technology may help alleviate a variety of health concerns, including skin wrinkles and scarring, joint pain and inflammation, poor blood circulation, and fatigue.[1]

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Kizilbayir, featured plenty of ingredients with these nutrients. We started the night with fresh green salads topped with crispy quinoa, shredded

carrots, and a marinated bean and chickpea mixture. Next were the entrées: I went for lemon grilled salmon, lentil soup, and a whole grain roll drizzled with olive oil. And we can't forget dessert—a decadent avocado chocolate mousse with fresh fruit on the side (arguably my favorite part of the menu).

Research has found most Blue Zones are bean and whole-grain-heavy because of the fiber, which is great for your gut, heart, and energy levels. Surprisingly, studies on Blue Zones have also found people still drink moderate amounts of alcohol, especially wine, so we enjoyed a few glasses alongside dinner. I felt satisfied but not stuffed by the meal, another key pillar of Blue Zone living: eating until you're about 80 percent full, and practicing mindfulness while eating to avoid discomfort.[3]

After dinner was finished, I couldn't help but think about how the fresh fish and produce brought me back to visiting the farmer's markets in my hometown and eating at seaside restaurants that used those fresh ingredients in their dishes. I felt grateful to have enjoyed this meal with other people as interested in longevity as me.

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Stallings had us walk slowly down the boardwalk to take in our surroundings, stopping us every so often to read a positive affirmation and letting it soak in. Once we reached the sand, I took off my sandals, and the shell hunt began. I strolled along the shore with my head down, watching the tide roll in and out and stashing anything that caught my eye. It sounds *so* simple, but I was having a blast; I could've stayed there for hours.

Meditative walking, especially along the beach, has a slew of longevity benefits. Grounding (aka planting your bare feet on the earth), for example, can help relieve anxiety and depressive symptoms, reduce insomnia, improve blood flow and circulation, and support overall longevity, while gazing at bodies of water can lower heart rate and blood pressure, and increase feelings of relaxation.[9,10]

Studies aside, it's just plain fun, which I'd argue is crucial to living a long life. I know my older loved ones would agree it fits their "staying young at heart" advice.

bustling Centre Street, where most of the restaurants, bars, and shops were located. It was such a full-circle moment because growing up, we used to get ice cream on the way home almost every beach day.

There are plenty of other activities to get up to at the resort, even if you don't have a car to explore the island, including tennis or golf lessons, wine tastings, cooking classes, bike or horseback riding, and surfing or other water sports rentals.



Photo: Courtesy / The spa's wet lounge at The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island

A few notes

If you're not one for learning—or expending *any* mental energy—while on vacation, this type of retreat might not be for you. The workshops required lots of self-reflecting and inner work (hence, intention setting at the start), and while I did find pockets of time to unwind, I spent a good portion of the weekend taking notes and feeling like I was in a real class. Retreat staff even gave us notebooks to jot things down as Hoffmann drew diagrams of brain waves and breath patterns on a whiteboard during the Yoga Nidra and Power of Breath workshops.

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My inner student absolutely thrived in this environment. However, if you're more of a lounge-by-the-pool, spa-all-day, "no thoughts, just vibes" person on beach trips, you might consider booking a regular resort stay instead, so you have more time to chill.

Another thing to consider is the food. Due to a few recently discovered food allergies, my options were somewhat limited at the retreat's pre-planned meals. Of course, the resort's restaurant staff were extremely kind and accommodating (they even cooked separate meals for me a few times!), but I was still left with the same rotation of beans, quinoa, tofu, and sweet potatoes each day. So, if you're a foodie, you might want to order other things outside the preset menu; just keep in mind that you'll have to purchase them separately.

at one of the many Ritz-Carlton luxury destinations all over the world.

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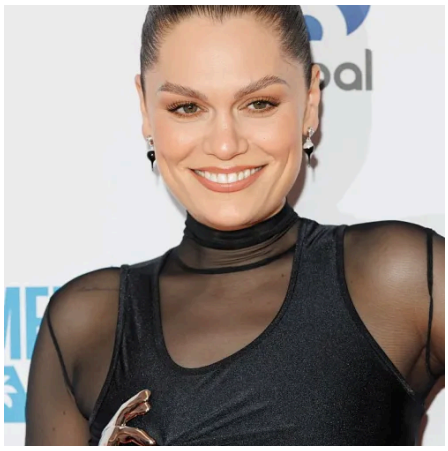
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