USA – A day at the White Stallion Ranch in Arizona

A day at White Stallion Ranch A
travelogue by Julia Wies

My flight lands in Phoenix, from where I take the Arizona Shuttle, which takes me straight to Tucson. Here, I am picked up by a wrangler from the White Stallion Ranch. I arrive at the ranch in the evening. The roads are unlit so that the nearby observatory can see the stars. The plain here, with a few hills in the background, is perfect for this. A sense of vastness, which is rather rare in Europe, can be found here in Arizona.

I am greeted warmly and check in. The bungalows, which house the rooms, are scattered across the well-maintained grounds. All have en-suite bathrooms and most have a small terrace with sun loungers in front. The upgraded version also features a fireplace and seating area in the larger rooms. When I reach my room, my luggage is already there, so I can lie straight into the big bed and dream of the cowboy life that awaits me tomorrow.

The next day begins with a special ride: the ‘breakfast ride’. Full of anticipation, I find myself at the stables at 8.30 am, where the horses are brought out to all the participants one by one and we mount up. My companion is Mantheo, known as Manthy for short, who looks at me with his pretty, brown face. At a relaxed walk, we head out into the desert landscape, which is dotted with countless cacti

of all shapes and sizes. We ride across the plain until covered tables finally come into view. The horses get a break whilst we riders treat ourselves to blueberry pancakes with butter and honey, scrambled eggs, sausages and so on. Accompanied by coffee or tea and a glass of orange juice – what a way to start the day!

I quickly strike up a conversation with other guests and so we enjoy breakfast together. Afterwards, we ride back to the ranch on horseback.

Everyone spends the time until lunch in their own way; the options are plentiful: a swimming pool invites you to take a dip, sun loungers by the pool or in a relaxation area are available, a tennis court, games room, multi-purpose sports field, petting zoo for the kids, reading corner, bar, a computer room, a visit to the on-site souvenir shop or an excursion into the surrounding area. The city of Tucson and the Desert Museum are just a few of the popular destinations in the area.

Lunch is served as a buffet and drinks are also available there. Sitting comfortably on the terrace, chatting with other guests, it tastes twice as good.

In the afternoon, another highlight is on the programme: Team Penning. Four riders form a team and ride out to a small herd of cattle, where they must select three animals and drive them away from the herd into a separate corral. Whoever manages this as quickly as possible wins. I've saddled up Manthy again, who accompanies me on all my rides. Easy to handle and relaxed, I'm able to gain my first real cowboy experiences. As an 'English rider', I adapt quickly to the Western riding style and it's great fun herding the cattle. Even at the starting line, Manthy knows what's expected of him. At the starting signal, we gallop straight from the spot towards the cattle. We quickly select three, which we drive more or less swiftly towards the corral. After each team has had several attempts, it's unfortunately over and we ride out of the arena back to the stables. After a shower, the horses are let out into the spacious paddocks, where they roll around to their hearts' content.

Dinner is served for everyone at 7 pm, which I enjoy on the terrace with other guests. Everyone shares stories of the day's experiences and time flies until tonight's lasso demonstration begins. An artist who has also performed with the famous 'Cirque du Soleil' puts on an amazing show for us.
Lassos whizz through the air, pistols are juggled whilst being spun one-handed, and whips crack in time to the rhythm. Impressive. We round off the evening in a relaxed atmosphere with a final drink.
After breakfast, I can go for one last ride, the "Mountain Fast Ride". Unlike the "Slow Ride", this one involves galloping. The system here is simple: everyone starts with a walk, then has to do a short "gallop test" behind a wrangler so they can see you're steady in the saddle at a gallop, and finally you can join in with all the rides on offer that day. As many as you like, depending on your mood. This is done for safety reasons and has proven its worth. Beginners have the

opportunity to enjoy the ride and the scenery on walking rides.

Accompanying non-riders can also get their money's worth on the offered hikes or covered wagon rides. And children get their money's worth too. Overall, it's a good mix of families and solo travellers.

My ride takes me across the plain, dotted with cacti, to a hill which we ride up. From the top, there's a fantastic view of the vast plain stretching to the horizon. Manthy and I are now a well-coordinated team, so we enjoy the final gallops until we arrive back at the ranch.

Now, unfortunately, I have to say goodbye to Manthy and everyone I've met, because after a quick shower it's time to head to the shuttle and make the return journey to Phoenix. From there, my US trip takes me on to California.

For information and bookings, visit http://www.equitour.com/graz03.htm