

USA – In the Bighorn Mountains in Wyoming

Visiting our premium programme

I arrive at the ranch in the early afternoon. The drive through the Bighorn National Forest alone was absolutely stunning and well worth the trip.

I'm given a warm welcome and provided with all the information I need, as well as my room – which is more like a flat: a living room with a fully equipped kitchen, a sofa area and a TV; a bathroom with a shower; a bedroom with a built-in wardrobe; and even my own washing machine in the hallway – it really does tick all the boxes. There's also a terrace with a magnificent view of the surrounding Bighorn Mountains and part of the vast horse paddocks.

The ranch is in a beautiful location and has a main lodge as its central hub, featuring a dining room, billiards, a small shop and the office. The accommodation consists of scattered cabins. Everything is lush green thanks to the well-tended lawns, and there's a small lake nearby. The stables, with a covered round pen and a huge outdoor arena, are not far away. The ranch covers around 6,500 acres and, as well as cattle, is home to around 130 horses, so there's a suitable horse for every rider.

I meet Tom, who shows me round the riding facilities and explains the 'ranch rules' for handling the horses. Then I'm allowed onto the arena to do the loping test so that my riding ability can be assessed. And finally, we go for a short ride straight away across the surrounding countryside, crossing rivers and visiting some oxen and the horses, who have the day off today and can enjoy life in the paddock with the herd.

A real idyll!



At 6.30 pm, we meet at the bar to discuss the riding programme for the following day. No guest ever rides the same route twice; the terrain is so varied and vast that there are plenty of options for diverse rides. The choice is always between two half-day rides with lunch at the lodge or a full-day ride with a picnic packed in the saddlebags. Other activities such as fly fishing or shooting can also be tried out. However, riding is clearly the main focus and takes centre stage! Afterwards, a multi-course dinner is served at the table at three long tables.

Today's menu features a colourful salad platter as a starter, pasta as the main course and a sweet pastry for dessert. Accompanied by wine, water, coffee, tea etc., whatever takes your fancy. The food is excellent and time flies by as I chat with the other guests, who have travelled from both Europe and the USA. A relaxed atmosphere, before I round off the day on my terrace as the sun sets.

A new day dawns in the Bighorn Mountains. Breakfast is on the menu and is served at 7.30 am: toast, bagels, jam, cream cheese, fresh fruit and bacon, eggs to order and 'hash browns' (a kind of small potato pancake) are available, as are juices, coffee and tea. At 8.30 am, the meeting point for the day's rides is at the main lodge. Everyone arrives there with their saddlebags (these are provided in every room) to pack the sandwich they've ordered and other snacks for the saddlebag picnic. The wranglers pick you up there, along with the trailer carrying the loaded horses.

We drive for about 25 minutes to Bighorn National Park, where the horses are unloaded. The various starting points offer extremely varied rides; no one has to ride the same route twice here. Our group is a mixed bunch, ranging from experienced riders to those of intermediate ability: a woman who's still a bit unsure at a gallop, accompanied by a wrangler; two young men who've only been riding for a week and are practising their gallop and trot diligently with their own wrangler; and another woman and myself, who are both confident riders. We also have our own Wrangler, who takes us on lovely gallops. When the terrain allows, the group is simply split up from time to time, so that everyone gets their money's worth and can improve their riding. This means I get to enjoy longer, more relaxed gallops – wonderful. Then the group comes back together and we ride at a walk over the mountains, a little up and down, across meadows where lovely mountain flowers are in bloom (they bloom a bit later here because of the altitude); after all, we're riding at over 1,500 metres today.

After a few hours, we reach a beautiful lake with clear water – the ideal spot for lunch. The horses can graze whilst we enjoy our saddlebag picnic. My tomato, mozzarella and pesto sandwich tastes twice as good here.

As some dark clouds are rolling in, we set off again on horseback towards the trailer fairly quickly. Despite riding at a slightly brisker pace, we get caught in a bit of rain and even a brief hail shower. But no problem – the rain jackets are stowed by the saddles and the wranglers are all equipped with walkie-talkies. The brief shower doesn't spoil this fantastic ride, though.

Through the trees, we spot a large bull moose watching us. A moose calf follows close behind. We can hear plenty of marmots too; nature is incredible up here.



Far too quickly for my liking, we reach the trailer again, where the horses are loaded, and then it's back to the ranch. The horses are unsaddled and given some feed before they're let back out onto the vast pasture to enjoy the rest of their evening. We riders, on the other hand, treat ourselves to a hot shower in the spacious lodges. We sit on the terrace for a while, enjoying the view, and before we know it, it's time for dinner, preceded by 'cocktail hour'. There, you can also look at the photos taken during the day by the wranglers, which are made available for guests to download at the end of the week. After a refreshing shower in my spacious cabin, as it's the last evening of the week, there's a big barbecue dinner outdoors. Before that, an aperitif: wine, beer, juices, punch – whatever takes your fancy – then it's off to the tables: grilled meats, a variety of salads, vegetable skewers and much more. Excellent cuisine, topped off with a heavenly dessert.

This is followed by a short musical interlude of a few Western songs, performed by the youngest member of the family, or in some cases together with his siblings. A lovely way to round off a magnificent day!

The next day, the generous breakfast tempts us with, amongst other things, a vegetable quiche, before all the guests set off. I felt very much at home here and can highly recommend the ranch!

My journey takes me on to Yellowstone National Park today to gain an insight into the Earth's history and, of course, to experience the unspoilt natural landscape. Above all, I'm hoping to see bison.

Note: I succeeded!

A travel report by Julia Wies | Pegasus equitour Further information here: <http://www.equitour.com/grwy01.htm>

