

USA – A family-run working ranch in the Pryor Mountains

Visiting a family-run working ranch

In the morning, I meet Iris at the agreed meeting point and she takes me into the wilderness of the Pryor Mountains. These lie just beyond the border between Wyoming and Montana. There is also a wild horse reserve there, where the horses live in the wild. This is also former Native American territory. The wild horses arrived in this area following the Native Americans' trails to Canada. The road, which is tarmac at first, quickly turns into a gravel track (if it rains, you'll need four-wheel drive here!). I can hardly take in this vast expanse with the Pryor Mountains in the background; in between, the Bighorn River winds its way through a canyon in a series of hairpin bends – idyllic!

After an hour, we reach the ranch, which suddenly appears from behind a hilltop. A proper working ranch covering around 37,000 acres. There are seven individual rooms in the so-called bunkhouse, which share two bathrooms. Then there are two separate cabins with en-suite bathrooms, the communal house with a large lounge, and a separate 'kitchen house' where everyone eats their meals together. Western-style, authentic. The corrals are nearby, where the riding horses are kept during the day. In the mornings, they're brought in from the pastures and released back into the open once the day's work is done. Around 150 horses enjoy life here in these wide open spaces, along with around 1,000 suckler cows and almost the same number of calves.



I'm warmly welcomed into the family at lunch – this is a proper family-run working ranch. Everyone pitches in here and there's always plenty to do!

Riding is brilliant in this landscape, and the horses, with their varied temperaments, are seasoned cowhorses. For the afternoon ride, I'm given Buzz, a bay, and off we go.

After all, some of the ranch's younger horses need to be taken to a distant pasture.

The three of us trot briskly ahead, whilst the other three follow the free-roaming herd of horses. We ride across the open countryside to the chosen pasture, where the grass is lush and the young horses can enjoy their lives.

Afterwards, we ride back to the ranch. The wranglers saddle up other horses for themselves (young ones that need to be worked), two riders from the group treat themselves to a break, and the two of us wait for the cowboys. Then we set off on a brisk trot around a hill, crossing a stream. The horses are incredibly sure-footed and very reliable over rough terrain. Depending on riding ability, the groups can also be split up so that everyone gets the most out of the experience. Afterwards, everyone tends to their horse and releases it into the paddock. Shortly afterwards, all the horses are allowed back onto the vast pastures. They gallop exuberantly towards freedom. For dinner, everyone meets up again in the ranch's dining hall, where there's a variety of dishes to choose from – delicious! Everyone eats together at two long tables – alongside the family.

The ranch, with its decades-long tradition, is still a genuine family-run business.

In the evening, two little girls (the wrangler's children) ride their ponies under their parents' supervision. Riding is the basis for so much here: herding cattle, checking fences, driving cattle and horses to fresh pasture, sorting out specific animals, branding weeks, and so on.
It never gets boring!

The peace and quiet is wonderful, and so sleep is restful. The next morning, I unfortunately have to say goodbye, whilst the others set off on horseback to tackle their next tasks.

A travel report by Julia Wies | Pegasus Reiterreisen Further
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