

SADDLE UP

For Adventure

The morning sun has just risen above the desert horizon as we head toward the stables. It is as though nearly every guest is waiting to take a morning breakfast ride. We mount up and set out, single file, in small groups of about 10. As we make our way past a small lake and along the serpentine pathways that lead up the saguaro-covered hillside, the only sound is the clip-clop, clip-clop of our horses' hooves as they traverse the narrow, rocky paths lined with prickly pear, cholla and fragrant sage.

After about an hour, we come around a sharp curve and find ourselves overlooking the desert valley below. The preserved ruins of an old stone building — the property's original homestead from more than 100 years ago — offer shade from the hot morning sun and the perfect vantage point to view the vast landscape of Saguaro National Park.

Soon, the smell of bacon begins to waft from a nearby chuckwagon. We fill our plates with fresh-made blueberry pancakes, scrambled eggs and crisp bacon, before settling down at picnic tables covered with red-and-white checkered tablecloths to enjoy the hearty home-cooked meal — just like the original cowboys of yore did so many years ago.

The breakfast ride is a Sunday tradition at Tanque Verde Ranch in Tucson. Tanque Verde is the largest, and one of the Grand Canyon State's most luxurious, dude ranches.





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Writer Rebecca L. Rhoades



According to the Dude Ranchers' Association, "horseback riding is absolutely the best way to experience Arizona." And thanks to the state's Wild West history, modern-day Western allure and wide-open spaces dotted with towering cacti, it's easy to find the perfect ranch to fulfill your cowboy fantasies.

From historic ranches to all-inclusive family-friendly resorts to authentic working ranches, these nine dude ranches are just waiting for you to ride and explore.

TANQUE VERDE RANCH // TUCSON

Named the Top Resort in the Southwest by Conde Nast Traveler in 2021, this all-inclusive family-friendly resort tucked into the Rincon Mountains near Saguaro National Park is where rustic ranch fun meets luxury accommodations.

Established in 1868, the ranch is the largest in the country, with 60,000 acres of desert landscape to explore. Lodging ranges from well-appointed rooms centrally located near the dining hall, spa and corrals to private casitas that will sleep entire families or groups.

A variety of activities are offered, including daily rides, a kid's camp, art and educational programming, archery and shooting, fishing, axe throwing, falconry and much more. A fitness center, spa and indoor and outdoor swimming pools also are available.

tanqueverderanch.com





WHITE STALLION RANCH // TUCSON

This former 1900 frontier homestead is now a working longhorn steer ranch — and a luxurious historic retreat.

Set on 3,000 acres bordering Saguaro National Park, the resort features 41 guest rooms and a private four-bedroom hacienda that sleeps up to 10 guests, all with rustic wood furnishings, cowboy art and Native American-inspired linens. Enjoy daily horseback rides, test your cowboy skills with cattle sorting and team penning, or thrill to the weekly exhibition rodeo.

Additional outdoor activities include rock climbing, shooting and archery, hiking and biking. A heated pool, spa, fitness center, recreation room and movie theater add to the amenities. Nightly entertainment includes country dancing, singing cowboys and Wild West shows.

whitestallion.com

TOMBSTONE MONUMENT RANCH // TOMBSTONE

It doesn't get any more Wild West than the "the town too tough to die." Located 2 miles west of the famed O.K. Corral in historic Tombstone, this ranch is designed to resemble an Old West town, complete with a hotel, marshal's office, saloon, blacksmith and jail.

Guests can partake in riding lessons and daily rides through the surrounding mountain ranges and even into town, or they can try their hand at roping and moving cattle. Archery, target shooting, roping lessons, card games, horseshoes, and live music and dancing fill out the packed activities schedule.

Cowgirls, take note: This ranch currently has only female wranglers.

tombstonemonumentranch.com

RANCHO DE LA OSA // SASABE

Located on 590 acres less than 2 miles from the U.S.-Mexico border, this historic ranch has a rich history that dates to 1699, when Jesuit priests constructed the first building on the property. Now the resort's cantina, the little structure is the oldest continually occupied building in the state.

Here, you'll ride trails once frequented by Western film stars, including Tom Mix and John Wayne, famous authors such as Zane Gray and Margaret Mitchell, and Mexican revolutionary Pancho Villa.



Guests stay in one of 19 adobe room decorated with Mexican antiques and Southwest-style linens. Activities include two daily rides, off-road UTV adventures, bicycle tours, sport shooting, hiking and bird-watching. Or simply relax poolside and soak up the Sonoran sun.

ranchodelaosa.com



RANCHO DE LOS CABALLEROS // WICKENBURG

Wickenburg is a treasure trove of cowboy lifestyle — from its regular rodeos and Gold Rush Days events to its renowned Western museum — so it's no wonder that it's the dude ranch capital of Arizona.

Celebrating 75 years of ranching, Rancho de los Caballeros offers a premier experience with Southwest flair. Stay in one of the 79 hacienda-style guest rooms; each unique room is charmingly outfitted with Mexican tile and furnishings and cozy fireplaces.

The extensive equine program includes about 100 horses that take guests of all skill levels on daily rides through 13,300 acres of Sonoran Desert. Luxury amenities include a heated outdoor pool, tennis and pickleball courts, an 18-hole golf course and new clubhouse, fitness center, spa with labyrinth, and two restaurants, including the newly opened 19, an upscale dining concept that offers modern global cuisine and includes a 3,000-bottle wine cellar.

ranchodeloscaballeros.com

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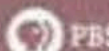
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FLYING E RANCH // WICKENBURG

Established in 1952, this operational cattle ranch offers 20,000 acres to roam. The 23 rooms are simple, with wood-paneled walls and oak furnishings, but the main attraction here is the horseback riding.

Saddle up for twice-daily rides through the desert, learn team penning, or join in on one of the four cattle drives scheduled throughout the year. Additional activities include Jeep excursions, tennis, archery, horseshoes and other games, nature walks and swimming.

The all-inclusive stay includes three meals a day; however, there is no bar on the property, so you have to bring your own alcohol.

flyingeranch.com



KAY EL BAR GUEST RANCH // WICKENBURG

Founded as a working cattle ranch in 1909 and turned into a guest ranch in 1926, this all-inclusive quaint, boutique dude ranch offers a myriad of Western activities in an intimate setting.

Set on 2,000 acres, it can accommodate 28 guests in homey rooms with cowboy-themed decor. Twice-daily rides and three meals a day are included in the cost. The ranch offers 50 horses for all skill levels; more experienced equestrians can partake in team cattle wrangling demonstrations.

Additional outdoor pursuits include sport shooting, fat-tire biking and hiking. When you're ready for some downtime, head to the lodge house for an evening tippie or soothe your tired muscles in the heated pool or hot tub.

Fun fact: This ranch is the childhood home of actor Val Kilmer.

kayelbar.com



SPRUCEDALE GUEST RANCH // ALPINE

This family-owned working ranch is located high in the White Mountains of eastern Arizona.

The intimate property offers 13 mountain-style log cabins, each with a wood-burning stove and homemade quilts, and can accommodate up to 45 people. Here, guests of all ages can experience a true ranch experience,

from helping with the morning milking to wrangling horses and cattle.

There are also plenty of fun activities to do when not in the saddle, including fishing, hayrides, line dancing, game nights, bonfires, swimming in the creek — or just relaxing on your cabin's front porch. Home-cooked country-style meals are served in the main lodge.

sprucedaleranch.com



STAGECOACH TRAILS GUEST RANCH // YUCCA

Located in the Mohave Desert, about one hour from the nearest town, Stagecoach Trails borders more than 360,000 acres of unspoiled federal land that guests are allowed to explore.

The equestrian program is tailored to each rider's skill. Go on slow scenic rides, challenging mountain rides or advanced loping rides. You can even try barrel racing. When not on horseback, you can still experience the rugged surroundings on a guided ATV ride, an authentic stagecoach or wagon ride, or a Desert Storm Humvee ride.

Guests can stay in traditional rooms themed with Western decor, or for a truly unique experience, they can spend the night in a covered wagon. The Pioneer Wagon is furnished with a king-size bed, three bunk beds, air conditioning and heat. Bathroom and shower facilities are nearby. Stagecoach Trails is also fully handicap accessible and is the only dude ranch in Arizona that's dog-friendly.

stagecoachtrails.com

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