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ROCKY MOUNTAIN HIGH

The unique C Lazy U Guest Ranch offers five-star luxury

STORY AND PHOTOS BY DAVID MANNIS



IT'S 4 P.M. AND IT'S RUSH HOUR at C Lazy U guest ranch, but not the rush hour we 'city slickers' know. It's an amazing sight watching and listening to the sound of a hundred stampeding horses. The thunderous parade, the whinnying horses, and the skillful wranglers leading the herd is an incomparable experience. This event takes place each morning at dawn, when horses

are gathered from their pasture and taken to the barn to be readied for saddling. At the end of the day the procedure is reversed, and guests are offered another chance to experience this awe-inspiring phenomenon.

My family and I arrived on a summer Sunday afternoon at C Lazy U, after an easy two-hour drive from Denver. Upon our arrival, ranch hands dressed in crisp red shirts with C Lazy U logos greeted us at the main entrance road off the highway. They greeted us by name! In fact, it seemed every employee addressed us each by our first names, from the greeters and registration staff to the bartenders and waiters. I can't figure out how they did it, given that we didn't provide any pictures, but it certainly made us feel welcome.

C Lazy U sits among 8,000 acres in Willow Creek Valley just outside Granby, Colorado and only 20 miles from Winter Park ski resort. Brian and Karen Murray have been owners of the ranch since 1988 and are avid horse people who love the outdoors and nature. In an effort to keep the ranch and surrounding areas in its

natural state, the Murrys purchased the acreage surrounding the ranch in order to preserve the land and prevent overdevelopment. To offset the cost of this expensive land, Brian Murray creatively subdivided some of this property into 35-acre lots available for individual "homesteads" to be built under strict architectural guidelines overseen by Mr. Murray himself. Many of the homeowners are former guests of the ranch. A unique membership arrangement is offered to homeowners, much like a country club where homeowners can enjoy the amenities of the ranch when in residence. They are essentially full- or part-time guests who reside in their own homes within the ranch's boundaries.

The ranch has many amenities that most ranches don't offer. The two-story main lodge is exquisite, made of natural cut logs beautifying the exterior and interior and set behind an expansive green lawn and against a hillside of forest. The first floor offers a lounge with large, luxurious sofas, a stone fireplace and grand piano and is adorned with lovely paintings, photographs and rustic furniture.



The library/study is perfect for reading, card games, or enjoying the large plasma TV (one of two TV-viewing areas at the ranch.) Adjacent to the sitting room is a quaint, comfortable bar where cocktails are offered until the 7 p.m. dinner bell rings.

The second floor houses the large dining room, which comfortably seats up to 80-plus adults (children gather separately for meals at the Pool House). Large windows surround the room for magnificent views of the fishing pond, creek, meadows, and mountains. Meals are gourmet and portions are generous. This week's menu was prepared by guest Chef Marc Valiani from the Grand Street Café of the PB&J Group in Kansas City. Valiani has worked with chefs George Morrone, Wolfgang Puck, and Hans Rockenwager. Meals were definitely a highlight of the day. The menu included filet mignon, lobster, shrimp, lamb loins, chops, prime rib, Chilean sea bass, salmon, and chicken. Meals always included two delectable entrees, two side dishes, and a fresh salad. A homemade and delicious dessert ended each dining experience. A few lucky guests were allowed to assist in the kitchen each day, helping to prepare the evening's unique hors d'oeuvres. Another highlight was the gourmet cooking class

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offered by Chef Valiani – a treat for guests opting out of the afternoon trail ride.

The popularity of all-inclusive vacationing is increasing each year as families are looking for different ways to stay active and enjoy the outdoors. Families can relax or be as busy as they want, choosing from the many activities the guest ranch has to offer. Activities include horseback riding (at least two rides per day for adults and children), trout fishing, fly-fishing instruction, games led by counselors, table games, ping pong, pool, air hockey, and swimming. Tennis and skeet shooting are also offered. Four championship golf courses are located in close proximity to the ranch. A complete workout center and massage therapists are also available. Everything is included in the cost with the exception of skeet shooting, golf, and massage services.

CHILDREN ARE GATHERED TOGETHER by counselors in appropriate age groups and taken on morning and afternoon horseback rides by experienced wranglers. The kids form immediate friendships with the other children visiting from all over the country. Counselors direct the children in a theatrical presentation and wranglers lead them in a demonstration of skills during the final day's "Shodeo." Friday was Family Day and provided an opportunity for parents and children to take their horses out together. The morning began with a special breakfast, which was served after a short hike to a hilltop with spectacular views, and prepared completely outside with blueberry pancakes, trout, eggs, sausages, hash



browns, and specially made donuts.

A typical day begins with a hearty breakfast served from 7:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. Eggs and omelets are made to order. Pancakes, cereal, yogurt, and plenty of fresh fruit and juices are available. For lunch we enjoyed hamburgers, chicken, fish and always a fresh salad, fruit, and fresh home-cooked soups and desserts, which changed daily. At 8:45, the children were called to saddle up for their morning rides; they returned for lunch around noon and set out again at 2 p.m. for the afternoon ride, returning in time to line up at the ice cream parlor which was open daily from 3:30-4 and again from 9-9:30 p.m.

Adults set out on morning and afternoon rides after the kids saddled up and could select scenic or adventure rides. The horse program is phenomenal. Head Wrangler Bill Fisher makes certain that every horse is expertly trained and appropriately matched with riders. Each guest is assigned a horse for the week. Saying goodbye at the end of the week was a touching scene for adults and children alike who had become so fond of their horses.

After a day of riding and dining, guests have the option of participating in special evening activities or retiring to lovely, spacious cabins. We were welcomed by a basket full of homemade cookies, fresh fruit, coffee, tea, and hot chocolate, all replenished daily. Room amenities include feather beds, fireplaces, large closets, refrigerators, double sinks, and plentiful hot water (not always available at more rustic ranches). Our children had an identical, adjoining room, which allowed for privacy when desired. There are no telephones or televisions in the guest accommodations. "This is by design," says general manager Tim Hennen. "Most guests want to be away from the typical distractions they have in their daily

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lives. We do, however, offer Wi-fi throughout the ranch for those who need to be in touch with family or business." Meeting and conference facilities are available complete with desks, fax machines, and telephones.

Each evening, guests were entertained with music, square dancing, a talent show, and an outdoor fireside branding party, another highlight of the week. Mr. Murray personally branded the C Lazy U insignia on guests' boots, belts, hats, and jeans while families gathered around the fire and branding pit for a guitar singalong.

If you forget your cowboy hat, you can visit Luis's Old Place, a charming store on the premises, with fine quality western wear, ranch logo items, and unique gifts. You can also shop ahead of time on the web at www.clazyu.com or call 970-887-3344.

ALTHOUGH THE RANCH IS MOST POPULAR during the summer season, winter provides another unique experience with indoor horseback riding, snow-tubing, snow-shoeing, cross-country skiing, telemark skiing, and ice skating. At Christmas, a tree is provided in each guest room for families to decorate!

C Lazy U offers a perfect family vacation. Children safely and happily participate in wrangler- and counselor-supervised programs while parents enjoy as relaxing or active a ranch experience as they desire. The location is convenient and breathtaking, the service and accommodations above par, the dining first quality, and activities are unique and enjoyable. General Manager Hennen boasted that all employees are tasked with making sure guests have "the best vacation of their lives."

My family certainly did. ■

C LAZY U Guest Ranch can be reached at (970) 887-3344 or at www.clazyu.com. You can also write to: C Lazy U, 3640 Colorado Highway 125, P.O. Box 379, Granby, CO 80446. You can e-mail them at ranch@clazyu.com.