BEST GUEST RANCH SUITES OF THE AMERICAN WEST

While not the Wild Wild West it once was, these standout luxury ranches (and their top-drawer staff) capture the rugged, earthy magic of the region’s heyday without skimping on modern-day comfort and care.

BY LARRY OLMS TED
MONTANA

THE RESORT AT PAWS UP
THE WILDERNESS ESTATES

Key selling points | These are the largest of the ranch's private homes and each is discreetly secluded on four private acres. All have panoramic vistas, high vaulted ceilings and three master bedroom suites, as well as a large living room and lofted game room.

Standout service | One family really wanted to view elk, so when a staff member spotted the animals five miles away on his drive home, he let the ranch know, and the guests were driven out to view them.

Style | Western chic, by co-owner Nadine Luspen, 2008

Special amenities | Chef's kitchen, six-person outdoor hot tub, jetted spa bathtubs, slate showers, ED Bath amenities, five flat-screen LCD TVs, Wii, vehicle for guest use

Square footage | 3,248

Number of rooms in suite | Six

Number of bathrooms | Three and one half-bath

Number of rooms and suites in hotel | 38 "tented accommodations and 28 homes"

"Who's slept here? | Renowned musicians and movie stars

Nightly rate | $2,130 inclusive

Location | 40060 Paws Up Road, Greenough, Montana

Contact | CEO Stephen Beaulmont, (800) 473-0601; pawsup@pawsup.com; www.pawsup.com

TRIPLE CREEK RANCH
PONDEROSA CABIN

Key selling points | The three-bedroom Ponderosa is both huge and secluded, a stone post and beam structure with every amenity from a full commercial kitchen to a three-level deck with gorgeous views onto a stocked trout pond. Vaulted ceilings, vast windows and original Western artwork throughout enhance the sense of place.

Standout service | During a full-moon horseback ride, a couple celebrating their anniversary was surprised by a stargazing telescope setup at the top of a mountain ridge, complete with champagne and chocolate-covered strawberries.

Style | Rustic Western elegance, by owners Barbara and Craig Barrett, 2006

Special amenities | Large great room, Sub-Zero and Wolf stainless steel appliances, 50-inch flat screen built into a floor-to-ceiling stone fireplace, king-size log post beds, 650-thread-count Pima cotton sheets, oversized walk-in showers

Square footage | 3,600, plus 4,171 of outdoor space

Number of rooms in suite | Six

Number of bathrooms | Three

Number of rooms and suites in hotel | 23 cabins

"Who's slept here? | Pro athletes, leading CEOs

Nightly rate | $2,650 (for first couple), $650 for each additional person

Location | 2421 West Fork Road, Darby, Montana

Contact | General Managers Bill and Leslie McConnell, (406) 821-6400, bill@triplecreekranch.com and leslie@triplecreekranch.com

www.triplecreekranch.com
THE RANCH AT ROCK CREEK
TRAPPER TENT

Key selling points: This unique half-cabin, half-tent accommodation is the most private on the property, secluded and situated directly on the banks of namesake Rock Creek for an authentic "trapper" experience. Upholstery and furnishings are American classics from the likes of Pendleton and Ralph Lauren, with rich leathers and hides throughout, plus museum-quality, collector pieces of Western art.

Standout service: For a family reunion of 30, staff created a City Slicker Olympics with myriad events for all ages, complete with gold, silver, and bronze spray-painted horseshoes as memorabilia.

Style: Authentic Western, by Jet Setkadas of Los Angeles Studio, LLC, 2010

Special amenities: Woodburning fireplace, kitchen, full linen, bedding, and lighting, locally produced organic sage and cedar bath/body products, iPod docks, Wi-Fi, wine fridge, outdoor soaking tub

Square footage: 600, plus 250 of outdoor space

Number of rooms in suite: Two

Number of bathrooms: One

Number of rooms and suites in hotel: 27, including 18 tents, homes, and cabins

Who's slept here?: Layne Rimes, country music star; Vince Gill, American Idol founder Simon Fuller

Nightly rate: $2,500 (inclusive)

Location: 79 Fairview House Lane, Philipsburg, Montana

Contact: General Manager Maja Kilgore; (406) 859-4027; skilgore@theranchatrockcreek.com; www.theranchatrockcreek.com

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LONE MOUNTAIN RANCH
RIDGEPOT LODGE

Key selling points: Overlooking the ranch and namesake Lone Peak (11,199 feet), this spacious six-bedroom lodge has 12-foot-high picture windows showcasing mountain views. The bedrooms, sitting area, and two great rooms each boast a rock fireplace and stunning vistas.

Standout service: The sleigh ride dinner outing was too late for one guest to bring his children along, so staff arranged an earlier private trip for the whole family.

Style: Montana log cabin, by in-house team and Biggerstaff Construction, 1993

Special amenities: Down comforters and featherbeds in all bedrooms, twin hard-built rock fireplaces, pool table, private outdoor hot tub, kitchen, wet bar

Square footage: 4,500

Number of rooms in suite: Eight

Number of bathrooms: Eight

Number of rooms and suites in hotel: 30, including 24 cabins

Who's slept here?: Executives looking to really get away

Nightly rate: From $2,142 (inclusive for six)

Location: 720 Lone Mountain Ranch Road, Big Sky, Montana

Contact: General Manager Bob Foster, (406) 995-4444; bfoster@lonemountainranch.com; www.lonemountainranch.com

Located in Big Sky, Lone Mountain Ranch was originally a 1915 homestead and is on the National Register of Historic Places. Perched in a hidden valley near Yellowstone National Park, it focuses on outdoor adventure and extraordinary ranch cuisine. Summer months include backcountry riding, guided hikes, mountain biking, and an award-winning Drury fly fishing program. In winter, guests have over 50 miles of Nordic ski and snowshoe trails, sleigh ride dinners, winter fly fishing and Yellowstone ski and snow coach tours. Massage therapists, yoga instructors, and our Old West Saloon help guests relax after all that activity.
Wyoming

The Hideout Lodge & Guest Ranch

The Hideout Home

Key selling points | This luxurious three-bedroom home boasts twin master bedrooms featuring master baths with walk-in tile showers, plus private terraces, a fireplace, fully equipped kitchen and fine furniture and materials throughout. Views take in the Big Horn Mountains and grazing horses.

Standout service | For a guest who incidentally mentioned her husband's love of big vintage chrome American cars, staff located a nearly new 1976 Lincoln Continental town car to pick the couple up at jet-side, then gave the guests the car to enjoy during their stay.

Style | Historical Western luxury, by Paula Fitner and Gene Rockman of Rockman Associates LLC, 2009

Special amenities | Fresh home-made pastries and cakes, plus wine, fruit and flowers on arrival, fire pit, stone fireplace, large flat-screen TVs in every room.

Square footage | 2,400, plus 400 of outdoor space.

Number of rooms in suite | Six

Number of bathrooms | Three

Number of rooms and suites in hotel | Nine, including five cabins

Who's slept here? | Film and reality TV stars, royal families

Nightly rate | From $425 (four-night minimum)

Location | 3170 Road 40 1/2, Shell, Wyoming

Contact | General Manager Peter De Cabooter, (307) 765-2080; office@thehideout.com; www.thehideout.com

Lodge & Spa at Brush Creek Ranch

Kinta's Cabin Residence

Key selling points | Originally the ranch owner's home dating to the land's homestead days, the three-bedroom Kinta's Cabin has been completely and authentically restored and is the largest and most luxurious of the original cabins at Brush Creek Ranch. Rawhide chairs, real hides and real fur throws evoke a true rugged-meets-refined vibe.

Standout service | For a wedding proposal, staff decked a rock cliff overlooking the ranch in candles and brought the couple to the romantic setting by horse-drawn carriage.

Style | Western luxury, by Simone Deary, 2009

Special amenities | Full kitchen, two fireplaces, Thymes by Slickrist & Soames bath amenities, 400-thread-count sheets, Egyptian cotton towels, Western works of art, grocery stocking service

Square footage | 1,924

Number of rooms in suite | Six

Number of bathrooms | Three

Number of rooms and suites in hotel | 60, including ten cabin residences, nine cabin suites and one bunkhouse

Who's slept here? | Reba McEntire, Kelly Clarkson

Nightly rate | $4,500 (inclusive for six)

Location | Brush Creek Ranch Road, Saratoga, Wyoming

Contact | EDD Mike Williams, (307) 327-5264; mwilliams@brushcreekranch.com; www.brushcreekranch.com
COLORADO

THE HOME RANCH

COLUMBINE CABIN

Key selling points | The largest and most luxurious cabin on property is also called “Home on the Ranch,” and is a two-story house, not a cabin. It comfortably accommodates three couples or a family of six to eight, with a spacious living room, stone fireplace, steam shower, outdoor Jacuzzi and a big wraparound porch.

Standout service | When a guest loved the coffee—a proprietary blend not sold anywhere—and asked where he could buy it, he was presented with a five-pound bag to take home.

Style | Sophisticated Western, by founder and owner Ann Strandahan, 1992

Special amenities | Arts & Crafts, school tiles and paneling, Frente sheets, Pendleton bedspreads, custom soaps and lotions from Mountain Soap Factory, authentic Navajo rugs, fresh flowers, bottomless jar of homemade chocolate chip cookies

Square footage | 2,100, plus 400 of outdoor space

Number of rooms in suite | Four

Number of bathrooms | Three

Number of rooms and suites in hotel | 14, including eight cabins

Who’s slept here? | Top models, Grammy-winning songwriters

Nightly rate | $2,797 for up to six (inclusive, seven-night minimum); $3,125 for eight

Location | 5640 County Road 129, Clark, Colorado

Contact | Assistant Ranch Manager Selina Heintz, 970-879-1780; selina@homerranch.com; www.homerranch.com

C L A Z Y U RANCH

MIDNIGHT TRAIL LODGE

Key selling points | This ultra-private villa sleeps up to 11 people in complete luxury, with a state-of-the-art sound system, full gourmet kitchen and a private golf cart for guests to use around the ranch. The custom iron, woodwork and cabinetry really sets the lodge apart.

Standout service | For a guest who wanted his son to have a genuine Colorado camping experience, staff collected mats, sleeping bags, a tent and a s’mores kit, then drove the father and son to a remote location on the ranch, helped them set up camp and built a fire.

Style | Rustic-chic Western, by Mark Hiebinger of Peak Craftsman and Rebecca Kaufman of Repeal Design, 2009

Special amenities | Molton Brown bath amenities, 70-inch HD TV, wet bar, large copper soaking tub and steam shower in master bath, private outdoor hot tub, indoor fireplace, two outdoor fire pits (one gas and one wood)

Square footage | 3,500

Number of rooms in suites | Nine

Number of bathrooms | Three and one half-bath

Number of rooms and suites in hotel | 30 cabins and one Midnight Trail Lodge

Who’s slept here? | Cindy Crawford, Dave Matthews, Tom Tebow

Nightly rate | $500 per person (up to 11)

Location | 3640 Colorado Highway 125, Granby, Colorado

Contact | Director of Sales and Marketing Brady Johnson, 970-867-3804; bjohnson@clazyu.com; www.clazyu.com
SMITH FORK RANCH
RIVER HOUSE
Key selling points | This authentically elegant log house has three master bedrooms and overlooks the Smith Fork River on one side, and one of the ranch's six stocked fishing ponds on the other. A large wraparound deck touts a hot tub cantilevered over the river, as well as a screened-in sleeping porch.
Standout service | On a horse riding cutout, a guest with a great sense of humor joked that he needed a "more colorful" horse, as his was white whereas his friends' horses were not. The next morning, wranglers rose early and painted his horse to look like the others.
Style | Elegant rustic, by Marley Hoegdson of SFR in collaboration with Dean Mosher, 2006
Special amenities | Locally handmade soaps and lotions, daily fresh flowers from Smith Fork Ranch gardens, woodburning fireplace, American antiques, original Western and Native American art
Square footage | 2,060, plus 766 of outdoor space
Number of rooms in suite | Six
Number of bathrooms | Three
Number of rooms and suites in hotel | 13, including three cabins and one house
Who's slept here? | Singer Joe Cocker, Riedel North America CEO Maximilian Riedel
Nightly rate | From $2,280 (three-night minimum)
Location | 45362 Needle Rock Road, Crawford, Colorado
Contact | General Manager Jim Nielsen, (970) 921-3656 ext. 260; jimi@smithforkranch.com; www.smithforkranch.com

VISTA VERDE RANCH
SAND CABIN
Key selling points | The view from both indoors and from the private hot tub on the deck is simply phenomenal, overlooking the horse pasture to the mountains beyond. This three-bedroom cabin is the largest on the property, and a stocked fridge and complimentary drinks make it feel like home.
Standout service | Staff hid a stuffed moose with a snack each night for a family's kids to find; the nightly treasure hunt was such a hit that the ranch now offers this fun turndown for all young guests.
Style | Western Luxury, by Bill Backer, 2009
Special amenities | Fili d'Oro sheets, locally made Steamboat Soap bath amenities, woodburning stove, welcome snack basket, log furnishings handmade on-site with wood collected on the property
Square footage | 1,440, plus 250 of outdoor space
Number of rooms in suite | Four
Number of bathrooms | Two
Number of rooms and suites in hotel | 13, including ten cabins
Who's slept here? | High-profile CEOs, TV personalities
Nightly rate | From $720
Location | 56000 Cowboy Way, Clark, Colorado
Contact | Director of Hospitality Stephanie Wilson, (970) 879-3858; stephanie@vistaerde.com; www.vistaerde.com

This is an ideal luxury Western experience for those seeking a private enclave with friends or family in the Colorado Rockies; there are never more than 25 guests and many groups take the place exclusively. It is known for fine cuisine and wine, and because of the intimate nature of the experience, staff excel at customizing activities to each particular guest; often with unique extras, such as the company of a local bamboo fishing rod craftsman or a "horse whisperer" for and equestrians. The focus here is always on personalization.