



Cowboy Up

Get back in the saddle again at Tucson's White Stallion Ranch

BY TERESA BITLER

Photo: © Balfour Walker Photography

Nestled along the northwest edge of the Tucson Mountains lies a place where the spirit of the Old West is still alive. Boots clomp across the hardwood floor in the lodge, the smell of horses and leather hangs in the air near the stables, and thousands of stars twinkle in the pitch-black sky above the campfire as a cowboy strums his guitar — this is White Stallion Ranch.

Here guests smile with contentment from under the brims of their cowboy hats, and — just like the locals have for generations — most spend their days riding the desert trails on horseback.

“There’s something about being on the back of a horse out in the desert that’s almost therapeutic,” says Beston Warden, a wrangler at the ranch. “Riding here is truly an unforgettable experience.”

Also reminiscent of a slower and simpler time are the personal touches that make guests feel like part of the ranch family: The wranglers know which horse you’re riding and ask how you like him, and ranch employees you haven’t even met greet you by name. The horses are just as amiable. The herd, 140 strong, comes from various backgrounds — cow pony, trail horse, circus performer, retired racehorse, and others — but now share a common focus of navigating the trails with their riders.

Warden says his favorite rides skirt the edge of the foothills, revealing panoramic views of the desert floor, but guests can choose from a variety of riding experiences. In the morning and afternoon you have the choice of either a slow (walking) or a fast (some loping) ride. Other opportunities include half-day and full-day rides; weekly Beer and Cheetos or Wine and Cheese rides; and timed team-penning competitions three times a week.

Unlike other ranches and outfitters, White Stallion Ranch pairs up horses and riders based on riding experience (and not exclusively on the rider’s size), so guests of all skill levels will feel comfortable in the saddle. And because you remain partnered with the same horse for the duration of your stay, you get to know each other and, in turn, you’ll feel more at ease in the saddle. This unique level of comfort allows riders to watch for rabbits, quail, lizards, and even javelina, while on the meandering trails.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, guests can choose from an assortment of activities, such as hiking into adjacent Saguaro National Park, relaxing by the swimming pool, taking line-dancing lessons, attending astronomy presentations, holding a boa constrictor during a nature talk, playing a game of tennis, or sipping a glass of wine on the patio. The on-site petting zoo — complete with goats, chickens, and other small farm animals — is a popular attraction. There’s also regular horsemanship clinics, women’s retreats, and photography workshops. One thing you can’t do in any of the 41 rooms or suites? Watch TV. Real cowboys didn’t have TVs, after all.

TERESA BITLER is the author of *Backroads & Byways of Indian Country*.

If You Go

White Stallion Ranch is open year-round. In fact, some guests prefer to visit during the summer months because they can ride early in the morning, request a sack lunch, and then explore Tucson and Southern Arizona during the day. You won’t find anyone riding on Sundays, as this is the horses’ day off.

White Stallion Ranch
9251 W. Twin Peaks Road
Tucson, Ariz.
888-977-2624
wsranch.com