

Latigo Ranch, Kremmling, Colorado: A Cowgirl's Coming Home



Welcome to Latigo Ranch, a dude ranch in the Colorado mountains that feels like coming home.

Clouds, some whisper-thin and lacy, others billowy white, dance across a wide, cobalt blue sky. Mountains, shades of green, brown, grey, and burnt umber, stack layer upon layer to the horizon. Before us, broad green valleys stretch and undulate across the landscape. The beauty makes me to catch my breath.

I've never been to a dude ranch, places where people come for a week or two to experience life as cowboys or cowgirls. The spectrum of dude ranches ranges from high-end, pampering with full-service spas and staff who are practically butlers to basic ride 'em and feed 'em beans and burgers places.

On the pampering scale, Latigo is somewhere in the middle. The accommodations are comfortable

and spotlessly clean cabins decorated with pine log furniture and Western style art and bedding. Guest needs are certainly taken care of and they'll cook to your dietary needs.

What makes Latigo different is the genuine sense of welcome. Co-owners Randy and Lisa George and Jim and Cathy Yost have owned this 450-acre spread at what feels like the end of the earth in Grand County, Colorado, for more than 25 years and they know how to encircle their guests with warmth and generosity.

"We love what we do," says Lisa, a comfortably round middle-aged woman with silvery hair pulled back from her tan face with a simple comb. Deep smile lines surround her lively eyes. She's a woman you immediately want to count among your dearest friends. "We really love the people and serving guests who come here."

One of their mottos is "like family coming home" and that's exactly what it feels like. On arrival, we're greeted with a big canister of handmade caramel corn in our cozy cabin. It's sweet and delicious, just like my grandmother used to make.

Food is a big part of Latigo's hospitable atmosphere and Lisa and Randy and their grown children, Spencer and Hannah, make nearly everything—sauces, salad dressings, even breads and rolls—from scratch in their small kitchen. "We want our food to be tasty and filling," says Randy, a lean balding man with wire-rimmed glasses and an impressive mustache. "Our guests are physically active so we want our food to be hearty without being pretentious. For us, food is about relationships. What goes on around the table between people is as important as what's on the table. If the food contributes to those relationships, so much the better."

The light-filled, knotty pine dining room overlooks the kids' fishing pond and a spectacular view of



At Latigo, you can ride and rope or just watch the clouds drift.



Lisa George bakes all the bread and rolls, including these delicious dinner rolls.

the valley and mountains. There are tables to fit any group—fours, sixes, and long tables that can be pushed together for bigger groups.

It's meeting guest needs that makes Latigo's food different from many "today we're having steak" dude ranches. The choices are varied and delicious. Breakfast offerings include fruit, cereal, and juice options or eggs, potatoes, meats, waffles, pancakes, or burritos made to your liking. Lunch always features a wide range of meats, cheese, and breads for sandwiches, a large salad bar with an amazing array of toppings (we counted 28), and dressings, as well as hot choices like pasta with five different sauces. For dinner, the choices are even broader with meat, chicken, fish, and vegetarian entrées offered at every meal. In addition, they'll custom make food to guests' individual tastes or dietary restrictions.

"We want people to feel like they're guests and part of our family," says Lisa "If they don't like mushrooms, for instance, we want them to feel comfortable asking, "What do you have without mushrooms?"

This variety and choice is part of what compelled the Gottliebs to bring their large family to Latigo to celebrate Mr. Gotlieb's 70th birthday and his and his wife's 45th wedding anniversary. "A lot of places just offer meats like steaks," he says. "We're a big group so we need choices. We did some research and found that Latigo offers lots of food options like fish, chicken, and vegetarian. We really like that."

Much of that choice comes from Lisa's creative drive. "I'm an inveterate recipe clipper," admits



You'll never go hungry at Latigo Ranch.



The George's make sure there's plenty of choice at each meal.

Lisa. “I’m always trying different dishes.”

So many recipes that she produces a new cookbook for guests each year with dishes they’ve served that season. Recipes in the 2011 cookbook include crunchy granola, crescent rolls, sweet potato braided bread, Latigo marinara sauce, sweet potato bake, peanut butter bars, strawberry trifle, and many others.

Horses, Fishes, and More

When guests aren’t eating at Latigo, there’s plenty to do. You can ride horses, play pool or foosball, swim in the pool, take a hot tub, fish in the stocked pond in front of the lodge (a favorite of both kids and adults), read, lounge, hike, whitewater raft, and go on overnight camping trips. Or you can simply sit on the porch swing, look at the beautiful scenery, and watch the broad-tailed hummingbirds buzz around the feeders. Unlike many dude ranches, all of it is included in the ranch’s pay-one-price.

Co-owner Jim Yost, a skilled horseman, runs the ranch’s riding program. During our first full day, the adults join Jim in a meadow out by the barn. Guests can ride horses every day, even twice a day if they want. However, the folks at Latigo want guests to be safe and to improve their riding skills.

We’re gathered around Jim and a horse he’s using for demonstration. First, he introduces us to some horse trivia like where horses first appeared on the planet (surprisingly in North America). Then he talks about the anatomy of horses, how it contributes to their survival, and impacts their behavior. “You can use all of a horse’s natural behavior to make your experience with a horse better,” he tells us. “You want to work with the horse’s nature, not against it.”

After a thorough orientation and conversation about our riding experience and skill level, we’re assigned horses. My mount, Shoshone, is a tall, handsome grey with plenty of spunk. We’re divided into small groups and three of us follow our young wrangler out of the barnyard and up into the hills. These smaller groups feel intimate like you’re riding with friends instead of on a standard rental horse trail ride. We’ve signed up for the walk, trot, lope group, which means we’ll do all three.



Lisa George shares a laugh with a guest.

We follow a narrow dirt path that winds through stands of white-barked aspen. “Ready to trot some?” asks our wrangler.

Off we go, a fast walk, then a trot. I’d forgotten how physical it feels to ride a horse. After some initial jarring, I get into the posting rhythm with my horse, rising up and down on the balls of my feet to minimize the trot’s bounce.

We climb up and down hills, alternating between walking and trotting. Then it’s time to lope. The wrangler’s horse takes off and, with a bit of urging, Shoshone breaks from his trot into an easy gallop. The rocking rhythm, familiar from my childhood days of riding my own horse, feels comfortable and easy.

We stop along Red Dirt Reservoir to let our horses rest. It’s early in the season and in the high altitude, the horses are a bit out of shape from winter’s rest. I slip off my horse and my stiff knees remind me that it’s been a long time since I trotted and loped like when I was a young girl. I, too, am a bit out of shape.

On the way back to the ranch, we trot and gallop some more. Shoshone has experienced a second wind and doesn’t want to allow the horse in front to leave him behind. Instead of an easy lope, he wants to gallop full out and I lean slightly forward and allow him to fly.

After several breathless sprints, we pause at the top of a ridge. To the west, mountain after mountain reach to the horizon. Valleys, green and broad, stretch before us. Clouds in fantastical shapes and whiter than white, float in an endless blue sky. It is all heartbreakingly beautiful and I feel like crying. I have come home to Latigo. – *by Bobbie Hasselbring, RFT Editor, Photographs*



Randy George and his son whip up a cowboy BBQ for guests, including juicy bison burgers and portabello mushrooms.



Guests eat together in Latigo’s comfy dining room overlooking the stocked lake.

by Anne Weaver, RFT Editor

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A staffer coaches a young cowgirl in the fine art of roping.



Co-owner and veteran horseman Jim Yost puts his horse through its paces.



One of the wranglers at Latigo Ranch checks the saddle for a guest.



After plenty of trotting and loping, a stop along Red
Dirt Reservoir was a welcome respite for out-of-
shape greenhorns.