

On the Road: Southwest Travel Round Up

By Suzanne Wright

White Stallion Ranch, Tucson, Arizona

If you love horseback riding, this is the place for you. Snuggled up next to Saguaro National Park, home of those giant, one-armed cactuses, this 3,000 acre dude ranch with down-home appeal is ideal for horseback riders at all levels. This charming, informal ranch run by the True family gives the temporary cowboy and cowgirl the feeling of the Old West.

From slow lopes to brisk rides, I enjoy western-style riding with the wranglers straight out of central casting, beautiful fine horses and scores of scenic, wide-open trails. This is a working cattle ranch, so it's fun to watch the Longhorn cattle herd coming in to water or to check out team cattle penning and there's a pool if you just want to sunbathe. Nearby is the excellent Arizona Sonora Desert Museum.

Meals are hearty and communal—a bell summons you—and you'll get to know the other guests quickly at the cookouts and hayrides. The 32 rooms are comfortable. Although closed for the summer (due to high heat), the climate the rest of the year is ideal with warm, dry days and cool evenings.

For more information: www.wsranch.com or 1-888-WS-RANCH.

The Inn of the Anasazi, Santa Fe, New Mexico

Santa Fe has more cultural attractions than any U.S. city its size—not to mention distinctive lodging, great eating and unique shopping. In the winter, you'll find the town dusted in snow and the dry cold brisk, not punishing.

The chic, 13-year old Inn of the Anasazi is located just steps from the Plaza in the heart of town. The massive carved doors open into luxury Southwestern accommodations with thoughtful touches like a humidifier, a gas kiva (fireplace) and organic amenities. The dining room is one of the city's best; a specialty is cinnamon-chile rubbed beef medallions. Be sure to try a glass of bubbly from New Mexico's own Gruet (who knew?)

Since cuisine is key here, I take a three-hour cooking class at the Santa Fe School of Cooking and learn to make huitlacoche-roasted corn salsa, blue cornmeal biscuits and a pinon dried apple tart. Santa Fe is a wonderfully compact, walkable city; you don't need a car. Strolling the Plaza, which dates from 1610, I ask shopkeepers where their favorite green chile burrito or margarita can be found; everyone has a different answer. Every day, Native American artisans display their wares on the sidewalks of the Plaza; I succumb to a turquoise necklace.

This is a town for art lovers, from Canyon Road, where historic adobe buildings house dozens of art galleries, to the (Georgia) O’Keefe Museum, which features the largest collection in the world of the iconic artist’s work to the Plaza’s Palace of the Governors. Museum Hill has four impressive museums and a restaurant.

As the air cools, I sip a margarita at La Fonda’s Bell Tower rooftop bar, the lights of the city twinkling below. At lively Casa Sena Cantina, the waitresses and waiters break into Broadway tunes between serving patrons. No surprise—they are terrific.

For reservations: www.innoftheanasazi.com or 1-800-688-8100.

Marquis Las Cabos, Cabo San Lucas, Mexico

In Baja Mexico, beyond the infamous party bars Cabo Wabo and Squid Roe, Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, boasts a number of stunning resorts perfect for a mid-winter weekend escape. If you like to fish, this is the world’s marlin capital. If you don’t, great snorkeling and diving await. The landscape is a surprise: mountain peaks in the distance, the desert giving way to the sea, more cactus than palm trees, thundering waves.

The dramatic, marble-floored, open-air lobby of the Marquis Las Cabos (a member of the Leading Hotels of the World) offers a breathtaking view of the shimmering Sea of Cortez. The public space features playful touches like a starfish in an ashtray. Each of the 237 suites faces the water and is sumptuously appointed; my favorite feature is a “private niche” where morning coffee and pastries and evening sweets showed up unbidden.

In addition to water sports, there are six golf courses nearby, along with ATViing and horseback riding. The pool area is stunning, with the lip of the infinity pool meeting the ocean from bather’s view. The beach is fine for walking, but the water here is too rough for swimming. The spacious spa overlooking the sea is a knockout with Mayan art and a range of holistic treatments. On the most comfortable massage table my body has ever experienced, I enjoy a 90-minute foot massage, exfoliation and full body massage with herbal oils.

Nearby San Jose del Cabo, founded by Jesuit priests in 1730, retains the charm of a quaint Mexican village with shops and galleries. I enjoy a memorable European-Mexican meal at Casa Natalia, an entrancing small hotel. At the Marquis, besides three kinds of ceviche, try the decadent tasting menu at the resort’s preeminent restaurant, where the waiters thoughtfully drape a pashmina over your chair to prevent clothing snags.

Visit: www.marquisloscabos.com or 1-800-388-3543.

Camel’s Garden Resort & Hotel, Telluride, Colorado

Chances are even ski fanatics haven't been to Telluride. Sure, it's a little harder to get to than Steamboat or Breckenridge, but the payoff's worth it: you'll find laid-back mountain elegance without the glitz of Aspen or the long lift lines of Vail; a genuine vibe without a trace of attitude.

Founded in 1878, Telluride is nestled in the San Juan peaks of the Rocky Mountains. A former silver and gold mining town, it now hosts a "white gold rush," with top-notch terrain for beginners, intermediates and expert skiers. Telluride garnered the 10th spot among North American ski resorts in last year's *Ski* and *SKIING* magazines, largely thanks to the Prospect Bowl expansion with its steeps and stunning views, which opened in 2002.

With just over 2,200 fulltime residents, Telluride is an alpine village at an elevation of 8,725 feet with impeccably restored, multicolored Victorian houses. Walking is a pleasure: the town is only eight blocks wide and 12 blocks long, so you don't need a car; the nearest stoplight is 45 miles away. Breathing the crisp air, I take in the wintry landscape: icicles hanging from the rooflines, bare aspens, majestic white peaks.

Family-friendly Mountain Village is where the slope action takes place and it is connected to town by a free, 15-minute gondola ride that operates from 7 a.m. until midnight—complete with wool blankets to keep you warm on the ride.

The 32-room Camel's Garden Inn is right at the base of the gondola. In addition to a warm and friendly staff, they offer a continental breakfast, wine and cheese in the afternoon, valet ski storage and a 25-foot hot tub with spectacular views. My room is contemporary in décor and features a four-poster bed, a marble bath with oversize tub, Aveda toiletries and—best of all—a sitting room with a gas fireplace.

Telluride Ski & Golf Company can polish your skills. Don't ski? I went snowshoeing in the pristine silence of the nearby woods; the tracks of snowshoe hare and squirrel are the only demarcation in the fresh powder.

After working up an appetite, tuck into great meals at local favorites: Rustico, a cozy bistro with a wood-burning stove, Honga's Lotus Petal, with sushi and Asian dishes, the very special Allred's at the gondola Station St. Sophia and funky La Cocina de Luz for a hearty breakfast.

Log onto: www.camelsgarden.com or call 1-888-772-2635.