

WESTERN RANCH EXPERIENCE

BIG SKY COUNTRY STYLE

Ranches are as much a part of the Montana experience as are blue skies and scenic vistas. From luxury resorts to generational run family ranches, your choices are as plentiful as the wildlife and livestock you'll see on any given day. With more than 200 guest and vacation ranches dotting Montana's landscape, a roundup is never far away.

If you are new to dude ranching, you'll need to take some time to consider what kind of ranch is right for you. To help you understand some of the differences in ranches and western adventure, we have divided them into the following categories:



✚ **Working Ranch** ~ As the name implies, these are working cattle or sheep operations. Your horseback riding adventures will be determined by the ranch's livestock and the work related to them. By day, work side-by-side with a fellow rancher or guest, moving cattle or irrigation, enjoying the sights. By night, experience the camaraderie of a job well-done and relax on a porch or around a campfire.

✚ **Dude or Guest Ranch** ~ Horseback riding is central to these ranches. However, you might also try a hike to a wildflower meadow, cast a hand-tied fly or swim in the "local" hole. The cowboy in you will experience Western riding by day and appreciate a rodeo or pillow at night.

✚ **Resort Dude Ranch** ~ Horseback riding is featured and these ranches offer an array of diverse activities and onsite facilities, usually with an upscale twist. After a trail ride in the morning, how about a sauna or massage in the afternoon? Here, cowboy coffee is 'gourmet' and as lavish as the landscape that surrounds you.

✚ **A Fly Fishing Ranch** ~ Offers a ranch-like setting and experience, but focuses on an extensive fly fishing program with complete instruction and guides. Some of these ranches even have a fly shop on the premise. In the evening, dinner may just be the fish that *didn't* get away!



✚ **Wagon Trains** ~ Western adventures, with a unique difference: guests' sleeping quarters and meals travel with them on the trail. Usually centered on a cattle drive or other trail-themed experience, wagon trains usually feature a chuck wagon for meals and covered wagons or tents for guest accommodations or just sleep out under the stars and *really* discover what is significant.

Just as the offerings at each ranch vary, so does the geography where they are found. Ranches are prevalent throughout all of Montana: in the eastern plains, in high mountain valleys, along main highways and on Indian reservations. Your options are as numerous as the wildlife you'll see on the range. All offer a unique Old West experience, beautiful scenery and best of all, Montana hospitality.



WESTERN RANCH EXPERIENCE

BIG SKY COUNTRY STYLE

With so many great options, how do you choose a ranch? We're convinced that each Montana ranch has something special to offer. Vast reaches of plains, badlands or mountain meadows. Abundant waterfowl, wildlife and western charm. Cozy comforts with friends you've never met. The key is finding which ranch is right for you.

Here are some things to consider when searching for your western ranch experience:

✚ **Location** ~ Since horseback riding is the primary emphasis for activities on a dude ranch, choose the riding environment that appeals to you. Do you want to ride in the mountains, on the open prairie or on a ranch that is in the foothills? The location of the ranch determines the terrain. Some ranches are close to a national park, many border national forests or wilderness areas, while others may be large ranch properties that have been in the family for generations. Ranchers love to share the history and flavor of the area. Off the beaten path or closer to the night life, location is something to consider.



✚ **Type of Riding** ~ Are you a beginner who would like to spend time learning horsemanship skills to become more comfortable or are you an experienced rider who wants a challenge? Most ranches offer horsemanship instruction for the beginner to the experienced rider, but ranch programs do differ. Some ranches have mostly scenic trail rides with limited trotting or loping, others have terrain that allows for more. There are working cattle ranches where guests can help with ranch chores and then there are vacations where you are never obligated to work! Some ranches offer overnight pack-trips or cattle drives or maybe just focus on riding in breath-taking country. Whatever you're looking for, there are ranches to meet your needs.

✚ **Size or Guest Capacity** ~ The number of guests that a ranch can host is something to think about. A guest ranch that hosts ten guests provides a different environment than a ranch that serves sixty. Larger ranches often offer an organized schedule of activities and entertainment while smaller ranches tend to have more personalized activities where you become part of the family for a week and can be less scheduled.



✚ **Season or Time of Year** ~ In the West, snow conditions mean that ranches open later in the spring and close in the fall; however, there are ranches that offer "off-season" packages or are open all year but have different activities to fit the season. July and August are typically the high season, but most ranches are also open in June and September. Many offer early and fall season specials.

✚ **Other Activities** ~ Some ranches concentrate mostly on horseback riding, while others include fishing, guided hikes, side trips to local attractions, rafting, pack-trips and much more. If you have children or teens, you may want to select a ranch with organized activities for kids. Single adults may prefer a ranch that is more adult orient or has specific adult weeks.

✚ **Accommodations** ~ Ranch atmospheres range from rustic to luxurious and everything in between. Ranches are always extremely clean and comfortable, but can vary from lodge rooms to private log cabins. If you need hair dryers, TV's, Jacuzzi tubs, a daily massage or wireless Internet, choose your ranch accordingly.



As you narrow your choices down to a couple ranches, call and explain to them what's most important to you – they'll help you make the best choice. One that will give you a memory to last a lifetime. Good luck in your search and have a wonderful ranch vacation.

For more information on ranch adventures, explore www.visitmt.com or www.montanadra.com.