

Along for the ride

Looking for new ways to sell Canada? Saddle up for a ranch stay, says Laura French

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Picture horses galloping across sun-strewn meadows, lakes glowing out from orange Aspen forests and misty mountains rising above emerald valleys, and you have a glimpse into Canada's Wild West - aka cowboy country.

That might all sound a little clichéd, but visit this glorious region and you'll see it's every bit as wild and romantic in reality, which is probably why business

here is booming. While driving through can give you a brief snapshot of its natural charms, nothing beats staying in the heart of it - and that's where ranch stays come in.

Interest in these holidays is on the rise, according to Prestige Holidays, which has introduced a dedicated ranch page in its brochure for 2019 in response.

"We've certainly noticed an increase in demand for this

type of stay," says Denise Hunn, Canada and USA manager for the operator. "Most ranches are en route from places such as Jasper in the Rockies, Prince George to the north or the Okanagan Valley to the south, so they make for an ideal add-on to self-drives in the region."

That's good news for you: sell a ranch stay and you'll be diversifying your product offering while boosting your commission

with a high-value experience. We've put together a guide to some of the best ranches in the region to help you whittle things down.

► BEST FOR...HERITAGE

Historic Reesor Ranch, Saskatchewan: Five generations have lived and worked at this historic ranch set in the Cypress Hills, and guests today get to experience it in

PICTURE: THOMAS SBAMPATO

→ much the same way as when it was first established in 1904. “It really reflects the history and heritage of cattle ranching in the region,” says Tony Daly, managing director at Ranch Rider.

Cattle drives, riding fence lines and checking cattle on horseback are among the experiences included in stays, while the surrounding Cypress Hills offer intriguing sights such as the Conglomerate Rocks – soaring formations with 360-degree views over the slopes – and buffalo wallows, formed by thousands of buffalo that once roamed the area.

Beyond that you’ll find all-terrain vehicle rides and historic walking tours, plus quintessentially Western experiences like hearing cowboy poetry, feasting on barbecued steaks and listening to stories around the campfire – authenticity, tick.

Book it: A week’s full-board with Ranch Rider costs from £1,126 per person, based on two sharing a Standard Double (with shared facilities), including most ranch activities and taxes. Flights extra. ranchrider.com

▶ BEST FOR...THE SPA

Echo Valley Ranch & Spa, Cariboo Mountains, British Columbia: Peeping out from the Cariboo Mountains, Echo Valley is part-ranch, part-spa retreat, made up of 20 rooms and suites



Echo Valley is part-ranch, part-spa retreat, made up of 20 rooms set among bottle-green forests and marbled desert canyons

set among bottle-green pine forests and marbled desert canyons.

It offers horse riding trails to suit all levels, with meadows, mountains and Aspen forests providing varied backdrops, but it’s not only about the

horses, with fly-fishing, gold-panning, white-water rafting, hiking, yoga and cooking demonstrations on offer too, plus Asian-inspired treatments at its Royal Baan Thai spa.

Book it: Prestige Holidays offers three nights’ full-board from £1,029 per person, based on two sharing a premium room from July 31, 2019, including certain activities (horse rides extra) and an evening entertainment programme. Flights extra. prestigeholidays.co.uk

▶ BEST FOR...FAMILIES

Sundance Guest Ranch, British Columbia: Tucked away in the Thompson River Valley, about a four-hour drive from Vancouver, is this sprawling ranch, home to more than 100 horses.

There’s plenty in the way of riding for experts and novices, but it’s also just as acceptable to sit back and relax in the remote, peaceful surroundings, chomping on steaks straight from the charcoal grill.

There’s a good family offering too, with a games room, movie area, swimming pool and more on hand, as well as an adult-only bar for those wanting to escape the younger ones and live it up a little, Western-style.

Book it: Canadian Affair, which has just begun selling through the trade, offers a seven-night fly-drive to the ranch from £1,361 per person, including full-board accommodation, two guided trails per day, car hire and flights from Gatwick. canadianaffair.com



ABOVE:
Echo Valley Ranch & Spa

LEFT:
Historic Reesor Ranch





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DESTINATIONS CANADA



ABOVE: Campbell Hills Guest Ranch

▶ BEST FOR...NATURE LOVERS

Campbell Hills Guest Ranch, British Columbia: This small, family-friendly spot, halfway between Vancouver and Banff, houses a maximum of 18 guests, meaning it's all about being personable, and its key focus is on 'natural horsemanship', working with horses based on the animals' natural instincts.

Bald eagles, black bears, moose and coyotes stalk the area, providing plenty of wildlife-spotting opportunities, and if that doesn't suffice there's also lasso-throwing, stargazing, fishing and photography workshops to keep guests occupied.

Book it: Premier Holidays offers a 10-night trip, including two nights at Campbell Hills Guest Ranch plus stays in Vancouver, Revelstoke, Lake Louise and Banff, from £1,426 per person, based on two sharing in May 2019. Car hire and return flights from Heathrow are included. premierholidays.co.uk

▶ BEST FOR...WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES

Siwash Lake Wilderness Resort, British Columbia: Named among National Geographic's Unique Lodges of the World, this intimate, luxury retreat prides itself on its eco-friendly



If the wildlife doesn't suffice there's lasso-throwing, stargazing and fishing to keep guests occupied

credentials and family-run feel. Though it's still recovering from a wildfire, it promises a proper back-to-nature experience, with canoeing, fly-fishing, archery and heli-safaris over Fraser Canyon, plus a wilderness survival workshop where guests build a shelter and forage for water and food in the wild, rugged forest.

There's also the comprehensive 'SiwashSynergy' riding programme, which aims to help build trust among the guests and their horses, teaching them how to read the animals.

Book it: North America Travel Service offers a three-night Wilderness Explorer Multi-Adventure Package staying at the ranch from £5,445 per person based on two sharing on an all-inclusive basis, including activities with a private guide. Flights extra.

northamericatravelservice.co.uk