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Horsebacking Riding & Equestrian Vacations: Four Legs Are Better Than Two

Horsebacking Riding & Equestrian Vacations: Four Legs Are Better Than Two



We're not sure what it is about the autumn that makes us want to jump on a horse and ride into the sunset ne'er to return, die-hard equestrian Athena Amot-Copenhaver set out in search of some of the greatest horseback riding adventures from here to Timbuktu.

When asked what her favorite part of "equitrekking" is, owner and founder of the award-winning equestrian vacation company, Darley Newman, says, "Being able to see the town you're visiting from the unique vantage point of the saddle. You see the world from a completely unusual point of view."

Considered one of the best companies to offer world-class riding for all skill levels, from fast-paced gallopers to beachside lopers, Equitrekking prides itself on taking riders on eco-friendly, culturally inquisitive tours on horseback.

Newman recommends for advanced riders the Jordan Bedouin Trek & Classic Tour—it's one of the most riveting. "People think that riding through the desert can be boring, just a bunch of sand," explains Newman, "but when you're led by a champion endurance rider heading to the Royal Stables of Jordan, it doesn't get any better than that."

Newman recommends the Icelandic ponies for riders who might want a less intimidating horse experience. The Icelandic horses are small in stature and have an unbelievably smooth gait.

You'll ride alongside enormous glaciers with 50 other horses—"go fast" being the only directions needed, says Newman. Equitrekking offers unique equestrian vacations around the world, including the States, for all riding abilities and all wallet sizes—so choose carefully!

The Wild, Wild West: Long Valley Cattle Drive, Arizona and Utah

This, brave riders of the storm, is the real deal. If you've always craved the Great American Cattle Drive Adventure, this one's for you. It takes place twice a year, in June and October, as the cattle is moved from between summer and winter pastures. Operated by the original clan that has run cattle in the western United States since the wild west days of Buffalo Bill, the Long Valley Cattle Drive is an 11-day saga of ranching, riding, cutting and cantering. Guests assist real cowboys in cutting particular cows and calves from the herd of 800, and then feast on hearty meals cooked fireside.



Recommended for intermediate riding levels, the ride begins in Alton, Utah, where guests will help ranchers herd 800-head of cattle from their summer range way up on Bryce Canyon Plateau, to their winter hideaway on the Arizona Strip. Homesteaders' trails and confident guides lead you and your sidekicks through miles of land, touching a number of recognized parks including Bryce Canyon National Park, Zion, and Coral Sands State Park. On your final day, you'll disperse groups of cattle along their winter range and ensure that the job is done well. The cattle drive from the summer range to winter is more expensive than the winter to summer, so plan accordingly. Also, don't forget there is a weight limit of 210 pounds.

"Silent Thunder" and Paniolo Traditions, Dahana Ranch, Hawaii



Riding all day long in the dust and the grime can be a rewarding experience, but riding all day long through countryside beside two of the world's liveliest volcanoes is positively soul-inspiring. At Dahana Ranch, nestled in Waimea on the Big Island, Hawaii's finest horse country, guests have the chance to work with third-generation Hawaiian horsemen who specialize in starting colts and fillies from day one. Although the ranch also offers rugged cattle adventures for those wanting to relax in time with the island lifestyle, Dahana's hidden secret is its horsemanship camps.

Owner and chief operator of Dahana, Harry Nakoa, testifies that the quiet, traditional methods of horse training will change your life and the way you work with horses. If establishing a solid connection with your equine partners is important to you, rest assured that Nakoa, who credits renowned horsemen Bill and Tom Dorrance's natural horsemanship techniques, will help you achieve those goals. Riders of all ages, experience levels and sizes (up to 300 pounds!) are welcome at Hawaii's only Native Hawaiian family-owned ranch.

If horses are your passion, but dirt and dust aren't, try an up-market equestrian manor experience—where classical riding instruction, both English and western, play a more prominent role than saddle bags and lassos.

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Living Large at Biltmore Estate, Asheville, North Carolina

Afternoon tea? Check. Garden tours? You bet. Wine tasting? Absolutely. Founded in the 1880s by imperious industrialist Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt, Biltmore Estate's manicured sophistication spews forth from opulent fountains and glosses every window featuring views of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Over the course of three nights and four days, guests partaking in the Biltmore Equestrian Escape will indulge in daily riding lessons, lunch on the trail, and estate tours punctuated by wine tasting and fine dining. Equipped with indoor and outdoor riding arenas, renowned trainers and gleaming horses, Biltmore Estate is not only a high-end vacation spot, but also a well-respected equestrian center in its own right.



Intimate Country Riding at Stonepine Estate Resort, Carmel Valley, California

Country chic meets rugged outlaw at the Stonepine Estate Equestrian Center, but the understated, sequestered glamour of the 1928 Chateau Noel makes you feel as if you are a film star escaping the paparazzi. Escape the paparazzi a little bit faster on horseback as you tour the hills of Carmel Valley.

Within the private gates of this family estate, every aspect of your Equestrian immersion experience is custom-tailored—yes, that means you decide if you want English or Western instruction, trail rides or longe lessons, grooming and tacking, or some special combination of everything.

Take a picnic lunch beside the river after a long ride through miles of trails, or get a massage before sharpening your riding skills on a range of talented steeds. Originally the oldest thoroughbred breeding farm west of the Mississippi, Stonepine Equestrian Center invites guests to get first-hand experience helping to re-train ex-racehorses for new equestrian disciplines under the guidance of Stonepine's award-winning staff. Whatever you decide to do, Stonepine Estate makes you feel as if the whole place is your own country manor.

By Athena Arnot-Copenhaver for PeterGreenberg.com. In the interest of full disclosure, since reporting on this article as a researcher and contributing editor for Peter Greenberg Worldwide, Athena has become the director of Stonepine Estate Resort.

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