

# The Cowboy Way



When the markets have taken you for a ride, there's one option for the trader thrown for a loss: Pull your positions up by their bootstraps and get your assets back in the saddle. By day, these wilderness resorts will toughen you up — and by night, they'll pamper you like the soft, indulgent man you are

BY CRISTINA VELOCCI

# Wrotham Park Lodge

**LOCATION:** Queensland, Australia **OPENED:** 2004 **LODGING:** 10 guest quarters  
**COST:** From \$1,440 for two nights **CONTACT:** 011-61-2-8296-8010; wrothampark.com.au

★ Are your cowboy fantasies narrated in a silly Australian accent? Do they costar Yahoo Serious? Then get yourself Down Under to this working cattle ranch spread over nearly 1.5 million acres. Wondering what in the name of T. Boone Pickens you need that much space for? Try mustering 70,000 Brahman cattle on horseback — or, for a less carbon-neutral approach, by helicopter.

That's not the only activity where a chopper comes in handy. For the truly obligatory use of a whirlybird, there's heli-fishing — flying to waterholes and rock escarpments along the Mitchell and Walsh rivers to fish for barramundi, black bream and archer fish. There's also exploring the Outback by horse (or tearing through it on a quad bike) to see kangaroo, freshwater crocodiles, dingoes and feral pigs, and diving in the world-famous Cod Hole, which is full of, uh, cod.

Don't get too attached to any of these critters, as there's a good chance they'll end up on your plate. Back at the Homestead, whose wrap-around veranda serves as common ground for the resort's maximum 20 guests, meals range from thyme-roasted spatchcock (a small, gamey chicken) with lemon aspen sauce to a grain-fed rib-eye. Oh, and this being Australia, there will be beer. Lots of beer.

**CANYON FODDER:**  
The stunning lodgings at Wrotham Park



**PLANKS FOR THE MEMORIES:** A private cabin at Dunton; (below) its legendary saloon

## Dunton Hot Springs

**LOCATION:** Dolores, Colorado **OPENED:** 2003 **LODGING:** 12 log cabins  
**COST:** From \$650 per night **CONTACT:** 970-882-4800; duntonhotsprings.com

★ Think it's hard being a gold trader these days? Consider life during the *real* gold rush. We're willing to bet a spot of cholera would make those wrong-way bids sound pretty good right now. Still, staying at this refurbished nineteenth-century mining town 30 miles southwest of Telluride allows you to experience the best of both worlds: the rustic appeal of sleeping in hand-hewn log cabins (many the same ones that once housed the miners) softened by such amenities as radiant-heat floors, buckskin and elk-hide bedspreads, individual fireplaces and private hot-spring plunge pools.

But just because Dunton was (and, considering its isolated location accessible only by dirt road, largely still is) a ghost town, that doesn't mean there's nothing to do but play tag with tumbleweeds. In addition to snowshoeing, ice climbing and snowmobiling, Colorado's only heli-ski operation will drop you into the deep-powder backcountry of the San Juan Mountains. In warmer months, you can fly-fish for rainbow and brown trout in the Dolores River's West Fork, descend into the Canyons of the Ancients to explore more than 6,000 archaeological sites or simply spend blissful days of



solitude on horseback.

At night, you'll return to gourmet meals prepared with seasonal, organic ingredients from local farms in the same saloon where Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid are said to have hid after robbing the

Telluride bank. Then wash it all down with first-growth Bordeaux, super Tuscans, bottles of Opus One and Dunton's own vintage from its Sutcliffe Vineyards winery. And then, presumably, shoot a man just to watch him die.

# Lajitas Resort & Spa

**LOCATION:** Lajitas, Texas **OPENED:** 2002 **LODGING:** 103 guest rooms **COST:** From \$149 per night **CONTACT:** 432-424-5000; lajitas.com

★ You're quick to pull the trigger on a massive CDO swap, but how would your gunslinger instincts fare in an actual showdown? No better way to learn than by perfecting the art of the quick draw at this 25,000-acre private estate in the heart of the arid Texas badlands, just outside Big Bend National Park. Learn how to shoot a single-action pistol, side-by-side shotgun and lever-action rifle at the resort's gun club, and then apply your newfound killing skills to hunting for white-wing dove and blue quail. An attendant will accompany you on the hunt, carrying chairs and coolers, clearing empty shells and retrieving and cleaning game — basically, the crap work. Still, to join the hunt, you're encouraged to wear proper Western attire (read: chaps and a 10-gallon hat). So while your attendant

might have to pick up your stuff, you could wind up looking like you're handing out flyers in front of an Arby's.

Speaking of food, a gourmet chef will prepare whatever majestic creature whose life you manage to snuff out, but even if there is none, you won't go hungry: Indigenous ingredients like prickly pear, cactus and peppers populate such regular dishes as rattlesnake cakes and elk backstrap. (OK, maybe you will go hungry.) Still, the suites and private haciendas are nice, ranging from rooms at the Calvary Post (where General John J. Pershing set up shop in his hunt for Pancho Villa) to the three-bedroom, three-bathroom El Caballo casita equipped with a fireplace, Jacuzzi, full-kitchen and wrap-around patio overlooking the Lajitas Mesa.

**MESS WITH TEXAS:**  
Shoot quail on the Lajitas  
range; shoot birdies on  
the golf course.



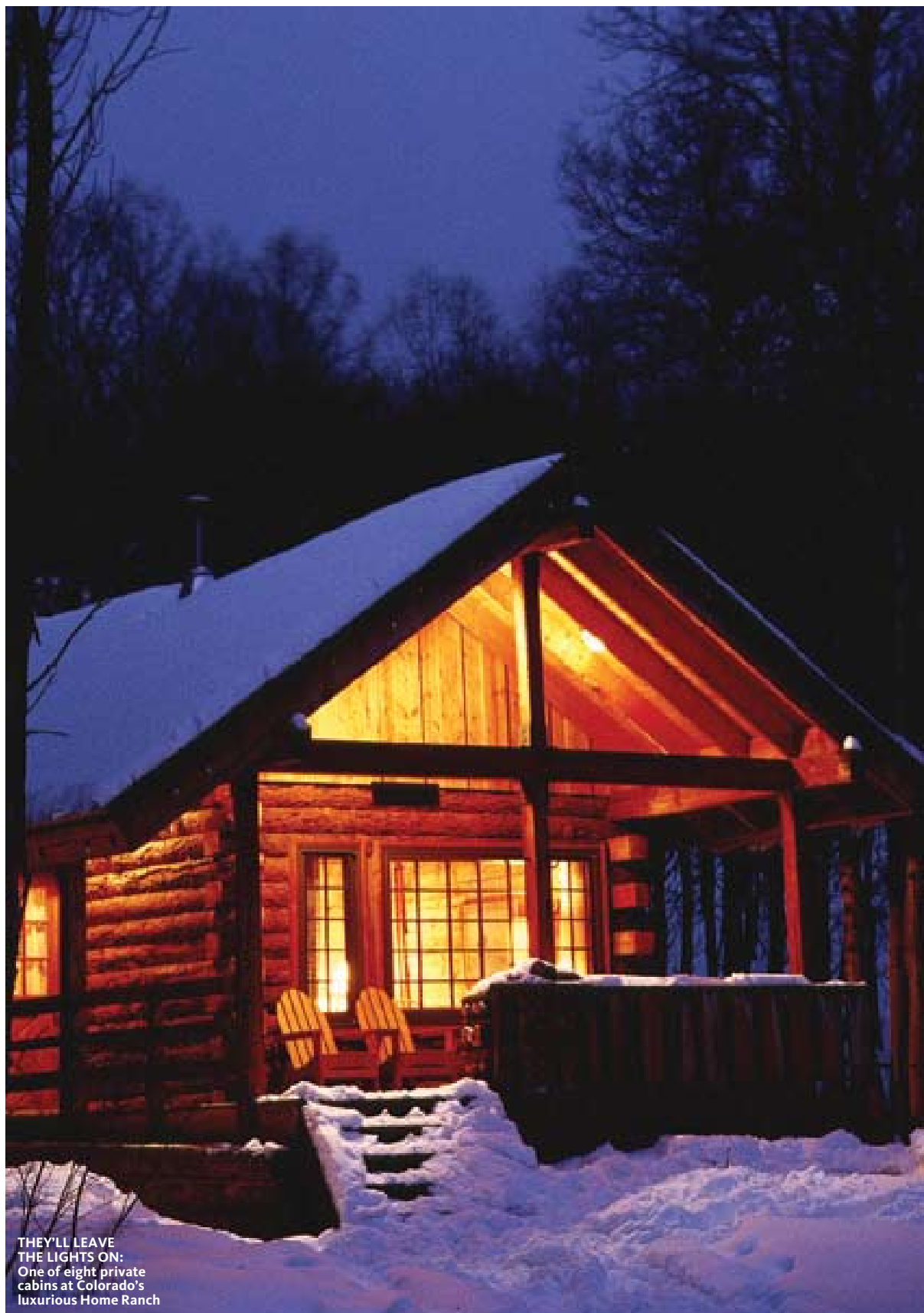
# The Home Ranch

**LOCATION:** Clark, Colorado  
**OPENED:** 1978 **LODGING:** Six lodge rooms, eight private cabins **COST:** From \$5,175 per week **CONTACT:** 970-879-1780; homeranch.com

★ Located in the bucolic Yampa Valley, this family-operated dude ranch lies in one of the few remaining open valleys devoid of the high-rise condos that populate most other Colorado resorts. It also happens to be one of two Relais & Châteaux properties in the state — so you'll not only get the cowboy treatment here, but the royal one as well.

It all starts with a stay in the main lodge or a private cabin, each appointed with antiques, Native American rugs and king-size beds. It extends to the foodie-friendly kitchen, which prepares such meals as free-range chicken with risotto soaked in chanterelle essence and huevos rancheros with black beans — all served family-style at long oak tables in a rustic lodge and prefaced by hors d'oeuvres and champagne (to ease the pain of being forced to socialize with other humans) out on the patio.

To burn it all off, there's cross-country skiing and hiking through the Rockies, fly-fishing on the nearby Elk River and horseback riding on one of the ranch's trusty steeds. Equine activities also extend from herding a set of steers to a team penning competition at week's end — which affords you the chance to shamelessly heckle the 10-year-olds you'll surely be competing against.



**THEY'LL LEAVE THE LIGHTS ON:** One of eight private cabins at Colorado's luxurious Home Ranch



## Triple Creek Ranch

**LOCATION:** Darby, Montana **OPENED:** 1987 **LODGING:** 23 log cabins **COST:** From \$650 per night **CONTACT:** 800-654-2943; triplecreekranch.com

★ Sure, there are bovines of a sort on the trading floor to contend with, but nothing to prepare you for roping and wrangling the real deal at this 600-acre luxury ranch in the Bitterroot Mountains. Here, you can join ranch hands in an authentic cattle drive or take cattle-branding and barrel-

racing lessons. (Or, if you're the type of trader who basically hates people — you know, like a currency trader — roam in solitude through the trails of Trapper Peak, Western Montana's highest summit.)

When not braving the rapids of the "River of No Return" — from which we assume most

folks do, in fact, return — or blue-ribbon fly-fishing for rainbow, brown and west slope cutthroat trout, you can retreat to your one- to three-bedroom log cabin, virtually all with fireplaces and hot tubs. Then hose down for dinner, as dining here is a refined affair — one that begins with a glass of sparkling wine from the

New Mexico Rockies, followed by a four-course à la carte menu or seven-course tasting menu. Both include such exotic dishes as pan-seared antelope roulade, pheasant confit and emu, all paired with wines from the 3,000-bottle cellar — because how the hell else would you know what to pair with emu?

# The Resort at Paws Up

**LOCATION:** Greenough, Montana **OPENED:** 2005 **LODGING:** 10 private estates, 16 cabin homes, 12 tents, one farmhouse  
**COST:** From \$595 per night **CONTACT:** 406-244-5200; pawsup.com

★ This one's for you quant traders: What do you get when you place 1,100 head of Angus cattle, 300 head of elk and a maximum headcount of 152 guests over a sprawling 37,000-acre ranch in Montana's Blackfoot Valley? Yup, that's right, you get 243 acres per guest — and many sizeable excretions. But can your fancy little metrics tell you there are 300-thread-count sheets, flat-screen LCD televisions and indoor plumbing?

Yes . . . *indoor plumbing*. In this neck of the woods — land

more or less untouched since Lewis and Clark first passed through it — that counts for something. Indeed, you'll appreciate that indoor plumbing all the more should you embark on the resort's three-day encampment trip to Bull Creek, just outside the protected Bob Marshall Wilderness (read: outhouse). It's accessible on horseback via a grueling (albeit scenic) five-hour, 12-mile trail (and, after that, should you never want to see another horse again, let alone ride one, there are also

sporting clays, whitewater rafting, ATV trails, fly-fishing for cutthroat trout and rappelling down the 150-foot interface of Lookout Rock). And don't even consider complaining if your precious little asset is sore, because you're preaching to the wrong choir: Outfitters here are guys who don't shower for weeks at a time. Men who regularly face down bears. In other words, *real* men, not ones whose greatest challenge in life is securing a table at Nobu.

If that all sounds a bit *too*

rustic, then the six new oversized safari-style tents at River Camp, whose king-size feather beds and private decks overlook the famed Blackfoot River, might be more your idea of "camping." There are also private estates, from two-bedroom Meadow Homes to the four-bedroom Morris Farmhouse, all of which were recently rented out by the Rolling Stones when they were in town for a concert. And the Rolling Stones may be many things, but rugged outdoor campers is not one of them.



**SHELTERED ASSETS:**  
One of 12 luxe  
tents at Paws Up

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY RESORT AT PAWS UP



HIGH BEAMS:  
One of 73 guest  
ranches at Alisal

## The Alisal Guest Ranch & Resort

**LOCATION:** Solvang, California **OPENED:** 1946 **LODGING:** 73 guest ranches  
**COST:** From \$475 per night **CONTACT:** 805-688-6411; alisal.com

★ Santa Ynez has long been home to ranches — Ronald Reagan’s former spread and Jacko’s Neverland, to name two — and while we’d rather not know about the activities at the latter, we’re pretty sure neither includes a true Western-style rodeo. (And, seriously, if Neverland *does* include a working rodeo, we’re still not bringing the kids.)

Regardless, at Alisal riders can take lessons to become eligible to join in the 10,000-acre working cattle ranch’s weekly rodeo. Doesn’t involve enough bullets? Rectify that at the shooting range, where Air Force sharpshooter Dale Combs will teach you how to fire down paper, silhouette and gravity-fall targets. Or make like Hollywood cowboys Kevin Costner and John Travolta, who’ve been known to gallop the resort’s 50 miles of trails on one of its 100 thoroughbred quarter horses.

Still, once you’ve indulged your inner Buffalo Bill and come to terms with what you really are — a wealthy dude on a dude ranch — hit the links at two 18-hole championship golf courses before retiring to your suite, with its patio, wood-burning fireplace and high-beamed ceiling. And one amenity you shouldn’t expect: connectivity to the outside world. With no in-room televisions or telephones, messages here are delivered by hand to your room, Pony Express style.

## Estancia Huechahue

**LOCATION:** Neuquén, Argentina **OPENED:** 1990 **LODGING:** Three guest lodges **COST:** \$340 per night **CONTACT:** huechahue.com

★ The whole American cowboy thing is nice and all — save for the fact that it’s basically a dead lifestyle. But whither the South American gaucho? In truth, the Argentinean Patagonia is arguably the last true frontier, as evidenced at this traditional estancia, spread over 15,000 acres of steppe in the Andean foothills. It’s entirely self-sufficient, from the gravity-fed water sourced from natural springs to the firewood used for heating and hot water, the electricity generated from a water-driven turbine and even the freshly produced food.

Regarding that food, meat is sort of a big deal in the gaucho diet, so prepare for a marathon of home-reared beef, ham and bacon from pigs cured in the smokehouse, chorizo sausage, venison and wild boar

cut with a *facón*, threaded onto sticks and cooked over an open fire in an Argentine *asado*.

In addition to developing a Dick Cheney-esque cholesterol level, guests at Huechahue are encouraged to assist with the operations of the ranch, which include rounding up animals on horseback as well as separating, branding and vaccinating them. (And who among us does not love vaccinating livestock?) And while the eight guest rooms provide a pleasant enough place for you to lay your *cabeza*, don’t get too used to them: Three- to five-day pack trips on the open range ensure that you’ll spend far more time under the stars than you ever will under a ceiling. ■



STEPPE BY STEPPE:  
The closing bell at  
Estancia Huechahue