

This Wyoming Dude Ranch Is the Ultimate Throwback Wild West Vacation

A new generation of ranchers are offering guests a transformative taste of the West at Reid Creek Lodge.



Thomas J. Story

Written by

Krista Simmons

FEBRUARY 12, 2024

Sagebrush crushes under my horse's hooves, wafting a sharp sweetness into the [Wyoming](#) air. Towering exfoliated granite, dotted with ponderosa pine, makes way for an expansive azure sky as we ride through Elysian Fields of wild lupine and Indian paintbrush. Meadowlarks sing, and aspens quake in the afternoon breeze. It's an impossibly beautiful landscape fit for a Clint Eastwood film. A sudden clap of thunder smacks, like clockwork, signaling the arrival of evening in the Laramie Mountains. It's time to head back to the barn for supper. The storm chases us as we canter along the frontier, and it's hard not to feel like a poster of an old rodeo.



Living the ranch life at Reid Creek Lodge.

Thomas J. Story

As we make our way to home base at [Reid Creek Lodge](#), on [Wagonhound](#) ranch, I'm grinning ear to ear from the childlike thrill of learning something new. The day prior we'd spent the day in the property's world-class equestrian arena, learning skills from loping to roping. Today is the first time I've cantered since I was a little girl at Western horse camp, and the feeling of freedom and connection with my horse, Hollywood, transports me to the carefree presence of childhood. The ranch's American Quarter Horses are impressively responsive; the well-loved steeds get us back to home base with just enough time to dismount before supper.



The great room boasts Western decor and views of Wyoming.

Thomas J. Story

This is where the reminiscence of the [Old West](#) ends, and a new experience of modern luxury begins. Instead of a cowboy's meal of baked beans, we're greeted with glasses of funky orange wine from the Caucasus Mountains in Georgia and homemade spanakopita to tide us over before our dinner of grilled steaks, which come from Wagonhound's natural Red Angus ranching operation. To finish, a selection of handmade pastries and sorbets.



More Western decor details.

Thomas J. Story

Housed on the 300,000 acres of Wagonhound Land & Livestock, Reid Creek Lodge distinguishes itself from a traditional [dude ranch](#) in that it's a guest operation on a commercial cattle ranch. Which is part of the reason the horses are so well-trained; they're the same herd working the land with the cowboys, rather than simply being taken out for guided trail rides with guests.



House smoked bacon and pancakes are served at breakfast.

Thomas J. Story

In our fast-paced world, there are very few places where time has stood still, but the land where Wagonhound ranches their 5,000 head of cattle feels like a piece of the American West preserved. Here, the terms “rebrand” and “AI” take on a whole new meaning. (The first refers to the season when cattle are marked; the latter the way ranchers selectively breed their herd. We’re not in California anymore, kids.)

There’s a welcome sense of slowness and connection to a bygone era that, despite the quickly changing taste in tourism trends, remains mostly the same. Though [cowboys](#) certainly have had a resurgence in fashion and popular culture thanks to the success of shows like *Yellowstone*, there’s always been a fascination with the American West. The idea of a dude ranch started in the Dakotas in the 1880s, when wealthy Europeans and folks from the Eastern United States would come out and pay a pretty penny to experience the romance of cowboy life on the open frontier.



A herd of longhorn cattle.

Thomas J. Story

Located on a portion of the Oregon Trail outside Douglas, Wyoming, Reid Creek opened its guest lodge on the historic property in 2022. The operation is owned by Art and Catherine Nicholas, and overseen by Andrea Nicholas Perdue, the CEO of Wagonhound Holdings. Because the accommodations are built inside a single lodge rather than separate cabins, it's the perfect place for a multi-generational family trip.



A bedroom at the Lodge.

Thomas J. Story

"I feel really passionate about that innate connection between humanity and nature. Having young kids myself, I really see the need for people to be outside, to be in the moment, to experience dirt on their hands, and the wind in their face. It does something to your soul," says Nicholas Perdue, who brought the idea of adding the lodge and guest experience to Wagonhound. "It allows us the ability to really slow down and appreciate the largest shared resource that we have, which is the land on which we live, and make conscious choices that are good for you, for me, and for the next generation."



Travel editor Krista Simmons tries her hand at roping.

Thomas J. Story

Each day on the ranch opens up a new element of discovery, picking up new skills with a childlike enthusiasm and a lack of self-judgment. On our trip, I witness a retired senior giggle with delight as he learns to rope on horseback, skeet shoot, and confidently ride on horseback—a side of him his equestrian wife of over 30 years has never seen.



A look inside the riding arena.

Thomas J. Story

Each day offers a fresh perspective, starting off with a wildlife safari looking out for the Reid Creek Big Five—mountain lion, pronghorn, white tail deer, mule deer, and elk—as we head to our chosen activities, all of which are inclusive and can be done on your own timeline. Think skeet shooting, horseback riding, roping, wildlife viewing, rock climbing, and more, all with private, in-house guides. There truly is something for every level of [adventurer](#), from tame to Bear Grylls, whose crew filmed at the ranch just a few weeks before our visit.



A horseback rider in motion.

Thomas J. Story

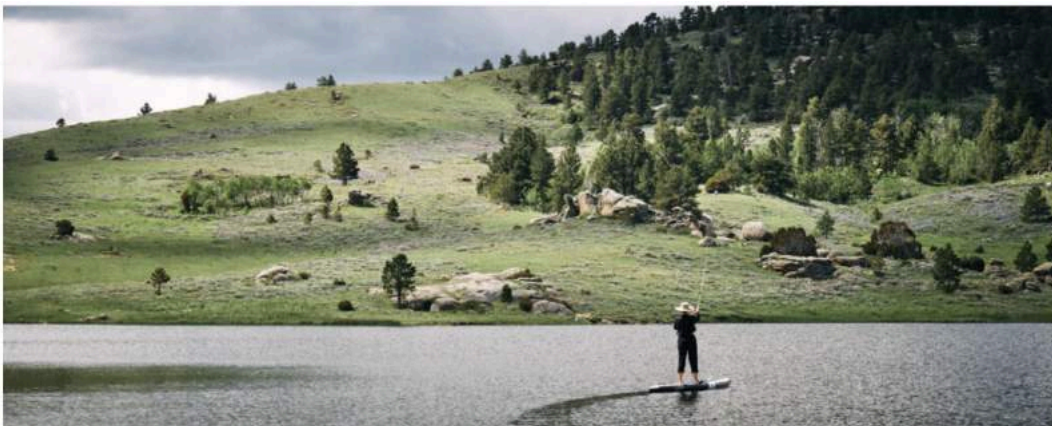
“Maintaining that connection to the past is critical,” says Nicholas Perdue. “When people come out and see how natural that connection is—even folks from the city that have never camped a day in their life—it can help reconnect them to the importance of this way of life, and the blood, sweat, and tears it takes to support our food systems.”



Boating out on the lake.

Thomas J. Story

Owner Art Nicholas is an advocate for preserving those traditions. Reid Creek houses his preeminent collection of Western art from the Traditional Cowboy Arts Association. It's a veritable museum of impeccably crafted leather saddles, chaps, bits, and braided rawhide ropes—pieces that prove they really don't make 'em like they used to. There's even a room dedicated to horse-drawn carriages from around the world, a nod to the fact that Wagonhound is situated on land that the Oregon Trail went through, and how the business got its name; a precarious creek on the property often caused carriage's wagon hounds, which connected the horses to the wagon, to break. Imagine making it all that way, and then getting stuck in Douglas because of a pothole.



The property includes a lake for stand-up paddleboarding and fishing.

Thomas J. Story

Frankly, it's a beautiful place to stop. As a Californian, I am a bit baffled to find out [Wyoming](#) has such a spectacular [superbloom](#). Spring is prime time to visit, particularly this year, when there was lots of rain that made way for incredible stands of wild irises, sawtooth, poppies, and, most important for the ranchers, lots of grass. The wet winter was a welcome one, as Nicholas Perdue emphasizes that ranching is, at its purest form, farming grass.



A wrangler on the ranch wears custom leather chaps.

Thomas J. Story

"You will never find a better land steward than a rancher. When you look at the individuals who are choosing that lifestyle, you do have that next generation that's coming up, but they're making the choice for a cognitive reason. It's a lifestyle choice. There's even a cowboy code of ethics. They find peace and happiness by waking up every morning and saddling a horse and going out and checking cows."



Catching trout on a mid-morning outing.

Thomas J. Story

That care makes for happy cows, and happy people. Heading to the airport to return home to [Los Angeles](#), we hit our first paved city road in three days, and there's an immediate sense of longing, not to be home with my dog and my creature comforts, as I typically am at the end of a trip, but for the past. Not just the past 72 hours, but for the old way of life that I was able to step into, if ever so briefly. While it's true that we tend to idealize these simpler ways of life, it's hard to deny the draw of the frontier. And there's something truly comforting to know that even in a world that seems to be changing at an exponentially faster rate, it can still exist in this special corner of the West.



Indian paintbrush bloom during wildflower season.

Thomas J. Story

Code of the West

Commandments of Western cowboys that stand the test of time.

- 1 Live each day with courage.
- 2 Take pride in your work.
- 3 Always finish what you start.
- 4 Do what has to be done.
- 5 Be tough, but fair.
- 6 When you make a promise, keep it.
- 7 Ride for the brand.
- 8 Talk less and say more.
- 9 Remember that some things aren't for sale
- 10 Know where to draw the line.