

# Alberta guest ranches a popular respite from urban life

BY GWENDOLYN RICHARDS, CALGARY HERALD    AUGUST 31, 2011



Cattle are moved to a new pasture at the Ride the Wind Ranch.

**Photograph by:** Courtesy Ride the Wind Ranch, Handout, edmontonjournal.com

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They come for the nostalgia or the chance to fulfil a childhood dream. They come to strap saddles to horses, ride along fencelines, herd cattle to a new pasture.

In the evenings, they dine on solid, hearty country fare, chat with their hosts and fall into bed, perhaps after a glimpse at the stars littering the dark sky unpolluted by city lights.

They are the guests at Alberta Country Vacation Association ranches; people who trade 9-5 city jobs for a chance to holiday on working ranches.

“A lot of people told us it’s a childhood dream to be a cowgirl or cowboy for once. They just want to make their dreams come true,” says Kathy Rissi, who runs Ride the Wind Ranch with her husband Marty.

Some are part of the adventure-seeking crowd; others have come for nostalgic reasons, as well,

echoes Lynda Purdie of Rolyn Hills B&B and Guest Ranch.

“Either they want to experience an authentic ranch or else they have in their past been raised on a farm or a ranch and want to go back and relive some of what they had as youth,” she says.

“We’ve had complete beginners come and say we didn’t know what to expect but this is just what we wanted.”

Whatever the motivation for their ranch holiday, they can be guaranteed two things: they can get as much of a real working experience as they want; and they will be well fed.

On the Rolyn Hills property, the Purdie family takes in 1,400 heifers to custom graze over the summer on 2,000 acres just east of Red Deer.

There are no trail rides to be had, but guests can check on the herd and do some fencing, if they’re inclined.

The Purdies created the guest ranch back in 1996, after taking a farm tour to Australia and New Zealand and returning with fond memories of the three farm stays they had as part of the trip.

“We came back and cattle prices were depressed here,” says Purdie. “We thought we could return a bit of the hospitality shown to us.”

The majority of guests are from Alberta, but others come from as far away as Europe. One couple from Germany will be back for their 10th time this fall.

In the mornings, Purdie sends them off after a filling breakfast of bacon and eggs or pancakes and sausages.

Homemade soup and sandwiches are usually on offer for lunch, while dinner can run the gamut. Beef, of course, is often on the menu, including Purdie’s cheddar meat loaves (recipe below).

“I have found this is popular wherever I take it,” she says. “There’s never any left.”

Kathy Rissi takes a similar approach feeding her guests.

She and her husband moved to Alberta from Switzerland in 1993, embracing their love for the wide-open spaces of Canada and western culture and immediately opening their home to guests. (Now, their two sons, Joe and Ben, also help out.)

Ride the Wind is a smaller operation with 45 head of cattle they run on a quarter section (160 acres) near Rocky Mountain House.

At the same time, they play host to bed-and-breakfast guests, as well as those who have come for a taste of life on a ranch.

"It's not as hard as being a real rancher," says Rissi with a laugh.

But guests are welcome to take part in daily chores like checking fences or herding cattle from one pasture to another. One couple even wanted to chop wood.

"They wouldn't stop. But they were so happy," says Rissi.

Rissi bakes a lot of her own bread and muffins for breakfast and sandwiches at lunch. But when dinner rolls around, it's usually their own ranch-raised beef on the menu.

"I like to change around some recipes or create my own. When you have been cooking for quite a few years, you have an idea of what will work," she says.

And it is hearty fare.

"When guests are here and they are being outdoors for hiking or helping with the fences, then everyone has a really good appetite," she says.

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### **Alberta Beef n' Beer Chili**

*Use any kind of beer in this hearty stew from Kathy Rissi of Ride the Wind Ranch.*

1-1/2 lbs. (750g) Alberta ground beef

2 tbsp (25 mL) chili powder

1 can beer

1/2 cup (125 mL) chopped onions

2 garlic gloves minced

2 cups (500 mL) tomato crushed, canned tomatoes

1 tsp (5 mL) vegetable bouillon powder

1/2 tsp (2 mL) salt

1 14 oz (398 mL) can red kidney beans

Brown ground beef in a skillet, add the chili powder and the beer. Simmer for 10 minutes.

Add onions, garlic gloves, crushed tomatoes, salt and vegetable bouillon powder.

Cook on low temperature for 40 minutes.

Add the red kidney beans and cook for 10 minutes.

Enjoy with rice or baked potatoes.

### **Li'l Cheddar Meat Loaves**

*Lynda Purdie of Rolyn Hills B&B and Guest Ranch found this recipe in Country Woman magazine a few years ago and has been making it ever since.*

1 egg

3/4 cup (175 mL) milk

1 cup (250 mL) shredded cheddar cheese

1/2 cup (125 mL) quick-cooking oats

1/2 cup (125 mL) chopped onion

1 tsp (5 mL) salt

1 lb (500g) ground bison (or very lean ground beef)

2/3 cup (150 mL) ketchup

1/2 cup (125 mL) packed brown sugar

1-1/2 tsp (7 mL) prepared mustard

Beat the egg and milk. Stir in cheese, oats, onion and salt. Add bison or beef and mix well. Shape into eight loaves; place in a greased 9x13 pan.

Combine ketchup, brown sugar and mustard; spoon over loaves. Bake uncovered at 350 F (180 C) for 45 minutes or until the meat is no longer pink and a meat thermometer reads 160 F (75 C).

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