

Feasting at Colorado

This family owned and run dude ranch in Colorado is as well-known for its food as it is for its year-round activities. Get a taste of what it's like to be a guest there. Writer Sandy Bornstein takes us to Latigo Ranch.

*Open
year-
round,
Latigo
Ranch in
Colorado
offers
beautiful
views.*

Colorado dude ranches are a popular summer destination. Few travelers realize that a handful of these picturesque mountain properties cater to outdoor enthusiasts during the winter months. On a sunny, frigid afternoon, my husband Ira and I drove approximately two and a half hours from our Front Range home to Latigo Ranch in

Grand County. This summer [dude ranch](#) has been voted as one of the top 50 ranches in the world. Latigo Ranch also offers a winter option from mid-December to mid-March for snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, fat tire biking, and a break from everyday life. My husband and I were eager to try cross-country skiing and snowshoeing for the first time and to find solitude at a remarkable Rocky Mountain retreat.

*The
dining
room at
Latigo
Ranch,
where
creative,
casual-
to-
gourmet
meals
are
prepared
and
served
by the
family.*

Within minutes of our arrival, we realized that our Latigo Ranch adventure would be infused with a memorable culinary extravaganza. Upon entering the lodge, Spencer George, the head chef, warmly welcomed us and asked for our dinner entrée preferences. Even though we had previously responded to an online questionnaire, Spencer wanted to double-check our dinner options. Each meal would be prepared to accommodate our dietary restrictions as well as our likes and dislikes. Lisa and Randy George, together with three family members — Spencer, Amanda, and Hannah, would cater to our needs like they have done for countless others who have stayed at their family owned and operated ranch.



Spinach salad with a dark chocolate dressing and cashews at Latigo Ranch.

Latigo Ranch meals are served at oversized tables in the lodge's wood paneled dining room. Guests can engage in conversation among themselves as well as with Lisa and Randy. Our first meal was a chocolate lover's feast. Amanda served each guest a spinach salad sprinkled with cashews and drizzled with a dark chocolate dressing. When asked about this unique dressing, Lisa said, "Our chocolate vinaigrette dressing is a unique combination of basic ingredients. Balsamic vinegar adds to the depth of flavor. Anytime Spencer can serve a salad with chocolate, we jump at the chance!"

Two baskets filled with piping hot chocolate swirl bread were placed on the wooden table covered with a white tablecloth. After admiring the full breadbasket from a distance, I succumbed to my temptation and nibbled on one slice of this crunchy bread. We were told that this bread recipe typically contains Mediterranean olives, but Spencer chose to substitute dark chocolate for a unique effect. It was the first time he'd tried this combination. Based on the guests' response, it probably won't be the last.

*Koberstein
beef
ribeye
entree
with
carrots
and barley
pilaf.*

When preparing entrees, Spencer told us that he “considers the flavor profile of the meal’s ingredients to ensure a synthesized dining experience.” Even though our meal had recurring elements of chocolate, he usually doesn’t create menus with themes. Spencer’s primary emphasis is to aim for compatibility and harmony of flavors.

A generous portion of cooked carrots with a flaming brandy sauce and a sorghum barley pilaf accompanied the meat option, a Koberstein beef rib eye fillet, and the fish selection, a Loch Etive Steelhead fillet. The meat was cooked sous vide, and seared briefly in a cast iron skillet at very high heat. The trout was prepared by the sous vide method and then seared with a torch before serving. It was drizzled with a blackberry Cabernet reduction.

Our dessert, a chocolate soufflé baked in a cast iron cauldron, was a fitting finale for our evening meal. Prospective summer guests will be delighted to hear that this decadent dessert is served on Wednesday evenings.

*Chocolate
mousse
with
sorbet to
end the
chocolate-
themed
meal.*

After a peaceful night in our cozy cabin, we headed back to the lodge for breakfast. From the dining room’s long counter, we selected items from a sizable number of bowls and small platters — yogurt, fresh fruit, dried fruit, nuts, and seeds were among the options. Hannah cheerfully greeted us with a full-page menu of made to order breakfast entrees. The generously portioned selections were served piping hot.

Lunchtime arrived after a full morning of outdoor activities. This time, Lisa was at the helm. Health conscious guests can select from an assortment of vegetables to complement their green salads as well as several salad dressings — ranch, fat-free raspberry vinaigrette, Italian, sun-dried tomato basil vinaigrette, and balsamic vinegar and olive oil.

*The
lunchtime
salad bar
at Latigo
Ranch.*

On the first day, we tasted a slice of Lisa's homemade zucchini green chili quiche and a dab of white bean and basil dip with our corn chips. The next day, cheese-filled tortellini with a choice of a marinara or a creamy white sauce was the entrée option. Our favorite soup was a bowl of roasted red pepper soup, a dairy-free and vegetarian choice. Lisa asked everyone at the table if anyone could identify the mystery ingredient. I correctly blurted, "Is it pear?"

As a lover of chocolate, I was drawn to the quadruple chunk chocolate cookies and the chocolate mint cookies that were the finishing touch for both lunches. The mint cookies are made with rice bran oil instead of butter. Lisa graciously shared another notable aspect of the mint cookie. She places an unwrapped Andes Mint on top of each cookie immediately after being removed from the oven. After waiting two minutes, Lisa carefully spreads the melted chocolate like frosting. The melted chocolate hardens relatively quickly. The recipes for these cookies as well as many other favorite Latigo Ranch foods can be found on the Latigo Ranch website.



How about a quadruple chocolate cookie? Yes, four times over!

Since 1988, a container of caramel corn has welcomed visitors after they settle into their guest cabins. In the summer, the staff prepares at least two batches a week in an enormous bowl that holds 36 cups of air-popped popcorn. The recipe for this sweet treat is one of the more popular ones downloaded from Latigo's website.

For decades, the Georges have been running their family-owned ranch near Kremmling, Colorado. Lisa spent the first ten years raising her three young children. A commercial oven in their residence enabled Lisa to bake goodies for the ranch during her children's naptime. Later on, she cooked in the ranch's kitchen. She is especially proud of her tasty and nutritious gluten-free foods, and her ability to create comfort foods from leftovers for her summer staff members. Lisa sees her mother as a role model. "My mother was, and is, an incredible cook. I still enjoy making pies with her every Friday for our summer dinner cookout." Latigo Ranch has an evolving list of

menus, and the family is always looking for fresh ideas.

Lisa and Randy's three children grew up in an environment where household chores and cooking were the norms. From an early age, they learned the basics of table setting, food preparation, and menu planning. Neither Hannah nor Spencer set out to be chefs. Throughout their youth, they fulfilled many roles—participating in interior and exterior construction work, providing medical assistance for the animals, clearing lumber, photographing life on the ranch, and writing the website's blog. Hannah was only 16 years old when she took over the role as dinner sous chef with her soon to be sister-in-law, Amanda. After Spencer and Amanda were married, Hannah switched to breakfast chef.

Hannah admits that this wasn't an optimal position for her disposition. "I'm not a morning person, and probably never will be. Cooking breakfast has been a test of character, to learn to be cheerful and alert first thing every day. The name of the game is speed, and if you don't know the kitchen-dance, you are more likely to sink than swim during the fast pace of breakfast. Summer breakfasts are an enormity with 25 staff and as many as 30 guests, and I need at least two or three wait staff and a sous-chef to keep the kitchen running smoothly."

The winter season is a bit more relaxed. Fewer guests tend to stay for shorter durations. As a result, the menu varies considerably from week to week, and the chefs frequently have the luxury of test-driving new menu items. In the spring, the family brainstorms new culinary options.

Even though no one in the George family has attended any professional culinary programs, they have learned through hands-on experience how to perfect their kitchen skills, including cooking and baking at high altitude, effectively addressing a wide variety of dietary needs, and creating meals with complimentary ingredients. Even though their remote location offers limited resources for organic produce and specialty items, the Georges take time to drive to the closest Whole Foods, a two-hour round trip drive, to accommodate special requests. Their background knowledge has come from "cookbooks like the *French Laundry* and updated copies of *Professional Chef*." Periodically, they schedule a time to watch online videos whenever they don't know how to perform a complicated cooking or baking skill. To keep the ranch running

smoothly, family members are willing to step out of the kitchen at a moment's notice. From season to season, the George family works together to provide memorable culinary experiences and outdoor adventures for Latigo Ranch guests who travel to Colorado's Grand County.

— *Story by Sandy Bornstein. Photos by The Traveling Bornsteins*

Hungry for more? Plan for Fall and Winter 2019 with this article about Latigo Ranch's groomed ski trails. Visit some of the other places Sandy and her husband have traveled, such as San Diego, South Carolina, and her award-winning article about picking the right shore excursion on a cruise.

Disclosure: Sandy and Ira received a complimentary 2-night stay at Latigo Ranch. But, as is RealFoodTraveler.com policy, this never influences a writer's opinions or reviews.

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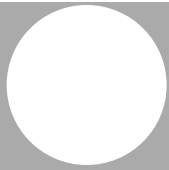
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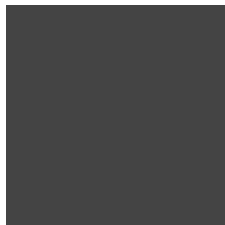
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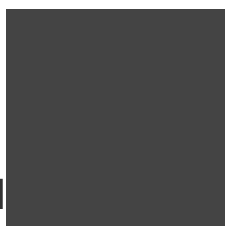
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