



Eating Healthy at Vista Verde Ranch



Fresh air, gorgeous scenery, and nutritious and delicious food to boot? Writer Sandy Bornstein and her husband, Ira, were fortunate enough to get to experience it all at Colorado's Vista Verde Ranch. Learn more about their culinary experiences and stay tuned for a special recipe provided by the Ranch's Chef.

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Healthy Dining Selections at Colorado’s Vista Verde Ranch

Outdoor activities and mealtime go hand in hand at **Vista Verde Ranch (VVR)** in [Clark, Colorado](#), where hearty appetites are satisfied by homemade cooking using quality ingredients. Chef Cholly McGlynn’s culinary staff, which includes eight chefs, seven servers, and two full-time dishwashers, meets the diverse needs of the dude ranch’s guests by offering entrees made with seasonal produce and, whenever possible, locally sourced foods. While Western themed foods prevail, pescatarians should not be dismayed. Fish products are overnighted from Florida, Hawaii, and the Pacific Northwest on a regular basis. With a wide variety of food options, it is hard for



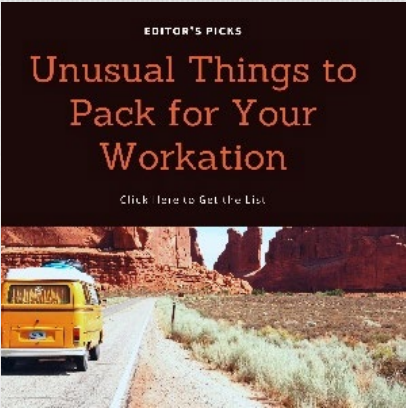
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anyone to leave the dining room without being totally satiated.

How does a chef prepare for such a position? Chef Cholly began his food service career by learning proper cooking techniques under the tutelage of Carlos DeMarco at Philadelphia's Bridget Foy. Four years of hands-on experience enabled Chef Cholly to use his culinary skills in another location.



Chef Cholly at work at Verde Vista Ranch.



Over twenty years ago, Cholly interviewed for a chef position at VVR and was hired. Additional bread baking experiences in Vermont and at Boulder’s notable Frasca Food and Wine added to his culinary repertoire. Thereafter, he returned to become VVR’s food and beverage director. When asked about his culinary philosophy, Chef Cholly recalled his time in Boulder. “At Frasca, hospitality begins and ends at the front door, at the front of the house. Hospitality is making people feel welcome and warm. Food only plays a part of it.”

Breakfast, lunch, and dinner are included in the price of a VVR stay. Guests have the option of completing a short questionnaire highlighting dietary restrictions and requests for food accommodations for allergies and other health concerns. The culinary staff works exceptionally hard to meet the needs of its visitors throughout their stay.

Evening Introduction at Vista Verde Ranch

Shortly after checking in, my husband Ira and I had our first meal. Since our visit occurred during COVID and when Ira was undergoing treatment for his brain cancer, we opted not to partake in the customary shared table experience. While it would have been enjoyable to meet other guests, our health concerns took precedence. Our leisurely meal was augmented by a personable and hospitable waitstaff who responded quickly to all of our requests and questions.

At our first dinner, we became acquainted with the ranch’s kitchen routine. The selections for each meal were printed on a one-page menu that greeted us when we sat down at our assigned table. We grew accustomed to seeing options for salads, entrees, side dishes, and a dessert. The menu did not always reflect what we ate. To accommodate our dietary requests, we were occasionally served foods that conformed to our dietary restrictions.

Our first night was designated barbeque night. We started with the VVR house salad. This colorful vegetarian option included baby local organic greens, heirloom tomatoes, cucumbers, radishes, and carrots along with a choice for a dressing.

A delicious trout dinner accompanied by a side of grilled asparagus and warm roasted potatoes cooked with piquillo peppers, parsley, and a sherry vinaigrette satisfied our pescatarian request. A basket of freshly made cornbread added a dab of sweetness.



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A delicious trout entree with broccoli we enjoyed one day for lunch at Vista Verde Ranch.

The carrot cake with cream cheese frosting sounded tempting. But it didn't fit into our desire to continue limiting our sugar intake. Instead, a bowl of assorted berries—strawberries, blueberries, blackberries, and raspberries, rounded out our meal.

Leaving the dining room, we noticed petite canisters filled with a couple of home baked cookies. We resisted the temptation but found it too difficult to walk away from this treat on subsequent nights.

Hearty Appetites Greeted Meals on the First Day at Vista Verde Ranch

Before heading out for our first morning activity, we enjoyed a hearty breakfast. Guests had the choice to simply order a continental breakfast or choose from a short list of options — oatmeal, eggs, omelets, pancakes, grits or raisin French toast. Anyone who loves to eat breakfast foods would be happy with this made-to-order menu.

Vegetarian omelets offered an abundance of vegetables and plenty of protein. Roasted breakfast potatoes were

our welcomed side dish.



A veggie omelet and potatoes for breakfast.

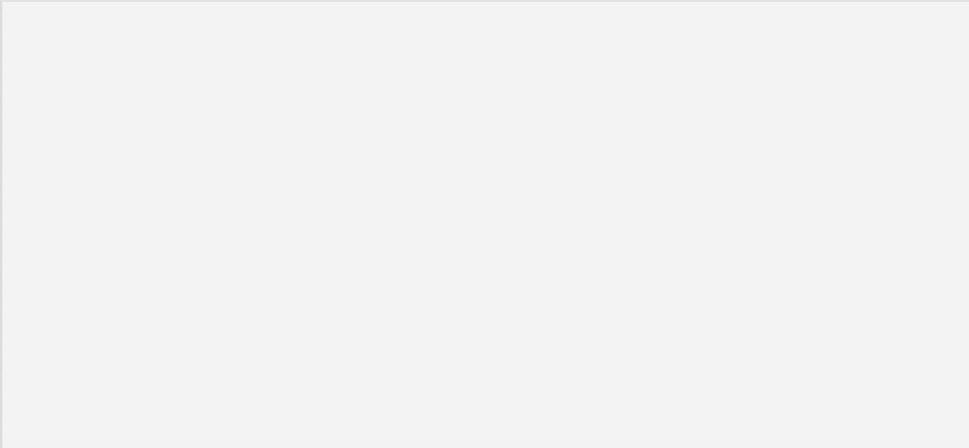
After a frosty morning filled with a horseback riding clinic inside the arena followed by a trail ride, our appetites were in high gear. The red kuri squash soup served without the cocoa whipped cream warmed us up. Ira’s main course centered on a grilled chicken breast topped with sautéed vegetables. My black bean burger mixed with sweet potatoes was a winner. Instead of a sugary s’more bar, Chef Cholly created a low sugar, nut flour, dark chocolate brownie.



My husband, Ira and I enjoyed a trail ride with the Ranch's horses.

[Hungry for more? Click here for Chef Cholly's Veggie Burger Recipe.](#)

An afternoon of snowshoeing with our guide Miller on an offsite trail made us hungry again. A frisee salad with toasted pepitas, crumbled feta, parsnip chips and roasted acorn squash drizzled with a cumin seed vinaigrette, was a tasty start to the more formal evening menu.

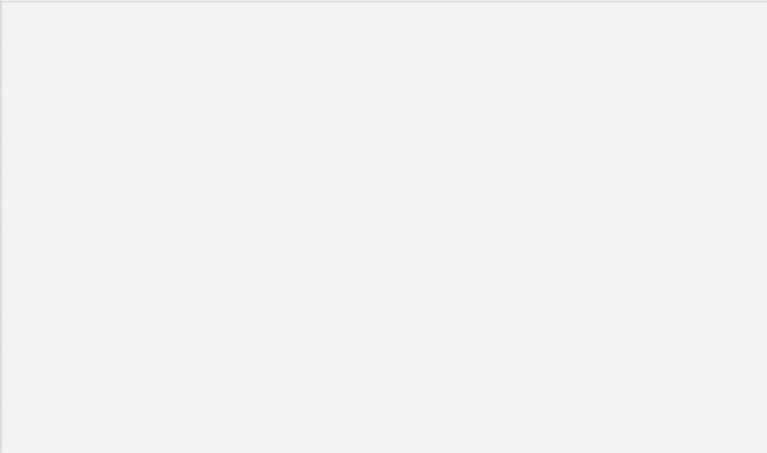




The House salad was a fresh frisée mixture.

Salmon was our main entrée. It was accompanied by a roasted pepper salad, eggplant caviar, and grilled romaine hearts with an herbed yogurt sauce.

Once again, it was not easy to pass on the regular dessert, a chocolate chip skillet cookie with caramel coffee ice cream. Our evening dessert was a permutation of our lunch selection. This time around the brownie was surrounded by berries drizzled with pomegranate syrup.





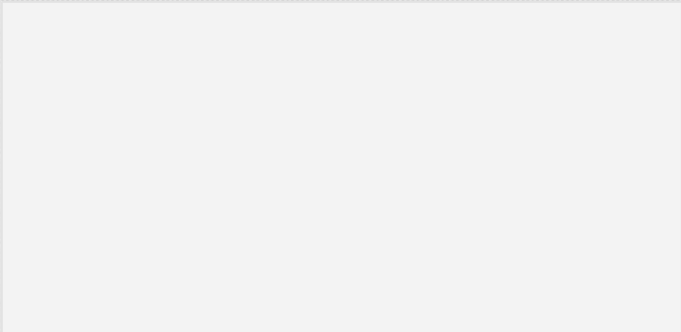
*A decadent brownie served with mixed berries was a delicious way to end a meal at this
Colorado Ranch.*

A Second Day of VVR Food

Since we had enjoyed our omelets the day before, we were happy to have this breakfast staple again. To make sure Ira didn’t get hungry during our half-day snowshoe trek, he started with a bowl of homemade granola and finished with the vegetarian omelet.

My stomach was rumbling as we entered the dining room for lunch. I was happy to see the familiar house salad as a starter. With a need for some protein, Ira and I both were looking for some fish. Instead of the menu’s beer battered fried fish and chips, the chef substituted a trout entrée.

For dessert, Chef Melissa Margason created a chia pudding topped with black berries. Her version started with an almond milk base infused with earl gray tea flavored with a tad of maple syrup and vanilla. Surprisingly, this healthier dessert tasted more like butterscotch than tea.





Chia Pudding, topped with berries.

A family-style dinner was presented on our last night. Once again, we were offered a different protein. Instead of fried chicken, baked chicken or pan-fried trout, we were served tile fish with a side of coleslaw along with a portion of herbed faro and garbanzo bean salad.

To complement this meal, Chef Melissa created a keto chocolate bomb filled with dairy fats. This chocolate lover’s dream dessert melted in our hands.

Last Meal at the Colorado Ranch Before Heading Back to Civilization

On our last morning, we enjoyed baked oatmeal made with almond milk, fresh berries, and pecans. After visualizing a bar shaped item, I was pleasantly surprised to see baked oatmeal inside a mug. It was the perfect finale to our stay at VVR. After participating in outdoor activities and eating homemade meals made with quality ingredients, we headed home revitalized and refreshed.



Baked oatmeal for breakfast.

— Story and photos by Sandy Bornstein

Hungry for more? Read about the dining experiences of another Colorado ranch.

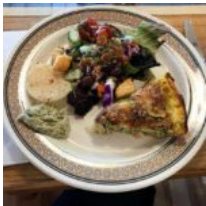
Please note, as is sometimes the practice for [visiting media](#), Vista Verde Ranch provided a 3-night complimentary stay for the Bornsteins to help facilitate this article. However, their opinions are their own, unbiased.

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Sandy has visited more than 40 countries and lived as an international teacher in Bangalore, India. Sandy's award-winning book, *May This Be the Best Year of Your Life*, is a resource for people contemplating an expat lifestyle and living outside their comfort zone. Sandy writes about food, family, intergenerational, and active midlife adventures highlighting land and water experiences, historical sites, and Jewish culture and history. You can follow Sandy on Facebook and Instagram.

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