



ride 'em. cowgirl!

**SLIP INTO THE
SADDLE WITH 944
(SPURS OPTIONAL)**

BY KELLE SCHILLACI PHOTOGRAPHY BY KELLE SCHILLACI
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Long before the slots, there were saddles. Before traffic clogged the Strip, pioneers made their slow way across the Old Spanish Trail, which slices straight through our arid desert. The western cowboy motif remains a time-honored theme here in Vegas, from our most famous neon wrangler to the ever-popular annual rodeos held at UNLV's Thomas & Mack Center to the sleek and expansive equestrian center built into the brand new South Coast Hotel & Casino. Those seeking a more literal gander at the spirit of the Old West need not look far yonder. Just beyond the neon glow, several nearby ranches serve up a pseudo-authentic cowboy experience.





Whether looking for alternative, outdoor fun for out-of-town visitors or hoping to hitch another local cowboy/girl, head no further than our own nearby Red Rocks or travel further eastbound, to where dusty earth transforms itself into a vibrant Valley of Fire. While the rules generally remain consistent (sit straight in that saddle, pard'ner, and no running on the trails!), each ranch offers its own unique vibe, scenery and outdoor experience. **Saddle up, and let's hit the trails!**

sagebrush ranch

Some may have spotted the Food Channel feature on Sagebrush Ranch — focusing more on the ranch's cowboy breakfast chow than its equestrian-gear activities. For nearly a year now, Sagebrush Ranch has operated out of two locations. At Floyd Lamb Park, wranglers Troy and Tory take riders out on hourly trails, conduct lessons and lead children's horse camp activities. Tory takes particular pride in the cowgals taking their beginner and intermediate classes, especially the 4-H Club (in Vegas? Who knew?) who learn more advanced lessons on horse care.

Sagebrush's main ranch is another half hour or so east on I-15, situated on a dusty stretch of Moapa Indian reservation land. The ranch itself is beautiful in its rustic simplicity. A leather clad cowboy introduces himself as Wyatt Earp and tips his hat to tourists bussed in from the Strip. He helps them mount their horses and join the ride line-up, that takes the group into the heart of the land, cresting along the colorful rim of the Valley of Fire. During the trek, riders cross over and back along the historic Spanish Trail; traversing the same dusty paths that the Paiute Indians did so long ago by wagon train.

A few hours into the evening ride, the sun will begin to set, casting the shadows of the part-time cowboys and their trusty steeds along the canyon's reddened rim, while the moon begins to rise in the opposite view of sky. The lucky ones might catch a whiff of their dinner steak while reaching down to pat their horse — but only if they've signed on for the famous John Wayne Sunset Steak Dinner ride. Contact the stable for a full listing of rides and events.

cowboy trail rides

A family of wild burros watches from along the cliff's rim as the next batch of riders get a quick lesson on stirrup length and neck-reigning. It's important to keep the heels down and the reins loose. Horses respond to all kinds of signals, and the plaid-clad wranglers always offer a quick lesson on horsemanship before heading groups out on the trails. From birthday to corporate parties, holiday rides to sunset trails, the folks at Cowboy Trails operate on a spirit of friendly horsemanship. No corral-based lessons, no frills, this place is all about the glistening desert trails — and there are plenty to choose from.

Dip into narrow gorges while dodging yucca plants on the Red Springs ride, or explore the geological wonderment carved into the caves during the Canyon Rim ride. And what better way to experience our local nature preserve while whetting your post-ride appetite than joining in on the Sunset Trail ride and authentic western barbecue? Enjoy all of the scenery, topped off by a hearty steak dinner and fireside s'mores. The ranch even provides ride service from most major Strip destinations, just call in advance to reserve a pick-up time.

bonnie springs, old nevada

Once a stopover for thirsty pioneers making their way across the Old Spanish Trail, Bonnie Springs Old Nevada Ranch has become, over the past several decades, a labor of love for owner Bonnie Levinson. A former showgirl, Levinson can still be found hanging out beneath the decades' worth of thickly layered dollar bills tacked to the ceiling of the ranch's cozy bar, or out taking care of the dozens of rescued animals in the zoo — including a feisty bobcat, a pair of wallabies, and a beautiful pair of wolves. Once the petting zoo, restaurant, motel and mining town melodrama have thoroughly convinced visitors they're at least a million miles from Vegas, it's time to hit the trails.

The basic, one-hour trail ride features a calm and slow weave through the canyon, half of which (over 115 acres) is owned by the ranch, the other half by the government. During the ride through bramble and mostly dry creek beds (depending on the season), one is likely to catch a glimpse of the region's wild burros. Bonnie's granddaughter Lindsay, who runs the stables, says there used to be wild mustangs, too, but they're mostly gone now. Tony, our friendly tour guide from Arcadia, Calif., went from working with race horses at Santa Anita to giving tourists and locals alike a very different view of Sin City, one best seen from horseback. The horses are happy and well behaved. My mount, Lacey, a speckled white mare, earned local fame starring in the ranch's commercials, and even had a cameo in a recent country western music video. The expansive ranch also offers boarding facilities for local horse owners, and several different trail packages taking riders deep into Vegas' vibrant Red Rocks.

hitch a ride ...

Sagebrush Ranch

Floyd Lamb State Park
Reservations: 702.645.9422
www.sagebrush-ranch.com

Trails: Hourly, Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Shuttle service from the strip available
\$99 - \$139 (\$6 park entry fee)

Cowboy Trail Rides

Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area
Reservations: 702.387.2457
www.cowboytrailrides.com

Trails: Hourly and several 2-hour tours,
Shuttle service from the Strip available
\$45 - \$289

Bonnie Springs Old Nevada

Reservations: 702-875-4191
www.bonniesprings.com/horseback.html
Trails: Hourly, Breakfast, Sunset, Dinner
For shuttle service, call Star Land Tours:
702.296.4381
\$35 per hour (\$10 per car entry fee)