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Summer travel provides a healthy dose of inspiration. You return home feeling recharged and refreshed. Perhaps even more so if the place you've visited is off the grid. White Stallion Ranch still has that allure. Read on to hear from its owners, Russell and Laura True, or click on the link below to read the latest and greatest media updates from Tucson.

[What's New](#)



Photo taken by: Christine Charron

Meet Russell and Laura True

White Stallion Ranch feels a million miles away from civilization, but it's actually in Tucson's backyard, just 12 miles from downtown. It sits on 3,000 acres of Sonoran Desert terrain bordering Saguaro National Park West, nestled in a valley of breathtaking mountains, the perfect backdrop for a western film.

It's owned by the True family, with the unlikely couple that is Russell and Laura True serving as the unofficial faces of the ranch. The former is a tried-and-true cowboy and intellectualist whose resume boasts author and podcast host, and

the latter is the tongue-in-cheek English-born Laura, whose brains, athletic acumen, and penchant for getting things right makes her a more than capable match for her husband.

On the day I sit down with the pair, I'm struck by how comfortable they make me feel from the outset – as if we're three old friends catching up. The hospitality they exude is so effortless and authentic that I feel as though I'm speaking with two people from a bygone era.

That's for good reason. Russell and Laura's life's work is to preserve a snapshot of the West's history that has been mostly extinguished by urban sprawl. They're doing this at their "mothership," White Stallion Ranch, and four other dude ranches they own throughout Arizona and Montana, as well as another Montana ranch they operate seven weeks of the year.

"I'm a little bit religious about maintaining dude ranching," Russell said. "Tucson was the dude ranch capital of the world – that's a fact. There were 127 dude ranches here at one time.... We want to hang tight to that history that's gone from 127 dude ranches to just two, White Stallion Ranch and Tanque Verde Ranch."

These days, the True family is doing more than just holding tight to White Stallion Ranch. The property has a devoted group of returning guests and a steady stream of newcomers who have catapulted it into TripAdvisor's coveted No. 1 spot of Tucson hotels the past nine years. That's because it's full of the amenities you would expect at a resort – like a full-service spa and pool – plus a host of additional activities, including mountain climbing, e-biking, shooting, archery, and a horseback riding program that caters to riders of all levels.

"If you talked to me 30 or 40 years ago, I would have said John Wayne, Roy Rogers, western movies were a big motivating factor for why people vacationed at White Stallion Ranch. If you asked me 15 to 20 years ago, people were more

motivated by the horses and riding program,” Russell said. “Today, people are motivated by the outdoors, nature, and uncrowded, real experiences – it’s not just about the horse. That’s a lot of why we expanded our activity offerings.”



While horseback riding may not be the driving force behind why first-time guests book White Stallion Ranch, they often “become captivated” by their equine companion during their stay, Laura said.

“We have some people who come back and request to ride the same horse because it’s really the horse that made their vacation,” Laura said.

Laura oversees daily operations at White Stallion’s bustling corral, one of the busiest in the U.S. During peak season, it’s home to as many as 180 horses, each one catering to hotel guests with varying degrees of experience in the saddle and as young as five years old.

The ranch’s robust daily schedule ranges from slow walking to fast walking and

loping rides, and Laura's favorite specialty rides, which include rides paired with breakfast, wine and cheese or the much talked about beer and Cheetos.

No one is better equipped to ensure the guest's riding experience is both positive and educational than Laura, who began visiting the ranch as a child and avid horse enthusiast. She says she returned time and time again because she was enthralled with not only the horses but the beauty of Arizona's mountain ranges and fiery sunsets. After finishing high school, she took a year-long sabbatical and volunteered at White Stallion Ranch. Though she returned to England a year later, the ranch was always on the forefront of her mind, so she moved to Tucson full-time after finishing college. She's never looked back.

Russell's affection for the ranch also runs deep. When he was five, his parents, Allen and Cynthia True, purchased White Stallion Ranch, a property that in its early days was identified as a cattle and bird ranch. In 1945, the property transformed into a guest ranch, changing hands several times before Russell's parents purchased it in 1965. At that time, White Stallion Ranch was only 200 acres with 17 rooms and 17 horses. Over the years, Allen and Cynthia grew the ranch to 3,000 acres by purchasing adjacent properties and adding to the guestroom count. Today, White Stallion Ranch consists of 43 guestrooms and a 4-bedroom, 3-bathroom Hacienda-style house.

"I inherited my parent's work ethic. They probably worked harder than me, but I work pretty hard. We don't quit," Russell said. "One of our little sayings is: The ranch is the boss and that means it's not about me, it's not about Laura, it's not about our staff, it's really about doing what's best for the ranch. That ends up being the best for everyone – the guests, the staff, and everybody around it. I think that's really at the core of our culture and mindset."



White Stallion Ranch remains a family venture with Russell's brother, Michael, and wife Kristin, and Russell's son, Steven, and wife Alice overseeing all parts of its daily operations in conjunction with Russell and Laura.

It works well because everyone "stays in their own lanes," Laura said. And when they do make communal decisions: "We move slowly, but we get it right. No one really rushes into anything. We all value each other's opinions."

In more recent years, Russell and Laura and a group of "dude ranch enthusiasts" have purchased four other dude ranches, including Tombstone Monument Ranch in Tombstone, Ariz.; Rancho de la Osa in Sasabe, Ariz.; Kay El Bar Guest Ranch in Wickenburg, Ariz.; Circle Bar Guest Ranch in Hobson, Montana; and through an agreement with the National Forest Service, they operate OTO Ranch near the entrance of Yellowstone during the summer.

Though they've breathed new life into each ranch, they are staunch believers in maintaining each property's historic integrity and storytelling elements. At

Rancho de la Osa, they've made use of a 300-year-old building that's central to the property's identity; at Kay El Bar's Guest Ranch, they've continued to occupy the 1914 Homestead House and the 1926 adobe lodge; at Tombstone Monument Ranch, they propagate the illicit storylines of 1860s Tombstone.

"We avoid any effort to cookie cutter them," Russell said. "Each property looks and feels as it should."

Moving forward, Russell and Laura hope to expand the programming at their dude ranches in a way that is authentic and furthers the west's most formidable values, namely self-reliance and hospitality, Russell said.

"We certainly don't see ourselves as the saviors of dude ranching, but we want to do our part to keep dude ranching viable and hold its historic, now very tiny piece of hospitality, intact," Russell said. "We want dude ranches to be around for the next century."

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