

VANITY FAIR

HOLLYWOOD 2017

On Travel

ADVENTURES

*in DELHI, LONDON
and VENICE*

*By WILLIAM DALRYMPLE, VICTORIA MATHER
and SKYE McALPINE*

*"I haven't been everywhere,
but it's on my list."*

— SUSAN SONTAG

SOUTH AMERICA

(On Travel talks Latin)

COLOMBIA, BRAZIL, BOLIVIA,
ECUADOR and ARGENTINA

*By ALICE B-B, ALEX CUADROS, STEVE KING,
PAUL RICHARDSON and NICHOLAS SHAKESPEARE*

— The Unexpected — DELIGHTS of PUBLIC TRANSPORT

(yes, really)

By VICTORIA MATHER

Plus

EMMA FREUD on MONTANA; OLIVIA COLE on SEVILLE and the COSTA de la LUZ;
VICTORIA MATHER on exciting HOTEL revamps; ZOE TRYON on the AMAZON; and GABRIELLA LE BRETON
and ELIZABETH SALTZMAN on far-out SKI and SURF destinations (and still there's more...)

When Chaps DO CHAPS

With a significant celebration looming, EMMA FREUD and family felt the call of the wild. Cue fun and games beneath the big skies of Montana

Peace and quiet at The Ranch at Rock Creek, Montana, USA



How is it possible for a youth like me to be going out with a man who's about to turn 60? I don't know either, but it's happened. "So who do you want to spend your big day with?" I asked the OAP, my partner, Richard Curtis. "I thought... Our children—I like them a lot," he said. "But we see them every day," said I. "I know, lucky us. Now let's take them away for an adventure."

So it is that we begin our journey from London to Montana, the fourth-biggest state in America, with the second-highest head count of grizzly bears, an average of only six people per square mile, and a population that's higher in cows than it is in humans. This is going to be fun.

Nineteen hours after leaving our home in London, we are driving through a massive valley of spectacular red, orange and gold trees, surrounded by pine-covered, snow-capped mountains. Smoke coiling above the silver birches tells us we've arrived at The Ranch at Rock Creek, an authentic 19th-century homestead that houses around 100 guests either in outrageously glamorous riverside tents with wood-burning stoves, or in warm, classy lodges nestled away on the 6,000-acre estate.

Our cabin has huge wooden beds, an ancient copper tub, a *Little House on the Prairie* bunk room and a porch with rocking chairs looking out at a view that stretches for miles and is still part of the ranch's estate. Fifty yards from us in one direction are a

swimming pool and hot tub with vistas to the hills; just across the river are the stables, with 70 horses ready to tackle the mountain trails. And between them, at the heart of the ranch, lies The Saloon—a cowboy pleasure dome containing a poker table, honky-tonk piano and bar stools made from vintage Western saddles. To the left is a barn that has been converted into a cinema; to the right is a barn that has been converted into a state-of-the-art bowling alley. It's the Wild West, only without the gun crime and with more toys.

On top of these delights are the activities which, along with all the food and drink, are included in the room rate. That doesn't mean they're cheap, but it does mean that you stop thinking about whether or not you want to splash



Clockwise from top left: Cowboy décor; the vast Montana wilderness; the ghost town; the Curtis family ready for paintballing; quad-biking in the mountains. Below: Richard explores by bike



out on the archery as you're likely to be more Friar Tuck than Robin Hood.

I'd be exaggerating if I said my family are keen to join in. They aren't. The birthday boy wants to spend four days hanging out with the children. The children want to spend four days hanging out with their mobile phones. I want to make them all do as many outdoor activities as possible. I encourage them, under duress, to park their attitudes on the deer-antler coat stand, and dive in. Reader, I cannot lie: I win—and it's a triumph.

Day One sees Grandpa (as Richard must now be known) mountain-biking through the lush, autumnal landscape, and then felling clay pigeons with a rifle—an activity at which he turns out to be an elderly badass.

Day Two finds the Curtis family armed with bows and arrows, stalking through the forest in search of a variety of large wild animals. We find them, shoot them, and would BBQ them were

they not made of foam. In the afternoon, I attempt (and fail) to conquer a terrifying rope course through the forest. This involves spending 20 minutes getting into the right kit for danger, climbing up to treetop level, and then slinking down two minutes later because I hadn't realized quite how frightening it would be.

Sadly, on Day Three I sleep through the "early morning ride to the top of a mountain for a yoga session", and find that I can't get Pops on to one of the



“Clay-pigeon shooting is an activity at which he turns out to be an elderly badass”

ranch's horses anyway—he's claiming an allergy, but I think it's the knowledge that cowboy boots with chaps is not a look that favours a British sexagenarian. Riding isn't compulsory, but the horses here are spectacular and we do at least catch a proper stagecoach to the foot of a nearby mountain. We climb through scented pine trees to reach a plateau known as The Top of the World, and just as we reach the summit, chilly and hungry, we find a ranch-hand has snuck up before us, laid a picnic and lit a crackling fire.

The afternoon brings a male-bonding fly-fishing trip where father and son both

EMMA FREUD

catch a trout—sadly it is the father who squeals like a towny when his hands touch the fish's scaly back.

Day Four—our last—begins with a paintballing session. My elder son begged me not to go. "You'll hate it, you'll get shot, and you'll sulk," he said. "Getting shot with a splash of paint? How bad can it be?" I scoffed. I last just under four minutes before being hit painfully in the thigh by my youngest. "I've been shot," I shout, and sulk off. Turns out the "paint" part isn't the issue; it's the "balling" bit that hurts. Grandpa, on the other hand, adores every minute: my gun is given to one of the ranch-hands, and in the end Richard has to be dragged away before he goes completely feral. The combination of a "nothing-matters-any-more-I'm-60" attitude and a camo outfit clearly suits him.

That afternoon sees the most exciting activity of all. We straddle a pair of quad bikes, teenagers on the back, and drive high up into the Rocky Mountains. As we ascend, we pass through the seasons—autumn turns to winter. We left in T-shirts, and 15 minutes later we are biking through snowy tracks until we spot the caved-in roofs of the deserted mines of an actual abandoned ghost town 7,000ft above sea level. Prospectors settled here in the 1800s, found silver by the hundredweight, and built a little town with a huge dance hall (#priorities #prostitutes). But when the ore ran out a decade later, they left it to the elements. We are the only people there, and wandering through the empty mine shafts and deserted machinery is a bit like being in an exceptionally good episode of *Scooby Doo*.

In the evenings, we eat fresh organic food served ranch-style on wooden platters down the middle of the table, drink hoppy local beer, watch movies, go bowling, play pool, and Grandpa beats us all at poker. And one remarkable night, we eat in their ancient barn, feasting at long communal tables on a harvest supper of local produce, before watching the visiting country-music heroine LeAnn Rimes sing her heart out to the 80 of us, and then join the guests for a barn dance.

It's a successful trip for all Curtises aged from 12 to ancient. It is also a deeply American holiday, and I say that



A ride in the Ranch's stagecoach

with love. Many American hotels need to be so internationally acceptable, with big international menus and huge international lobbies, that they become homogenized. But from the staff in their

“The combination of a nothing-matters-any-more-I'm-60 attitude and a camo outfit clearly suits him”

jeans, to the maple syrup on the oversized stack of pancakes, to the road sign that reads Whoa instead of Stop, to the genuine folksy friendliness, this beautiful ranch, in a huge, unpopulated valley with a river running through it, shows why America is—still—so wonderful. □ The nearest airport to the Ranch is Missoula, Montana. To read more, visit theranchatrockcreek.com

RANCHES: WE ROUND 'EM UP

By VICTORIA MATHER

Dude ranches began in the 1800s when ranch owners invited their city-slicker friends (known as "dudes") to stay. Now they're less John Wayne, more Billy Crystal.

TRIPLE CREEK RANCH, MONTANA

Log cabins, leather furniture, sculptures of moose—it's the full yee-hah. Cowboys and -girls can wrangle 100-800 head of cattle; in the winter there's skijoring, when a horse and rider pull a skier through snowy meadows. (Now, why hasn't Klosters thought of that?) Triple Creek is on the Lewis & Clark National Historic Trail—you need to know about these pioneers to be ranch-literate. Owners Craig and Barbara Barrett have a mind-blowing collection of Western art. triplecreekranch.com

THE RESORT AT PAWS UP, MONTANA

Native Americans, fur trappers, miners and loggers (all a bit *The Revenant*) were here before you in the gorgeous Blackfoot Valley where Paws Up—also very Lewis & Clark, btw—is a 37,000-acre working cattle ranch once owned by aviator Charles Lindbergh's sons Jon and Land. John Steinbeck wrote "I'm in

love with Montana. For other states I have admiration, respect, recognition, even some affection. But with Montana it is love." And it is here that Robert Redford filmed *A River Runs Through It* with his young doppelgänger, Brad Pitt. Fab spa, 200 Black Angus cattle, 300 elk, chuck wagons, fly fishing, clay shooting, a horse-drawn sleigh in snowtime with hot cider—what more do you want? pawsup.com

SMITH FORK RANCH, COLORADO

Seven miles of private river access equals a treat: to float down the Black Canyon of the Gunnison river—big fish and big rocks. A smaller (300 acres) resort, with farm-to-table food and 400 wines; winner of the Wine Spectator Award of Excellence. smithforkranch.com

COTTONWOOD RANCH, NEVADA

A family affair. The Smiths have been at Cottonwood (take oxygen—it's 1,840m up) for five generations and now include guests. There's riding, camp fires, star-gazing, birdwatching, snowmobiling or joining the horse drive for three nights' camping under the stars. cottonwoodguestranch.com