

Warming up at all-inclusive desert guest ranch

By Lisa Huard



WICKENBURG, Ariz. – About 150 years ago it was gold, the fertile soil and ranch land that drew people to this Phoenix-area town. Toiling the land is no longer necessary. The guest ranch is more about pampering than ranching.

Wickenburg is located in Arizona's Maricopa County and is approximately 12 miles square. The more than 5,000 residents live in an area full of history, things to do, and places to see. Streets are out of the Old West, and filled with shops and places to eat.

This is the gateway to a wonderful vacation destination such as a guest ranch. If you're looking for an all inclusive cruise on land, if you'd like the enjoyment of being pampered without the fear that your kids or significant other might fall over board, if you enjoy the unique beauty of the desert, if you need a break from shoveling snow, then Arizona is the place to head.

Wickenburg is a special place.

In 1862, the discovery of gold in Arizona brought many pioneers who were eager to strike it rich. One such individual was Henry Wickenburg. Here he realized his dream and established the lucrative Vulture Mine. The fertile soils of the Hassayampa drew farmers and ranchers who joined with Wickenburg along with settlers from Sonora, Mexico, and

founded the town of Wickenburg.

The young town faced many challenges – Indian wars, mine closures and a disastrous flood in 1890 – but prosperity came to the area in 1895 with the arrival of the railroad.

Since the 1920s Wickenburg has been a destination guest ranch area for tourists looking to get out of the cold and into the warmer winter climate of the desert. In fact, the population of Wickenburg doubled from 1920 to 1940.

Two successful businessmen, Charles Maguire and Belford Howard, spent many years in the area admiring the landscape. They decided it would be an excellent location for a lucrative investment – a guest ranch.

The prime area of their interest hugged the Hassayampa River valley and had a highway that connected Wickenburg with Phoenix and California. The two men, albeit both successful in business, knew they lacked the knowledge and experience of running a guest ranch. They invited Dallas C. Gant to join them in their business venture. Gant began working in the guest ranch business as a youth. With his hospitality experience, the Rancho de los Caballeros (loosely translated as the Gentlemen's Ranch) was destined for success.

The three gentlemen turned to John Gem Meem for his architectural expertise in the Pueblo Revival and Spanish Colonial Revival styles. His vision for this oasis in the desert would include materials from Arizona. Striking flagstone was used for flooring and peeled aspen limbs used for the ceilings added to the southwest charm and appeal.

The main building, which hosts the lobby's check-in, says, "welcome" with its décor and incredible guest service personnel. The masonry construction reflects the colors of the desert and the "portales", porch covers, keep visitors cool and comfortable from the hot desert sun. The many common areas offer comfortable and handsome places to put up your boots,

rest a spell, read a good book, have a conversation, or gaze out the window.

Their hard work and dream came to fruition Thanksgiving 1948. Rancho de los Caballeros opened the ranch for a few days so Wickenburg residents and dignitaries could get a good look a place. The Wickenburg Sun reported that then California Rep. Richard M. Nixon visited the ranch and was quite taken by it. Word spread and in mid-December the ranch received its first guests.

With the success of Rancho de los Caballeros, the number of guest ranches in the region grew to eight. Wickenburg became the “Dude Ranch Capital of the World” for those that wanted to have an authentic Western experience.

Rancho de los Caballeros has continued to develop along with the idea of the perfect vacation. If you’re looking for a relaxing and beautiful place to take the family or for a getaway, make this site one that you check out. There’s something to please everyone.

Rancho de los Caballeros offers amenities galore: 18 holes of golf, swimming, birding, trap and skeet shooting, nature trails, conference meeting rooms, tennis, horseback riding, and spa. And for those of you who can’t leave the office at home, there’s WiFi.

Their “Full American Plan” provides all your meals by a crack culinary team that can be enjoyed in the several community spaces or poolside. The ranch also has a great children’s program to keep the young ranch hands engaged while the parental units breathe in the beauty of their surroundings.

Rancho de los Caballeros continues to attract guests from all over the world. Their tradition of hospitality remains strong and is something you’ll appreciate even as soon as you arrive on the property. The ranch is among the more than 200 quality hotels on the National Trust Historic Hotels of America

program, which is a part of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Recognition only goes to those hotels that have faithfully maintained their historic architecture and ambience.

The ranch is just a short jaunt from downtown Wickenburg, which is filled with history, shops and a fabulous museum. I visited the Desert Caballeros Western Museum. On display until May 2 is the Cowgirl Up exhibition – it is fantastic. The art includes paintings, sculptures, and the most amazing charcoal work I've seen. Harriet "Rox" Corbett does such incredible work that it looks like a photograph. The entire museum is something to see.

Wickenburg is one hour from the Phoenix area. Transportation from Sky Harbor Airport is one of the easiest and most organized airports I've seen. One could easily holiday here for an extended period of time.

Let me help to get you started. [Click here](#) for tourism information for the Wickenburg area; [Rancho de los Caballeros](#) and [here](#) is the museum's website.