

# Montana: Big Sky Country and Cowboy Fever

Getting to **Montana** from the UK and back involves a few flights but it's definitely worthwhile; I made the most of this by twinning Montana with Los Angeles on the way out and Seattle on the way home, which worked perfectly.



**Caroline Beckett**  
Product Manager for the Caribbean,  
North & South America, Canada  
and Luxury Cruise



*The Ranch at Rock Creek*

“The morning was not without event; two of us managed to land a catch – my catch-of-the-day was a big fluffy Retriever who is so used to getting flies caught in her fur that she just stood there waiting to be released, thankfully without injury.”

As soon as you arrive at Missoula Airport, Montana, you notice that you are somewhere different; it's small and within minutes you are off the plane and patiently waiting for your luggage – which is a real bonus. Then, you step outside into a completely different world – I have never seen so many SUVs or cowboy hats, definitely not like the usual airport arrival experience! We were swiftly shown to our large, comfortable SUV and in no time at all were on the road to the ranch, “yee haa!”. The journey took around an hour and forty-five minutes, but it was a nice scenic route that allowed us to see how vast Montana actually is and we chatted so much with our driver that it seemed much shorter. Finally, we turned off the main road and onto a private road – we had arrived at **The Ranch at Rock Creek**. There were the riverside tents and some mares and foals playing in the fields, then the impressive main wooden lodge came into view.

On arrival, we were greeted like friends rather than guests and I immediately felt that I was somewhere very special that I was going to like very much. We were shown to our rooms in the main lodge, which have a lovely prairie feel to them; very homely, filled with antique furnishings and pictures. Every room is unique and is individually named. You can stay in the main lodge, a log cabin – perfect for families or groups of friends – or your own luxury tent overlooking the river (I will definitely try one of these on my next visit). After a quick freshen-up, it was down to the restaurant where, with log fires blazing and gingham furnishings in place, a simple yet absolutely delicious lunch awaited us.

So what to do next? Well, we decided on an afternoon of fly-fishing, something I can't say I've ever had a desire to try, but when in Rome! We headed off to the Gun and Rod Club, situated on the other side of the property; it's a nice stroll but we decided to take the bikes (each room is allocated their own) and work off that hearty lunch. Once at the club we were introduced to our Guide and his gorgeous Golden Retriever who

likes to assist on fishing trips. We were fitted with waders and off we went to the pond, a good place to start for us beginners, although you can easily fish in the river on-site. After a short introduction on what to do, we were casting-off in the sunshine amidst the marvellous scenery. I recall thinking, “I could actually get used to this, it's not boring in the slightest, like I thought it might be.” The morning was not without event; two of us managed to land a catch – my catch-of-the-day was a big fluffy Retriever who is so used to getting flies caught in her fur that she just stood there waiting to be released, thankfully without injury. However, the session finished with us all catching a fish, which felt like a huge achievement, and even more satisfying when we put them back in the water and away they swam. Then it was off to the lodge and time for a bit of exploring on the bikes. After a leisurely cycle around, we headed back to the lodge and the bar to be greeted by canapés and cocktails. The ranch has a wonderful social scene which reminded me of an African game lodge; guests sat along the bar chatting about the day's experiences and what they were going to do the next day.



*One of the luxury tents at  
The Ranch at Rock Creek*



*individual log cabins are cosy and located in the forest at Triple Creek Ranch*



*cattle-driving is an activity which can be enjoyed at the nearby cattle ranch*

The Ranch at Rock Creek and Triple Creek Ranch, where Caroline stayed on this trip, are featured in our 2012 Americas brochure, which can be viewed on our website [www.elegantresorts.co.uk](http://www.elegantresorts.co.uk) Alternatively, call our Travel Consultants to order a copy of our Americas brochure or discuss your own bespoke itinerary. Please call 01244 897 222 for more details.

*“Pre-dinner drinks, in the bar of the main lodge, were followed by dinner, a veritable feast of locally sourced produce cooked simply to allow the flavour of the food to burst through.”*

Triple Creek is a completely different ranch experience and makes a nice combination with The Ranch at Rock Creek. The ranch itself is located in a woodland setting with the main lodge housing all the facilities; the accommodation comes in the form of individual log cabins dotted throughout the forest, each with access to a private or shared Jacuzzi and all are spacious and cosy, with lovely huge log beds. I was lucky enough to stay in Castle Rock which came with its own golf buggy for getting around.

It was decided that we would enjoy some more horse-riding, so we partnered up with our horses and away we went along the forest path, weaving in and out of the trees; the scenery here is completely different and the majority of the ride took place in the forest. This was a short ride of an hour which then gave us time to explore so, armed with our maps, we followed one of the well-signed routes around the ranch. Not another soul was seen or heard – it was a great way to get to grips with the property.

Pre-dinner drinks, in the bar of the main lodge, were followed by dinner, a veritable feast of locally sourced produce cooked simply to allow the flavour of the food to burst through. Again, there was a great social scene with people chatting about experiences and discussing the plans for the following day. Sometimes, the simplest things are just the best.

There is a whole host of things to do at Triple Creek and the majority take place on the actual

working ranch, approximately a ten-minute drive away. Here, you can explore the open plains of Montana by horseback, go float fishing down the river or enjoy an ATV adventure. The ranch also has a relationship with a local working cattle ranch, assisting with all the ranch activities, including cattle-drives. Obviously, this is all based around the needs of the actual ranch, but it makes for some really different experiences. We spent a gentle morning fishing in the pond – I still wasn't quite good enough to brave the flowing waters and fly-fish for real, but maybe next time!

After a hearty cowboy's lunch of traditional chilli, we set off for a leisurely drive back to the airport; we all felt that we could have spent a few more days here and never get bored. Triple Creek only accepts children over sixteen years of age, so it's perfect for adults who want to be adventurous and get excited about all the activities.

From Missoula Airport we travelled to Seattle, which is just a short flight away and the perfect place to spend a few days before flying back to the UK. Cowboy fever finally left me after a few weeks (much to the relief of my partner and colleagues), but the memories of my trip, and the desire to go back, haven't.



*fly-fishing is a popular pursuit on the river near Triple Creek Ranch*



*Seattle is a short flight away and a great place to spend a few days before flying home*



**About Caroline...**

Caroline joined Elegant Resorts in March 2008 as Product Manager for the Caribbean & Mexico – since then she's added the Americas and Luxury Cruise to her portfolio. An avid traveller herself, and a lover of the great outdoors, Caroline is happiest at the top of a mountain or sitting around a camp fire, so this trip to Montana was a dream come true for her.

*Elegant Resorts*

As the time for dinner approached, I decided to make a quick change out of my jeans and sweatshirt. However, when I got back to the bar I was told I hadn't needed to change at all! Formality and glamour is not the order of the day here, it is so relaxed and informal that dressing for dinner is something you can forget at the door. After another amazing dining experience, featuring all local fresh produce and some outstanding wines, it was over to the Silver Dollar Saloon for after-dinner drinks. The saloon is the social hub of the resort; it has a four-lane bowling alley, pool tables, a poker table, billiards and a large screen for watching movies. We, of course, tried everything out on the first night and then retired to the bar which, instead of bar stools, has saddles to sit on, perfect if you haven't done a lot of riding that day!

The next morning, after a hearty breakfast (the savoury scrambled eggs are amazing), it was off to the corral for our real ranch experience. We were greeted by the cowboys and after assessing our abilities, they went to get our horses ready. Just watching them in the corral, roping the loose horses ready for us to ride, was amazing. Once we were kitted out with cowboy boots and hats we were ready for our adventure. Heading to the other side of the resort, passing through a forested path we reached the open plains of the ranch - now I could truly see where the name 'big sky country' came from! There was nothing in any direction apart from sky and rolling hills; I have never felt more isolated or content in my life, the peace and tranquillity was tremendous. Because we could do as much or as little as we liked on our horses, I picked up the pace a bit before heading back down to the corral, where a delicious picnic lunch awaited us. We had decided to do an all-day ride so after lunch we crossed to the other side of the ranch for more stunning scenery and the chance to see the lodge from a bird's-eye-view. Every experience can be tailored to you, so if you are new to riding you can go out for an hour's ride or if you are more experienced you can enjoy two rides a day just as easily.

That evening we got to see the cowboys practicing roping the cattle and riding the bucking horses; when you speak to them they have the most amazing stories to tell, as well as their injuries to show from the job and competing in rodeos. For them it really is a way of life and something that they're born to - they each have a long history of working with cattle and horses and it is something they are truly passionate about. Afterwards, it was back to the lodge for another sumptuous dinner and a nightcap in the saloon.

The next morning, with a few hours to go before we left Rock Creek, we decided that clay-pigeon shooting was the way to go for our final activity. Having never held a gun, let alone fired one, this was an exciting yet nerve-racking experience, but it was really good fun. Our Guide was an extremely good teacher and so patient with us, and it paid off as quite a few clays were hit and we all returned to the lodge feeling satisfied that we could definitely make shooting our new weekend pursuit.

All too soon, and with heavy hearts, it was time to say goodbye. We really felt that we had become part of the Rock Creek family and were privileged to experience such an amazing place and people who were really passionate about what they did and made our experience very special.

The beauty of a ranching holiday is that you can do as much or as little as you like; you could spend the day sitting around the pool or enjoying spa treatments if you don't fancy any activities at all; explore the local area, try sapphire-mining or visit the local town of Philipsburg, which looks just like the set of every western you may have seen. Next time, I will try all the activities I didn't get a chance to this time. Luckily for us this was not the end of our ranch adventure as we were heading off to **Triple Creek Ranch** next...

“...we decided that clay-pigeon shooting was the way to go for our final activity. Having never held a gun, let alone fired one, this was an exciting yet nerve-racking experience, but it was really good fun.”



*me and my fellow guests in the Silver Bullet Saloon*



*cowboys working with the horses at the corral*



*riding across the peaceful, open plains of the ranch*



*choosing my horse at the corral*



*clay-pigeon shooting was a really exciting activity to try*