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Love on the Range

GET ROMANTIC AT MONTANA'S RANCH AT ROCK CREEK.

{ by Rhonda Reinhart }



— ranch retreat —
MONTANA



RUGGED LUXURY:
(from top) Trapper cabin,
the most secluded lodging
at the Ranch at Rock
Creek; a cozy outdoor
fireplace.

MANY A BODICE RIPPER has been set among the wide-open spaces of rugged ranchland. But those Harlequin paperbacks are just dime-store fiction. At the Ranch at Rock Creek in southwestern Montana, you can live out your own romance novel, without the embarrassing book cover.

Just outside the mining town of Philipsburg, the Ranch at Rock Creek sits on 10 acres of working ranchland. The luxury guest ranch offers a wide variety of accommodations, including multi-room log homes, cabins in the main lodge, and a room built into the hayloft of a 100-year-old barn. But for you honeymooners, the ranch has something even more special: a riverside cabin known as Trapper. This canvas,

WHERE TO STAY

THE RANCH AT ROCK CREEK

Rates start at \$900 per person, per night and include lodging, meals, beverages, activities, and bicycles for on-property transportation. theranchatrockcreek.com

GETTING THERE

United Airlines flies to Missoula International Airport with a connection in Denver. The drive to the ranch is approximately one hour, 45 minutes. Rent a car, or the ranch can arrange transfer for an additional fee.

BIG SKY BEAUTY:

(clockwise from top) The interior of Trapper; some friends of the ranch; a horse and carriage ride; the banks of Rock Creek; the spa at the ranch.



wood, and stone cabin is the most secluded living area on the ranch—from the main lodge, it's a three-minute drive or 10-minute bike ride. Nestled right on the banks of Rock Creek, Trapper is decked out with a king bed, gas fireplace, wine cooler, private hot tub, and come-hither patio. It also comes with a vehicle for guests to use while on property.

It will be difficult—especially with the complimentary mini-bar, warm slippers, and luxurious robes that come with the room—but try not to spend all your time tucked away inside Trapper. The activities available at the ranch include everything from hiking, horseback riding, and fly fishing in summer and fall to cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and ice-skating in winter. And there's no need to bring your own gear. The ranch has everything you need to enjoy all the activities—snow boots, hats, cowboy boots, you name it. And when it comes to relaxation, there are two options you definitely shouldn't miss: the

spa and the saloon. In addition to the typical facials and massages, the full-service spa offers a signature treatment called Rock Creek Ritual, which consists of a sea salt exfoliation, a hydro-therapeutic soak, a massage, a hydrating wrap, and a scalp massage. The spa can also accommodate couple's massages. For a different kind of soak, mosey on over to the Silver Dollar Saloon, where you can saddle up at the bar (really, the barstools are saddles), shoot some pool, or knock down some pins in the four-lane bowling alley. Also in the saloon are some comfy couches and a 14-foot television screen that can be reserved for a private dinner and movie.

Speaking of dinner, chef Josh Drage is the man in charge of all the meals at the ranch, and you should feel quite confident putting your palate in his hands. The menu changes with the seasons, but for dinner, think red-wine-braised venison shoulder with kalamata olives, capers, and roasted red peppers or grilled bison

tenderloin seasoned with smoked sea salt and fresh thyme. (Vegetarians, fear not. Drage can make accommodations for special diets.) Dessert could be a huckleberry milkshake, honey crisp apple tarte tatin, or possibly some warm chocolate chip cookies with vanilla bean ice cream. Lighter options at lunch, maybe a chicken pesto salad or turkey sandwich, mean you can save room for those decadent dinners.

Though it would be easy to stay on the ranch for the duration of your trip, you might consider a drive into nearby Philipsburg. The quaint little town has a population under 1,000 and a cluster of great shops. The massive Sweet Palace candy store offers 50 kinds of fudge, 72 flavors of taffy, and a delicacy called a Moose Drool Truffle. Next door, the Sapphire Gallery is a gem lover's dream, and just down the way, Stuff & Such has six rooms of antiques and collectibles. Sugary treats and new jewels? You just thought your ranchland honeymoon couldn't get any sweeter. **D**