

# WEST

OF THE CITY

YOUR HOME, YOUR MAGAZINE  
Burlington Oakville Mississauga

[Home](#) | [People & Events](#) | [Style](#) | [Food](#) | [Recipes](#) | [Getaways](#) | [Home & Garden](#) | [Motoring](#)

## GETAWAY: BC Ranches

Sep 12, 2012 - 9:09 am

by Josephine Matyas

One glorious summer week, I got in touch with my inner cow- boy. There was no wrangling and no pain involved. There were horses and there was wilderness and yes, there was spa. And this blissful commune with nature happened right here in our Canadian west.

### The synergy of Siwash Ranch

I put down my paddle, pull out my thermos of coffee and nibble on a blueberry muffin. There isn't a ripple on the lake and the morn- ing sun is already promising a scorcher. Just when I'm starting to think there is nowhere more peace- ful than sunrise on a remote lake in central British Columbia, I hear it. The sound of thundering hooves as a herd of two dozen horses makes its way in from the overnight pas- ture. And these horses are really moving.

Horses at Siwash Lake Ranch.



1 2 3 4 5

Most horses would not consider me "good horsemanship material." I say this with the greatest respect for the gentle steeds. It's me, not them, where the problem lies.

"Good horsemanship is all about little tiny steps," explains Allyson Rogers, the owner of Siwash Lake Ranch, as she runs me through "everything-horses" on the first morning of my stay. I learn that a take-charge rider is the road to success. And this is where things come off the rails. A 2,000-pound horse has got the upper hand on me without breaking a sweat.

Allyson founded this 160-acre remote ranch after "following a yearning to be closer to nature." With a steady hand, she designed and oversaw the construction of a massive log home built from hand-hewn spruce, created paddocks, installed solar panels (Siwash is an "off-grid" property and gets most of its power from sunshine), hired trail guides and a Cordon Bleu-trained chef, and then swung open the ranch gates to city-weary guests from around the globe.

"I'm trying to provide an experience that brings them closer to nature," she says. "To make them step out of their comfort zones in a safe, nurturing environment, and to take the time to connect with family and loved ones."

And here's the thing: Siwash is a plug-into- nature experience, with or without the horses.

Although the ranch is renowned for its hallmark horseback-riding program, there's much more inside its fence lines. The property backs onto 80,000 deserted acres of Crown land crosscut with hiking trails, off-road mountain biking routes and lakes for canoeing and fly-fishing. Just being here makes me want to slide my feet into the strange pointy-toe boots (yes, they'll provide you with a pair for riding) and yell git along little doggie!



Siwash is the sort of spot where you are encouraged to pad about barefoot, indoors and out. It quickly feels like home – if your idea of home-sweet-home includes evening campfires, stargazing with a cocktail, and a sweet little pre-breakfast tray of muffin and coffee that is slipped inside your door each morning.

Tucked into an old growth pine forest almost an hour east of 70 Mile House in B.C.'s Cariboo region, the ranch is the real all-inclusive deal: coolers stocked with drinks are tucked in the shade, the chef can rustle you up a snack between meals, and there's unlimited access each and every day to the ranch's guided adventures – fly fishing lessons, trail rides, wildlife spotting for bear and moose, mountain biking, skeet shooting and even wilderness survival.

In the end, the horse and I reach a truce. Under Allyson's patient guidance I learn how to watch for signs ("pay attention to their ears – they're like antennae"), clean their hoofs and saddle up. But I make no mistake: the horse is still the boss.

#### **A little bit of Thailand in the hills of B.C.**

There's a large bird circling over the muddy Fraser River far below. It's taken us an hour to get to this point: a gear-grinding 4WD expedition crawling up the switchbacks of the High Bar Road to this dizzying lookout at Cougar Point. The roadsides are lined with dry scrub – fragrant sage, prickly pear and, in some spots, stunted fir, their roots hanging on for dear life. In some places, the edge of the road just drops away. I scan the ravines for the rusty carcasses of pickups; signs of joy rides gone bad. Nothing. In fact, there is a lot of nothing here. And it is beautiful.

Norm Dove, the guy behind the wheel and the owner of the isolated Echo Valley Ranch, took early retirement from a successful corporate life in Vancouver for this remoteness.

"The rancher we bought our land from went through the entire Nixon impeachment without knowing anything about it," says Norm. "That's how disconnected he was out here."

Norm and his wife Nan built the expansive log lodge at Echo Valley as a getaway for friends and family, but before long they were adding cabins, a spacious Thai-inspired spa (a nod to Nan's heritage), barns for two dozen horses and several spring-fed ponds. Home became a luxury ranch destination.

There's little to shatter the silence at Echo Valley. Several trout-stocked ponds were created for the Zen of fly-fishing. Or just to sit beside the water, think and quiet the mind. There's a spider web of seven different hiking trails that go from the flats of the lush marshlands to the heart-pounding, bare rock heights of Mount Bowman. "There will always be a dog with you," laughs Norm. And he's right – a platoon of the ranch's eight border collies fall in step whenever a guest starts down a trail. "It's their herding instinct. They want to try to keep the group together."

Even the very Canadian log buildings embrace the concept of "sabai sabai," a way of life in Thailand where everything is in harmony, at peace and exactly as it should be. Mornings begin with Thai stretching classes – an hour-long routine of gentle, slow movements through 15 yoga-like poses. Classes are held in the Bann Thai, a large building that fuses – if you can imagine this – the features of a northern fishing lodge with swooping Thai rooflines, ringed by ornamental wood-carvings.

Stretching, I learn, is also a big part of traditional Thai massage. In the ranch's Cariboo Spa I change into loose fitting cotton pyjamas and within a short time the therapist is using her forearms and feet to manipulate my limbs into various pretzel-like positions. Things are happening to my arms and legs that I did not even know were possible. It feels good. I doze off.

That night, at a barbecue dinner served family-style around a long table, we discuss our plan to take a sightseeing flight over the four distinct ecosystems surrounding the ranch – desert, boreal forest, grasslands and fertile marshlands. On the map, Norm shows us the mountain ranges that were the result of tectonic collisions and the cuts in the landscape carved out by the mighty Fraser River. "We call this our Grand Canyon of the North," he says.

At one time large, open range cattle operations gobbled up enormous swaths of grasslands. "Operations like the B.C. Cattle Company came into being to provide Gold Rush prospectors with food. At one time it was overgrazed, but things are better now. We're lucky to have such diversity here."

And perhaps it's this diversity at Echo Valley and in the surrounding landscapes that brings that sense of sabai sabai to the entire spot. I toss a few items into my daypack and head out the door for one of the shorter hiking trails. I've barely stepped off the porch of my cabin and am immediately adopted by a border collie. Of course.

#### **If you go**



Share all of life's  
*special moments.*

Post and share all of your's and your loved ones life's milestones – births, marriages, graduations and obituaries.

*Life*news.ca

**POST NOW**

Air Canada (aircanada.com) and WestJet (westjet.com) offer flights into Kamloops. From there it is a 2 34-hour drive to either ranch.

**Cariboo Chilcotin Coast Tourism**  
hellobc.com/cariboo-chilcotin-coast.aspx

**Siwash Lake Ranch**  
siwashlakeranch.com

**Echo Valley Ranch & Spa**  
evranch.com

---

## Comments

Be the first to comment on this story!

[Login to Post Comments](#)

## WestoftheCity.com

### Westofthecity.com

Contests  
West TV  
MultiMedia  
About Us  
Contact Us  
Advertising  
Past Issues  
Subscribe

### Local Info

Announcements  
Jobs  
Cars  
Real Estate  
Rentals  
Classifieds  
Flyers

### Local Sites

Boat Guide Canada  
Carguide Canada  
City Parent  
Forever Young  
Premier Consumer Shows  
World of Wheels

### Affiliates

Goldbook.ca  
InsuranceHotLine.com  
MyHolidayHomeRental.com  
OurFaves.com  
Save.ca  
Toronto.com  
LeaseBusters.com  
WagJag.com

### Daily Newspapers

The Guelph Mercury  
The Hamilton Spectator  
The Toronto Star  
The Waterloo Region Record

