

# Over the moon in the Rocky Mountains

**Wild-West-Feeling** Majestic mountains, lakes as clear as glass, blue skies and unlimited expanse— people who have always wanted to become one with nature should travel to the Canadian Rocky Mountains. On horseback you do not only experience a breathtaking scenery, but mainly one important thing: total tranquility.

By Katrin Müller-Wipfler

Although „The Sound of Silence“ by Simon and Garfunkel was written about twenty years before I was born, it has always been one of my favourite songs in the world. And I have always wondered what it may sound like, the sound of silence. Now I know: Silence sounds like gently rolling hills and mountain tops covered with snow, like horses softly plucking grass between heather on pasture that stretches to the horizon. Silence sounds like “No phone connection”,

like no electricity. Silence sounds like beef steaks, as long as my forearm, which are silently fizzling over the log fire. Silence sounds like Brokeback Mountain.

This is exactly where I am: the very place where the notorious Hollywood movie about two cowboys in love was filmed. It is half past six in the morning, I wriggle out of my cosy sleeping bag surprisingly fit and chirpily and I open the door of my little log cabin just in time to see the first rays of sunlight crawl over the mountains. Although it is September, it is quite chilly out here, the temperatures in the low single-figure area. The sky glows

in a cheerful pink and luscious orange and some hundred metres away, our horses have scattered over the open pasture and are leisurely chewing the late summer grass. There are no fences here – if they wanted, our four-legged friends could abandon us here in the wilderness.

## Breakfast in the wilderness

„Don't worry“, says Wyatt, the young cowboy who is our guide on this pack trip and who trudges alongside me over the grass with a wide-brimmed hat and clinking spurs.

Unlimited expanse: The view in the Rocky Mountains is just sensational.

FOTOS: PRIVAT



FOTO: ADVENTUREHAKS



- 1 Like the Wild West: no cars, no phone connection, no hectic
- 2 Meadow Creek: One of the two camps where guests stay during the pack trips.
- 3 Nice to wake up like this: My morning view from the log cabin.
- 4 Safe nights: In the cozy cabins, guests are protected from wild animals.
- 5 Restored with love: the Guest House on the Ranch.
- 6 Space for 250 guests: the Dance Barn in Lake Louise.



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### About Alberta:

Alberta is the westernmost prairie province in Canada. The capital is Edmonton, the biggest city is Calgary. Alberta has cold winters with average temperatures between  $-10^{\circ}\text{C}$  in the South and  $-24^{\circ}\text{C}$  in the North. In the summer, the average temperature during the

day reaches from about  $21^{\circ}\text{C}$  in the valleys of the Rocky Mountains up to  $30^{\circ}\text{C}$  in the dry prairies of the South-West. In the summer, the time difference between Alberta and Germany is eight hours - if it is 4 pm in Munich, it is 8 am in Calgary. The currency is the Canadian Dollar, which is worth 0,680661281 Euro (Oct 2016). Roughly calculated you have to divide the CAD by 1,4 to get the sum in Euros.

### Flights:

From Munich, Lufthansa and Condor fly to Calgary (1 stop) for about 800 Euros, from Nuremberg it is about 100 Euros more expensive. The flight time, depending on the length of the stop, is about 12 hours.

### Things to see and do:

Brewster Adventures:

[www.brewsteradventures.com](http://www.brewsteradventures.com)

Banff Nationalpark und Lake Louise:

[www.banfflakelouise.com](http://www.banfflakelouise.com)

Calgary Stampede:

[www.calgarystampede.com](http://www.calgarystampede.com)

Spruce Meadows:

[www.sprucemeadows.com](http://www.sprucemeadows.com)

Jasper Nationalpark:

[www.kanada-alberta.de/jasper/](http://www.kanada-alberta.de/jasper/)



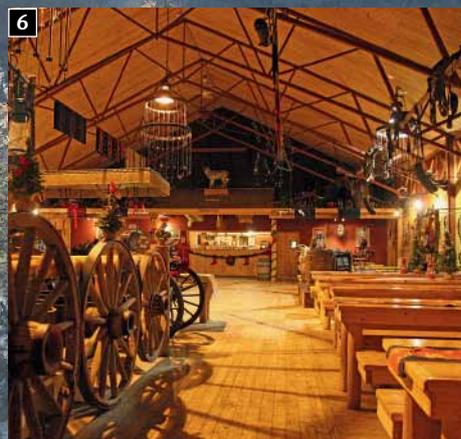
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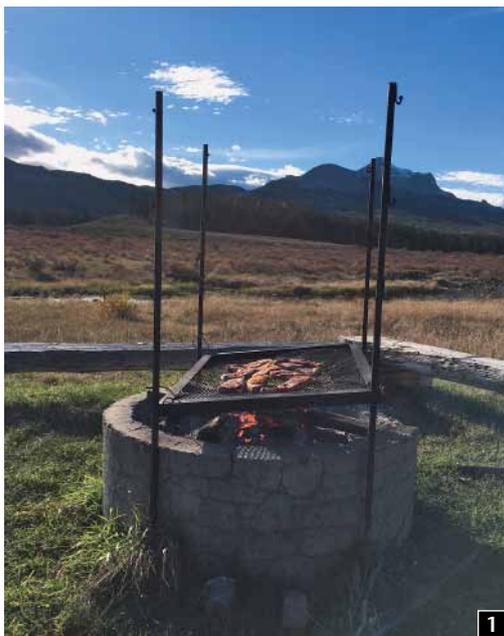


FOTO: ADVENTUREHAKS

„They may wander off at night, but for breakfast they all come back!“ And indeed – a short whistle, a loud clatter with the pellet-bucket and here they come: Orbit, the moody pack horse, the jovial big ones Lusty and Larch, the well-behaved Guy, the mischievous Charly and Moon, the gorgeous dark brown gelding that is “my” horse for this trip and has grown very close to my heart after a few hours only. After all, the quarter horse is only five years old, but has already carried me up and down narrow, steep mountain paths without so much as batting an eyelid, has stomped through rivers, marsh and mud and let me steer him with only a tension of my back and

the slightest movement of the reins. Even I, as a non-Western rider, am indeed over the moon with my lovely Moon.

Now, after he has munched his feed in the little corral, he patiently lets me heave the heavy western saddle onto his back – a true show of strength when you are used to a soft Italian show jumping saddle – and waits, tied to a wooden post, uncomplainingly until us humans have feasted on eggs and pancakes. Together Wyatt, who is 24 years old and originates from British Columbia, and I worked side by side until all horses are brushed and saddled – but this happens by far not as quietly as you would expect. Wyatt is a far cry from the stereotypical “silent cowboy”. He chatters happily away, shares funny anecdotes with me and from time to time, he spits a good measure of „Copenhagen“ (chewing tobacco) on the ground. Quickly all horses are taken care of. When we have finished saddling, breakfast awaits us in the biggest log cabin. On this trip, we are accompanied by Hanspeter, a Swiss who has immigrated to Canada more than 50 years ago and who works as ski instructor, mountain guide and “packer” – these are the Canadian outdoorsmen who still master the traditional, centuries-old art of loading a pack horse in a way that it can safely carry the more than 100 kg heavy equipment and supply for a number of riders through rough terrain.

### True family tradition

Centuries old, that is a good keyword anyway. Brewster Adventures, the family



**1** Steaks have never tasted as nice: Dinner with a view on the pack trip.

**2** The perfect time: In the Indian Summer Alberta glows in wonderful colours.

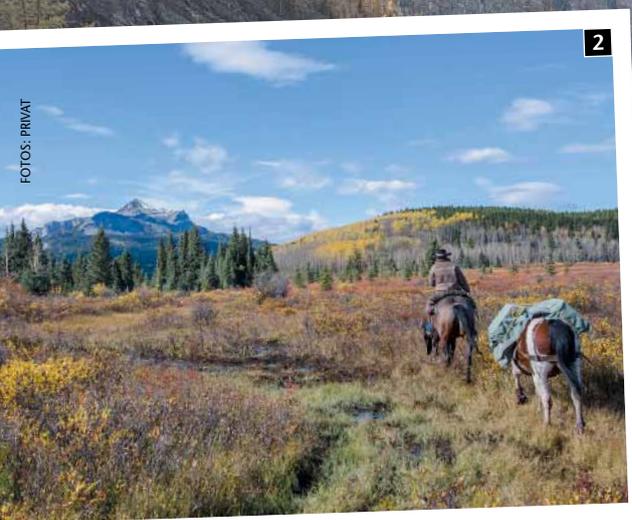
**3** Calm, gentle and reliable: the trail horses in Lake Louise are very well educated.

**4** Brilliant pack horse, but does not like to be ridden: Orbit is a real personality

business with whom I am experiencing this trip into the Canadian Rocky Mountains, is running in the fifth generation now. In order to escape the Irish potato famine, William Brewster immigrated in the mid- 19th century to Canada. His son John settled in Banff, in the prairie of Alberta, and founded a dairy. However, his sons did not much like the milk business and started at the tender age of 10 and 12 years to lead guests on horseback through their homeland. The Brewster pack trips have been organised in the back country for more than 100 years now, additionally there are day rides in the spectacular scenery around the turquoise glittering Lake Louise.

### From popular lake to solitude

I have already done this eight-hour ride to the two historic tea houses in the middle of the rugged mountain landscape on my first day in Canada and I was immediately fascinated by the sensational view and the agility with which the horses conquer, like mountain goats, the cliffy and narrow trails – completely untouched by the weight of their sometimes not particularly skilled riders. High and even higher we went, along steep abysses and over stony rubble paths, up to the very ridges of the mountains, from where you can not only see the wonderful, pool green lake with the impressive Chateau Fairmont, but also dazzling blue glaciers which allure skiers



FOTOS: PRIVAT

Water as clear as glass and snowy mountaintops: Lake Agnes.



FOTO: ADVENTUREHAKS

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from all over the world year after year. As we are out and about in the summer, we rather have to share our tracks with hikers, who are cresting the mountains with heated faces.

I had thought this day ride to be breathtaking, but nothing had prepared me for the overwhelming beauty of the untouched and secluded back country which we are now riding across on our pack trip.

"I told you so", laughs Lacey Stanton – daughter of Janet Brewster and Kevin Stanton, who is together with her parents involved in the family business – when I come back from the two day trip with my jaw on the floor out of sheer astonishment. The lively redhead who manages the company's fortunes in the office and who, more or less as a hobby, drives a truck and a trailer with up to 17 (!) horses through the entire country to participate in barrel races and rodeos, is always on the move.

When she is not busy organising pack trips or coordinating horses for the rides or, in the winter, for the sleigh rides on frozen Lake Louise, she trains her show horses or helps her father on the ranch.

### Hard work on the ranch

Now that the tourist season, which from May to September is not that long anyway, comes to an end, Kevin Stanton finally has time to move his more than 100 cows from the summer pasture to the winter pasture – and I am allowed to help. Admittedly, I am a bit excited as I have been a showjumper for all my life and I am not sure if I can keep up with all the experienced cowboys after only a few days in a western saddle.

What I had imagined to be a wild and hectic racket, is another lesson in the topic silence. Aside from the guttural mooing of the countless cows that we round up in a walk



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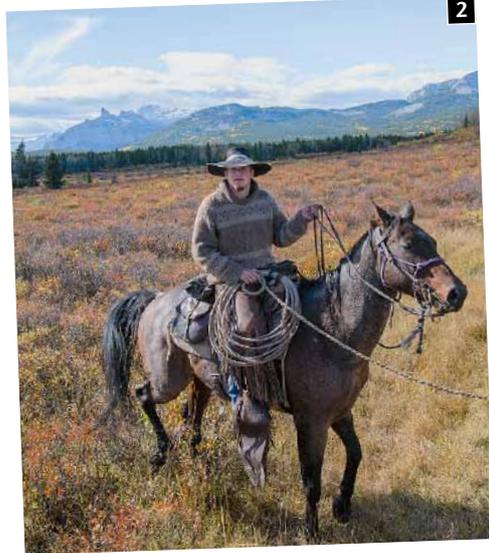
and completely without hectic, everything happens almost without a sound. Not all the cows will be transferred to the other field, exactly 21 animals are supposed to stay behind in their summer pasture. In the saddle of his faithful Chester, Kevin Stanton rides right into the middle of the densely packed bodies of the black ruminants, expertly selects the animals which are not supposed to move and quietly chases them out of the group. When the boss has staked his choice, the gate is opened and the cows move for kilometres and kilometres along the only road to the other pasture. We accompany the herd on our horses, keep the cattle in check and recapture the runaways. Even though the cattle drive – which I was only able to attend out of pure chance, it is not something that “normal” tourists can do – has little to do with action packed chasing around, it still is exactly how a girl from Germany would visualise living on a Canadian farm.

## What a life for a horse

I am told to come back mid October at all costs, then the action is on at the ranch. All horses of the family – traditionally they do not talk about numbers. In the heyday of the pack trips they had about 400, now it is approximately 100 – will be brought to their winter territory in Meadow Creek, where they can enjoy their free time until April in the wilderness. This is not for wimps: The horses are not fed during the winter and if they are thirsty, they might have to break through the ice of one of the countless creeks. In exchange, they get total freedom: No fences, no boundaries, just vastness as far as the eye can see. In order to get the horses there, Kevin Stanton and his team ride all the way from the ranch to the back country on their horses, the rest runs free and is being chased along the road. This



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1 The perfect spot for a lunch break: Ride back from Meadow Creek.

2 He could ride before he could walk: young cowboy and tour guide Wyatt.

3 The horses deserve a break, too: Lunch break at the glacier.

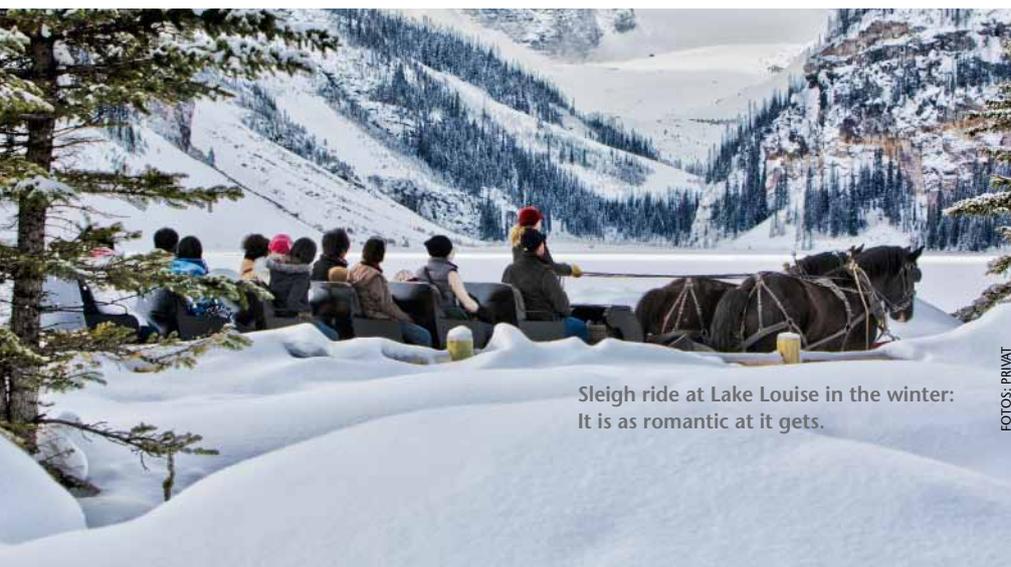
radiates calm and quietness. He is not only responsible for the cattle on the farm, but mainly for the management of the horses. Without further ago, he puts a missing shoe back on the horse – after all, this is what the 61-year-old has been doing all his life. And even the used horseshoes are of use for the taciturn farmer: For the Dance Barn in Lake Louise, a vast and self-built log cabin for events of all kind, he built a more than 20 metres high Christmas tree out of old horseshoes.

## Everybody gets involved

But I also have to salute (quite literally) his wife Janet. The perky business woman is on Kananskis ranch responsible for the organisation of things, but she also accommodates and cooks for large gatherings in the on-site “donut” (a round cabin with a hole in the roof, underneath which they can light big log fires) as well as in the lovingly decorated Dance Barn. Corporate events, birthday parties or weddings – they can all look forward to juicy pieces of beef, served in proper style on a pitchfork with baked potatoes and salad, to a country band and lessons in line dancing. Furthermore, Janet Brewster has renovated and restored the more than 100 years old Guesthouse, up to eight people can enjoy their holidays here with a sensational view over the Bow river, the woods and the adjacent Rocky Mountains. And even people who are not interested in horses get their money's worth: In 2002, Janet's tireless father Bud built a modern 18-hole golf course directly at the ranch, which is in full use for guests over the summer months. Kevin's and Janet's younger daughter Bailee is a veterinarian, but

is neither calm nor quiet, it is rapid and spectacular. They gallop up and down the hills, some escapees might even have to be roped back. The Wild West is alive!

And it is very much alive in the boss himself: Kevin Stanton is a textbook example of a cowboy with a Stetson and well-worn Chaps, a voice like rolling thunder and hands like frying pans, but most importantly with the manners of a true gentleman: there is no door that he would not open for me, he helps his guests on and off the horses and



Sleigh ride at Lake Louise in the winter: It is as romantic as it gets.

FOTO: ADVENTUREHAKS

FOTOS: PRIVAT

now she wants to switch: She is currently in Europe to become a human surgeon.

## A real empire

Over the course of many years, the Brewster family had created a true little empire. The Brewster Mountain Lodge, a hotel in the enchanting town of Banff, which is conducted by Janet's sister, is also part of this. The reason that everything nevertheless emanates a very familiar atmosphere is the family itself. "With us, real people pick up the phone", Janet Brewster explains emphatically. "We do not want people to call us and to be fobbed off with a robot or an answerphone." This direct connection to Canada has one unbeatable advantage: You can talk about anything. Technically, the Brewsters "only" offer three opportunities for horseback holidays: the rides in lake Louise, which can last from mere hours to a full day, and the sleigh-rides in the winter respectively, as well as two- and four-day-trips in the back country.

However, if they are groups that wish to stay a little bit longer, everything will be made to measure. "We can organise custom made trips and arrange everything", stresses Lacey Stanton. Normally, the riders organise their way to the ranch themselves, often in rental cars or caravans. If required they get also picked up from the airport in Calgary, which is one hour away. The most important thing is authenticity, as Lacey explains: „Our guests want the real thing, no cheesy staff or kitsch and no fake wild west romanticism. Often we get requests from people who want to come to ‚a real working farm‘ to help, but basically, this is not what we are. My Dad breeds and sells his cattle, but that is more of a hobby.

We are not a classic cattle station."

The special thing about Brewster adventures is the fact that the guests do not have to bring anything, as Kevin Stanton tells me: „At our pack trips, we take care of everything. Our guests do not have to bring sleeping bags or pillows, everything is there in our cabins. As one of the only hosts, we have solid accommodation and no tents – it is much safer." The safety aspect is indeed a very important one, after all the Rocky Mountains are not only home to cougars and wolves, but also to black bears and grizzlies. Especially when they have cubs, you do not want to get too close to them.

It is very important to the Brewsters to cater for every guest's requirements and needs. No matter whether it is an experienced rider or a total rookie – everybody is supposed to enjoy their holidays and be happy and safe. Just a few days before I arrived in Canada, Dr. Heinrich Middelmann, a dentist with his own dental clinic closed to Munich, was on a pack trip with his wife – both of them are beginners and only had two riding lessons beforehand at a western riding ranch in Germany: "We were on a trip for three days with two overnight stays and it



FOTO: PRIVAT

really was exceptional. It was wonderful and we had no problems at all, not even with sore muscles. And as we had worn long johns as recommended, not even our bums hurt."

## How to organise a trip

Of course it is not really worth flying all the way to Canada from Europe for just a two

## Im Kampf gegen die Kälte



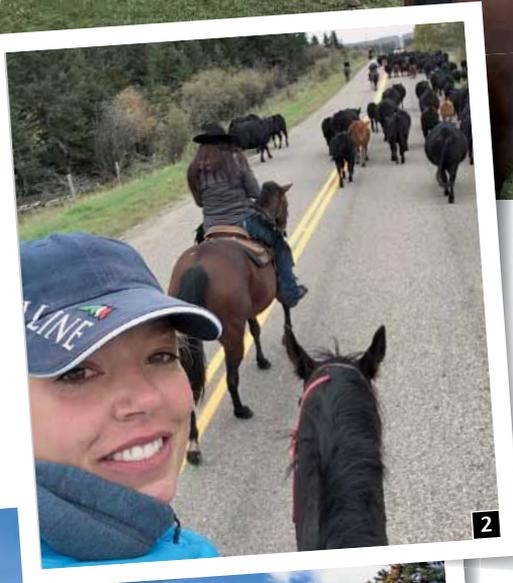
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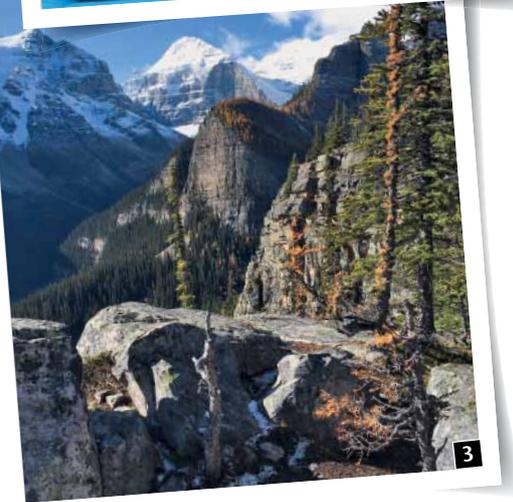


FOTOS: PRIVAT

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or three day riding holiday. However, if you look at all the things the country has to offer around the Kananaskis ranch, it does make sense. Banff is only three quarters of an hours away in the middle of a gorgeous national park, which lends itself to hiking, climbing or all sorts of outdoor activities in the winter. Hot springs invite the holidaymakers to relax, cute little shops for a little stroll. The small town with its less than 8000 inhabitants ist he ideal stopover on the way to Lake Louise, where from June to October horse friends can take the rides to the teahouses or the Plain of Six Glaciers I have already spoken about. All other outdoor enthusiasts can go hiking, rock climbing, rafting or kajaking.

**Many things to explore**

In the winter from December to April, there are romantic sleigh rides in the deeply snowed in landscape. Calgary, the nearest city, is a must for showjumping fans especially in September, when the legendary show ground Spruce Meadows hosts the Rolex Master, a five star event for the best riders in the world. All

those interested in Western riding should come two months previously: At the beginning of July, the Calgary Stampede takes place, an enormous agricultural exhibition with shows, rodeos, wagon races and much more. And the city itself is certainly worth a visit: Compact and neat, it combines tradition and a modern spirit, you can find interesting museums as well as great shopping opportunities. In the Jasper national park, a bit further down the road to the North-West, there are plenty of possibilities to spend a day with or on a horse. And for all those who do not feel like doing anything, who want to enjoy the feeling of endless freedom and expanse, who want to find themselves and peace and quiet – look no further. You will just have to listen thoroughly and then you will know how it sounds: The Sound of Silence. <<

Find more information under: [www.brewster-adventures.com](http://www.brewster-adventures.com)

- 1 Real cowboy life: When cattle is moved from the summer to the winter pasture...
- 2 ...every helping hand is needed. Even I can join in – and it is great fun!
- 3 You just can't get enough: There is a post-card motive behind every single corner.
- 4 No disturbing lights: In the back country, the sky full of stars and the milky way are close enough to touch.
- 5 Breakfast in the corral: The horses stayed outside all night.



FOTO: ADVENTUREHAKS





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