



*Longhorns at the Silver Spur Ranch often mosey along for the hayride.*

first dude ranches, such as the Prude (still operating as a guest ranch in the Davis Mountains of West Texas), the Gallagher west of San Antonio (now a venue for corporate retreats and private parties), and the Buck near Bandera, opened to vacationers during that decade. One of the Buck Ranch's neighbors observed wryly, "You can run more dudes to the acre in these hills than you can cattle."

Bandera styles itself as the dude-ranching center of Texas, and it still holds the reins on the state's "horsepitality" industry. A dozen or so dude and guest ranches as well as more sophisticated equestrian centers lie within 15 minutes of the self-proclaimed "Cowboy Capital of the World."

Many more guest ranches operate around the state. A cadre of small-scale ranches near the Metroplex caters

to clients booking corporate events, reunions, and weddings. Others, like the 30,000-acre Cibolo Creek Ranch south of Marfa and the Wildcatter Ranch near Graham, northwest of Fort Worth, pamper guests with luxury lodging, gourmet cuisine, and spa amenities.

A few other spreads, such as the Lazy F Guest Ranch, an hour east of San Antonio in South Texas, and the Bar H Dude Ranch in the Panhandle, remain closer to the cowboy way, providing true-grit, butt-in-saddle trail-riding experiences that transform city slickers like me into Gus McRae wannabes.

Here are four of my favorite guest ranches in Texas. I return to them time and again because the stars seem brighter, the nights quieter, and the days longer when