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Grand County: An Adventure-Filled Family Destination

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A family vacation to Grand County, Colorado, promises horseback riding, whitewater rafting, alpine sliding, hiking.

By [Judy Koutsky](#) September 15, 2017

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“This is the best vacation ever,” my eight-year-old announced on day one of our stay at [Drowsy Water](#) ranch, a family-friendly dude ranch located in [Grand County](#), Colorado. My boys, ages 8 and 6, had been on pony rides, but never an actual horseback ride, so I wasn’t sure how they’d do for a week on a ranch with back-to-back rides. Turns out, I did not have to worry. Jack took to his horse, Cooper, immediately. Matthew, my younger guy, equally loved his horse. And I developed a nice little bond with my horse, Sleven.

I’m always up for an adventure vacation, but I wasn’t sure if we were horse people. A week on a ranch seems like a serious commitment, but I figured why not give it a try. This ranch was specifically recommended because it’s so family-friendly. The first day we got lessons (both the adults and kids) on the basics of horse behavior and how to handle them on a ride. Then we met our horse and went out on a short trail ride. The magic had begun.

While the food and accommodations are basic, we were hardly ever in the room and we didn’t come to the ranch for a steak dinner. Instead, our family is all about activities. In addition to daily horseback riding (both half day and full day rides), there’s whitewater rafting, hiking, fishing, yoga, mountain biking, hayrides, a carnival, and more. My kids were entertained constantly, which allowed me to relax and enjoy myself.

While there are many dude ranches out there, Drowsy Water is unique because of its size with 52 people at its max, a staff of 32, and the fact that it’s family-run. Ken and Randy Sue Fosha have run the ranch for 42 years and their sons, Ryan and Justin, along with Justin’s wife Gretta are hands on, leading rides, making the food, and overseeing the nightly entertainment (including square dancing).

The ranch is open Memorial Day through Labor Day, and the beginning and end of the season are the cheapest times to go. There’s also a returning guest discount, which gets used a lot since there’s a 50 percent repeat visitor rate. The ranch also attracts multigenerational travelers. While we were there, there were three such groups. Also, a lot of ranches don’t take kids younger than 3, but Drowsy Water takes babies (there were two there during our stay).

Don't come expecting a luxury vacation, but if you're looking for an authentic dude ranch experience with lots of fun, you've come to the right place. It's a rustic ranch for adventurous families.



Families can go horseback riding at the Drowsy Water dude ranch.

Prior to the dude ranch, we spent two nights in [Winter Park](#) at Zephyr Mountain Lodge, at the base of Winter Park Resort. The upscale accommodations were nice and spacious; we had two bedrooms, two baths, plus a balcony, full kitchen, and living room.

While at Winter Park, we unitized the full-day activity pass which included the alpine slide (600 vertical feet above ground and more than 3,000 feet of winding track—my kids loved it); the bungee jump (a trampoline that lets you do flips and somersaults);

a miniature golf area; a rock wall; and a human maze. Not only were all the activities right there, but there were plenty of restaurants in walking distance, including my kids' favorite: Goodys Mountain Creperie. The next day, we hit the newly opened [Winter Park Adventure Quest](#), an aerial adventure park. This climbing adventure consisted of platforms fixed to utility poles with elements connecting each platform, such as swinging logs, rope bridges, cargo nets, and balance beams, all of which my high-energy boys loved.

Post-dude ranch stay, we went to Grand Lake, where we stayed right on the lake at the [Western Riviera](#) in the Treehouse room, which had two bedrooms, a full kitchen, a living room, and a balcony overlooking the lake. There were plenty of water activities here, including stand up paddle board, boat rides, paddle boats, and kayaking. Plus, Rocky Mountain National Park is only a short drive away with amazing hiking options.

It was a week of full-on adventure—horseback riding, whitewater rafting, alpine sliding and hiking—and for this New York family, it was the perfect vacation.

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Main image: The author and her family in Grand County, Colorado.

Photos by Judy Koutsky

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Judy Koutsky is an award-winning writer and editor and her work has appeared in over 30 publications, including Conde Nast Traveler, Travel + Leisure, Redbook, Parents, Scholastic, and Prevention. She writes often about travel, parenting, health, and lifestyle. Follow her [@JudyKoutsky](#) or visit her website [JudyKoutsky.com](#).

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