



1 CARMEL VALLEY RANCH, CALIFORNIA

Sprawled over almost 2025ha in the heart of wine country, a short drive from Monterey, the all-suites Carmel Valley Ranch, operated by Hyatt, offers adventures from yoga and hiking to falconry and beekeeping. Signature equine experiences were introduced in 2021, led by Dr Robert G. Magnelli (also known as “The Horseman”); three offerings invite guests to “forge bonds and find joy” through equine interactions. “Horses do not resonate with high energy and anxious energy, so he (Magnelli) teaches participants how to find comfort in spending time with these majestic animals,” a Carmel Valley Ranch spokesperson explains. The Equestrian Mindfulness program focuses on building “present moment awareness”, while an Equines and Wine option allows guests to sip local drops in the horses’ presence. Equines and Wine, 90 minutes, \$US165 (\$245) a person; Equestrian Mindfulness, 120 minutes, \$US390 for up to two guests.

carmelvalleyranch.com



3 THE AERIAL, BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS

The Aerial is a private 17.5ha island wellness resort in the Caribbean. Beyond the hiking trails, spa and open-air beach gym, guests can mosey down to Redemption Ranch to join an equine-assisted healing program. Activities might include brushing the horses to build trust and foster connection; leading through an obstacle course to promote problem-solving skills; or swimming with equine companions just for the sheer joy. Redemption Ranch rescues horses from equine kill pens, with five horses, six ponies and four zebras once destined for slaughter now rehabilitated and playing a pivotal role in the program. Other therapy partners are retired racehorses. Many have faced neglect, abuse or abandonment, making selection a task that considers their potential for forming positive connections with humans and building resilience and strength and renewal. Brushing and Bonding or Mindfulness and Grounding options, 60 minutes, \$US50 (\$74) a person.

aerialbvi.com

LEAD THE WAY

From the ranch to the round yard, equine therapy can help holidaymakers find peace

DENISE CULLEN



2 GWINGANNA LIFESTYLE RETREAT, GOLD COAST, QLD

It’s just me and Jack in the round yard and the 26-year-old horse won’t do anything I ask. “Pick up the rope, lean into the step, and breathe in,” says Sharon Kolkka, who’s facilitating this small-group Equine Assisted Learning session. I try again, lifting my chest, taking a stride, and urging brightly, “Come on, Jack.” But still he won’t budge. Kolkka asks, “Do you believe he’s going to walk with you?” I pause. I reply in a tentative way that I hope sounds positive. Then she shows me how to apply just enough pressure to the rope to get Jack moving. It’s an educational moment about persisting in the face of resistance, and gently upping the ante to get a desired outcome. “We’re interested in what the horses show us about connection, relationship, leadership, confidence and mindset,” says Kolkka. “The horse literally becomes the mirror of you.” Group Equine Assisted Learning, 180 minutes; \$235.

gwinganna.com



4 PINK SPIRIT WELLNESS RETREATS, JORDAN

The red sand desert of Wadi Rum, in the south of Jordan, is the setting for Pink Spirit Wellness Retreats. Over two to eight days, these retreats, run by Sandra Jelly, include activities such as yoga, breathwork, chakra meditation, sound healing, and private camping amid the lunar-like landscape with a Bedouin guide. Working with a herd of local Arab horses and a donkey, the retreats also involve equine-assisted systemic coaching. These sessions involve time spent with the horses, and a family constellations therapy approach aimed at uncovering the hidden dynamics within a family or group. “It’s about (seeing) what belief patterns and trauma are working in (a client’s) life,” Jelly explains. The horses’ sensitivity means small movements can have deep impact. “We not only work with the herd, but with the elements, medicine wheel and ancestors.” Two-day Soul Spark retreats \$US315 (\$484); 11-day Desert Horse retreat that includes Petra and the Dead Sea from \$US1798.

pinkspiritjordan.com



5 NIHI SUMBA, INDONESIA

NIHI Sumba is a boutique all-villa property on Sumba Island in East Indonesia, located an hour by plane from its better-known (and busier) neighbour Bali. With lush rainforests, waterfalls, and white-sand beaches, it’s an enchanting destination to explore on foot and is popular with surfers, snorkellers and stand-up paddle-boarders. In-house guests at NIHI Sumba can participate in varied equestrian activities, including sunrise and sunset beach rides, cross-country trail rides and ocean swimming with the island’s herd of “sea horses” or sandalwood ponies. It’s even possible to view a mini pasola demonstration (a traditional mounted spear-fighting competition). The resort has also a five-day Retreat and Conquer program that blends group and equine therapy, plus the Ride and Recharge option, which views horse-human interactions as integral to healing; from \$US2100 a person, twin-share. Seasonal variations apply.

nihi.com