

Activity holidays

Travel on Trial Meet Bailey, my four-legged therapist

Facing a key life change, Amber Gibson heads to the Arizona desert to commune with a horse

‘Come on, buddy,’ I whispered, stroking the soft nose of my horse as I attempted to lead him through a stone maze under the sweltering desert sun. “I know it’s hot out, but we’re almost there.” I was at Miraval Arizona Resort & Spa in Tucson, a holistic health retreat that first opened its doors in 1995 and was acquired by Hyatt hotels in 2017.

Miraval is known for its equine programming, but there are no trail rides here. The experiences at Miraval use horses as a form of therapy, whether it’s painting on the side of one, meditating with one or connecting with a four-legged friend to identify patterns in your life that might be holding you back. I booked the Journey to Self, Miraval’s newest equine activity, which uses horses to simulate the archetypal “hero’s journey” developed by Joseph Campbell in his 1949 comparative mythology book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.

There were four of us working through the hero’s journey that afternoon, with equine facilitator Carolyn Knowlton, who has been at Miraval for 16 years. Knowlton has a psychology background and the first hour of our Journey to Self resembled a therapy session. Although we were among complete strangers, Purple Sage Ranch overlooking the Santa Catalina Mountains felt like a safe haven. We were sitting in a semi-circle under a dusty canopy as the horses patiently waited for us in the ring. Within minutes, with Knowlton’s encouragement, we had introduced ourselves and revealed our deepest fears and struggles to one another. One of us was there to heal and nurture herself after experiencing devastating losses of loved ones, while another was torn with her career, struggling to maintain integrity and professional values at her workplace.

For my part, I was at a crossroads. I’d lived a nomadic lifestyle throughout



JAMES BANGRE

my twenties as a freelance journalist, spending up to 350 nights a year in hotels, yet now I was on the precipice between the familiar and the unknown. I was about to embark on the adventure of moving in with my boyfriend, marking the first time I would live with a partner. Was I ready to settle down? To commit to a relationship? I hadn’t even seen our new apartment yet, but my boyfriend had already signed the lease. Would I be able to cope?

It was time to meet the horses. We stepped into the ring, with one-on-one time to touch and talk to each horse. I looked each horse in the eye while smiling,



▲ Make an equine friend in the Arizona wilderness

▼ Amber takes the reins of her horse – and her life

ing, and either stroked their shoulders, or ran my fingers along their strong flanks, noticing the differences in how each horse responded to me. I chose to lead the one that seemed to like me the most – a rich chocolate-brown horse named Bailey who had been at Miraval for 24 years. The other women were all struggling to get their horses to venture from the comfort of the shade into the arena, where there was a series of obstacles around which we would guide our horses.

“Horses live in the moment and are incredibly mindful,” Knowlton said. “So we must live in the moment to connect with them.” That’s never been a challenge for me, and almost immediately, Bailey was following me towards the maze entrance in the arena centre.

The maze was constructed of stones laid in the dirt, forming a path that led to the middle. There were also several platforms we could attempt to lead our horses on to, and wooden stakes planted in the ground, like in a slalom race, around which we could weave our horses. There were no rules to follow; there was no prescribed path to take. We could choose which obstacles to tackle and in whatever order we liked.

Maybe I just got lucky with picking the most amenable horse, but I couldn’t explain why I was successful when oth-



▲ ‘Complimentary classes, such as aerial yoga, mean everyone leaves more relaxed’

‘Horses live in the moment and are incredibly mindful. So we must live in the moment to connect’

ers were not. I noticed that so long as I looked where I was going, and not back at my horse, he followed me. Sometimes I needed to make the lead rope looser and let in some slack, but if I strode confidently forward, he stuck with me. I took this as a metaphor for my next steps in life.

“We need to complete these journeys to be fulfilled,” Knowlton told us. I always thought I would be completing my life’s journey more or less alone. I am close with my family and have a few dear friends whom I adore, but my personal anthem for years had been G-Eazy and Bebe Rexha’s *Me, Myself & I*. For the first time in my life, I found myself with a partner who was strong and steadfast, somebody I believe will stick with me like Bailey did, even through the deepest abyss. I just need to love fully and fearlessly and see where life takes us.

Two-hour Journey to Self equine experience at Miraval Arizona £76 pp; rooms from £775 single occupancy, including all meals and an array of health and wellness classes. British Airways (ba.com) flies to Tucson from Heathrow via Dallas or Chicago. Overseas holidays are currently subject to restrictions. See Page 3.

THE

VERDICT

Instruction

★★★★★ Knowlton was kind and compassionate, a horse lover who made us immediately feel at ease. The journey itself is free-form, though – there are no rules or guidelines. It’s up to you where you want to guide your horse.

Animal magic

★★★★★

I wish we could have spent a little more time with our horses. By the time we got in the arena, we had less than an hour and there were only three horses between the four of us to share.

Resort life

★★★★★

Miraval is the ultimate wellness retreat, with myriad complimentary classes to fill each day and nutritious meals to fuel your adventures. Everyone seems to leave happier, healthier and more relaxed. You can even go to dinner in your plush robe – no judgement.



cruise.co.uk
The Real Cruise People

In association with



CHILE • PERU • ECUADOR • MEXICO • COSTA RICA

FROM ONLY **£2,599^{PP}** **UNBEATABLE VALUE**
INCLUDES FLIGHTS, HOTELS, CRUISE!

LATIN AMERICA VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY

FREE UPGRADE INSIDE TO Oceanview

DEPARTS	INSIDE	OCEANVIEW	BALCONY	MINI SUITE
16 MAR 2022	£2,699	£2,699	£3,099	£3,899

DEPARTS	INSIDE	OCEANVIEW	BALCONY	MINI SUITE
16 MAR 2023	£2,599	£2,599	£3,099	£3,899

✓ FLIGHTS & OVERSEAS TRANSFERS INCLUDED—CALL FOR REGIONAL FLIGHTS

✓ 2 NIGHTS 4★ CENTRAL HOTEL STAY IN SANTIAGO, CHILE

✓ 18 NIGHTS PREMIUM FULL BOARD ON SAPHIRE PRINCESS*

✓ FREE UPGRADE INSIDE TO OCEANVIEW

✓ FREE TOUR COSTA RICA RAINFOREST, WILDLIFE AND BEACHES

✓ PORT STOPS IN CHILE, ECUADOR, MEXICO

✓ ON BOARD FINE DINING AT CRAFTED BY CURTIS STONE

✓ CATCH MOVIES UNDER THE STARS

✓ WORLD CLASS SHOWS IN THE PRINCESS THEATRE

✓ ABTA AND ATOL PROTECTED

*16 March 2023

EXCLUSIVE FREE GUIDED TOUR

RAINFOREST, WILDLIFE & BEACHES OF COSTA RICA

A breathtaking adventure into the Costa Rican rainforest to spot the poison dart frog, monkeys, lizards & more. After you will journey to the Tarcoles River, famous for its large American Crocodiles & one of the largest crocodile populations in the world! Your tour ends in the city of Puntarenas where you can sample fresh seafood and lounge on the beautiful beach.

FREE UPGRADE INSIDE TO OCEANVIEW

18 NIGHTS DISCOVERY CRUISE
PREMIUM FULL BOARD

DAY 1-2 Fly UK to Santiago, Chile Transfer to 4★ Central Hotel for 2 nights

DAY 3 Santiago, Chile, at Leisure Time to explore this lively city bustling with the sights and sounds of Latin America

DAY 4 Embark Sapphire Princess If you’ve booked an Inside, you’ll discover you’ve been upgraded to an Oceanview Stateroom with our compliments!

DAY 5 La Serena, Chile famous for its long beaches and the landmark Faro Monumental lighthouse. Don’t miss the pre-Columbian Diaguita and El Molle cultures exhibits in the Archaeological Museum

DAY 6-7 The Andes Glide Past as you cruise

north, with time to indulge in on-board experiences. Try ‘Chocolate Journeys’ or dine at the delicious ‘Crafted’ by celebrity chef Curtis Stone

DAY 8 Pisco, Peru Gateway to the uninhabited Ballestas Islands, home to sea lions, pelicans, Peruvian boobies and Humboldt penguins. Nearby is the Paracas Candelabra geoglyph, a huge hillside etching of mysterious origins

DAY 9-10 Lima, Peru (overnight) The second-driest world capital, rising above a long coastline of cliffs where pre-Columbian temples face Pacific breakers. In the nearby desert are the vast Nazca drawings in the sand – are they the ‘largest astronomy book in the world’?

DAY 11 Luxury at Sea You’re spoilt for choice of restaurants. Try Sabatini’s, the specialty Italian restaurant voted one of the “Best Cruise Ship Specialty Restaurants” by USA TODAY

DAY 12 Manta, Ecuador Bars and restaurants are clustered along the Malecón Escénico promenade and nearby streets, while the low-key Tarqui Beach has a waterside fish market. Manta features spectacular watersports – the beach at San Mateo noted for the longest waves for surfing in the country

DAY 13 Luxury at Sea Entertainment is lavish on board: enjoy Movies Under The Stars, a world-class show at the Princess Theatre, or simply unwind in the Freshwater

Pools and Hot Tubs

DAY 14 FREE GUIDED TOUR: Costa Rica Rainforest, Wildlife and Beaches

DAY 15-17 Luxury at Sea Unwind on a padded lounge and soak up the sun, catch up on reading, listen to music or dream of your next adventure on board or ashore. And don’t forget, there’s always a server nearby to bring you a refreshing cocktail

DAY 18 Puerto Vallarta, Mexico a resort town on Mexico’s Pacific coast, famous for its beaches. Its cobblestone centre is home to the ornate Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe church, boutique shops and lively restaurants and bars

DAY 19 Cabo San Lucas, Mexico Swim the

transparent waters, relax on the white-sand beaches or try some of the finest sportfishing in the world

DAY 20-21 Luxury at Sea It’s no surprise the shops on board are awarded “Best Onboard Shopping” from Porthole magazine year after year: Swarovski, Chanel, Estée Lauder, Clinique, Lancôme, Calvin Klein, Citizen and Tissot, plus local crafts and souvenirs

DAY 22 Disembark Los Angeles Transfer to the airport for your overnight flight home

DAY 23 Arrive UK

ABTA
78024

TATA

CLIR

NO RISK
FLEXIBLE
CANCELLATION TERMS
See our website for full details.

Talk now to our expert Cruise Consultants.

0330 303 8263

Mon – Sat: 8.00am – 10.00pm Sun: 9.00am – 10.00pm | **cruise.co.uk**

All fares are per person and based on two adults sharing. Deposits paid are non-refundable. Please see Cruise.co.uk for full terms and conditions.

Lily

Lisa

George

Holly

TO GET THIS OFFER
QUOTE CODE

LATIN AMERICA TELEGRAPH