Travel on Trial Meet Bailey, my four-legged therapist

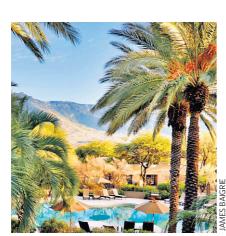
Facing a key life change, Amber Gibson heads to the Arizona desert to commune with a horse

ome 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



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, markpartner. 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.

stepped into the ring, with one-on-one time to touch and talk to each horse. I looked each horse in the eye while smil-

Make an equine

▼ Amber takes the reins of her

 $ing, and\,either\,stroked\,their\,shoulders, or\,$ 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. which we would guide our horses.

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



and are incredibly mindful. So we must live explain why I was successful when oth- in the moment to connect' *****
Knowlton was

THE

VERDICT Instruction

kind and compassio nate, 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

> Animal magic I wish we

could have

your horse.

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.

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but my personal anthem for years had been G-Eazy and Bebe Rexha's Me, robe – no Myself & I. For the first time in my life, judgement. 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.

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 meta-

neys to be fulfilled," Knowlton told us.

I always thought I would be complet-

ing my life's journey more or less alone. I am close with my family and

have a few dear friends whom I adore,

Two-hour Journey to Self equine

rooms from £775 single occupancy,

including all meals and an array of

health and wellness classes. British

Heathrow via Dallas or Chicago.

Airways (ba.com) flies to Tucson from

Overseas holidays are currently subject

experience at Miraval Arizona £76 pp;

"We need to complete these jour-

phor for my next steps in life.





yoga, mean everyone leaves more relaxed'

Horses live in the moment to restrictions. See Page 3.



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