

Saddle up and see the world

Whether you live out the gaucho lifestyle in Argentina or trot off on an African safari, a horse-riding holiday puts you at the heart of the action

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What's the attraction?

Horse riding offers a gentle pace at which to explore a location, whether it's a trek across East Yorkshire, a taste of the gaucho lifestyle on an Argentine estancia or an experience of the day-to-day life of a cowboy on a dude ranch. Even if you've never ridden a horse before, there is plenty of opportunity for immersion, whether it's on a learning holiday or combining riding with another element such as a safari or gourmet break. In the Saddle (01299 272 997; inthesaddle.com) offers a "Learn to Ride in a Week" holiday in the Azores with departures in February, April, May, June and July. A week costs from £781 per person, excluding flights from the UK.

Safari in the saddle

Encountering big game from the back of a horse is an unforgettable way to see Africa's wildlife, although only experienced riders should apply. A new offering is a horseback safari in Botswana, split between a camp in the Kalahari Desert and fly-camping in the Makgadikgadi Salt Pans. Riders explore acacia forests and the "Land of One Thousand Islands" (vast plains dotted with palm trees) with the chance to see zebra, wildebeest and meerkats. Aardvark Safaris (01578 760 222; aardvarksafaris.co.uk) offers the seven-night itinerary from £3,190 per person, including full board, all safari activities and internal flights; international flights are not included.

Galloping gourmets



Proficient riders can enjoy unspoilt mountain trekking in the Serranía de Ronda while discovering the local cuisine on Ride Andalucia's "Gallops for Gourmets" itinerary (10 and 17 March; 00 34 952 151 614; rideandalucia.com). Guests get to explore this enchanting part of southern Spain and meet producers of the region's gourmet specialities. In the evenings riders return to a historic cortijo with views of the Straits of Gibraltar for cookery lessons, dinner and bed. Seven nights costs from £2,160 per person, with transfers and accommodation with most meals, but not travel to Spain.

Pukka chukkas

Experience the traditional life of an Argentine cowboy or "gaucho" with the chance to try your hand at polo at Los Potreros in the province of Córdoba in central Argentina. Home to the Anglo-Argentine Begg family, this 6,000-acre working farm with an antique-filled house at its centre, breeds Peruvian Pasos horses and is also home to criollo steeds traditionally used for farm work and polo. Journey Latin America (020-8747 8315; journeylatinamerica.co.uk) offers three nights of B&B at Los Potreros from £691 per person. International flights not included.

Cultural canterers

Have a Lawrence of Arabia-style adventure on a nine-night trip in Jordan with Ride World- wide (01837 82544; rideworldwide.com). Explore the desert with six days' riding between Wadi Rum and the breathtaking "rose-red city" of Petra, which was rediscovered 200 years ago this year. Pass through empty valleys, towering canyons, sleep under the stars and see Bedouin camps along the way. The trip departs throughout May, June, July, August and September (June and September are likely to be more comfortable for riding) and the price of \$1,925 (£1,283) includes accommodation, riding, guides, transfers and most meals, but excludes flights from the UK.

Horsing around

Riders can bring their own four-legged friend to experience itineraries devised by Ride Yorkshire (01439 798 108; rideyorkshire.org). It offers trips across swathes of countryside, ranging in length from one to five days. Its newly introduced Wolds Wanderer explores the rolling countryside, panoramic views, historic villages and stately homes of East Yorkshire via a network of quiet bridleways and country lanes. The five-day ride costs £400 per person and includes b&b, luggage transfers, route descriptions, maps, packed lunches, horse box parking and guide.

Horse and snow shoeing

You don't need a pair of skis to enjoy the snow. The Riding Company (01534 745 795; theridingcompany.com) offers "Ride and Ski" weeks among the Alpine peaks of Austria. Staying at the Hotel Schlosswirt, novice and experienced riders

explore the wintry scenery of Hohe Tauern National Park, on native Haflinger horses. There is also the chance to take to the slopes of the Grossglockner Heiligenblut ski area. A five-night Winter Trekking Short Break costs £448 per person, half-board with five hours of riding and a sleigh ride as well as transfers. Flights extra.

Ride 'em cowboy

Ranch holidays are a perennially popular choice, whatever your riding ability. You can saddle up for a week of cattle drives and rides in the Rocky Mountains at Hidden Hollow, a cattle farm in Montana, with Ranch Rider (01509 618 811; ranchrider.com; £1,119 per person full board. Flights extra).

If you prefer to ride in luxury try Dunton Hot Springs (001 970 882 4800; duntonhotsprings.com; doubles from \$700 (£467), full board), in the Colorado Rockies, where after a day in the saddle you can ease aching muscles in thermal springs.

You could join a cattle drive in June, July or August with a stay at the Cottonwood Ranch (001 775 752 0817; cottonwoodguestranch.com; doubles from \$275 (£183) full board), set in a remote corner of Nevada.

Finally, proficient riders can spend three nights on a camping horse drive in Idaho with American Roundup (01798 865 946; americanroundup.com). Six nights from £984 per person full board, flights extra.

Who said that?

"A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!" – *Richard III, William Shakespeare*

"No hour of life is wasted that is spent in the saddle." – *Winston Churchill*

"A canter is a cure for every evil." – *Benjamin Disraeli*

Insider information

"Be really honest with yourself about your riding ability and experience. You cannot get too fit for your holiday. I frequently hear from guests, 'I wish I had ridden more before coming...' Your enjoyment is increased and the chance of a muscle and back problems decreased if you are riding fit." – *Sally Vergette, owner, Ride Andes (rideandes.com).*