

How about a visit to Siena or Florence with In the saddle?

An Italian Job

WORDS and IMAGES : In the Saddle

Visitors to Tuscany go for a variety of reasons. Some may go in search of fine art, others explore the extraordinary countryside, many will go for the fine wine and sumptuous food, while riders and walkers enjoy exploring the mountain paths and rolling hills.

In this box of delights, In the Saddle can offer riders the chance to soak up the atmosphere with their Castellare di Tonda ride starting at your base for the week at the Castellare an 800 acre working wine estate and Quarterhouse stud farm dating back to the Renaissance.

The estate is situated close to Pisa and Florence, above the beautiful medieval village of Montaione, close by to Lucca and Siena. Owners Stefano and Alessandra are passionate about their horses, shown by their investment in the facilities at the stud farm and equestrian centre. The estate runs a herd of over fifty horses. Trail horses are a mix of Criollo's, Fjord horses and Quarterhorses.

The surrounding hills and



countryside offer varied trails for all levels of rider. The soft Tufo sand provides excellent footing for lovely long canters even during the dry summer months when ground elsewhere is often hard. Each trail has been designed to include a variety of landscapes, from shady Mediterranean forests to rolling golden grain fields, vineyards and olive groves. You can even stop for a refreshing gelato while riding through a medieval village, visit ancient castle ruins in the middle of a forest still

inhabited by wolves and wild boar and enjoy a paddle with your horse in the estate's own lake followed by and Italian style BBQ and a taste of the farm's own Chianti wine. Visit a friendly artisan for an aperitif at his workshop or discover medieval castles and abandoned churches on horseback

All horses are ridden western style with a loose contact and the riding is suitable for novice to experienced riders. There are gentle horses for beginners and more spirited ones suited to experienced riders. Speed is mixed with lovely canters for those able and for novice riders a calmer pace, enjoying the wonderful landscapes on sure footed horses. All riders are asked to sign a disclaimer as the riding includes some steep mountain trails and riders may be required to dismount for small sections and walk with the horses.

On the first day you are collected from either Pisa or Florence airport



Castellare di Tonda, Tuscany



◆ and transferred to the farm with time for a swim and a late evening drink on the terrace while meeting your guide and other riders.

In the morning expect a lovely meet with your horse, his tack and then a gentle walk to the lake. In the afternoon a dirt trail takes you the medieval Montaione village, meet Riccardo, a local artisan and then take a lovely canter through fields of wildflowers before returning to your home. The next two days see wonderful rides and sights with the third day as a free day to roam as you will. Perhaps a visit to Siena or Florence. The last two days again take you through magnificent and majestic scenery ending with

and groups of mixed ability. The week includes twelve hours of riding, which can be a mixture of lessons and trail rides. Accommodation is in a Tuscan Style self catering

apartments built on the castles and Tonga estate, each coming with its own swimming pool.

Children aged 12 years and over and are competent riders, are welcome to join their family on the trail while children seven years and over can enjoy Western lessons in the arena. Saddle bags are provided for carrying essentials but jodhpurs, riding boots or leisure boots with half chaps, a fleece for the evening, waterproof coat and hard hats should all be brought by the rider. Available April to October duration 7 nights from £829.

For further details visit www.inthesaddle.com **NM**

