

'I'd be bored stiff on a beach'

Thinking about a riding holiday? Caroline Bankes asked the equi-trip cognoscenti to share their insight on the best venues, value and how to prepare for the trip of a lifetime



Patagonia is growing in popularity as a riding holiday destination...



...thousands of miles away, Iceland is on the up with riders, too

THE riding holiday brochures paint the dream – all those happy souls cantering through the Okavango Delta make you want to get the credit card out there and then. But is the picture accurate? Was the smiling rider in the photo struggling with a horse that pulled by day while fighting off bomber-sized mosquitoes at night? What's the secret to the perfect riding holiday? *H&H* finds out by talking to the riding holiday veterans who've done it all.

Where to go and what to pack

ELISE FREEDMAN

A riding holiday devotee

ELISE has been on many trips and she stresses how important it is to get the mix of riders right.

"The first time I went to Iceland, there were 10 Germans," she says. "They were not interested in speaking English, which spoils the otherwise great trip. Last year I went to Iceland again – there was a thorough mix of different nationalities and we all had a great time."

Elise says her most memorable experience was on safari in Botswana, while her worst was riding a Connemara trail in Ireland.

She explains: "They were three hours late picking us up, the horses were not groomed properly and they didn't have their own tack. It was very poorly organised."

As a result of this experience, Elise does a lot of internet research before booking her holidays.

"If you book with the ride organisers directly, you usually get a better feel for the place," she adds.

HUGO DE FERRANTI

Master of the Mid Devon hunt

HUGO, 48, has been on about 20 riding holidays all around the world, including eight trips to Kenya, a 400-mile trek across Argentina, Georgia, Spain – twice – Morocco, Greece, Bulgaria, Tanzania, and many parts of Asia including Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

His most recent was to Jordan where he spent his honeymoon riding "fantastic little Arab horses through the desert". All his trips have been organised through Ride Worldwide, a Devon-based company run by Nigel and Ruth Harvey.

"For people who go hunting, a riding holiday is the only one to go on – they would get bored stiff on a



Hugo de Ferranti enjoying one of his many trips (*H&H* strongly recommends wearing a hat)



For people who go hunting, a riding holiday is the only one to go on. It's damn good fun

Hugo de Ferranti



Most memorable experiences

Riding fantastic Arab horses through the desert and experiencing different cultures

Hugo de Ferranti

Five-star accommodation and galloping with the giraffes in Botswana

Elise Freedman

A trip to Okavango Delta. It was extraordinary — there is no horizon, the terrain just goes on and on

Tim Corballis

Trotting past zebra and watching a sleeping cheetah

Caroline Banks

» beach,” he says. “You get to ride strange horses and experience different cultures.”

Hugo takes a riding holiday each spring and says the cost is “half the price of a day ski pass and a damn sight more fun”. Every trip has been memorable and the only place he is not quite so keen to return to is Morocco as he had to ride stallions, which made chatting to fellow riders tricky. He also found that the horses were not treated as well as on other trips.

As a seasoned traveller, Hugo has a list of holiday essentials: tea bags, a silk sleeping bag liner, a shortwave radio, so he can listen to the World Service, half chaps, a waterproof coat and gloves, as “the reins can be ropey”.

Enjoying amazing scenery

CAROLINE MOOREY

A riding holiday addict

CAROLINE has been on five riding safaris to Rajasthan and can't wait until the next one at Christmas.

On one of her early trips, she arrived at a camp to be greeted by a seven-gun kalashnikov salute. The experience was washed down by plenty of neat alcohol and followed by a good party. She is now “totally hooked” on riding holidays and Patagonia is at the top of her wish list for new destinations to visit.

According to Caroline, one of the best things about riding holidays is the chance to explore remote areas.

“We are riding where the tourists don't go — it is really off the beaten track,” she says.

Caroline always packs a real sheepskin seat saver (not a gel one because it can make you sweat), knicker elastic (to tie the camera onto the D rings of the saddle), a universal sink plug, a tin of Zam-Buk (often known as first-aid in a tin) and she always wears canvas half chaps. A sun hat cover for your riding hat is an essential for reducing the risk of sunburn and heatstroke.

TIM CORBALLIS

Combines his holidays with working at Coolmore Stud

THE Peruvian paso horse gave Tim, 52, his first taste of a riding holiday.

When not holidaying, Tim is part of the sales team at the legendary Coolmore Stud in Co Tipperary. He has been on five riding holidays with his wife Clare, usually they go with hunting friends from the Tipperary, and all bookings have been made through Ultimate Travel.

The couple have been to Jordan, Botswana and Argentina, while Clare has done a couple of Spanish riding holidays. They plan to go on one riding holiday every year, with Rajasthan next on the agenda.

“As an *Indiana Jones*-type of holiday it is very good value,” says Tim, who admits he's not good beach

Where's hot to trot?



South America offers riding in remote and beautiful territory

material. One of his most memorable trips was to the Okavango Delta. “It was extraordinary — there is no horizon, the terrain just goes on and on.”

On one occasion his camera got him into trouble with an elephant who decided he didn't want to be photographed and charged, but the horse got him out of it quickly.

Being fit is a riding holiday essential, says Tim.

“Even if you are going for five days it is important you are riding fit,” he reasons.

His other tips are to pack for the climate, get the right jabs and malaria tablets, respect the guide, remember to pack your own medical kit with essentials, and above all, have a sense of humour.

“It is a great opportunity to meet new people. We've made some great friends from our holidays,” he says.

ALISON LAWRENCE

The mum of two works full-time, but loves travel

LONDON-based Alison has been on six riding holidays and goes away every other year with a group of six



As an *Indiana Jones*-type of holiday it is good value and it's great for meeting people

Tim Corballis



Sally Evans, 49, is a Hampshire-based brand manager. She has been on seven trips in as many years, five to Africa, one to Portugal and another playing polo in Argentina. ‘Over the years we've been going on riding holidays we've collected like-minded people on the way,’ she says. ‘For our next trip, we have enough friends to fill a ride of eight to 10 people.’

H&H reveals the up-and-coming riding holiday destinations

SOUTH AMERICA

ADRIAN DANGAR of Wild and Exotic (www.wildandexotic.co.uk, tel: 01439 748401) says there is a growing interest in the continent from riders.

"The area, especially Patagonia, has so much to offer," he says.

Adrian's company also runs rides across the Andes and in Argentina and, over the next two years, he intends to develop a holiday in Brazil.

The Andes trip combines a luxury stay in Buenos Aires with camping in remote parts of the Andes and costs from £2,250 per person (excluding flights).

ICELAND

THE country is becoming very popular, according to Emma Getliffe of Have Horses Will Travel (www.hhwtravel.co.uk, tel: 01303 862996).

"The beautiful volcanic scenery and the appeal of riding the Icelandic horse draws people there," she says.

The company only runs holidays in the summer months when temperatures reach the mid-teens. There are 15 different itineraries and, from 2009, golf can be incorporated into trips to make it more suitable for non-horsey partners.

SPAIN

JUST a few hours away from the UK by air or sea, Spain is increasingly popular with riders.

Equestrian Escapes (www.equestrian-escapes.com, tel: 01829 781123) has noted this trend and one of the company's most popular holidays in 2007 was "Horses, Sun and Wine", which was based in southern Spain and designed for riders of all levels.

The company's Sarah Caplan says the holiday is for those "who love life as well as horses!"

UK

PROVING that you don't have to travel far afield to enjoy great riding, more and more people are holidaying at home.

"In the past few weeks, I've noticed that the UK has become really popular," says Sarah Caplan. "One of our most booked trips is a riding skills one in Cheshire — you can even bring your own horse and prices start at £225 per person for two nights and horse hire."

Dawn Williams of Equine Tourism (www.equinetourism.co.uk, tel: 01984 640668) says she gets more enquiries about the UK than anywhere else.



There's great beach riding in Spain — and it's only a few hours away



Alison Lawrence (far right) loves the thrill of riding holidays

friends, most of whom she met on her travels. She has ridden since she was five, but the only riding she does now is on holiday.

"We're an eclectic mix of people — all professionals who want a real escape," she says.

Last September, the group set off to South Africa.

"The horses were very good but the terrain was not open enough — there were too many fences in sight," says Alison.

The next trip will be in 2009 and the options under discussion are Tanzania, the Limpopo Valley or Argentina. Her children are too young, but she'd love to take them on a riding holiday when they are older.

In February 2007, my family set off to Kenya on a riding holiday. Ride Kenya sorted my non-horsey husband out with a kindly mount and I'll never forget the grins on my children's faces, then aged 11 and 13, as they trotted past zebra and stood stock still to watch a sleeping cheetah.

When our guide said, "This is the best canter in the world," we soared up a ridge to stand with Kilimanjaro in the distance, specks of grazing giraffes far below and the everyday worries of home a million miles away. **H&H**

Top tips

- ▶ **Do your research.** Before booking a trip, make a shortlist of where you'd like to go and be honest with yourself about how much you want to spend. Be sure to carry out thorough research on both your destination and the holiday companies you're considering booking with.
- ▶ **Alone or with friends?** Many holiday companies offer trips specifically designed for single, like-minded travellers. If you intend to take non-horsey friends or family with you, check whether there are alternative activities to keep them entertained.
- ▶ **Be honest about your riding.** Don't exaggerate how proficient you are in the saddle. Most holidays cater to riders of all levels — you will not enjoy your trip if you feel the riding is beyond you.
- ▶ **Get your cover sorted.** Riding holidays are not automatically covered in all insurance policies, so ensure your cover is adequate before travelling.
- ▶ **Travel essentials.** A sun hat (to go over your riding hat), chaps, waterproofs (even in hot countries), a first-aid kit, gloves, a sheepskin seat saver, a universal sink plug and tea bags.

ARE you a riding holiday regular? Share your best and worst experiences with H&H by emailing us at HHletters@ipcmedia.com

Trips to suit every budget

Up to £850

▶ One-week camping among dramatic scenery in Turkey can cost as little as £475 with Ride Worldwide (www.rideworldwide.co.uk, tel: 01837 82544).

▶ A week in Austria touring the Spanish Riding School with the head of the Lipizzaner Society of Great Britain is £819 with flights at Have Horse Will Travel.

▶ Three days at Morgado Lusitano in Portugal starts at around £500, including lessons from the principal rider of the Portuguese School of Equestrian Art (Equine Tourism).

▶ A two-night break improving your riding in Cheshire is £225, which includes horse hire (Equestrian Escapes).

£850-£1,600

▶ Discover unspoilt Romania, from £880 a week with Ride Worldwide.

▶ Wild and Exotic offers six nights in the Limpopo Valley in Botswana from £1,350, and nine nights at Wadi Rum in Jordan (£1,150).

▶ Ride through California's redwood forests, £1,185 for six nights with In The Saddle (www.inthesaddle.co.uk, tel: 01299 272997).

£1,600-plus

▶ Ten nights' safari in some of Africa's best big game country — Kenya's Loita Hills and the vast Masai Mara — costs from £3,600 (Ride Worldwide).

▶ A chance to experience India on horseback, including rural Rajasthan and the famous annual Pushkar cattle fair in November, starts at £2,650 for 15 nights with Have Horse Will Travel.

▶ In The Saddle offers polo playing holidays in Argentina for every level of rider. Prices start at £1,180 per person for four nights.

* Please note prices quoted are per person and exclude flights, unless otherwise stated. Prices correct as H&H went to press.