

HOLIDAYS IN THE SADDLE

Four stunning holiday experiences

Cover
feature

INDONESIA

Anna van Rheeden

Havana Horse is located in Central Java in an authentic village with a comfortable tropical climate, coffee plantations, bamboo and coconut trees and ricefields. It is a paradise for horses, and people come from all over the world to enjoy trekking holidays, trail rides, lessons and courses in natural horsemanship and natural horse care.

Here they do things the natural way. Their methods are greatly inspired by the works of Klaus Ferdinand Hempfling and Carolyn Resnick. The horses live outside in a big herd of 15-20, just as in the wild, and all lessons start with leading the horse out of the field. Then you take the time to get to know the horse, and introduce yourself as a gentle, kind and clear leader by doing liberty work and ground work.

"It is tremendously satisfying for us that people, from beginners to the most experienced riders, have thrilling and eye-opening experiences with our horses" explains Anna van

Rheeden, who runs Havana Horse. She continues, "To experience a horse happily following your lead, without any ties attached, is just amazing! Our guests really get to feel how subtle and sensitive horses are." These barefoot horses are ridden without bit, spurs or any other means of force.

Havana Horses is open all year for six months of dry and six months of rainy season. There are programmes for all horse lovers, from absolute beginners to advanced riders. Clients receive individual coaching and will ride in groups of a maximum of four. Intensive courses of between one and fourteen days can be tailored to your requirements: liberty work and groundwork to develop your leadership skills, riding with the bareback pad to develop your independent seat, classical dressage and jumping are fun with a bitless bridle or just with a neck ring.

Between midday and 2pm, the hottest part of the day, a delicious Javanese

lunch is served on the cool veranda, overlooking the paddocks. At 4:30pm you are taken back to your comfortable, green hotel in Salatiga.

You can also enjoy trail rides watching authentic village life and buffaloes working in the rice fields from horse back. Advanced riders can have a most exhilarating experience on the nearby racetrack where you can let your horse go and feel the acceleration, barefoot and bitless of course.

New trekking programmes of three to twelve days can be enjoyed by riders, but your spouse, friend or child, who may not feel as comfortable on a horse as you do, can also join the treks on a mountain bike. You ride approximately five hours in a day in all gaits, through amazing landscapes with terraced rice fields and views over mountaintops. Guests stay the night together with the horses in a comfortable home stay in an authentic Javanese village.

www.havanahorses.co.id

THE GOWER

Jenni Nellist



The Gower Pony Experience is the ultimate natural horse holiday, spending your days among the native, free ranging (semi-feral) hill ponies who are in complete charge of how they live their lives. You get to see how their social lives really unfold, and how they really interact with the changing environment they live in. Here we let the ponies do the talking while everyone gets another layer of understanding in their horsemanship journeys.

On last October's Autumn Watch holiday we met Lyra, lone mare Lily's only daughter. We watched her awkward, tentative steps to make friends with the neighbours' foals. She and a very young colt were figuring each other out, dancing to and fro, growing in confidence. Then, like all babies, returning to mother for a rest!

Another morning, eight year old brothers, Blaze and Star, and their band ran around the hill to meet up with extended family. The photo opportunities were stunning as Blaze and Star took turns to play with a younger cousin. The lessons in horse play were fascinating, watching each playmate controlling the heat of the game, pausing when it was too hot, and winding it up as confidence grew.

We questioned why more ponies

don't get hit by vehicles. Their behaviour around the road was calmly confident. When cars slowed up, ponies took command. We watched one traffic-stopping blonde, a palomino colt from the Broadpool group, repeatedly stepping out and bring cars to a halt.

Eager to take home a lesson directly applicable to our own horses, we also set out to see how ponies coped with spooky objects. We planted a hi-viz vest in the middle of groups on the paths they were clearly taking. The young were generally keen to take a good look, smell and sometimes, taste, squabbling for first dibs. A secure and confident pony enjoys exploration. Older mares were more blasé, having seen so much human junk before.

Is this a journey worthy of your bucket list? Residential and non-residential trips are available. Join us for this year's Autumn Watch in October. There's a comfortable Gower Bunkhouse, meals are vegetarian and each morning and afternoon is spent with the ponies, watching and recording what they get up to. You tour guide, Jenni Nellist, will assist you in honing your observation skills, helping interpret the ponies' behaviour.

gowerponyexperience.wordpress.com

COLORADO

Judith Turner



I spent my first night at Lost Valley Ranch in the Rocky Mountains in my beautiful log cabin and woke up to fresh mountain air and the smell of horses.

It doesn't usually take me long to get used to Western riding but there is good tuition available for beginners. They usually have two rides a day, each about two hours long and, if conditions are right, a day ride with picnic lunch gives the opportunity to explore far and wide.

The ranch was hit in 2002 by the Hayman Fire, the fastest moving forest fire in Colorado history. It was a miracle that the ranch buildings and horses were saved. The black trunks of the pine trees make a startling contrast to the rest of the greenery and we commented that snow would make this a photographer's paradise. We all spoke too soon! The next day the worst snowstorm since 1913 hit parts of Colorado. Lost Valley got at least three feet and we couldn't ride for one and a half days. It is testimony to the great camaraderie at the ranch that we still all had great fun. We spent one day clearing snow off the barn roof and from the corral, we all huddled round an enormous fire in the evenings and when riding resumed we had to start off slowly but once we had opened up the trails and the sun got to them we were able to explore again.



PATAGONIA

Judith Turner

The rides here are divided between different levels of experience so there is no nose to tail riding and experienced riders can lope and gallop and even jump over small logs. The ash run off from the fire had made some of the streams black and, although the horses didn't seem to mind drinking this, some of them were reluctant to cross over so we had a few enormous leaps!

The food at the ranch is first class as are all the amenities. It is one of the few 'four diamond' rated ranches and this is the place to go to chill out. You do have to make some of your own entertainment. There is no television although each cabin has radio and a CD player. Every Saturday is the square dance, which is good exercise and hilarious to watch. Once a week when there are enough guests there is the 'programme' which consists of sketches, songs and cowboy poems performed by the very talented and musical staff. The ranch has a high proportion of loyal returning visitors who value the quality and friendliness of the staff and I certainly feel as if they are my American family.

There are two horsemanship weeks each year when specialist trainers give tuition in Western riding. Riding this wilderness is a dream come true for me.
www.lostvalleyranch.com

I had always wanted to visit Argentina and I chose Estancia Huechahue because of the brilliant reviews and because it is owned by Jane Williams, originally from the UK, so I knew my very basic Spanish would suffice.

The brochure promised that if I arrived by 6pm, I would get an evening ride. By somewhat of a miracle I made it and by 6.15 I was mounted on my first Criollo horse, Lucero. We got back about 8.30 and it was still hot and light.

After a few days the other guests had left so I had rides all to myself. My guide was a very rare breed, a female gaucho or gaucha. Amelia had all the authentic clothes, red beret, red sash, baggy bombachas and a wide leather belt. She was very knowledgeable, very kind and spoke excellent English.

I rode seven different horses over the week and all were very reliable and well trained. We rode over the estancia, by the rivers and up to caves with ancient petroglyphs. We cantered or walked mostly but the soil was so dusty it could at times obscure the track and even the horse in front. It was also very windy but that kept us relatively cool. When we got to the high altitudes we could see the volcano, Lanin, and the black dust in some places was a reminder of the eruption the previous year from a

volcano in Chile.

On a couple of days we had proper jobs to do moving cattle from one pasture to another and rounding them up for transport the following day.

The evening meals were an adventure. Lots of hunks of meat and bizarre puddings. We had great lunches though, either brought to us or transported in our large saddle bags. After a simple bacon and eggs breakfast we set out at 10am and then were in the saddle all day apart from a long siesta in the heat of the day. It was a great place to ride and learn about the history, although there's not a lot of variety of countryside and it's very arid so there's not much wildlife to be seen.

The saddles are a McLellan type covered with thick sheepskin which gives the advantage that you sink into the wool and if the horse spooks you never move. They have a tied cinch and then a second cinch goes over the sheepskin so the only disadvantage and source of much getting on an off and adjusting was that if the saddle slipped everything had to be dismantled and shifted and re-fixed.

Also the stirrups are very far forward so you are not meant to get off quickly. I never got saddle sore!

www.huechahue.com

