

ITALY – TUSCANY: RIDING IN THE CHIANTI FOOTHILLS NEAR FLORENCE

8-day / 7-night GUIDED 'English saddle' horse rides and sightseeing for experienced riders *



Founded in 1970, this well-known horse-riding centre is high above sea level on the slopes of the Chianti hills with splendid views over the Arno valley. Riders and guests stay in a comfortable Tuscan farmhouse. There are six bedrooms, all with private bathrooms, a large dining room and a sitting room with plenty of books and a log fire on cool evenings. At mealtimes guests sit at a long table together with their hosts. Our cook prepares delicious Tuscan dishes, accompanied by Chianti wine. The atmosphere is relaxing and friendly.

For experienced riders there are fixed-date residential programs of 5-8 days combining riding with walks, sightseeing and cultural and gastronomical visits. Quiet rides for novices and longer, faster rides for the more experienced. The surrounding hills, with their olive-groves, vineyards and extensive woodlands offer a variety of itineraries. The stables are behind the house, and the horses graze daily in the nearby paddocks. There are twelve horses, mostly Italian bred and carefully chosen to suit all ability levels. The saddles are English style and instructors / guides are experienced and friendly. In the ring surrounded by olive trees riders can improve their flat work and jumping. You may help to groom and feed the horses.

DISCOVER TUSCANY RIDING & SIGHTSEEING TOUR

Duration: 8 days (7 nights)

Cost from: \$2695 per person (twin share or single, if available)

2019 Dates: 6th - 13th April; 27th April - 4th May; 18th - 25th May; 28th September - 5th October

Includes: Florence pick up and drop off, three half-day rides, two whole-day rides, a fun Italian lesson, guided cultural excursions to lesser known attractions including the art-city of Arezzo, all accommodation, all meals with a choice of wines (except for lunch on free day).

A TASTE OF TUSCANY RIDING, WALKING & ART-CITY TOUR

Duration: 5 days (4 nights)

Cost from: \$1455 per person (twin share or single, if available)

2019 Dates: 6th - 10th April; 18th - 22nd May; 1st - 5th June; 21st - 25th September, 28th September - 2nd October

Includes: Florence pick up and drop off, two half-day rides, one whole-day ride, guided touring to Arezzo, a guided walk in the woods, perhaps to a medieval tower, all accommodation, all meals with a choice of wines.

INSIDE TUSCANY RIDING, WINE-TASTING & CHEESE FARM VISIT

Duration: 8 days (7 nights)

Cost from: \$2695 per person (twin share or single, if available)

2019 Dates: 8th - 15th May; 9th - 16th October

Includes: Florence pick up/drop off, three half-day rides, two full-day rides, a gourmet restaurant lunch, guided walking on Pratomagno Mountain, a cheese farm and winery visit, comfortable accommodation, all meals with wine and coffee (except lunch on free day).

Call OUTDOOR TRAVEL on 1800 331 582 for details and reservations



Suggested itinerary: (based on abilities, weather and other factors decided by the guide each day – all riders MUST be able to trot and canter on a well-trained horse, those who can't may not be allowed to join the rides).

Day 1: Own arrangements to reach Florence main railway station (Firenze Santa Maria Novella). At 17.50 you are met usually by your host, Jenny Bawtree or her son, Nicholas and accompanied on a forty-minute train ride to Montevarchi and then on a 10-minute journey by minivan to Rendola Riding, a 400-year-old typical Tuscan farmhouse. Settle in and enjoy a chat and a glass of Chianti Classico wine in the garden or sitting room. Dinner and overnight at Rendola.

Day 2: After breakfast meet the horses in the stables behind the house. Set off on a two and a half hour ride through the olive groves, vineyards and woodlands of the Arno valley, passing near an 11th Century tower and a 14th Century church. In the afternoon perhaps a siesta, then a guided walk to introduce you to the local flora and fauna or an Italian lesson. For supper a choice of genuine Italian style pizzas.

Day 3: After breakfast a two and a half hour ride in the wooded hills north of Rendola, scattered with charming hamlets and traditional farmhouses. After lunch we visit the ancient city of Arezzo where we have a guided tour of the fascinating, world-famous frescoes of Piero della Francesca at the Church of San Francesco, then visit the town's main square, the Piazza Grande, which may be familiar from the film *Life is Beautiful*. There is a chance to do some shopping – Arezzo has a history as a centre for goldsmiths and jewellers and there are still many artisan jewellery workshops here. We return to Rendola for dinner.

Day 4: A full day of riding in the Chianti hills south of Rendola, with some five hours spent in the saddle. We pass the medieval village of San Leolino, with its 12th Century parish church, and the contrasting castles of Cennina, a 12th Century ruin, and Lupinari, an early 20th Century work by Italian architect Gino Coppedè. At lunchtime a splendid picnic spread is served.

Day 5: Free day. You may like to go sightseeing in Florence (if Jenny is available she will gladly guide you to the main sights), or visit the hill towns of Assisi or Orvieto – all are an easy train journey from Montevarchi and you can be dropped off and picked up from Montevarchi station. Or, if there is enough interest (minimum 4 people), your host will arrange a wine-tasting visit to Montepulciano and Pienza (at extra cost and paid locally). Breakfast and dinner are included today; lunch is at your own arrangements.

Day 6: Either a morning ride or a guided visit to Montevarchi for its famous weekly market – a good chance to pick up bargains. Lunch at a gourmet restaurant in Loro Ciuffenna, a medieval village built round a ravine on the other side of the Arno valley. We return to Rendola, and in the afternoon have either a good ride or a lesson with our British Horse Society-accredited instructor.

Day 7: A final full-day ride, five hours in the saddle, to the top of the Chianti hills behind Rendola. Our lunch is a BBQ on the ridge next to a boar hunters' hut, then we ride back to Rendola passing by the village and castle of Montegonzi.

Day 8: After breakfast you are driven to Montevarchi to meet the train for Florence or Rome.

Non-riders welcome on all these tours and may undertake other sightseeing while others ride – ask for details

ART LOVERS: RIDING AND FRESCOES

In March/April and October, there are one week tours especially for those riders who are also art-lovers. This combines half-day rides in the Tuscan countryside with a look at the frescoes of Florence, Siena, San Gimignano and Arezzo. Please ask us for more details.

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What you need to know about Rendola*: This is a small family-run farm on the slopes of the Chianti hills with views over the Arno valley. It is 5km from the nearest train station Montevarchi (on the Florence-Arezzo line). It is easy to reach by car or by train, while still located in lovely countryside with panoramic views.

Rendola is not for people who are looking for elegance. Hens and ducks peck around the house, the family dog lies on the doorstep, and you may find the cat curled up in your chair. A recent arrival is Emmelina, a charming Tibetan goat. Rendola is first and foremost a riding centre: the stables are immediately behind the house, and horses graze in the surrounding paddocks. No one has to dress up on any occasion. Non-riders are welcome, of course, but they must not be shocked at the occasional whiff of manure!

The house itself is clean and pretty, but it is after all a family home, with books spilling out of the shelves and jackets hanging on the back of chairs. But this is what appeals to a certain kind of client. In fact, they hardly feel like clients, more like honoured guests. Jenny is happy to welcome country-lovers to her home and guests quickly become friends. The place is suitable also for single people, who will here feel looked after and cherished. Single guests can have a room to themselves if bookings allow. But if they wish to ensure this, it may be possible for an additional supplement (please ask when booking). At mealtimes the guests all sit together at a long table and there is plenty of merriment as well as good food.

The Tuscan cooking is, of course, a great attraction and at Rendola, Franca the cook has a large repertoire of pasta, rice and meat dishes. Sicilian born, Franca came to live in Tuscany as a small child so as well as Sicilian dishes she is also expert in Tuscan cuisine, often running cooking classes for guests. Vegetarians are well catered for. A lot of the vegetables are sourced locally, the olives for the oil are picked on the premises and eggs are all home produced.

Jenny founded the riding centre a good many years ago and while she is still riding she now dedicates most of her time to writing books - *'Tuscany on horseback'* is her latest publication - and to organising the sightseeing activities that Rendola Riding offers, as she is very knowledgeable about Tuscan history, art and architecture.

Then there is Eraldo, a qualified British Horse Society instructor who has worked at Rendola for many years and is now in charge of all the riding activities. An experienced and much loved instructor and guide, he knows a lot about Italian fauna and flora, is a keen fisherman and hunter - and is a charming fellow too! Marco, whose grandfather Pietro was the cook at Rendola for thirty years keeps up the family connection and works in the stables, while Gianni is an excellent Mr Fixit, being an excellent plumber and much else besides.

While riding is Rendola's main activity, Jenny will sometimes take small groups to Florence, Arezzo and Siena, to visit the churches with their magnificent frescoes. Wine-tasting trips to Montepulciano and Pienza can be arranged and paid for locally for riders and non-riders.

*** All riding holidays have a mandatory travel insurance requirement specifically covering horse riding.**

Riding holidays are available in many other areas in Europe, particularly Italy, France or Spain. **Outdoor Travel** also offer guided or self-guided walking or cycling holidays in Tuscany and in many other areas of Italy and across Europe. Bike & Barge or boat cruising holidays are also available:

Contact OUTDOOR TRAVEL for more details and reservations

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