

Riding, rafting and relaxing - Slovenia is full of surprises for England's Equestrian reporter, Anna Bruce.

Treks of the unexpected...

Resting place.

The challenge: relax and recharge in under 24 hours

The destination: Slovenia

The solution: The Riding Company



If you'd told me it couldn't be done I'd have believed more in the challenge, but tell me to relax and I'll give you a list of reasons why I can't.

Put me on a plane to Slovenia – well Austria actually and then transfer me by car across the mountains of Italy and then



Scary but exhilarating white water rafting.

into Slovenia – and this trip is beginning to sound more like I'm digging my own grave than enjoying a getaway break.

Cue first surprise – the drive through the mountains is stunning and gives me two hours in which to switch from busy bee to me.

It seems as though The Riding Company director, Kat Tiefenthal, on whose shoulders the solution is resting, knows more of these mountains than many others as she explains to me that she's visits ten riding establishments for every one she is actually prepared to add to her books.

But even so, I can scarcely believe there's a community high up in these hills, let alone a secret holiday location.

Crossing a bridge over the Soca River and twisting around an old barn, Kat then introduces me to my hosts – Silvia and Milan Dolenc of Pristava Lepena.

Silvia is a linguist and chats merrily in English while Milan is also a happy conversant – the former civil engineer with several years' experience working in the USA having been the driving force behind their holiday community.

Their restaurant is the talk of the nearby towns and they even have a cosy bar in

the cellar that offers almost soundproof parties to take place!

Tucked away under the steep rocky outcrop of the mountains that surround them on all sides are several apartments – enough for a maximum of 50 guests, a swimming pool, sauna, hot tub, tennis court and small stables.

After a leisurely lunch however, it is to the river that I am headed.

It's a haven for all watersport lovers and fishermen are frequently standing in the cool water that takes on the colour of the sky or trees around it thus ranging from a startling turquoise to a deep green.

We head to a highly-recommended rafting centre just a few minutes away and I'm soon on the banks of the river, listening to a safety briefing and donning a hard hat and lifebelt before climbing in.

10km later and the white-water rafting is over, I've a grin from ear to ear and my internal batteries have had a distinct recharge.

Back to base and a leisurely dip in the pool followed by a hot shower in my charming apartment has me freshened up and ready to hit the bar.

There are only a handful of others there



Linda stands patiently for the photographer.



Winding through the woods.

so there's an amiable atmosphere and the wine lovers among them marvel at the selection on offer from the wine list – it appears the local vineyards have quite a reputation.

My wild boar supper is delicious - like nothing I've tasted before - and I head for a deep sleep forgetting all that I left behind just a few hours before.

The following morning and a lavish and leisurely continental breakfast is followed by meeting my mount for a morning ride along the riverbank.

Known for their spirited nature, Milan

has talked lovingly of his handful of Lipizzaner horses, one of whom he rescued as a young stallion.

Mine, however, is a homebred, and while the black former stallion snorts and stamps like his breeding intended, my mare, Linda, is patient and kind.

An hour's hack takes us down hill and through the river, enabling us to enjoy a canter through meadows of wild flowers and wind our way through the woods with wild strawberries under the horses' hooves.

The groom takes over on our return so

that I can then enjoy another dip in the pool and shower before enjoying a quick bite for lunch and heading back to the airport.

Time had almost stood still – a day away has felt like weeks and although I'm now looking forward to work again, it's refreshing to know that one can feel a world away from it all without having to add light-years to one's life.

Kat entices me to stay with tempting offers of trips to the Lipizzaner breeding and training centres, wine-tasting opportunities, to try my hand at fishing or just to finish the novel I've been writing but she's accomplished the mission far too well.

While I'd love to return a weekend at a time to take on each of these activities, to have had the opportunity to ride and raft and recharge was wonderful and Kat's inventiveness in providing a break to fit anyone's budget and desires has opened my mind to see the World in a new way.

For your chance to try combining your passion for horses with a new sport or spa, check out

www.theridingcompany.com

what to wear

Lipizzaners are the choice of many dressage divas and to get the look I chose Mountain Horse's low-waisted Annabel breeches coupled with a funky long-sleeved shirt. Completing the look with petrol blue leather Tyler gloves from their range and professional looking long leather High Rider II boots, I settled into the saddle easily.

Guests are advised to bring their own hat and with comfort, style and fit my priorities, I chose the Charles Owen Show Jumper XP which topped off my outfit perfectly.

For more information visit
www.charlesowen.co.uk
www.horsemasters.co.uk



Meandering gently downstream.