



Above: The Dienstl Estate is home to one of Austria's top riding centres. Right: Amanda ready for action



Main: Polo is great for getting the adrenalin up! Below, from top to bottom: Practise stick and ball on a wooden horse; play indoors when the weather's bad; polo ponies waiting patiently

Anyone for polo?

Then why not combine the game with an overseas holiday? *Horse&Rider's* Sales Executive, Amanda Toms tried it Austrian-style

After a short flight into Klagenfurt airport in Austria, our team was transferred by minibus to the 400-year-old Dienstl Estate – home to one of Austria's top riding centres, with the beautiful medieval Hochosterwitz Castle as the backdrop.

On arrival, we were briefed on how to use the equipment, then it was time to saddle up our ponies, ready for our first stick and ball session.

Yes, this was out on the polo field – nothing like throwing yourself straight into something!

Hitting the ball proved a bit of a challenge, but after several attempts at hitting turf, I finally made contact with the ball. And we were



off, walking and trotting in pursuance of the not-so-fast travelling ball. Our group was a mix of people who had played before and others, like me, who were trying it for the first time.

After the first session, everyone was beaming and adrenalin was running high, so we headed back to the hotel for a rewarding sauna and a

“I thought polo was only for the elite, having never tried it before”

traditional Austrian meal – regional cooking is a speciality here and the staff even dress in traditional Austrian costume. The evening was spent going over the day's events and discussing tactics for the next day.

Indoor polo

Next morning it was wet, so we resorted to the indoor polo school for our first chukka. The rules were explained and off we set on eight fiery

chestnut ponies, mainly mares, as they have the feisty temperament for this game. After someone attempted, but failed, to hit the ball, I grabbed my chance and by some miracle, managed to hit the ball not once, but twice in a row, scoring our first goal. Hurray!

Lunch was enjoyed at the Hochosterwitz Castle, but it wasn't

long before we saddled up again for our full game. This time we were playing outside, and a mixture of excitement and fear was felt by all as the chestnut fleet made their way onto the field. Galloping flat out with seven other polo ponies all vying for the ball, was one of the most exhilarating experiences of my life. In fact, I enjoyed it so much that I thought I'd practise my stick and ball skills on my own horse when I got home. However,

he had his own ideas about this and showed no desire to be a polo pony, so I'm hoping that one day I'll get the chance to relive the experience.

Riding extras

The riding school offers tuition for novice and intermediate riders, and has first-class trainers for dressage and jumping – there are 14 horses and ponies for adults and children.

You can go trail-riding in 1,000km.

There's an indoor riding hall and a power-ground jumping arena.

And for non-riders...

Lake Worth is great for swimming and relaxing.

Visit the cultural centre of Klagenfurt and the walled city of Friesach, with its famous summer medieval pageant.

See the federal Lipizzaner stud farm.

There are six golf courses.

Visit the beautiful medieval Hochosterwitz Castle and museum.

Travel information...

Polo instruction is available from April through to October. A one-week holiday (excluding flights) with The Riding Company costs £850, and includes half-board accommodation at the four-star hotel, 10 polo sessions and three massages, plus full use of the sauna and steam room. Or a four-night short break (excluding flights) costs £660, and includes half-board accommodation at the four-star hotel, 10 polo sessions and three massages, plus full use of both the sauna and steam rooms. Non-riders pay £525 for seven nights or you can stay for four nights for £345.

How to get there...

You can fly with Ryan Air – Stanstead to Klagenfurt. It's £45 for a return flight (including taxes) – but bear in mind that prices may vary. There's a 45-minute transfer by road to the Dienstl Estate.



For more information

Contact The Riding Company on
 ☎ +43 4284 2044311/0207 846
 0033 info@theridingcompany.com
 www.theridingcompany.com

