

Riding holidays round-up

Planning a horsey get-away in 2011? Then let our holiday round-up guide help you make the right choice

An Austrian adventure

Haflingers, mountains and guaranteed snow. Who could ask for more from a winter riding holiday?

The Riding Company offers holidays all-year-round and winter breaks are proving more popular as British riders get to experience snow in a more positive light! In the UK, riding is confined to arenas in winter, but in Austria you can ride out in spectacular settings.

Penny Roberts, Head of Austrian Holidays at The Riding Company talks to Toni Sauper, Mountain Guide at the Schlosswirt Hotel in Carinthia, about how he keeps his horses fit, happy and healthy.

Q Which breeds cope best in these snowy conditions?
Without a doubt, in Austria, it is the native Haflinger. Compact, sturdy and sure-footed, they are the ideal mountain horse and they remain unclipped throughout the season. The Kroller Hotel in Tirol has Criollo horses of South American origin, renowned

for their endurance and ability to cope at altitude.

Q Do the horses live in or out?
The Schlosswirt herd are turned out from nine to five every day, in all weathers. They're stabled overnight in winter, but can't wait for their roll in the snow each morning. Hay is made available for them, too.

Q Are they shod?

Special shoes are a must in winter, not just for hacking but also for pulling the sleigh. The shoes are inlaid with a rubber ring that protrudes slightly within the inner side of the shoe to provide grip. Snow studs are used for extra grip on ice. You can prevent snow forming balls on the sole of the foot by applying Vaseline or a similar grease.

Q Do you groom them?
Yes, once they are dry after work they are brushed with a rubber curry comb

and dandy brush to remove any dry sweat and aid muscle tone. A body brush is ineffective on the winter coats and we don't want to remove too much of their natural grease, which they need for warmth. We leave their manes and tails long and natural like most of the British Native Breeds.

Q What time of day do you ride out?
The Haflingers are more than happy to be ridden out after dark and Moonlight rides are a feature at the Schlosswirt Hotel. When there is a good moon, it is never really dark. Sleigh rides after dark are also popular, and passengers are provided with plenty of blankets and a warming schnapps en route!

Top tip
Watch out for the snow-spray from the rider in front when you are cantering.

Top tip

Take a camera! The views are amazing and you'll want to remember the experience!

Q How do you advise riders to look after themselves when riding in these conditions?

Riding in cold conditions at altitude burns up much more energy than your average hack, so make sure that you prepare with a hearty breakfast. Alpine food is often high in carbohydrates for a good reason!

Pack your sunscreen! Yes, it's winter, but a good, strong sunscreen with UV block is recommended for those hours in the saddle. It also moisturises your skin against the effects of the cold and wind. Lip salve is highly recommended, too.

Q How do I pick the right centre for me?
Ask yourself whether you are experienced or a novice. Do you want to canter through snow or trek at a more leisurely pace? Would you like to combine lessons on warmbloods with hacks on Haflingers? All are possible, but you need to ensure

that you select a destination that has the right horses and facilities to cater for your needs.

Try skjöring

Have a go at this winter sport, where you ski behind a horse – like waterskiing on snow! This sport dates back to Sweden 2500 BC and it was a simple means of winter transport by peasants. It was also presented as a demonstration sport in the 1928 Olympics in St Moritz.

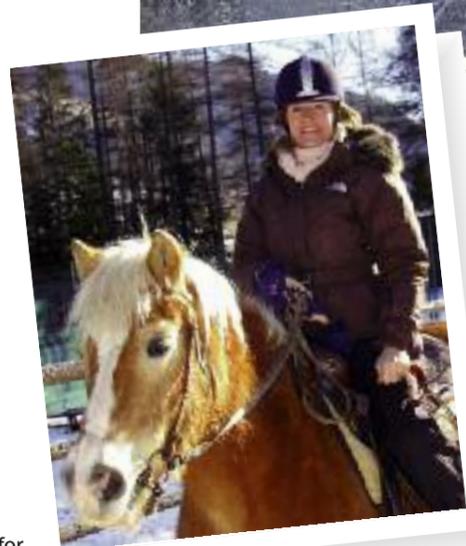
If you wish to give it a go, you must be at least 16 years old and a good parallel skier, but no riding experience is necessary.

For more information

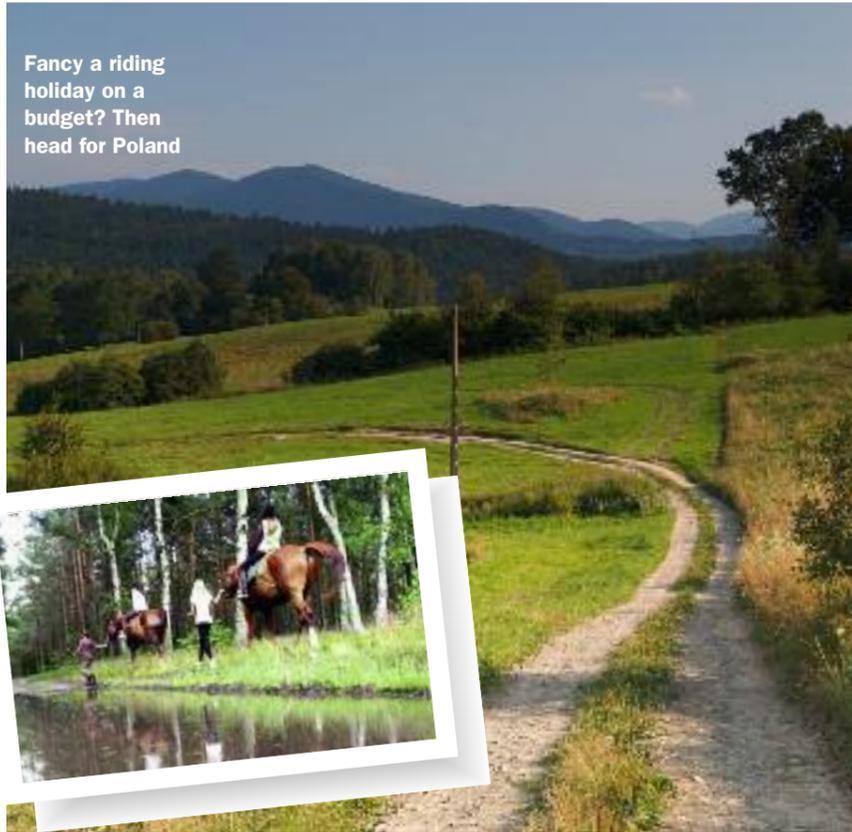
Call ☎ 020 7917 9880 or visit www.theridingcompany.com



The native Haflinger is sturdy, sure-footed and the ideal mountain horse



Fancy a riding holiday on a budget? Then head for Poland



Polish perfection

Poland, with its wonderful beaches, fantastic countryside and lakes, is an ideal activity holiday destination and a great way to enjoy an inexpensive riding holiday

Poland Your Way offers carefully chosen, centre-based rides in unspoilt locations with breathtaking scenery. Horse lovers have chosen these centres for their forward-going, well-schooled horses and the variety of riding available.

Choose from our family-run centre close to Krakow, or our stud based deep in the forest close to Gdansk, both holiday centres offer plenty of riding on peaceful trails across varied terrain. Instruction is available if required and there is always plenty to do for non-riding partners. The centres cater for all ages and abilities, and can tailor your holiday to suit the whole family. For small groups and individual travellers they arrange groups of similar ability, ensuring everyone gets the most from their holiday.

Each centre offers ensuite accommodation, full board and tasty

Polish specialities prepared fresh each day using local ingredients – all diets are catered for.

Why Poland?

Poland is a fascinating country, steeped in a turbulent history, modern and progressive, yet determined to hold on to its cultural traditions. Tourism in Poland is growing fast and horse riding in this unspoilt countryside is a real pleasure for horse lovers.

With prices for one week starting at just £365 per person – including return airport transfers – and low-cost flights often available, horse riding in Poland is a must-see destination for your 2011 riding holiday.

For more information

Call ☎ 01347 848714 or ☎ 07912 415266, email: info@polandyourway.co.uk or visit: www.polandyourway.co.uk

Magical Menorca

Assistant Editor, Kate Hammaren visits the Spanish island of Menorca and discovers the Black Pearl of the Balearics

Menorca is not somewhere I've visited before (and I have only seen a bit of mainland Spain), so I wasn't sure what to expect. Driving through the countryside was simple. The main highway that stretches from one end of the island to the other turned off here and there down roads leading, I imagined, to beaches, coves and cliffs.

I was pleased to find that our hotel, the stylish Audax in Cala

Galdana, was situated in a gorgeous bay with restaurants a beach and shops. Later on, after a little siesta, it was time to head off to the pretty town of Ciutadella for dinner at Ses Voltes, where we sampled exquisite soups, seafood and sauces.

Getting in the action

The following day was action-packed, starting with a kayaking experience where we explored caves and jumped off rocks. Then, to soothe our aching arms, we were treated to a fabulous Thermal Circuit session in the hotel's pools, where we were liberally blasted with all sorts of water jets, hot and cold, to invigorate and relax. Perfect preparation for the long ride to come!

Horse heaven

Day two and it was time to explore the Menorcan countryside on horseback. Arriving at riding centre, Son Angel, I met my mount – Bandido a sweet Iberian gelding – and we set off around a stretch of the Cami de Cavalls. This is a trail which circles the island and was used during the British occupation to keep watch for attacks. It is now being restored so that the whole route around the island can be walked or ridden – ideal for long days in the saddle.

Lluís (our guide) told me that in Menorca horses are a main feature of

the island's fiestas. The Menorcan horse is stunning – always black and most often stallions or mares.

I was curious to find out more about this little-known breed, so later that day I visited the Breeders and Owners Association of the Menorcan Race Horse. They couldn't tell me enough about 'The Black Pearl of the Balearics' – the Menorcan Horse – and the passion that the Menorcans have for their breed is heart-warming. They suggested I went to visit Sisco Marques, the man who opened the first Menorcan riding school 25 years ago, to experience this beautiful horse first-hand.

The Black Pearl

When I reached the equestrian centre, Escola Ecuestra Menorquina, the first thing I saw was a horse and rider performing flawless dressage movements. Silhouetted against the sun, the black stallion was the most beautiful horse that I had ever seen in my life.

Sisquo, who was riding, came over and I learnt that before riding schools came, the Menorcan style of riding used to be passed on from father to son. Rearing is a major feature of the displays, and I was awestruck at the sheer height and size of the horse as they demonstrated this move. Then it was my turn! I couldn't believe my luck as I rode Travieso around the arena – the sheer power underneath me was breathtaking. Although I didn't



Did you know
That Menorca has more horses per metre square than anywhere else in Europe?

The Menorcan horses are real head-turners

attempt the rear, I had no doubt that it would be amazing to be a part of the Menorcan fiesta.

Sadly, I had to hand the gorgeous black stallion back to Sisquo, but after my experience, the Menorcan Horse is at the top of my favourite breeds list.

The most surprising thing about my visit was the Menorcan people's deep connection with their beautiful horse – almost everyone on the island owns horses and they say that Menorca without the horse doesn't exist.

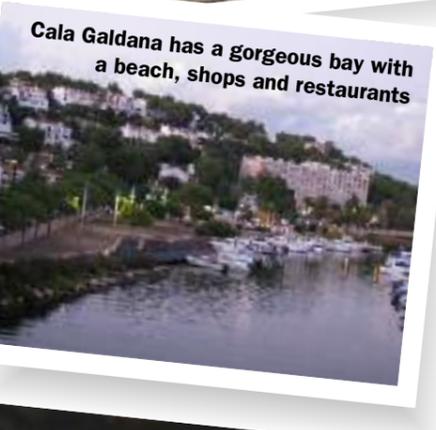
For more information

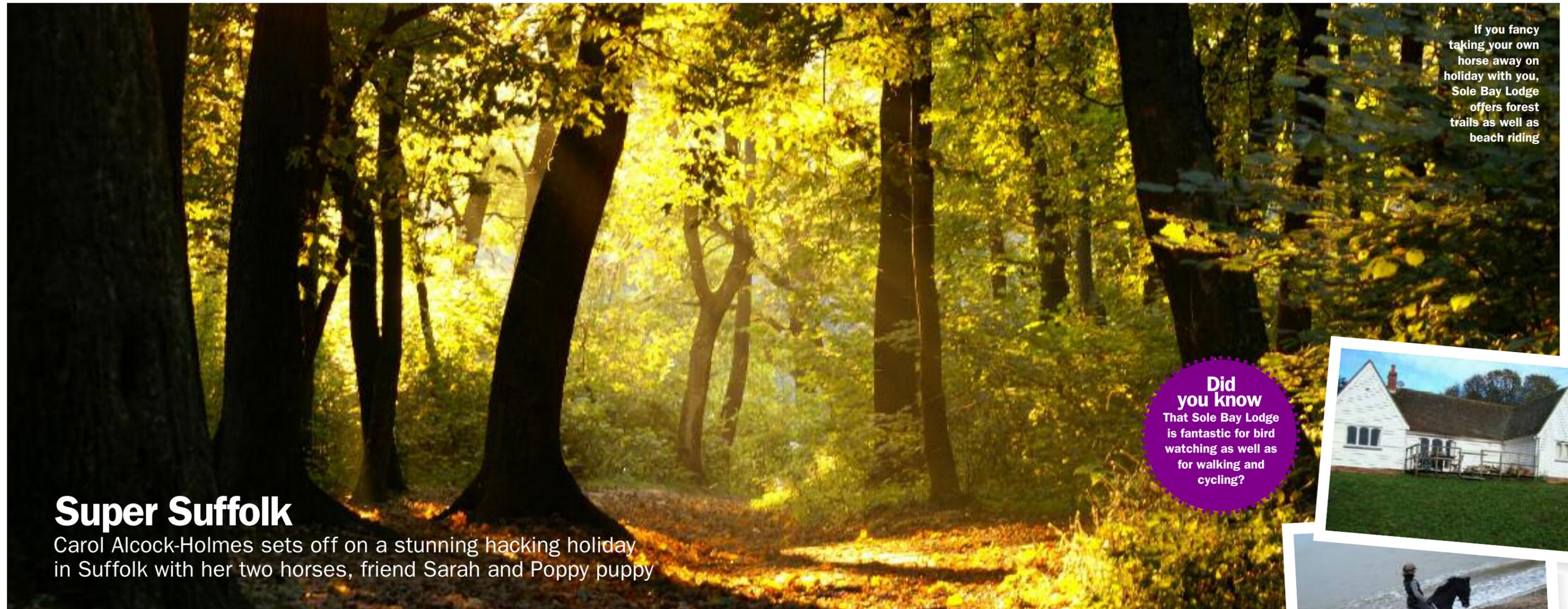
To find out more about the Menorcan Horse, visit www.cavalls-menorca.com. For holiday details, call the Menorcan Tourist Board on ☎ 0034 6285 52699.

Menorca offers a variety of riding terrain



Cala Galdana has a gorgeous bay with a beach, shops and restaurants





If you fancy taking your own horse away on holiday with you, Sole Bay Lodge offers forest trails as well as beach riding

Super Suffolk

Carol Alcock-Holmes sets off on a stunning hacking holiday in Suffolk with her two horses, friend Sarah and Poppy puppy

Did you know

That Sole Bay Lodge is fantastic for bird watching as well as for walking and cycling?



I love my animals and can think of nothing better than a holiday being all about them, so I looked through *Horse&Rider* to get some inspiration. Checking through the options, it soon became apparent that the type of holiday which would suit me and my friend Sarah best was a self-catering, hacking-style break. Taking Poppy puppy was also something I was keen to do,



too. I found the perfect property in Sole Bay Lodge and forwarded details to Sarah who excitedly agreed.

What's the plan?

Being a rather organised character, weeks ahead of our holiday I started planning. First the horses...

- Feeds – how many?
- Hay – how much?
 - Grooming kit and wash kit.
 - Shavings – how many bales?
 - First-aid kit.
 - Water.
 - Carrots.
 - Rugs.
 - Mucking out tools.
 - Feed bowls, water buckets and hay.

Poppy Puppy's suitcase...

- Dog food.
- Lead.
- Chews and bones.
- Dog bed.
- Towels.

My suitcase was easy – a few tops, jumpers, socks, undies, fleeces, jodhpurs, riding boots, wellies and toiletries – that's me done!

Grubs up

I hated the thought of my holiday being spoilt by food shopping, so Sarah and I decided on a menu for the five days we'd be away. We chose meals that we could slow cook in the morning and would be ready for us when we got back from our rides. This made the evening very relaxing, and Lancashire Hot Pot with port and cranberries, Beef Bourguignon and Coq au Vin were all very welcoming on our return.

Why Suffolk?

We chose Suffolk as it's only three hours from home (Surrey) – not too long a journey, but far enough away to change our scenery. We soon realised we weren't going to be disappointed by Suffolk or Sole Bay Lodge.

The property sits just on the edge of Dunwich Forest, where you're treated to autumn colours and forest pine smells. The gold, red and brown mix are a feast for the eyes, as are the Dartmoor ponies who roam and eat their way through nature.

And if this isn't enough to excite you, then the beach is just moments away – perfect for a long canter.

My two boys, Fritz and Dundee, soon settled in their stables, and tucked into their hay and feed. Then it was time for Sarah and I to be shown around the house.

The house is heated by a Rayburn and, as I have no other experience of heating other than pressing a button, keeping the Rayburn topped up with wood or coal added to the excitement of our break. With three bedrooms – two large doubles and a smaller one with bunk beds for children – the house was a decent size and better still, I could say hello to my horses from the sitting room window (pictured left).

The yard

Sole Bay Lodge's yard is well-stocked with hay, shavings, mucking out tools, wheelbarrows, buckets and anything else you need for your horse. There are two stables and a small open barn, which is where we kept the horses' feed and equipment. Dee and Fritz were able to have a leg stretch in the paddock while we mucked out.

Hacking

In one word wow! Sarah took on the task of organising our hacks and brought along Ordnance Survey maps to help us explore possibilities. The local pub 'The Ship Inn' also supplies brideway maps for just £2.

Fritz woke me up nice and early on the first morning with a big whinny at 6am, demanding breakfast! How lovely it was to pop out in my PJs to feed and hay the boys, and then pop back into my warm bed until 9am, when I was woken by Sarah carrying tea and toast. It's a hard life!

Each morning, we put the horses in the paddock while we mucked out and ate breakfast. The horses were then groomed, tacked up and we were off!

If, like me, your favourite time of the year to hack is in the autumn and winter, when the heat and flies are nowhere to be seen, then this part of the world really is a hidden gem. It turned out to be a perfect holiday. And we've still got so much more to explore next year.

For more information

Prices range from £200 per week to £600, depending on the time of year. Call Ms Jane Hamilton on ☎ 01502 531630 or ☎ 07979 428058, or visit www.solebaylodge.co.uk

A taste of Tuscany

Fancy a bit of classical equitation with added stunning scenery, fine wine and fabulous food? Who wouldn't!

Lusitanos, Anglo-Arabs, Arabs, Berbers, Thoroughbreds and Italian-bred horses make up the breeds at Il Paretaio, which is situated just 30 minutes from both Florence and Siena. Christina and Giana De Marche, both great dressage riders and trainers themselves, will give you the warmest welcome to their centre and will cater for all your needs.

Start the day with a hearty breakfast, then head out into the

Tuscan countryside on horseback for some olive oil sampling or wine tasting. Or if you prefer, have a dressage lesson then relax by the pool after lunch.

And there's plenty for non-horsey partners to do, as well. Visits to Florence and Siena are well worth while (and don't forget to check out the famous market square in Siena, where the annual Palio horse race is run), but one place you mustn't leave Il Paretaio without visiting is San

Gimignano – a walled-city made up of 13 towers! Stop for a coffee or Italian ice cream before exploring the city then head to a nearby cafe for lunch – you won't be disappointed.

Choose Il Paretaio if you are a keen dressage rider or you simply want to explore the Tuscan countryside on the back of a horse.

For more information

Contact Il Paretaio on ☎ 00 39 055 8059-218 or visit www.ilparetaio.it



Improve your dressage at Il Paretaio



Cowboy magic

A ranching holiday is on every keen horse rider's wish list. Check out Ranch Rider

Colorado's rolling plains, lush valleys and Rocky Mountains are just beckoning to riders. Head to the Lost Valley and ride through the Pike National Forest from just £725 per person.

Or why not capture the beauty of the Continental Divide on camera at the North Fork and enjoy a relaxing massage (prices from £1,865 per person).

Kansas is also tipped to be a firm favourite. Saddle up and participate in the annual burning of the prairies, the conservation activity complimented by authentic cattle drives (from

£1,059 per person). Also situated in the Sunflower state, the Moore Ranch will give any rider a taste of the real west. Doctoring, tagging and branding are all part of the seasonal programme, and visits to local rodeos are included (from £835 per person).

For a dose of culture, head to neighbouring Oklahoma. Home to more Native Americans than any other state, its festivals and pow-wows reflect the destination's heritage. Tomahawk lessons and story telling with Moses Little Bear are just some of the highlights at Tiger Mountain, with an optional visit to Geronimo's grave (from £929 per person).

Did you know
That you don't need to be a rider to go on a ranch holiday? Ranch Rider caters for non-riders, too.



Fancy being a cowboy for a week?

The rugged landscape of Patagonia in Argentina offers challenging terrain (from £1,495 per person), while in South Africa horse back safaris start at £990 per person.

For more information

Contact Ranch Rider on ☎ 01509 618811, email: info@ranchrider.com or visit www.ranchrider.com

horseandrideruk.com



For a comprehensive list of riding holiday centres.