

Portugal

Arrabida Nature Park and Alcainca

Escaping the cold of February for a few days and getting back on a horse was my motivation for this short trip. And it was worth it. I had the opportunity to get to know two of our partners and their horses.

I landed in Lisbon in the morning and immediately set off in a hire car to Palmela, south of Lisbon. The drive over the Vasco da Gama Bridge, which spans the Tagus River, is spectacular.

This is how I reached Carlos' farm in the Arrabida Nature Park near Pamela. The farm has been in the family for 300 years and is the ideal starting point for trail rides in the nature park.



Carlos turns out to be an absolute horseman. His horses are outside 24/7 and in company. Renovated and large stables on the farm are only intended for emergencies. Carlos calls his stables "hospital"; they are used, for example, when a mare is about to foal.

He breeds his own horses and has had a very close relationship with them. I was deeply impressed by this man, who lives this passion more as a balance to his actual profession as a businessman.

To convince me of the beauty of the Arrabida Natural Park, the horses were already saddled up and we went on a ride in the surrounding area. The landscape was incredibly beautiful. Slightly hilly, with cork oaks and almond trees that were in bloom at the time.



There are a few typical mills on the hills, which belong to the farmsteads of yesteryear. Otherwise, the area is virtually undeveloped. Pure nature.

But above the hills, there is an unobstructed view of Lisbon. It's far away, but it's a stark contrast. Here you can find peace in unspoilt nature.

The horses are easy to ride and enjoy walking. As a sport horse rider, I still find it incomprehensible when the Portuguese gallop their Lusitanos up the steep path on hard ground. We rode through this beautiful landscape at speed under a bright blue sky, and I enjoyed being back in the saddle.

After the lovely ride and tour of the hospital stables, tack room (very well organised and maintained!) and a visit to the horses in the pasture, I unfortunately had to set off again. Now I headed to the northern side of Lisbon, to Alcainça. Pedro and Sandra, the owners of the riding stable, were already waiting for me there.

This is also a very well-maintained facility, but with a different focus: here, the emphasis is on training riders and horses in haute école and, more recently, in working equitation. Two renowned trainers, Saergio and Mario, give their all here.



The noble Lusitanos are kept in traditional stables. There are paddocks, but there is not enough space for pastures. This is a riding stable that is entirely dedicated to training.

For me, it was an absolute experience to ride the very well-trained Lusitanos in piaffe and passage. It comes so easily to these horses and they are very light in the hand. You get to focus on your seat and legs again.

The aids are super light and subtle.

This riding experience was a real enrichment for me.

Did the Lusitano win me over? To be honest, despite all its advantages and ease, no. The warmblood has a different transmission, is more energetic and covers more ground. The Lusitano is a horse of collection.

It is easier to sit on because of its lower momentum.

But anyone who can sit a spirited warmblood will not prefer a Lusitano for the sake of comfort. At least that's how it is for me.



Looking beyond your own horizons and learning about other riding styles can only be enriching.

This is how I see Alcainça: for experienced riders, it is a great opportunity to feel and experience the high collection in piaffe and passage.



I really enjoyed the few days. I had a riding lesson in the morning and afternoon. And since I was the only guest, I was also lucky enough to enjoy these riding lessons as a solo rider. But one should not underestimate the effort required for concentrated riding. I wasn't motivated to go on sightseeing tours or trips to the beach. It wouldn't have been a problem, after all, I had a hire car, but I used all my energy in the riding lessons.

Otherwise, I enjoyed the Portuguese food, which was lovingly served by Lena. Unfortunately, the temperatures were still too low for a dip in the pool.

I would like to make up for that in the summer. But maybe next time. Because Alcaíça is worth a repeat visit. First, unfortunately, it was back to Basel. It was exciting, or rather stimulating, and remains a very fond memory.