

Portugal – Comfort trail and sea

Varied Portuguese landscape, highly trained horses, warm hosts and delicious food

To escape the cool temperatures in Germany, we head to hopefully warmer Portugal at the end of March. We spend the first few days of our trip in Lisbon and the surrounding area, enjoying the pleasant weather and the many activities and sights to discover here – Lisbon is definitely worth a visit! After a few days on our own, we are now looking forward to a wonderfully organised riding holiday and return to Lisbon Airport, where Sacha, our riding guide, picks us up. We travel for just under an hour before reaching Kristin and Pedro's huge estate. The quinta is located in the heart of the Ribatejo region, which is known for breeding Lusitanos. The horses are cared for and cherished here and are allowed to enjoy their lives in herds on the lush meadows.

The grounds feature two riding arenas, an indoor arena (currently being renovated to be optimally supplied with an ebb and flow system), several paddock boxes and guest rooms. The guest rooms are cosy and comfortable with en-suite bathrooms. Those who want to really pamper themselves can also enjoy the pool, which is located directly in front of the guest rooms. A facility for absolute well-being and a paradise for horses! The guest rooms are cosy and nicely furnished, and you immediately feel at home. In the afternoon, we get to know our four-legged companions for our first ride – Casique, a Lusitano gelding, will be my horse for this week.



The horses here are ridden with a curb bit and a traditional Portuguese saddle with fur. At first, most guests are a little sceptical, because hardly anyone rides their horse with a curb bit at home. But the horses here are used to it, they run relaxed with it, and with a little contact on the reins and a steady hand, you can't go far wrong. The horses are very finely ridden and you don't get the feeling at all that the bridle bothers them. In general, the horses are saddled and bridled. If you would like to help, you can make yourself useful by grooming, but it's better to leave the actual saddling to Sacha. The welfare of the horses is the top priority here! We set off in a small group with Sacha as our guide and can already enjoy the beautiful landscape of Portugal. Pine and cork oak forests await us and there is always room for a gallop or two.



Casique is easy to ride, responds well to all aids and is great fun. All the horses here are ridden regularly for correction, respond well to aids and are trained and very well educated. The horses here make riding a special and wonderful experience, as it is rare to find horses that are so refined and easy to ride – a real joy! Back at the farm, we take care of the horses and look forward to our dinner. No one goes hungry in Portugal. There is always plenty of delicious food with a starter, main course and dessert. Even in the evening, the temperatures are still pleasant and we have arrived in the Portuguese spring – the perfect holiday atmosphere! We are very lucky with the weather all week and are spared from rain.

Our host Kristin, her husband Pedro and their son, as well as all the staff and helpers, are always friendly and involve guests in the activities, so you quickly feel comfortable and at home.



The next morning, we set off from the Quinta and ride past fields through forests and along beautiful forest paths, which we gallop along again and again. Sacha quickly notices that we are having great fun with the shorter and longer gallops and are full of enthusiasm. At one point, she simply asks, "What do you think we could do here?" "Maybe a little canter?" is our reply. The horses are in top condition and don't tire despite the rather hot weather. After about two hours, we reach our lunch stop for the day, a small winery. From the outside, it looks inconspicuous and not particularly charming, but as soon as you step inside, you are delighted. We are treated to a feast consisting of several courses, which is so delicious that it is hard to stop eating. We are also allowed to try a few wines and chat, a great way to end the ride! After the lunch break, we make our way home and enjoy the beautiful nature and wonderful weather.



As there are only two guests for today's ride, we spend another night at Kristin and Pedro's quinta. We are delighted, as we already felt very comfortable there the day before. In the evening, I sign up for a riding lesson with Pedro (not included), as I would like to get to know the wonderful Lusitanos in the advanced lessons. I am thrilled with my horse Herkules, who tries very hard in everything and guides me well through all the lessons.

The next morning, after a delicious, hearty breakfast, we are taken by horse to Quinta Boa Vista, where our day begins. The farm is located directly on the Tagus River and belongs to an elderly lady who is committed to Lusitano breeding and has herself competed in driving tournaments for many years. From here, we mount our horses and set off. Our ride takes us past several cultivated fields, through cork oak forests and past olive trees.

Part of the way we ride along the Portuguese Way of St. James and reach the Tagus River. It doesn't have much water at the moment, but it offers wonderful views along the sandbank. It's a wonderful place to rest, so we dismount from our horses and make ourselves comfortable at a table that has already been set, and are treated to delicious food while we enjoy the view and the silence.



Antonio, a friend of the family, helps out from time to time and brings us salad, some Portuguese specialities and chicken with chips, which we enjoy. It is a magical place and the perfect spot for our lunch. Afterwards, we ride past a few small villages, fields and green meadows until we reach Azinhaga. Even in this small village, there are a few stables. We ride around the corner and through a gate and find ourselves in a stable with several boxes and an indoor riding arena – Portugal always has a few surprises in store, big and small. We experience another one at our accommodation. A traditional guest house, also behind a gate, reveals itself to us. We enter this little kingdom and find flowers blooming everywhere, a beautiful garden and a glass of juice waiting for us outside by the pool. What a wonderful way to end the day.



In the evening, we go out for a drink with Sacha. Every Portuguese village, no matter how small, has a bar where you can relax with a glass of wine, beer or whatever you fancy and always meet friendly Portuguese people. Dinner at the lady's guesthouse is once again delicious and, as always, far too much. The next morning, we set off for Golegã. Once a year in November, there is a big festival here with hundreds of horses and shows. We must travel here at that time sometime, as it seems to be a very special experience. The rest of the year, the place is rather quiet and tranquil. We ride past the Veiga stud farm and again and again some of the young horses and herds of mares gallop along the fence to inspect us intruders. Today, too, there are many stretches that invite us to enjoy a nice gallop.



After three hours of riding, we reach the village of Golegã, which seems a little sleepy and quiet, but still has its charm. Once again, we open the lock on an inconspicuous gate, behind which lies a converted stable with bright, large stalls and space for many horses. Horses are regularly transported to other countries from here, and they are well cared for. We help to look after our horses and take them to their stalls before it is time for us to eat. We make ourselves comfortable in the restaurant overlooking the main square of the horse town. The fish here is very good, as are the vegetables and delicious side dishes. We spend the afternoon relaxing, strolling through the town and exploring the area. In the evening, we meet Sacha again for dinner and a drink to round off the day.



The next day, we are joined by a lovely lady from Luxembourg, who will accompany us on our rides for the next two days. We gallop along sandy paths and dirt tracks, riding through lush meadows, fields and forests. Absolutely beautiful and great riding! We have lunch at a small restaurant in a tiny village. As always, everything is delicious and we enjoy our lunch break before setting off on a shorter ride to our accommodation for the night.



An elderly lady has created a little paradise here. A huge estate with a fire pit, a beautiful garden and a huge house. The horses have a seemingly endless meadow at their disposal. We wonder a little how we will find the horses again the next day. The hostess is very nice and warm-hearted and is delighted to have us as guests. We spend the evening together.

The next morning, we prepare ourselves for a long hike across the meadow, but the horses are kind to us and are standing in the first third of the pasture. They let themselves be caught without any trouble. We groom them and then enjoy our breakfast. Today we look forward to a wonderful sea breeze that will soon be blowing around our noses. We load the horses and drive a good hour to the Obidos lagoon. Today's landscape is very diverse.



We ride through vineyards, forests, along the lagoon and don't miss out on galloping along soft sandy paths. There is a bridge to cross, so we dismount and lead our horses. We are already riding along the water's edge and can already sense the sea air.



It's amazing how green it is here and how many bushes and trees grow. Today's lunch break is at a restaurant right on the lagoon. We sit outside and indulge in delicious fish and meat while enjoying the sun with a cool drink. Afterwards, we enjoy long gallops along the lagoon on horseback, whenever the sand allows and is not too deep. Then we finally reach the sea and the horses are lively and eager to move forward.



We catch wonderful views of the approaching water and the rocks in the background make for a great picture. Soon, unfortunately, we have to say goodbye because the water is rising and, depending on the water level, it is no longer possible to get past the rocks.



We still have a few longer gallops on the sandy ground ahead of us before we take the horses to the waiting trailer and load them up. Everyone heads back to the Quinta – a wonderful end to a magnificent day. In the evening, we enjoy dinner together. Unfortunately, it is time to say goodbye, and we want to go on one last short ride through the area surrounding the Quinta the next morning. My friend's horse decides that the trail is now over and that it is time to graze in peace, so she gets a different horse today. However, this does not spoil our last short ride, which we enjoy with some nice gallops. Afterwards, it's time to say goodbye to the horses. We sit together one last time for lunch and are then taken back to Lisbon Airport. A wonderful week with many great memories of the wonderful horses, the nice people and the varied landscapes comes to an end – we'll be back!

Angelika Kaiser, March 2019
