

Cappadocia at a gallop

We decided to set off on new adventures and booked the horse-riding tour in Cappadocia at the start of 2022. Several weeks and months of anticipation passed before we could finally set off and board the plane. After the pandemic, everything felt a bit unfamiliar and it took a while to get used to the hustle and bustle and the crowds at the airport again, so I was glad when I finally landed in Kayseri later that evening. My girlfriend and I had booked an extra night's stay in Kayseri so we could start our holiday at a leisurely pace and without any stress. Kayseri doesn't have many tourist attractions to offer, but for us it was a pleasant and quiet town for the evening and the following morning, allowing us to start our holiday at a leisurely pace. If you have a few extra days to spare, I'd recommend a stay in Istanbul either before or after your horse-riding holiday. There's much more to see and experience there.

On Sunday, we waited together for our transfer, already keeping an eye out for the odd rider here and there – and after a while, the group was all set on the coach. We were taken to our first accommodation in Ortahisar. The village is characterised by bizarre rock formations, and time and again you see accommodation or houses that have been carved into the rocks – a fascinating landscape! In the evening, we got to know the other riders and our guide at our accommodation. Our guide, Nico, is from France and has been living in Cappadocia for many years. We were a diverse group from different countries, and it was absolutely fascinating and exciting. The others had also been on a few riding trips before, so we were able to chat easily and quickly find things to talk about.

The next day we headed to the ranch to meet the horses. Nico and his wife have created a beautiful home here. There's plenty of space for the horses, chickens and goats, and everything was very well looked after and lovingly designed – a paradise for any animal lover! We were given a brief briefing by Nico on what to bear in mind whilst riding, and then it was straight off to the horses – Shaman was to be my companion for the whole week, an attentive bay gelding with plenty of drive. Throughout the week, our horses impressed us with their absolute sure-footedness – we rode uphill and downhill and could always rely on our horses, no matter where we were. They always moved forward and were easy to ride.



Before the first ride, everyone had to complete a short trail and demonstrate all gaits, ride across a small bridge, manoeuvre backwards through poles and, finally, cover a short stretch at a canter. Only then were we ready for the ride and could set off.

The landscape in Cappadocia is unique and breathtaking – the ash that covered the region following several major volcanic eruptions turned into an erodible material known as tuff. It erodes quite easily, and so rain and wind have carved out various shapes and formations that can still be admired today.



Time and again during the week, we saw Mount Erciyes in the background, which was still snow-capped even in May, despite the otherwise hot temperatures. It is approximately 3,916 metres high and is a dormant volcano located about 25 km south of Kayseri.

We made good progress – we took every opportunity to gallop along the open stretches. We reached Mount Avlak and enjoyed a magnificent view of Cappadocia's stunning landscape. Today, a delicious picnic awaited us, featuring salad, freshly cooked dishes and a wonderful dessert – it felt just like paradise.



In the early afternoon, we set off quite early to escape an approaching thunderstorm and rode through a canyon to the ghost town of Karain until we finally reached our destination for the day with a few brisk gallops. Throughout the week, the horses were always stabled quite close to our accommodation. Once the horses had been looked after, we usually had a quick drink and a bite to eat before heading off to our accommodation for the night. The accommodation was always lovely, often nestled in the rocks or with a magnificent view of the valley. The next

days took us through unique landscapes across high plateaus and along narrow country lanes, past impressive rock formations. We arrived at Lake Damsa and enjoyed some wonderful gallops around the lake before being invited by the villagers to a delicious meal. I particularly enjoyed the first and middle days of riding, when we hardly came across anyone and could simply enjoy the horses, the silence and the beautiful natural surroundings. In my opinion, that's what makes riding holidays so unique. You see many places that are difficult or impossible to reach by car; you make good progress on horseback and can simply enjoy yourself and the landscape, finding your inner peace again. The tranquillity and seclusion do the rest, providing a wonderful respite from the often hectic daily life back home. One of my highlights was the underground village of Golgoli. We climbed through narrow passageways and explored the individual rooms. We couldn't see everything, as some of the passageways were partially blocked and the descent wasn't always safe. It's truly fascinating how entire villages were built underground here and are still so well preserved.



The following days continued to be full of variety, and no two days were the same. We saw pastures and farmland, canyons, vast plains and valleys, and explored the cave village of Kirkule. We passed vineyards, enjoyed magnificent views of the stunning landscape, and rode through narrow valleys and across small rivers. Time and again, we were enchanted by colourful flower-filled meadows. At lunchtime, we sometimes ate in small village restaurants or at locals' homes – always authentic and absolutely delicious.

On Friday morning, we were looking forward to the hot-air balloon ride (optional). Here, peace and quiet and nature free of people were a thing of the past. At 4 am, we were picked up and taken to the balloons. We could watch as balloons were being inflated all around us and rose into the air. A colourful mix of different nationalities was represented here and, despite the early hour, everyone watched the hustle and bustle, chatting away excitedly. We climbed into the basket and then we set off. The view and the wonderfully peaceful glide of the balloon more than made up for the early start, and we were able to enjoy the flight for an hour – truly an experience worth having!



If you fancy relaxing in the evening with a hammam or a massage, today's accommodation is just the place for you – you can book it flexibly for the evening and treat yourself to a good hour of pampering.

In the morning, after breakfast, we set off on horseback and rode through the famous Green Valley, over little bridges and through woods. We stopped at a small clearing where we were served freshly squeezed, delicious orange juice and lingered there for a short while. We then reached the Valley of Love, with its gigantic rock towers, which immediately revealed to us why it was so named.

Finally, we rode through the Red Valley, which captivated us with its red and ochre-coloured rock formations.



Time and again during the week we had to walk short stretches; a bit of fitness and stamina were required. However, everything was perfectly manageable and you didn't need to be an experienced hiker to tackle the trails.

At the end of each day, we were treated to some outstanding drone footage – our guide always enjoyed filming us with the drone, whether we were galloping or capturing short sequences of the landscape, which we were able to admire in the evening in a video summarising the day. The resulting footage was truly beautiful and exciting!



Our final day's ride gave us another chance to experience the unique features of the Cappadocian landscape – we galloped across plateaus and along narrow country lanes, reaching gorges and valleys. For lunch, we were once again treated to a surprise picnic amidst stunning natural surroundings – there were salads, freshly prepared hot dishes and a delicious dessert. We were simply in heaven! In the afternoon, with a heavy heart, we mounted the horses for the last time and, riding past colourful rocks, reached the farm. There, we said goodbye to our horses and sat together as a group for a while over drinks before heading back to our accommodation for our final dinner. We enjoyed our last evening together before we had to say our goodbyes one by one. My friend and I had planned to spend the following day on a little shopping trip and relaxing, before heading home ourselves the day after that. It was a wonderful, varied and lively tour that we'll never forget!

May 2022, Angelika Kaiser (test rider for PEGASUS)

Link to the programme: www.equitour.com/cap008.htm