Dolphin Coastal Ride – August 2021

After a long break from horse-riding trips due to the pandemic, nothing stood in the way of our trip to Portugal this time. The bags were packed, all vaccination certificates and entry forms had been filled in, and all entry requirements had been checked – we were finally ready to go! Once we arrived in Lisbon, we headed to the meeting point and kept an eye out for other potential travelling companions. Riders usually recognise one another quite quickly, and after a good 20 minutes the group had already come together and we moved on to the first round of introductions. We were a diverse group comprising Germans, Belgians, French and a Sicilian, and we soon struck up a conversation. After a good hour, we arrived at a cosy farmhouse in Grandola, where we were to spend the night. Everything was well-kept and beautifully laid out, with a pool and a lovely seating area – the perfect start to our stay! Over dinner, we sat together comfortably and found plenty to talk about whilst indulging in Portuguese cuisine. The next morning, we waited eagerly for our horses. We were looking forward to the Lusitanos, one of Europe's oldest horse breeds, which are lovingly cared for by Miguel, our riding guide. None of the horses here lack for food, and they are free to roam to their heart's content in vast pastures when they are not in use. We got to know our horses and were quickly convinced by their sure-footedness and their friendly, calm nature. The Alentejo region captivates with its unspoilt nature, vast cork oak forests, wide green meadows, small villages and endless sandy beaches. We ventured into our first gallops and felt at ease on our horses. We stopped at a beautiful spot in the middle of the forest and enjoyed a wonderful picnic that had already been prepared for us.

We gave the horses water and feed, and were then able to treat ourselves to a break. There was salad, snacks and freshly prepared meat or delicious fish. That's what holidays are all about – simply sitting at a table in the middle of the forest, enjoying a delicious meal with a group of fun-loving people, and being able to sit back and relax – an absolute dream! After the picnic and a short siesta, we continued on horseback and enjoyed the wonderful peace and quiet whilst we let our minds wander. In the late afternoon we arrived, looked after our horses and were taken to our accommodation, a cosy hotel. We had some time to read and relax before we all set off together for dinner.

The next morning, after a hearty breakfast, we were ready to set off on our horses. We rode through cork oak forests and across gently undulating terrain, interspersed with fields. Once again, we hardly met anyone and enjoyed the magnificent open spaces. I was fascinated by the many cork oaks we passed. Cork is used in many different ways. The barking process takes place here between May and August, as this is when the tree is at its most active in terms of growth. The cork oak can only be barked for the first time when it is 25 years old, and every nine years thereafter, as it takes a long time for the layers of bark to regrow. The year in which the cork oak was last barked is marked directly on the tree.

Our support vehicle was already waiting for us in a meadow, and we were delighted to find a table already laid and a delicious lunch waiting for us. Every day, we were treated to another surprise in the form of truly excellent food.

On the way back, we had a few gallops to enjoy before arriving at the hotel.

We'd planned a particularly early breakfast for the next morning, as we were all already looking forward to the dolphin boat trip and started the day in good spirits despite the early hour. Our good mood lasted until, after a half-hour drive, we received the bad news that the boat trip had unfortunately had to be cancelled due to thick fog. The mood was dampened and everyone looked rather disappointed. Instead, we spent the morning in a small village, settling down in a cosy café. It was still lovely, even though we'd naturally been really looking forward to seeing the dolphins. I suppose it just wasn't meant to be.

We had today's picnic right by the stables just round the corner; once again, it was delicious and there was fresh fish. It was simply wonderful to sit outside together, hear the horses snorting in the stables and sample delicious Portuguese delicacies whilst enjoying pleasant conversation – that's exactly how I imagine a perfect holiday. In the afternoon, we mounted the horses for a short ride. We were able to gallop for longer stretches on several occasions, riding through woods and past fields.
We also passed a few rice paddies along the way – at this time of year, their lush green colour made them particularly beautiful to look at. In the evening, we sat together comfortably and wound down the day together.

The next day, our ride set off early – we were heading for the beach. While it was still dark, we made our way across the dunes until we finally reached the sea, where we were able to enjoy some wonderful gallops on the beach at sunrise. We eventually reached a pine forest and took a short break there to explore the beach bar or have a little nap. At midday, freshly prepared fish with vegetables and salad awaited us; we made the most of it before setting off on horseback for the return journey.

Over the next two days, we gradually made our way back. We rode through pine and oak forests and past picturesque little villages, passing herds of cattle and taking in the stunning natural surroundings. We hardly saw anyone and enjoyed the wonderful peace and quiet, as well as the refreshing gallops. As had been the case all week, the food was delicious, and we were all a little more subdued at our final dinner, as a

A wonderful week had come to an end – as always, faster than we would have liked. We spent one more cosy evening together before we all flew home in different directions – who knows when we'll be back!

August 2021, Angelika Kaiser

(Test rider for PEGASUS)

Link to the programme: www.equitour.com/del008.htm