

A visit to the Comboyne Plateau and Beach Ride in Australia

South of Port Macquarie, I turn inland and reach the farm a quarter of an hour later. My host, Kathy, and her dogs give me a very warm welcome – you feel right at home here straight away! I'm impressed: a short path leads past the stables, with horses grazing in the pastures, green lawns in front of a beautiful farmhouse with a terrace, a water lily pond and a swimming pool.

The house offers a lovely panoramic view of the plain and Comboyne Mountain, which isn't far away. Inside, there's also a lovely living room with a seating area, a dining area and the bedrooms off to the side. After a short tour of the house, I enjoy dinner with a glass of wine before retiring to bed, feeling relaxed.



This morning begins with a delicious breakfast: yoghurt, muesli, fresh fruit, toast, cheese, jam, Nutella and Veggie-Mite – so popular in Australia – are all on offer, alongside juice, tea and coffee. And then it's finally time to see the horses: whilst a small group of 'retirees' are enjoying life in one of the pastures, we head over to the others. I'm assigned Jimmy, a purebred Arabian, a beautiful grey with a dreamlike gallop. We saddle up and head off into the rainforest. Wider tracks alternate with winding paths, and at first we follow an old railway line, parts of which are still preserved. Huge trees, impressive plants and termite mounds that look like

stranded UFOs, form today's backdrop for our brisk ride. After a relaxed walk to warm up, we move on to a trot and wonderfully long stretches of canter. The Arabian horses enjoy this just as much as their riders!

Lunch is a saddlebag picnic, which we enjoy whilst sitting comfortably on a tree trunk. Even the light drizzle can't bother us in this forest, sheltered by the canopy. Up and down, always glancing up into the treetops in search of koalas, and a few gallops later, after about 5½ hours, we reach 'The Vinery', our destination for the day.

Max, the helpful neighbour (and in Australia, 'neighbour' can mean many kilometres away), is already waiting for us. The horses are looked after and given some hay and a chance to relax whilst we sample some Australian wines.

Accompanied by some cheese – what a perfect end to this fantastic ride. Well rested, we load the horses and drive back to the farm. Tonight we're having dinner in a proper Australian pub, where burgers are just one of the specialities.

For today's beach ride, it's a case of getting up a bit earlier and loading the horses. The beach is just a short distance away. A 'short distance' in Australia can easily mean several hundred kilometres, but in this case it's just under 40 minutes. We saddle up and, after just a few minutes, reach a dream beach:

7 km to the end, with fine sandy beaches and crystal-clear sea. Hardly a soul in sight – no wonder, as there are so many beaches in Australia that they're rarely overcrowded. The ground is firm and, after a bit of trotting, we're able to enjoy some longer gallops.

After about an hour, we reach the end of the beach, where there's a campsite not far away and we come across a few swimmers and surfers.

The horses get a well-deserved rest and we riders have a picnic from our saddlebags to recharge our batteries. On Kathy's advice, I go in search of kangaroos; sometimes you can spot them at the campsite, but unfortunately they're hiding today.

Now we head back along the 7 km of beach, and even now I can't believe what a perfect day we've had: sunshine, blue skies, a sparkling sea, fantastic gallops along the beach on excellent horses, and to top it all off, a pod of dolphins appears right beside us and accompanies us for the final stretch! It doesn't get any better than this.

The horses are looked after, we riders have a coffee, then we head back at a leisurely pace towards the farm. On the way, we stop at a pelican spot and watch the birds.

A delicious lunch of salad, olives, bread and cheese, before I head to the pool and terrace to relax.

Unfortunately, after this short stay of just four days, it's already time for me to say goodbye tomorrow. How I would have loved to have stayed the whole week and gone on the rides in the surrounding area and up to the Comboyne Plateau, where you have a panoramic view in all directions.

In the evening, whilst enjoying a sundowner on the terrace, I spot a wallaby, which is happily grazing alongside the horses, before a Thai curry with rice is served and we round off the evening with a good glass of wine. Kathy offers a very homely experience and, with her warmth and her Arabian horses, is a must for advanced riders heading 'Down Under'.



The next morning arrives far too quickly, and then it's time to say goodbye for good: I drive to Sydney in my hire car – a 4–5-hour journey, a mere stone's throw away by Australian standards.

Thank you, Jimmy, for the fantastic rides; thank you, Kathy, for your hospitality and your incredible energy and organisation – I'll miss you all!

Julia Wies, January 2015

Link to the programme: <http://www.reiterreisen.com/it-aurt01.htm>