

## Travelogue: Turkey

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Lycian Way, 200 km trail ride, 8 days including 6 days of riding

November 2023

November was, once again, not particularly inviting here in Basel. So an escape from this dreadful weather was most welcome. My exciting trip began with a direct flight from Basel to Antalya in Turkey. The temperatures on arrival were pleasantly warm and, for once, there was no rain. As my riding companions weren't due to land until later that evening and I wanted to get my bearings in the area, I treated myself to a private transfer to the hotel. The Erendiz Garden Hotel in Kemer is about an hour's taxi ride from the airport. I was given a warm welcome there, with its friendly, family-like atmosphere.



The rooms at the hotel are very basic. The garden, however, is lush with mature trees. A modern gym and a swimming pool offer some variety. In the evening, I met up with my riding companions: three female riders, Halina our guide, and Isa, the organiser of all the arrangements. We went out for dinner together, and getting to know each other and discussing the coming week were the main topics of conversation. The next morning, after a hearty breakfast, we set off for Berke Ranch. This ranch is located just outside Kuzdere, away from the tourist-packed Kemer. There we met our horses. I was very happy with my Arabian mare, Sahra. Halina told me straight away that she had a "lively gait". That was certainly the case, which I very much appreciated. We saddled our horses and got ready for our first introductory ride. That day, we returned to the stables after a two-hour ride.

The next day, the trail ride was due to begin. The test ride went wonderfully. It turned out that Halina had assigned the right horses to all of us. It must be emphasised, however, that we are all very experienced riders and were able to adapt quickly to our four-legged partners.



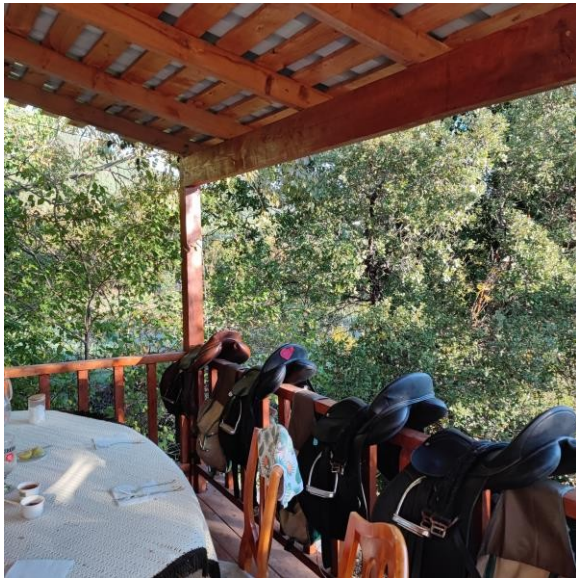
After lunch at the hotel in the afternoon, we had actually planned to go to Mount Chimera. But unfortunately, the weather threw a spanner in the works. It was pouring with rain. A shame – we would have loved to see the ever-burning fire pits on the mountain. So we made the best of it and drove to Kemer to the Baklava Restaurant. It's not as if they only serve sweet things there. We had a hearty meal followed by something sweet. In any case, we were well looked after and were now really looking forward to the trail, which began the next day.



We left Kuzdere in the morning with our saddlebags packed. The support vehicle had stowed away our luggage for the overnight stays. At first we followed a few roads, but there was little traffic. There were plenty of opportunities for trotting. We followed the mountain stream into the Kuzdere Gorge. There were opportunities for a lovely photo shoot in the mountain stream. The water is so clear and pure. It is drinkable. For the photo shoot in the water, we had to dismount and lead the horses, which happened less often over the next few days than I had anticipated beforehand. For lunch, we stopped at a very lovely restaurant by this mountain stream. The horses were also able to rest for a while with their girths loosened and tied to the trees. After this break, things started to get serious: the ascent up the Tahtali to the village of Gedelme. We passed through pine forests along winding scree paths. The quality of the paths varied. Overall, there were a great many stones, and we always had to look for the best route for the horse on the wide path. Depending on the ground, we galloped and trotted up the slope. The vegetation was very

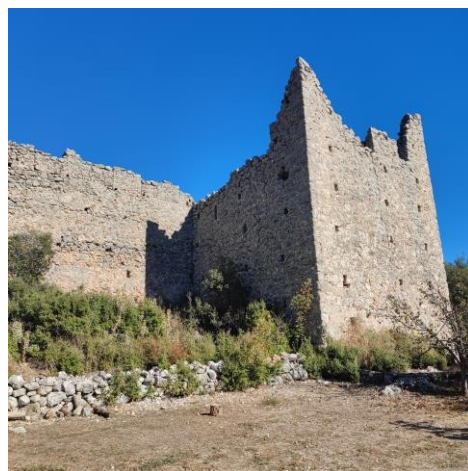
green with pine trees and orchards; gardens with pomegranates and orange groves lay between scattered small farmsteads.

We reached the small village of Gedelme, at an altitude of around 1,200 metres. Here we spent the night in a typical, traditional farmhouse. It was all very basic: the toilet and washing facilities were outside. But at least the house had an electricity supply.



After tending to the horses for the night, we enjoyed a delicious dinner together on the balcony, looking out at our four-legged friends as they rested. We spent the night in sleeping bags on the mats laid out on the floor. It was fine, but I was surprised by the cold that crept in during the evening. You wouldn't think so during the day in the warming sun. But here, the service from our hosts was once again commendable: for the next night in the tent, we were provided with extra blankets and softer sleeping pads.

But the following day held further impressive sights: in Gedelme, there are ancient Byzantine castle ruins to explore, as well as a stalactite cave and a plane tree that is over 2,000 years old. An incredibly beautiful tree that invited us to take photos amongst its branches. We did these sightseeing stops and the walk after breakfast and then set off for the climb to 2,200 metres.



Heading towards Ovacik, we stopped for a break at a shepherd's farm on the plateau. Once again, a table was laid out for us amidst the green of the meadow, close to our horses and the farm's cows. We rested there after a long gallop. There are fewer trees up here, and in this valley we had the chance to have our gallop filmed by a drone. We had great fun, as our horses love the fast gallop just as much as we do.



From this height, we repeatedly have an unobstructed view of the sea between the mountains. The paths are stony but wide, and our horses have good shoes. This ensured a safe ride forward. Towards evening, we reach our camp. Our tents are pitched beneath a beautiful plane tree. In the shelter of this huge tree, the horses also find their place for the coming night. To ward off the cold, we gather wood for the campfire. And “abracadabra”, the table is set: Halina and Isa's team have once again organised a dinner of the finest quality. We spend a relaxing night in our tents. We drift off to sleep to the sounds of the resting horses standing right next to us under this huge plane tree. We have spring water here too. It's enough for brushing our teeth and a quick wash. We relieve ourselves round the corner in the bushes. Back to nature.



The next day we set off again. Upwards to Tahtali. Today we'll reach the highest point: a full 2,200 metres. We ride into the sky. The clouds surround us. But every now and then we have clear views stretching out over the sea. The tree cover thins out at this altitude. There are many stony slopes, yet in between there are grassy green plains where we can ride at a brisk gallop again.

In the evening we reach Beycik. There we spend the night in a very simple hotel with good food and a fantastic panoramic view. The horses are stabled right next to a mosque, but the regular calls to prayer at full volume do not bother our four-legged friends in the slightest. We enjoy a shower and the soft beds for the night. Time to recharge our batteries, as the next day we head further down towards sea level and the beach.



Our route takes us back through wooded areas and along wide scree paths down the slope. During the descent, trotting and galloping weren't always possible. But whenever a flat stretch or a short climb presents itself, a faster pace is immediately adopted. So boredom certainly isn't an issue. Especially as our eyes are feasted on the natural beauty of the pine forests. And all of this away from civilisation, one might think. For in fact, we hardly meet a soul along the way. As we head towards the beach, we do come across the odd hiker, but they are few and far between. Here in the national park, there are beach coves that cannot be reached by car at all. Consequently, these beaches are very secluded. We also ride to Turtle Bay, though no turtles are sighted at this time of year. Our tents are already set up on the beach again for the night. First, we welcome our overnight spot with a refreshing gallop along the beach through the shallow water. Unfortunately, the outside temperature didn't allow for a swim with the horses. But that didn't spoil the fun. We spend this night with the sound of the sea and the horses' voices combined – simply unique. When do you ever get to experience something like that?

And once again, we keep things simple: the bushes are our toilet, the flowing mountain water in the trough on the beach our fresh water source. After a restful night, we set off early the next day. We want to visit Phaselis, an ancient city founded 2,700 years ago. Unfortunately, rain is forecast for this afternoon and we want to avoid it. We have our lunch in a rock cave above the sea. Before we set off on foot to explore this ancient city. Halina, our guide, shows us the way and waits for us by the horses.



This cultural programme is impressive, as it's easy to see how this Lycian Way was a strategic point in history. After the tour, we head back home to Kuzdere. We make it. The rain starts as our horses are washed, cared for and taken to their stables. That was perfect timing! And that was our last day. We look forward to a refreshing shower and sit down together once more to reflect on our experiences. Three riders and a guide – that is, four women – are in agreement: it was wonderful.

We had a brilliant time. Our eyes took in nature and landscapes of incredible beauty. For me personally, the moment was so poignant when, on the way to Phaselis, we left the nature reserve through a gate. A ranger opened the gate and Halina said at that moment: "Back to civilisation". That statement summed it up for me.

I'm actually a fan of good hotels and I don't like camping, but I felt like I was 'resetting' on this trip. Back to basics. You can get by with very little, and it gives you so much. Well, it's a bit of a spiritual tangent, but it had an effect on me. Consequently, I found this week very enriching. But also because the package was just right: it was a very demanding ride. You really need to be in good physical shape and also have plenty of riding experience.

I'd expected to spend more time leading the horses, but that was hardly the case. The horses were in top condition and more than up to the task. Of course, the team – Isa and Halina – deserve nothing but praise. The care and logistics were well thought out and organised. They constantly tried to accommodate the customers' wishes. Thank you for everything! It was an impressive trip that I can wholeheartedly recommend.

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