

Horseback Trekking in the Engadin

At the end of August, I set off to visit our new partner in the Engadin. The farm offers fantastic panoramic trails through the Alps; our programme includes the 3-Country Ride through Switzerland, Austria and Italy. Whilst I have already travelled through the Vinschgau and Vorarlberg on the Austrian and Italian sides, this is my first time visiting the Engadin.

Thanks to Switzerland's excellent rail network, I reach the riding centre comfortably and on time by train and bus.

I've signed up for a weekend ride to see part of the Panorama Trail. When I arrive on Friday evening, I'm warmly welcomed by the

manager and shown to my room. The rooms are very nice and cosy in a ranch style with a veranda. The whole farm is built in a ranch style with lots of wood. From my window, I can see the paddocks. This is also where the retired horses live, who, after many years on tour, are now enjoying their lives in the large pastures. The other horses (around 80 of them!) live partly in open stables and partly in spacious stalls. During the day, they are all in the open stables and spend time in the huge pastures.

It's lovely to see how much space there is here for the four-legged friends!

After checking in, I meet some of my fellow riders on the veranda for a beer. We've actually hit the only cool weekend of the summer, and it's getting quite chilly outside.

Whilst it has been extremely hot and dry all summer, snow is actually forecast for this weekend in the higher elevations! So I've packed my winter riding gear, which seemed very strange to me when it was still 30 degrees, but I'll need it...

My fellow riders say their goodbyes in the evening, as they've booked rooms in the village because the riding centre is fully booked. Instead, I meet two other lovely fellow riders at dinner.

The three-course dinner is superb. Full of anticipation for the ride, we finally head for our comfortable beds.

It rains heavily during the night, but the next day, although it's foggy and cool, it's dry. The whole group of nine meets up with the riding guide after breakfast at the stables to be assigned horses. I am given a dainty young Freiburger mare. It is the six-year-old's first weekend ride, so she takes a very close look at the surroundings as we go. Full of enthusiasm, she marches along at the front, responding well to the aids, and so it is a joy to ride her. The farm mainly has Freibergers, the Swiss national breed. They are characterised by a good temperament, sure-footedness,

modesty and willingness to perform, making them

thus also perfect trail riding horses. After a lovely ride through the larch forest, the path descends steeply into the Inn Valley. Here, the horses are led. Once in the valley, we remount and cross the river via a bridge. On the other side, we continue for a while through the river valley before turning onto a path leading up to a village. Now the mist is lifting and the sun is coming out. At last we can enjoy the view over the Engadine mountains and the Inn Valley. The river is already quite wide here and flows through the valley with a fair current. To the left and right, the mighty mountains rise up. We ride through the village and then follow a high-altitude path with a fantastic panorama. We continue into a narrow side valley, the Val Sinestra, towards the Austrian border. This too is crossed by a stream. A wide, good path leads all the way round the deep valley. In a meadow in the forest, we tie the horses to the trees and enjoy our saddlebag picnic in the open air. The weather remains kind to us; although the clouds have thickened again, it isn't raining. After the picnic, we continue along the path through the forest. Along the way, the view opens up to a small castle hotel,



nestled on the mountainside above the gorge. Accompanied by the whistling of a marmot, we reach the end of the valley, where we cross the rushing stream via a wooden bridge. On the other side, the path leads through a beautiful larch forest. Here, we are accompanied by the ringing of bells from the free-roaming cows. For the final stretch, we lead the horses down to the Zuort farm. This consists of two historic houses. Today's guesthouse with restaurant was once the customs post between Austria and Switzerland. We release the horses into a lovely pasture by the house. They still have enough energy for a joyful gallop and then tuck into the lush grass. And now the forecast rain sets in – what timing! We settle into the rustic, historic-style rooms and warm ourselves up a bit first. From my room today, I have a great view of the earth pyramids, a unique phenomenon in the Alps – the cone-shaped rock deposits date back to the Ice Age. After a hot shower, a delicious dinner awaits us in the cosy dining room with its open fire. Outside, the rain is lashing down, making it all the more cosy in the warm room. The farm is run by a woman from Berlin who ended up in this remote corner a few years ago.



After a restful night in complete tranquillity, a delicious breakfast buffet awaits us in the morning. Well-rested and fortified, we fetch the horses from the paddock and get ready for another day's riding. As we set off, the valley is thick with fog. As it gradually lifts a little, we see it: the highest peaks around us are white! We start the day with a correspondingly chilly breeze. We ride through the forest on the other side of the Val Sinestra back towards the Inn Valley. As soon as the clouds and fog thin out a little, we catch glimpses of the picturesque mountains in between. The route takes us across idyllic meadows to a pretty village with typical Engadine houses.

These are made of stone, white and grey with beautiful decorations. We then pass through a beautiful mountain pasture with views of the mighty mountains beyond the Inn. Here and there we now pass dark-wooded alpine huts, which were once used by farmers in spring and autumn on their way with the cattle up into the mountains or back down into the valleys. After a final cool shower, the sun comes out again today and accompanies us for the rest of the day. From the mountain pasture, we

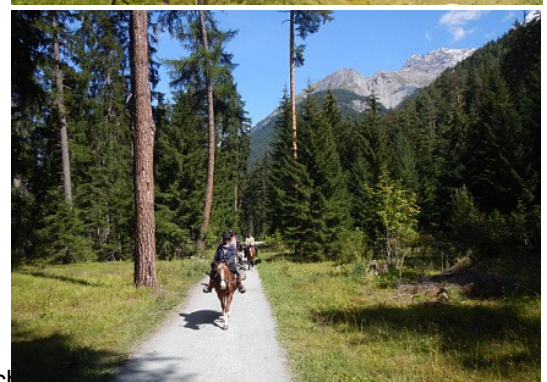
finally back down into the valley. The descent (on foot) is quite long and steep, but offers a fantastic view of the mountains and across the Inn Valley. Eventually, we reach another typical village. Now we are on the plain and ride along soft paths through sparse woodland and meadows towards the river. Crossing a wide wooden bridge, we reach a campsite with a restaurant, where we enjoy our lunch in glorious sunshine.

In the afternoon, we follow the Inn through woods and meadows and typical villages. The rushing river appears milky white, a striking contrast to the lush green landscape. After a lovely ride through the valley, we head up into the woods along a stream. The path is extremely steep, but the horses handle it with ease.

We then make our way back to the riding centre, alternating between woodland and alpine meadows. Here we tend to the horses and say our goodbyes. If I didn't already have two, I'd have gladly taken the mare home with me, along with the extremely comfortable trail riding saddle. In general, the saddles and bridles are in excellent condition and every horse has its own matching saddle and bridle. Most of the saddles are Western-style. There are also sturdy rain ponchos

to borrow. Everything is well organised and maintained, which is all the more commendable given the size of the operation.

Before the train leaves, there's still a little time for a beer on the terrace. After that, we say our final goodbyes and set off for home. The train journey this time, in the sunshine, is a real treat: the Upper Inn Valley with its romantic villages, castles, chapels and the stunning mountain panorama...



This, along with the 'Torta da Nusch' (Grisons nut cake), will definitely ensure I return, not to mention the wonderful hospitality and the fantastic horses – highly recommended all round!

Jessica Kiefer, August 2018

Information & booking at: www.equitour.com/pan010.htm

