



# RIDE WORLD WIDE

## France 2017 - Riding the Pyrenees

With Rose Webb-Carter

### Ride Information Sheet



This ride will explore the Basque country of the western Pyrenees in south-west France and northern Spain. Covering spectacular mountain scenery and following in the footsteps of the Duke of Wellington during the final offensive of the Peninsular War in July 1813, it will also be a wonderful opportunity to experience first-hand the culture and traditions of the intriguing Basque people, whose language, flag and food dominate the western Pyrenees. During the week there will be a chance to enjoy the superb local cuisine which includes delicacies such as foie gras, traditional Basque stews, delicious cheeses and local wines and nights will be at comfortable Basque style B&Bs, small hotels and private houses. The group will be led by Rose Webb-Carter along with local hosts Emmanuel and Sylvie Fagoaga. Emmanuel, who runs an equestrian centre is an experienced and knowledgeable riding guide and Sylvie will run the week's logistics. Both are charming, speak excellent English and are altogether wonderful hosts.

**The Story** In June 1813 Wellington had defeated a French army at the Battle of Vittoria in northern Spain and this, combined with the retreat from Moscow in 1812, marked the beginning of the end of Napoleon's dream. By the middle of July 1813 the French armies had retreated into France but were subsequently ordered by Napoleon to go back on the offensive into Spain to relieve French garrisons under siege at Pamplona and San Sebastián. After initial success, the offensive ground to a halt in the face of allied resistance under the command of Wellington and by the end of July 1813 the French had abandoned their offensive. **cont. over**

From then on they were fighting to defend France. There followed a number of distinct actions which will be highlighted during the ride – although it will not be an overwhelmingly history heavy affair! The unfolding of Wellington's story and a chance to ride to the sites of ancient battles at Roncevalles, Maya and La Rhune adding another layer of interest to what is anyway a lovely ride through magnificent countryside.



**Dates** Trip dates are Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> to Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> June 2017 and Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> to Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> September 2017. The ride will include 4 ½ days riding and 5 nights accommodation.

**The Horses** The horses used are owned by Emmanuel. They are locally bred, of mixed blood and range between about 14.2hh and 16.2hh. They are well kept and good mannered but also forward going and responsive to ride. Emmanuel and Rose will generally tack up the horses each day and luggage will be transported ahead of the group by back up vehicle to the next night's accommodation. Saddles are English and saddle bags will be provided. There is a rider weight limit of 90 kg in riding clothes. As horses do not come back to a base at the end of each day and as the group is generally self-sufficient, members of the group will be asked to help with some of the stable management. This normally includes grooming your horse, tacking up and leading your horse to the field at the end of the day.

**Riding** There will usually be about 5 to 6 hours riding a day, broken up with rests to stretch your legs, for drinks and lunch. The daily timetable is usually around 3 hours riding in the morning, a leisurely picnic lunch (and siesta if desired) and then another 2-2 ½ hours in the afternoon. Much of the going is good although there may be occasional rocky and steep paths where you might need to dismount to lead your horse and there will also be some road work each day riding through small villages. The ride will be run for a minimum of 6 and maximum of 10 riding guests. Luggage is moved between accommodation by back up vehicle and a vehicle will also meet some days at lunchtime.

**Pace Riding** overall will be at a relaxed pace, mostly walk and trot with a few canters when the ground allows. The route is generally over mountains, looking down onto beautiful valleys and occasionally riding through or ending the day in sleepy Basque villages.

**Riding experience** All participants need to have a reasonable amount of riding experience. Although you do not need to be an expert rider, you should feel comfortable, balanced and secure in the saddle at a walk, trot and canter and able to control a well-schooled horse in open country at all these paces. You should also be used to riding over different, sometimes rough, terrain. The ride is aimed at reasonably competent riders but as the horses are sensible and well-mannered and the pace is not particularly fast, it is well suited to confident riders of an intermediate ability. As with all of our 'progressive' rides, you will be spending quite a bit of time in the saddle on consecutive days, so will enjoy your holiday much more if you are reasonably riding fit and we recommend regular riding practice in the months before you go.

**Accommodation** Accommodation is in a variety of good quality 3\* village hotels, B&Bs and private houses, chosen for comfort and character. They range from quaint B&Bs in small Basque villages to large Basque houses in open countryside. Individual rooms will be simple but comfortable with their own private bathroom, with loo and shower or bath. Two consecutive nights may be spent in the same B&B. Many of the hotels have excellent restaurants and when in private houses Sylvie, who is an excellent cook, will provide a delicious local dinner. Please note that occasionally due to the number of rooms available at different accommodation, the group may be split staying in two different village B&B, houses or Chambre D'hotes although dinner will be eaten together.



**Meals** The regional cuisine is a highlight of the ride and a particular effort is made with the food and wine to ensure that you are extremely well fed and able to sample many of the local specialities. Breakfast is usually French style and eaten at the accommodation – coffee, tea, croissants and bread. Lunch is a varied and delicious picnic. On some days, you will be expected to carry part of the picnic in your saddle bags (which will be provided) as some locations will be too remote to meet up with the vehicle. On one day you will be met by Sylvie who will have prepared a delicious picnic. Lunch will usually include fresh bread, Basque pate, Spanish ham and Idiazabal, the local cheese. In the evening, there will be a three course dinner eaten as a group at the accommodation. Menus are varied and carefully chosen to include some of the local dishes. Wine is included with lunch and dinner. Extra drinks and spirits are available and will be charged to your bar bill. Vegetarians can be well catered for, but if you have any special dietary requirements please let us know in advance so that arrangements can be made.

**Weather** As in any mountain range, the weather can be unpredictable but generally June and September are warm and dry, though there may be more chance of rain in September. You will ride between altitudes of 300 to 1200 meters. Depending on altitude, temperatures during the day are expected to range from about 15 to 30 degrees C. Nights will be cooler. It is not uncommon to have rain towards the end of summer but showers are usually short lived.

**What to bring** We will send you a list of things we suggest you bring, when you book.

**Itinerary** An outline of the itinerary planned is set out below but please note that, at this stage, this is only a guide and the day to day arrangements may be altered. The programme below is based on the ride that took place in August 2016.

**Day 1** - Met at Biarritz airport and driven to the small village of Roncesvalles in the Navarre region of Spain where the first night is spent in a comfortable hotel. Dinner at the hotel with your hosts, Emmanuel and Sylvie. (D)

**Day 2** - Drive to the start of the ride where you meet the horses. After an introduction to the horses, set off riding in the mountains of Orreaga and the Aldudes valley via the site of the battle of Roncesvalles. Picnic lunch on the side of a hill overlooking the valley. Ride on to the small town of Eznasu on the border of France and Spain. Overnight in a charming B&B with stunning views and excellent traditional Basque dishes. (B,L,D)

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**Day 3** - Ride up the foothills of the Pyrenees where there are breath-taking views of the Baztan valley in the Navarre region of Spain and the Aldudes valley in France. Picnic lunch looking into the valley and ride onto the Spanish town of Baztan for the night. (B,L,D)

**Day 4** - Ride to Maya village and stop on the Maya Pass to learn about the battle where Wellington's troops were forced back from their position. Picnic lunch in the neighbouring valley and ride onto Sare. Overnight in Sare with dinner at an excellent restaurant set within an elegant Basque house hotel. (B,L,D)

**Day 5** - Ride to Bera via the Santa Barbara Redoubt. Excellent views out to the sea and down onto St Jean de Luz. Meet Sylvie at a picnic spot above the Nive Valley and ride back along a medieval road to Sare. Overnight in the same hotel as night 4. Dinner with your host in the village of Espelette. (B,L,D)



**Day 6** - Spend the morning riding in the open country around La Rhune and take in the battles of Bidassoa and Nivelle which took place months after Maya. Ride back to Sare where the ride ends, in time for a final celebratory lunch at Emmanuel and Sylvie's house. After lunch collected and transferred to Biarritz in time for onward flights OR if you wish, an optional extra night (extra charge) can be arranged in Bayonne [transfer to Bayonne for dinner and night in a hotel]. (B,L)

[OPTIONAL Day 7 - Day at leisure to explore Bayonne before transfer to Biarritz airport for onward travel].

**Price: 1640 Euros per person**

Please note that due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, the ride rate is quoted in Euros. The sterling price will be the equivalent sterling rate using the euro/sterling exchange rate in force when you book/pay.

Rate quoted **INCLUDES** 5 nights twin accommodation, all riding, meals (dinner day 1 to lunch Day 6), tea, coffee and wine with lunch and dinner (half a bottle per person at each meal) and group transfers from/to Biarritz at set times on the first and last day (see paragraph re – travel arrangements).

It **EXCLUDES** International flights and taxes, travel between your arrival port in France and Biarritz, personal travel/medical insurance (which you **must** have), supplements for a single room, your bar bill for extra drinks, transfers outside the set times, any visa fees, any personal extras at hotels (laundry, phone calls etc), any extra night's accommodation and meals etc in Bayonne after riding itinerary and any tips you might wish to leave.

The rate is based on a minimum of 6 ride participants; if there are less the ride may still go ahead but a supplement will be charged. Please contact us for details.

**Single supplement** - The rate assumes twin bedded rooms and if you are travelling alone or wish to book a single room a supplement of 145 Euros is payable for the week. If you are travelling alone and are prepared to share with another (same sex) guest on the ride to save paying the supplement, we can sometimes arrange this - let us know and we will see if we can find a sharer - if there is no-one, the supplement will be charged.

**Flights and Travel arrangements** - The closest airport to fly to is Biarritz which is the ride meeting / drop off point on the first/last day of the ride. There are several flights a day to Biarritz from London and regional UK airports. Ryan Air fly daily from London Stansted with arrival and departure times that suit the itinerary. EasyJet also fly from and to London Gatwick although their flights are not daily. There are also flights with Flybe from Birmingham and Southampton although also not daily. Fares vary but expect to pay from around £100-£250 per person economy return. British Airways also have flights to Biarritz from Heathrow but only on Sundays OR you can fly with British Airways to and from Bilbao and we can arrange a special transfer at an extra cost. If you would like help booking flights or a fare quote please contact us - we can book British Airways scheduled flights for you. Our ATOL number for flight bookings is 6213.

**Transfers** - Please note when organising flights that there is **one set** (included) transfer for the group on the first / last day of the ride. This will be organised to suit group arrival times but will not leave Biarritz later than 17.45 on the day of arrival so you need to aim to arrive at Biarritz by about 17:15 at the latest. You should also book a return flight which leaves **after 16:00** on the final day to allow time for lunch and transfers. Transfers from Sare to Biarritz take about 45 minutes. If you do decide to go on to Bayonne for an extra night/day, a transfer will be provided. There will be an additional cost for special transfers outside these set times.

**General visa and health information** (NB this is only a brief outline - further information will be sent to you if you make a confirmed booking.)

**Visas** Holders of full UK passports do not need visas for visits to France whatever the length of stay, although for visits of over 90 days residence permits are required. Holders of other passports should check requirements with the French Consulate.

**Health** No vaccinations are needed by EEC residents to enter France.

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