



# **RIDE WORLD WIDE**

## **France 2018 - Riding in 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 simple yet comfortable 'Basque style' B&Bs 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 meals and 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. Wellington knew that the French would attack in one of three places so he strategically placed his men to hold the line of the Pyrenees. After initial success, the French 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.

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From then on, the French were no longer fighting to keep Spain but to defend France. There followed a number of distinct actions which will be highlighted during the ride - although it will not be a history heavy affair! The story simply adds another layer of interest to what is a lovely ride through magnificent countryside.

**Dates 2018** Dates are **Thursday 7th to Wednesday 13th June** and **Saturday 15th to Friday 21st September**, including 6 nights accommodation and 5 days riding.

**The Route** Largely dictated by the historical story, the ride route follows the line of the Pyrenees - the front held by Wellington's army in 1813 from Roncesvalles in the mountains to the coast at Irun. Starting just outside of Roncesvalles the next five days are spent riding towards the coast crossing the border between France and Spain countless times. Wellington's story gradually unfolds as you ride through the battlefields of Roncesvalles, Maya and La Rhune.



**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, well-mannered and also forward going and responsive to ride. English style saddles are used and most horses are ridden in hackamores. They are used to a light contact with the mouth and go well on a relaxed rein. Some help with horses is required along the route and although Emmanuel and Rose will do all they can to prepare horses each day, when out on the route participants will be expected to help a little by (for example) bringing their own horse in from the field, lightly grooming, tacking up and untacking at the end of day. Saddle bags are provided for small personal belongings. Luggage is transported ahead of the group by back-up vehicle to the next night's accommodation.

**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 are 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. Rides are run for a minimum of 6 and maximum of 10 riding guests.

**Pace** Riding overall is at a relaxed pace, mostly walk and trot with a few canters when the ground allows. The route is cross country, much of it along narrow paths and tracks through a mountainous area, looking down onto beautiful valleys and occasionally riding through, or ending the day in, sleepy Basque villages. Due to the mountainous terrain riding is often in single file although you are free to spread out where the going permits.

**Riding experience** All participants must 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 be 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 2 to 3\* village hotel / guesthouses (B&Bs) and private houses, chosen for comfort and character. They range from quaint B&Bs in small Basque villages to large Basque houses, converted to Chambre D'Hotes in open countryside. Individual rooms vary, with some simpler than others, but all are reasonably comfortable with their own private bathroom, with loo and shower or bath. Accommodation to start is fairly simple, but as you progress through the week riding from a more remote area towards the better known Basque villages, it becomes more comfortable, with the final two nights in charming, privately owned Chambre D'Hotes that are known for their excellent food, style and ambiance. Please note that occasionally, due to the number of rooms available at different accommodation, the group may be split, staying in two different places although always close by, of similar standard and dinner will always be eaten together.

**Meals** The regional cuisine is a major part of the ride and a particular effort is made with food and wine to ensure you are extremely well fed and able to sample many of the local specialities. Breakfast is usually simple in the French style and eaten at the accommodation – coffee, tea, croissants and bread. Lunch is a rustic but varied and delicious picnic, carried in saddle bags (which will be provided) on most days as lunch locations are too remote to meet up with the vehicle. Picnics usually include a selection of fresh French bread, homemade Basque pates, Spanish hams and Idiazabal the local cheese. In the evening, a three course dinner is eaten as a group at the accommodation or at a local restaurant. Menus are varied and in the more remote areas dinners are simpler but delicious (perhaps a local recipe stew or casserole for your main course) with food developing more finesse towards the end of the ride. There are often hors d'oeuvres / appetizers with a drink before dinner and 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 sunny, warm and dry, although rain is always possible! Riding is at altitudes of between 300 and 1200 meters and, depending on altitude, temperatures during the day in summer are expected to range from about 15 to 35 degrees C. Rain is not uncommon 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** The following is an outline of the itinerary planned but please note this is only a guide and the day-by-day route and arrangements may be altered by your guide in his absolute discretion according to local conditions, the weather and number and ability of riders.



**Day 1** - Met at Biarritz airport and driven about 90 mins to the small village of Burguete just beyond Roncesvalles in the Navarre region of Spain where the first night is spent in a Basque house. Dinner at a local restaurant with your hosts, Emmanuel and Sylvie. (D)

**Day 2** - Breakfast and then you will be driven to meet the horses at the start of the riding route. 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 between France and Spain. Overnight in a charming B&B with stunning views and excellent traditional Basque dishes. (B,L,D)

**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, then ride onto the Spanish town of Baztan for the night. Dinner at a local restaurant. (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 vastly outnumbered but fought gallantly, inflicting greater losses on the French than they suffered themselves. Picnic lunch in the neighbouring valley and ride onto the village of Urdax for the night. (B,L,D)



**Day 5** - Ride over the border once again into France and onto Sare, stopping for lunch and looking down over the picturesque town of Ainhoa. Today's ride finishes at the stables on the outskirts of Sare and riders will then be driven to the town of Espelette (15 mins) to spend the night at a charming family run Chambre D'Hotes Irazabala (or similar) with lovely views. Dinner with your host. (B,L,D)

**Day 6** - Ride from the stables up into the open country around La Rhune mountain which saw a number of battles in the concluding months of the campaign as Wellington's army pushed into France and onto victory. Wonderful panoramic views out to the sea and the seaside town of St Jean de Luz as well as the country that you have covered over the last 5 days. Picnic lunch in a shady spot before riding back along the Nivelle river and to Sare where the ride ends. Overnight Olhabidea Chambre D'Hotes (or similar), a Basque country guesthouse where there will be a final celebratory dinner. (B,L,D)

**Day 7** - After breakfast collected & transferred to Biarritz (or Bayonne) in time for onward flights / journey (B)



**Price: 1895 Euros per person**

**Please note that due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, the ride rate is quoted in Euros. Payments can be made either in £ sterling using the euro/sterling exchange rate in force when you book/pay, or you can pay by Euro bank transfer.**

Rate quoted **INCLUDES** 6 nights twin accommodation, all riding (5 days) and equipment, the services of an English speaking guide, meals (dinner day 1 to breakfast Day 7), 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).

Rate **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 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 175 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. Occasionally as there are only a limited number of rooms in the smaller hotels & B&Bs the group may be split between two hotels if single rooms are required, although dinner will be eaten together.

**Flights and Travel arrangements** - The ride meeting / pick up point is Biarritz and a transfer from and back to Biarritz is included on the first and last day. Currently there are limited flights to Biarritz from the UK (this may change for 2018) – best timings are RyanAir who fly daily from London Stansted. EasyJet also fly from and to London Gatwick although not daily. There are also flights with Flybe from Birmingham but again not daily. Fares vary but expect to pay from around £100-£250 per person economy return. You can also travel via Paris, travel by train or fly with British Airways to and from Bilbao and we can arrange a special transfer at an extra cost. Please ask if you are interested in this. 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 Biarritz **after 10:00** on the final day to allow time for breakfast and transfers. Transfers from Sare to Biarritz take about 45 minutes. If you decide to add an extra night(s) in Bayonne after the ride, 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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