



RIDE WORLD WIDE SPAIN

Riding in the Valleys of Gredos with Richard Dunwoody 17th to 24th May 2020

This ride will explore the four valleys of the Sierra de Gredos, west of Madrid in Castille, central Spain. The mountains that make up the Gredos range are situated between the provinces of Avila, Caceres and Salamanca and are crossed by the Duero and Tajo rivers. The majority of peaks are higher than 2000m and the summit of the best known, the Circo de Gredos Almanzor peak, is about 2590m and always snowy against the horizon. In between these imposing mountains, grassy moorland valleys, scattered with wild flowers in spring and summer, provide wonderful going for horses and the area is a lovely example of rustic, rural Spain with a landscape that is wild, natural and full of colour. The ride is organised with, and will be lead by, Maria Elena Dendaluze, an extremely personable and much sought after riding guide who is extremely professional, knowledgeable and always excellent company. She (together with her team) always looks after both her horses and guests with the greatest care. Accommodation is carefully chosen at a high standard and this, combined with good horses, unspoilt, un-touristed riding country and Maria Elena's attention to detail, local knowledge and commitment to ensuring everyone has a good time, makes these rides one of the best you can do in Europe.



In addition this particular ride will be accompanied by Richard Dunwoody, one of racing's great names. Champion jockey from 1992 to 1995, long-term record-holder of jump winners, as well as an accomplished Equestrian photographer and increasingly an adventurer in his own right, Richard's love of photography and travel has taken him far and wide. Approachable, fun and always full of interesting stories, he is an experienced trip leader who has accompanied numerous riding groups. This promises to be an extra special week!



The Horses Maria Elena has about 24 horses in all, most of which are locally bred Arab and / or Andalucian crosses. They average between 15hh and 16hh and are a very enjoyable, responsive and well schooled ride. They are also good-natured, nimble, extremely sure footed and well adapted to the going making them a real pleasure to ride. Most of the horses have been owned or known to Maria Elena since they were young and have been carefully brought on and schooled by her and her helpers. She knows them well, they are calm, kind and well-loved and she is expert at matching horse and rider. Tack is good quality English style with seat savers and saddle-bags provided. There is a strict rider weight limit of 90kg (14 stone) in riding clothes.

Riding There will usually be between 5 and 6 hours riding a day, broken up with rests to stretch your legs, for drinks and lunch. 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, where you will be watched by locals who love to see riders on a beautiful horse. Luggage will be moved between accommodation by back up vehicle and a vehicle will also meet riders at drinks stops and lunchtime each day.

Pace The riding pace will be moderate overall although will vary from time to time with the terrain. The Gredos area itself is used for endurance riding competitions and there are some lovely open grassy valleys (rather like moorland) where you can canter off-track, as well as wide woodland paths that provide good going. When riding higher and on winding paths there are places where the pace will be slow but as you descend, for example to the area around the Corneja valley, the going is generally flatter and fairly open and there are wide sand and dirt tracks, the old cattle drover roads, that provide excellent chances to move on. Overall the ride should be at a moderate, well-varied pace and the horses are active and energetic.



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Riding Experience This ride is aimed at reasonably experienced riders and to participate you are expected to be a reasonably competent rider, who is comfortable and secure in the saddle and able to control a well schooled horse in open country at all paces. Although you don't need to be an expert rider, you should be used to riding over varied terrain at a varied pace with a group of horses. You should also be quite riding fit as saddle hours can be fairly long.

Terrain The ride explores the four valleys of the Tormes, Corneja, Alberche and Tietar Rivers. Although this is a region of high mountains, there are forested slopes of oak, pine and chestnut and vast open moorland pastures nestled in the valleys. This rough grassland, which is scattered with craggy rocks, acres of broom and grazed by wild goats, provides wonderful going for horses. In spring and summer the grasslands are covered in an array of wild flowers and you will ride through a sea of yellow broom catching the scent of wild thyme and lavender on the air as your horse brushes past. On some days, routes climb winding, rocky paths; on others you ride along forested river valleys and past small isolated villages with age-old traditions, architecture and a unique character.



Accommodation The first two and last nights will be spent at the Parador of Gredos, a hotel belonging to Spain's national chain of Parador hotels chosen for their special building or setting. The impressive Parador of Gredos was built in 1926 as a hunting lodge for Alfonso XIII and was the first establishment in Spain to be converted to a Parador. Rooms are very comfortable and the hotel has several dining areas and terraces where you can sit with a drink and enjoy the mountain views. Other nights will be spent in small, comfortable country and village hotels ranging in style and character. The standard will vary a little over the week (choice is limited), but hotels are of a good 2* to good 3* standard and carefully chosen. Single rooms can be arranged for a supplement - but singles in some hotels are limited and, if the ride is full, you may be asked to share with another guest on one night.



Meals Breakfast, lunch and dinner every day will be included (dinner first day to breakfast the last day). Breakfast is at your hotel and is generally simple - bread, toast or croissant, perhaps yoghurt, fruit and tea or coffee. On most days you will stop for an 'aperitif' mid morning, with a selection of drinks as well as light tapas. Lunch will normally be a substantial picnic, eaten at a long table set up in the countryside. It usually includes a selection of freshly prepared salads, bread, and a main course such as Spanish omelette, barbecued steak, fish or a delicious Paella. Dinner is three courses, usually eaten at your hotel, sometimes with a choice from the a la carte menu and sometimes a set menu, although often a choice of meat or fish. Maria Elena takes great care with menu choices and works closely with local restaurants to include local specialities. Meal times will generally be a little later than in the UK with breakfast usually 9.00-9.30, aperitif at 12.30-1.00pm, lunch at 2.30 to 3.00pm and dinner at about 9 to 9.30pm. A selection of soft drinks, beer, good local wines and tea and coffee will all be included with lunch and dinner. Vegetarians can be catered for with prior notice - please tell us of any special diet when you book.

Weather Late May is late spring / early summer and usually dry, but as you are close to the mountains the weather can be unstable with rain (even snow) always a possibility! Temperatures in the Gredos are strongly influenced by the altitude which is between 1600 and 1700m. In May daytime highs are usually between 15 and 20 degrees C. Days are normally sunny with clear blue skies - the sun can be very intense because of the altitude but as you are high. Evenings are usually cool in May and a warm (waterproof) coat is necessary.

What to Bring We will send you a list with suggestions of what to bring when you book.

Itinerary The daily routine will generally be to set off at about 10am riding for a couple of hours before stopping for a rest and aperitif to keep you going until lunch. You then ride on for about 2 hours before lunch. After lunch and a siesta until about 4pm, you ride until early evening, stopping at about 6 or 7 pm or sometimes a little later. Below is the day by day detailed itinerary - please note that this is only an example of what is planned and day-by-day arrangements and route may be varied if the weather or other local conditions require.

Sunday 17th May - Meeting will be at Madrid airport at 3pm. The group will then be driven about 2 hours to Navarredonda de Gredos, a small village in the Gredos with a splendid view of the Almanzor peak. Time allowing, a stop en route at the historic walled town of Avila for sightseeing before driving on to the first night's hotel, the imposing Parador of Gredos just outside the village of Navarredonda de Gredos. Welcome dinner and night at the Parador. (D)



Monday 18th May - Breakfast, then a short drive to the stables to meet the horses. This will be an easy introductory day so you can get used to your horse at all paces. After mounting up, set off following cattle tracks through pine woods and across open pasture towards the mountains with magnificent views of the Sierra de Gredos. A mid morning aperitif and then stop for a delicious lunch, either at a small secluded country bar or a picnic in unspoilt countryside, followed by a short siesta before riding back to the stables in Navarredonda by a different route. Dinner and second night Parador. (B,L,D)

Tuesday 19th May - Breakfast and return to the stables. Set off through the woods and beautiful meadows along the Tormes River Valley with chances to trot and canter. Cross a stone bridge over the river to a magical picnic spot at the 'Poza de las Paredes', the gorge of Barbellido. Picnic in a shady cherry orchard and if the weather is good sunbathe or swim from the rocks by the river. After lunch, mount up for a lovely ride along cattle trails to the town of Navalperal de Tormes and on to a hotel set by itself in the countryside, a short walk from the river. This is a simple hotel but is in a great place for an evening sun-downer and you might take a gentle stroll down to the river as the horses graze nearby, before dinner and the night. Night at Hotel Rural Cruz del Gallo. (B,L,D)

Wednesday 20th May - Breakfast at the hotel, then set off on a long half-day ride continuing along cattle paths in the Tormes river valley passing the village of Aliseda de Tormes. There is a marked change in the vegetation as you ride deeper into the mountains to eventually arrive on the outskirts of the small town of Barco de Avila where the night will be spent at a comfortable hotel, converted from a lovely country house. The afternoon free to explore Barco de Avila a 15th century walled town with a beautiful medieval bridge over the river, about 15 mins walk from the hotel. Or you can just rest and relax by the hotels heated indoor swimming pool. Dinner and overnight. (B,L,D)



Thursday 21st May - Breakfast then ride on with a little road work and then along cattle tracks, through holm oak woods and across grassy pasture heading away from El Barco. The going today is quite flat and there will be a chance to canter as you follow winding tracks through grassland dotted with huge granite boulders and rocky outcrops. A long chalk road and finally head through the village of Puente del Congosto, before stopping a little further on for a picnic lunch in the shade near a lovely swimming spot in the river. In the afternoon a shorter ride to a small country hotel where the night is spent just outside the village of Hoyorrendondo. The horses are turned out to graze in the fields around the hotel and there will be time for a drink in the garden, before dinner. (B,L,D)



Friday 22nd May - After breakfast at the hotel, set off riding. This is a day of contrasting landscapes starting in the open flat country of the Corneja river valley until a mid-morning aperitif stop. Then follow the Corneja river to its source, stopping for a picnic lunch near one of the many old water mills, which used to produce most of the flour for this part of Castile. In the afternoon, a bit of riding on a tar road, before cutting into the hills to follow the path of an ancient Roman road to the Puerto de Chia (5,686 feet) for a breathtaking panoramic view of the Corneja Valley on one side, and the Alberche river on the other. Descend to San Martin de la Vega where the horses spend the night. A short transfer to a small village hotel in Barajas de Gredos for dinner and the night. (B,L,D)



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Saturday 23rd May - Breakfast and drive back to meet the horses. Set off riding back towards the Sierra de Gredos with some great views of the distant peaks. Head down towards the Tormes valley, winding across broom-covered hills, to where the ride started and stop for an early lunch near the river. A short afternoon ride takes you back to the stables in Navarredonda de Gredos. Farewell to the horses before being driven the few minutes from the stables to the Parador in Navarredonda where the final night is spent. After settling into your rooms meet up for a drink on the terrace, with its glorious views over the pine forest towards the mountains, and then a farewell dinner before your last night at the Parador. (B,L,D)

Sunday 24th May - Breakfast in the hotel, then driven to Madrid (arriving about noon) for onwards flights. (B)



PRICE

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

Euros 2700 per person (single supplement 200 Euros)

NB - Single supplement payable on arrival in Spain in cash

Rate **INCLUDES** all riding, 7 nights twin hotel accommodation (single room if paying supplement), services of experienced bi-lingual guide and full back-up / support team, meals from dinner Day 1 to breakfast Day 8, mid-morning aperitif most days and drinks (wine, beer and a selection of soft drinks) with meals and also transfers from / to Madrid airport with the group at set times on the first and last day.

Rate **EXCLUDES** international flights / travel to Madrid and taxes, personal medical / travel insurance (which you must have), any extra drinks at bar stops and before / after meals at your hotel etc, any visa fees, extras such as telephone calls & laundry, charges for transfers outside the set times and any tips you may wish to leave.



Single supplement - The Rate assumes twin bedded rooms in hotels and the single supplement is payable if you are travelling alone or wish to book a single room (NB one or two hotels have a limited number of rooms and if the ride is full you may be asked to share with another guest for one night even if paying a single supplement - you would of course be refunded this part of the supplement). If you are travelling alone and are prepared to share with another (same sex) guest 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 - The ride meeting point is Madrid airport. There are several flights a day to Madrid from London - British Airways have regular flights from Gatwick and Heathrow and Iberia fly several times a day from Heathrow. Easyjet also usually have a daily flight from Luton and Gatwick and there may be other 'budget airline' options from London or regional airports, depending on the season. You need to aim to arrive in Madrid by about **2.15pm** at the latest on the first day (17th May) and should book a return flight which leaves **after 13.30** on the final day (24th May) to allow time for transfers. The transfer takes about 2 ½ hours each way. Fares to Madrid vary but expect to pay from around £120 to £220 per person economy return. 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 will be **one set** transfer for the group on the first / last day of the ride. Pick up will be scheduled for 3 pm on the first day and drop off at about 12 noon on the last day but **PLEASE** contact us before you confirm any flight arrangements as this time may change. If you cannot get to Madrid in time for the pick up or if you need to arrive in Madrid earlier than the drop off time on the last day, it might be possible for the group to wait a short time / leave a little earlier but you will probably have to pay extra for a private transfer / taxi (we can help arrange this - around 150 Euros one way). **PLEASE** contact us to discuss flight times before you book

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 If you hold a full British passport you do not need a visa for visits to Spain whatever the length of stay, although for visits of over 90 days residence permits are required. Please check up to date requirements with the Spanish consulate.

Health No vaccinations are needed by EEC residents to enter Spain (according to the Spanish and World Health Organisations). If you have a particular condition requiring special medical treatment, in case of emergencies you should carry a letter from your own doctor translated into Spanish describing your condition and the medicine / treatment required.

Additional information on the area for before or after a ride:

The area of the Gredos is a Natural Park and there is some wonderful walking and hiking. The Tormes river also has good trout fishing from April to August - if you are interested please contact us as a permit is required. There is also some excellent bird watching (best in May). The region is in the heart of Castille, home to some of Spain's most historical towns and cities. Avila, Segovia, Salamanca and Toledo have all been declared World Heritage Sites by UNESCO.

Avila is a medieval town, surrounded by walls constructed in the 11th and 12th century (2500m in length, 88 towers, 9 gates). These walls were built to protect the Spanish territories from the Moor and are still pretty much intact. Known as the "City of Saints and Stones", it is the birthplace of St Theresa and the burial place of the Grand Inquisitor Torquemada. Avila has kept its medieval austerity and the purity of form can still be seen in its Gothic cathedral and the fortifications which are the most complete in Spain. There are charming squares and beautiful quiet pedestrian streets which make it a wonderful historic town to explore on foot. The Parador de Avila is very comfortable and in the centre of the city; there are a number of other smaller, stylish hotels that are also very good. If you decide to stay the Saturday before the ride in Avila it is usually possible to meet the transfer vehicle in Avila (an easy train ride from Madrid) on the Sunday (it will pass through at around 16.30 to 17.00). Please liaise with us if you would like to do this

Websites worth visiting are: <http://whc.unesco.org> & www.spain.info/tourspain & www.avilaturismo.com
www.paradores-spain.com

Segovia has many magnificent monuments including a Roman Aqueduct built in the 1st & 2nd C AD and a castle - Alcazar - dating back to the 12th Century where Isabella la Catolica was proclaimed Queen of Castile.

Salamanca was conquered by Hannibal in the 3rd C AD. The university of Salamanca, founded in the 12th C, is the oldest in Spain and one of the oldest in Europe. There are many fascinating monuments to explore.

Toledo the medieval capital of Spain, is one of the most impressive historical - artistic complexes anywhere in the world. The town, perched on a hill and skirted by a sharp bend in the river Tagus has remained largely unaltered since the end of the Middle Ages. Romans, Visigoths and Moors lived there in successive centuries, each leaving a mark in the development of the city. Alfonso VI, king of Castile, conquered the city in 1085 and thenceforth three ethnically distinct communities grew up - Christians, Jews and Moslems all leaving a profound mark on its architecture and culture. Of all cities in the area, Toledo is impregnated with a fascinating history and culture. A few days exploring on foot, with a night or two in the Parador, a lovely 4 * hotel, is a wonderful addition to any ride.

Avila

(DRAFT 22/08/19)

