



# RIDE WORLD WIDE

## FRANCE

### PYRENEES & PAYS BASQUE 2025

#### RIDE INFORMATION

These rides explore the Basque country of the western Pyrenees in south-west France and northern Spain with some routes heading south into the Spanish provinces of Navarra, Rioja and Aragon. This border country between France and Spain has some spectacular mountain scenery as well as several hidden 'microcosms' such as south east Navarra's Bardenas Desert and the wine growing country of Rioja. Historically, from its strategic role in Medieval times to the part it played in the Duke of Wellington's final offensive in the 1813 Peninsular War, the region also has much to offer and your French hosts, Emmanuel and Sylvie Fagoaga, are a knowledgeable and superbly welcoming local team as well as experienced riding guides. Their aim is to give an insiders' view of these lesser known regions, a chance to enjoy lovely riding but also to explore and experience local history, culture and traditions. They take great pride in showing all the areas have to offer - their history, culture and landscapes - and in introducing you to the delicious local cuisine and wines. Nights on all rides are spent in local 'B&Bs' and small village guesthouses, simple but carefully chosen and all adding to the 'insiders' view.



#### YOUR GUIDE

Emmanuel guides these rides personally, with Sylvie, his wife, organising logistics and back up. Both were brought up in the Sare area and Emmanuel spent his youth exploring the mountains on foot and by horse. He is an excellent horseman and a gentle, sympathetic and inspiring guide who takes huge pride in sharing the area he knows so well with his guests. Both he and Sylvie speak French, English and Spanish and are delightful, knowledgeable company who will look after you very well.

#### DATES

Different routes are run on request for small groups and from occasional set dates between April and October. Please see dates overleaf.

## HORSES

The horses used for all rides 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, calm and sensible yet also forward going and responsive to ride. They are used to a light contact with the mouth and go very well on a relaxed rein.

## TACK

English style saddles are used and most horses are ridden in hackamores. Participants are asked to give some help with horses during riding days and, although Emmanuel is always on hand, are usually required to tack up, and untack and sometimes bring their own horse in from the field and lightly groom before riding. Saddle bags are provided for small personal belongings whilst riding and luggage is transported ahead of the group to the next night's accommodation by back-up vehicle.



## RIDING

There is usually about 5 to 6 hours riding a day, broken up with rests to stretch your legs, for drinks and lunch. The daily timetable varies but generally there is around 3 or 3 ½ hours riding in the morning, a leisurely picnic lunch (and siesta if desired) and then another 2-2 ½ hours or so in the afternoon. Set date rides are run for a minimum of (usually) 5 and maximum of 8 riding guests although rides can be organised for smaller / private groups on request. The going underfoot on all routes is generally good but there will be some occasional rocky and steep paths where you might need to dismount to lead your horse as well as some road work each day riding through small villages. With only one or two rides on each route, each season, exploration is an integral part and each ride is different to the last.

## WEIGHT LIMIT

The weight limit on all rides is about 95 kgs / 15 stone but this does depend on numbers, riding experience and fitness - if you are 85 kg or more please contact us to check that suitable horses are available.

## PACE

Riding overall is at a relaxed pace, mostly walk and trot with a few canters when the ground allows, although this varies with each itinerary. The Aragon & Navarra regions have some good sandy going where you can move on; on the route between Espelette & Sare the going is generally more mountainous so the pace often slow. Riding, particularly in this area, is often in single file, looking down onto beautiful valleys and occasionally riding through, or ending the day, in a sleepy Basque village - although you are free to spread out where the terrain and safety allows.

## RIDING EXPERIENCE

To join one of these rides you 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, riding with a group at all these paces. You should also be used to riding over different, sometimes rough, terrain and confident handling a horse from the ground. The rides are aimed at reasonably competent riders and as Emmanuel is always keen to explore, you need to be relaxed and confident on a horse. However as the horses are very sensible and well-mannered, they suit riders of an intermediate ability very well. 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 yourself much more if you are reasonably riding fit and we recommend regular riding practice in the months before you go.

## ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation on all rides is in a variety of small rural and village hotels, guesthouses and some private houses. Accommodation is chosen as far as possible for character and for the warm welcome and good food it provides, but the choice is often limited by the route and depends on what is available close by. Some accommodation is very simple and sometimes bathrooms will be shared between 2 or more rooms; on some itineraries you may also spend a night 'dormitory style' in a simple shepherds' cabin to allow you to explore an isolated area. Individual rooms in each place may also vary, with some rooms simpler than others, but all-in-all you should be reasonably comfortable. Ride prices assume twin / double shared rooms. Some single rooms are usually possible (not always!) with advance warning and on payment of a supplement - please call to discuss for the ride you have in mind (and note that sometimes due to the number of rooms available at different accommodation, if several singles are requested the group may be split, staying in two different places although dinner will always be eaten together).



## MEALS

The regional cuisine is a major part of these rides and a particular effort is made with food and wine so you sample some local specialities. Breakfast is usually simple in the French / Spanish style and eaten at your accommodation - coffee, tea, croissants, cake or bread / toast. Lunch will be a rustic but varied and delicious picnic, either brought by back-up car to meet you or sometimes, when lunch locations are too remote to meet a vehicle, carried in saddle bags (provided). Picnics usually include a selection of fresh French bread, pates, hams and local cheeses and are eaten 'picnic style' seated on the floor or on an obliging local log! In the evening, dinner will be three courses, eaten as a group at your accommodation or at a local restaurant. Menus vary according to where you are - in more remote areas, your main course may be a local recipe stew or casserole cooked by Sylvie, an excellent cook; when staying in a town, you may go to a local restaurant, usually somewhere renowned for its food! 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

Rides are run between April and October (spring to early autumn in this part of southern France / northern Spain) when days should be sunny and warm but as you are near the mountains, weather is always variable! Riding is at altitudes of between about 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 and is possible at any time but showers are usually short lived.

## WHAT TO BRING

We will send you a list when you book.

## ITINERARIES

Below is a brief outline of various itineraries which can be arranged - please ask for more details but **note** that the idea behind these rides is to explore the regions you visit; we can give you a day-by-day outline but this will always only be a rough guide and the exact route you follow will be left to the discretion and experience of your guide (and will depend on local weather conditions and ability of riders etc).

**Aragon & Navarra** - A ride taking you to an area that was highly strategic throughout the Middle Ages, located between two great ancient kingdoms of Navarre and Aragon, with their sumptuous medieval architecture and a wild and un-spoilt Mediterranean-Pyrenean landscape. Start from Uncastillo and from here head to Sos del Rey, then follow the Aragon river valley to Gallipienzo, a hill top town with outstanding views of the valley. From here continue to Ayesa and transfer back to Sare for the last night.

**Bardenas Desert, Navarra** - A little known part of Navarra in northern Spain, this route explores the spectacular semi-desert region of Bardenas Reales, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. In sharp contrast with the lush, green one expects of Navarra, the desert chalk and sandstone soil has been eroded into a striking array of gullies, canyons, fairy towers, and solitary hills that transport you to a distant place! Nights in simple local Spanish guesthouses, one night sleeping out in a cabin in the desert and the final night close to the Basque town of Sare.



**Sare to Orbaizeta** - This ride starts in the town of Sare and follows shepherds trails through the Baztan and Aldudes vallays to Auritz/Roncesvalles. The route crosses the mountains between France and France, ending near Roncesvalles, Navarra, the setting of the famous battle of Charlemagne, and other battles of the British Army during the Peninsular Wars.

**Wild & Medieval Aragon** - Romantic Aragon was highly strategic in the Middle Ages and today its medieval architecture, historic churches and ancient towers blend with a wild and untouched Mediterranean / Pyrenean landscape. This ride allows you to absorb all the area has to offer with nights in local village hotels.

**Espelette & Sare** - Exploring the border country between France and Spain, this is a gentle riding route - winding paths through peaceful hills and valleys overlooking sleepy Basque villages. Nights in small but comfortable country guesthouses where hospitality is a matter of course and there is a passion for good food and wine.



## DATES & RATES 2025

Please note that due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, ride rates are 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.

### **Aragon & Navarra, Medieval Castles & Romanesque Churches (6 nights)**

23rd to 29th May

**Euros 2250** per person

### **Espelette & Sare (4 nights)**

On request between March and mid May & mid July to end August

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

Rates **EXCLUDE** International flights, taxes and travel between your arrival port in France and Biarritz, personal travel/medical insurance (which you **must** have with cover to ride), 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.

Rates are based on a minimum of **4 participants**; if there are less the ride may still go ahead but a supplement will be charged. Please contact us for details.

**Single supplements** - Rates assume twin bedded rooms. Sometimes it may be possible to book a single room for an extra charge of **60 Euros per night but** if your booking is dependent on a single room, please contact us to discuss as rooms are limited and this is **not** always possible. If you are travelling alone, you will generally have to pay the supplement, although if you are prepared to share with another (same sex) guest we can sometimes arrange this, however if no sharer is found, the supplement will be payable. Occasionally due to room numbers in smaller hotels & B&Bs the group may be split between two hotels if single rooms are required, although dinner will be eaten together.



## FLIGHTS & TRAVEL INFORMATION

The meeting / pick up point for all rides is Biarritz and a transfer from and back to Biarritz is included on the first and last day. Ryan Air fly from London Stansted; EasyJet fly from London Gatwick. Fares vary but expect to pay from around £150-£300 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.

## GENERAL VISA & 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.

(DRAFT 11/02/2025)

