





South Alps - In the heart of Mercantour

PROVENCE - THE COTE D'AZUR

Explore the **Mercantour region of the Alps on horseback**, ride trails through the imposing high mountains and passes, between altitudes of 1500 and 2800m - in an area known for its almost year-round sunshine! Experience **horse riding through alpine pastures**, isolated villages and the impressive peaks along the Italian border. Throw yourself into a challenging **itinerant horseback ride in Mercantour, France** in complete autonomy along remote paths and passes.

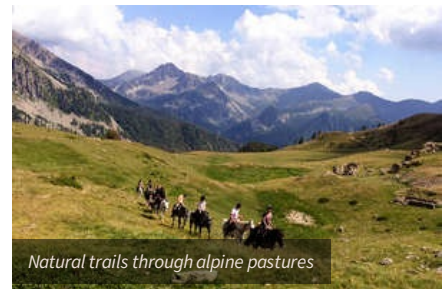
Trail Riding	 7 days / 5 days riding -	 From £0	
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Riding in Mercantour National Park



An idyllic alpine lake picnic spot



Natural trails through alpine pastures

ITINERARY

Highlights

- Visit a region of France that has almost perpetual sunshine!
- Discover the beauty of the Mercantour National Park's flora, fauna and scenery
- Ride to the Valley des Merveilles, a UNESCO world site, and have a guided visit of the petroglyphs, dating from 3000BC, that were found and are studied there
- Experience an athletic and challenging ride, with uneven terrain, and technical passages in the highs and lows of the stunning peaks
- A truly autonomous and itinerant ride with your kit carried in saddle bags and a pack horse for groups of 8 and over

Important - the itinerary outlined on this page is given for illustrative purposes only. The final ride itinerary will be decided around a month before your departure and can be altered somewhat significantly.

Day 1 — 1 : ARRIVAL IN NICE - ST MARTIN VESUBIE - No riding

Fly into Nice airport - flights are not included but can be booked upon request. The shared transfer is at 4:00 pm from the airport.

You will be transferred to St Martin Vésubie and spend the night in a local hotel close to the equestrian centre.

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Day 2 — 2 : MADONE OF FENESTRE SANCTUARY - 7h30 hours riding

From the off, you will set off at pace as you head out towards Le Boréon for a rhythmic ride through alpine forests before riding up a steep incline to reach the La Cougourde dell and Trécoulpas Lake.

Here, you will stop for your picnic lunch; this region belonged to Italy until 1947, and this area has seen a lot of smuggling and clandestine passage. You will ride back out along the Pas de Ladres passage, site of the famed Madone de Fenestre religious sanctuary. Once the Italian border comes into view this means that your rest-stop for the night, Soria Ellena (1840m), isn't too far off and that the day's ride is at an end. You will have your dinner and spend the night in the cabin - in Italy.

Please note: this is an adventure ride and you will be required to dismount and lead your horse on foot on particularly steep or rocky sections of the trail. We recommend hiking boots or boots with a good sole. Previous hiking/adventure trip experience recommended.

Day 3 — 3 : THE HIGH PEAKS - 7 hours riding

Your second day of riding will unfold in the highest and most picturesque summits in the southern alps, including Mount Gelas, the highest of the Maritime Alps, Mount Malédie and Mount Clapier. The scenery here is nothing short of grandiose, and populated by the goat-antelope chamois and ibex that can weigh up to 80kg and have horns 1.5 metres long.

You will experience riding through open prairies, past alpine lakes and stop for your picnic with a view out across the far off Pô Valley. The landmark of Col dei Sabbione signifies the end of the day's ride and the arrival at you hostel for the night; here, you will have dinner and spend the night, in Casterino.

Day 4 — 4 : VALLEY DES MERVEILLES - 3 hours riding

Today's ride is the shortest stage, only 3 hours on horseback, and is an ideal opportunity to recuperate a little before the expedition's 2-day home strait. After a 1 and a half hour ride, you will dismount to visit the open-air petroglyph museum in the Valley des Merveilles. These petroglyphs, rock engravings, carved into rocky outcrops were first identified in 1881. The mineral landscape itself was shaped by glacial movements which over time revealed these some 40,000 cave engravings, some dating to 3000BC, spread over 4000 rocks and making up the largest site of engravings in Europe.

Since 1881, the engravings have been extensively studied and display the earliest representations of man's inhabitation of the area; you will have a guided visit of the site as well as meeting the numerous herds of sheep in the area as well as learning about the local cheese-making processes. You will have dinner and spend the night in a cabin in Merveilles.

Day 5 — 5 : VALLEY DE LA GORDOLASQUE - 7 hours riding

In the morning, you will ride out to Lake Mesches, at an altitude of 1380 metres. Alternating between beautiful larch wood forests and magnificent open countryside in the company of chamois, you will reach the banks of Long Supérieur Lake. Here, you will stop to take in the view and enjoy your picnic.

In the afternoon, you will ride out of the Valley des Merveilles and into the ancient glacial Gordolasque Valley, one of the wildest valleys in the southern alps. Here, you will experience riding through an area of exceptional untouched beauty. You will take the "Terra Rossa" paths that promise some fast-paced riding towards the end of the day.

You will spend the night at the Relais des Merveilles refuge.

Day 6 — 6 : FIVE LAKES - 6 hours riding

For your final day's route, you will ride the return trail back to le Boréon. The Prals lakes, or the "Five Lakes", create an enchanting backdrop through the alpine pastures, themselves crossed by a fast-flowing mountain stream; you will stop for you picnic on the water's edge. After 4 days spent surrounded by mountains, the far-stretching crystal clear water and openness of the lakes will really be a marked and stunning change. Please note that today the terrain is quite mountainous so the pace will be at a walk only.

You will follows trails back to the equestrian centre that should have you arrive at around 17:30. Overnight at the gite.

Day 7 — 7: DEPARTURE

Departure after breakfast.

Transfer to Nice, arriving at 12:00 noon at the airport.

DATES & PRICES

We are currently updating our dates and prices they will be online soon. If you want details of this holiday, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Price details

No departure for this destination. Please contact our travel advisers for more information.

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- Flights to your destination are not included, but can be booked on request - please contact us for rates.

- Groups are made up of 5 - 7 riders.

- Rates are per person, based on riders sharing communal bedrooms. Single rooms are not always available: when they are, they are around €60/£55/\$60 per person per night.

- Transfers are organised at 4 pm on the first day at Nice Airport (T2). On departure day, you will be taken to the airport for 12:00 noon, so please plan for flights after 2:00pm. Transfers outside of these guidelines are possible but would be private transfers at a cost of €250.00 (each way).

- Young riders from the age of 10 are accepted on this ride if accompanied by their parents - and on the condition that they meet the riding requirements

- For riders over 90kgs, please contact us before signing up for this ride so that we can assure a suitable mount.

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Please Note

The itinerary may be modified at anytime for security reasons, meteorological or events beyond our control such as blocked roads, rivers in flood, drought, strikes and local holidays. Equus Journeys, our local partners and their local guides will always strive to find the best solution and will alter the itinerary as needed.

The names of the hotels and accommodation are given for information only and depending on availability, they may be modified without notice and replaced by another of a similar standard.

Price includes

SUPPORT TEAM

1 English-speaking horse guide

LOGISTICS

1 horse equipped with saddle and bridle per rider

ACCOMMODATION

Nights spent in mountain cabins, refuges or shared hostel accommodation.

MEALS

Full board from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on the last day

EXTRAS

Doubles saddlebags

Price doesn't include

MEALS

Beverages and personal extras

TRANSPORT

International flights

Return transfers to Nice airport or train station

EXTRAS

Tips to the local team

Park, museum and other site entry fees

INSURANCE

Cancellation and travel insurance are not included in the above listed price. Please note that insurance is mandatory. We recommend taking out an insurance policy as soon as your trip is booked to cover you in case of cancellation

EQUESTRIAN INFO

Horses

The centre is home to a small stable of around 20 horses of different breeds including Arabs, PRE, Merens, Quarter horse, Lusitanos, Halfinger. There will be a horse to suit each rider, according to their level and preferences. They are well balanced, athletic, shod, live in a herd and are sure footed - knowing the mountain terrain well.

Guide & local team

Your guides, Denis and his son are American. Denis is an BEES equestrian instructor, and is a qualified equestrian tourism guide. Denis is a true American cowboy - with the accent to go along with it! Scott is calmer, unflappable and inexhaustible! They both speak French (and English), with Scott speaking both Spanish and Portuguese as well.

Camille has worked alongside Scott and Denis for the past 2 years and is likewise a qualified equestrian tourism guide; he is a perfect guide always in a great mood and happy to help!

Minimum riding ability

MINIMUM RIDING ABILITY

Riders must be at ease at all 3 paces: walk, trot and two point gallop.

Riders over 90kgs should contact us before signing up for this ride so that we can assure a suitable mount. The maximum weight limit for this ride is 110kg.

PACE

This ride takes place high in the mountains with significant changes in terrain, including steep and technical passages. You will trot and canter everyday depending on the terrain and unevenness of the ground.

TACKING ABILITY AND PARTICIPATION

You will be responsible for tacking and untacking your horse. You will also be more than welcome to participate in meal preparation as well!

TRIP CONDITIONS AND REQUESTED EXPERIENCE

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As well as riding competently, to get the most out of this ride it is important to have a good level of all-round physical fitness to be able to cope with the long days in the saddle and on foot.

This ride takes place in difficult terrain. On horseback or on foot, you must have a good head for heights and be prepared to deal with tricky paths, drops and descents. Previous experience in a mountainous environment is a plus on this trail.

Please note: this is an adventure ride and you will be required to dismount and lead your horse on foot on particularly steep or rocky sections of the trail. Hiking boots or boots with a good sole are mandatory.

EQUESTRIAN EQUIPMENT

You will be riding out into the countryside with all your equipment transported by the horses.

Blankets with pockets and saddlebags will be provided.

Saddles are Portuguese army saddles and bits are Hackamore.

We recommend our riders to wear a helmet to the correct standard and you should bring your own to ensure a proper fit.

If there are over 8 riders, a pack horse will be added to the group.

This ride takes place in the mountains, the ground is mineral in nature and necessitates, particularly for the descents, that you lead your horse on foot. For this reason, you may prefer to wear hiking boots instead of riding boots.

You will be provided with an 18 litre expedition type saddlebag - attached to the back of your saddle, in which you can carry your personal effects (toiletries, change of clothing, and nightwear). We also recommend ensuring you can fit a sleeping-bag liner and a small towel in this space.

TRAVEL INFO

COMFORT

You will spend the night in simple hostels and cabins in the peaks at high altitudes. You will sleep in dormitory style accommodation, usually reserved solely for riders, with access to hot water and electricity. Blankets and bedding will be provided but please bring a sleeping bag liner for more comfort. Breakfast and dinner will be had as a group in your accommodation and it will be hearty - with your days' exertions in mind!

MEALS

The ride is full board.

Breakfast will be had in the refuges, inns or guesthouses and will consist of bread, jam, tea, coffee and occasionally orange juice.

Lunch will be picnics prepared by your guide. Usually they will consist of salad, cheese, mountain chacuterie, local sides (aubergine caviar, tapenade etc.). Dessert will be fruit and biscuits.

Snacks will be had twice a day and will be either dried fruits, biscuits, fruit and/ or chocolate.

Dinner will be had in your accommodation, these meal will be hearty and prepared with the long days in the saddle in mind. Drinks are not included.

CLIMATE

Due to its extreme location in the southern Alps, Mercantour's climate is affected by multiple influences: a northern alpine front as well as strong sunshine and Mediterranean influences from the south. The meeting of these 2 fronts creates a variety of unique meteorological conditions including frequent storms. Temperatures vary between 15 and 25°C during the day and can, in the peaks (> 2400m), drop to 5°C at night.

TIPS

In France, it is customary to tip - usually this is by rounding up the price. You may wish to leave a tip with the guide who can split it amongst all members of the team - this is not obligatory and is entirely at your discretion.

PACKING LIST

On this pack trip, your belongings will be carried by the horses. You will be provided with an expedition-type saddle pack (located at the back of the saddle) with a capacity of about 18 litres to bring all of your personal belongings (toiletries, change of clothes for the night, etc.). Please bring a sleeping bag liner and not sleeping bags because they won't fit in the bag, a towel will be useful. You can put your daytime clothes (sunscreen, telephone, etc.) in the saddlebags. Coats can be tied to the front of your saddle.

Head

- A riding helmet is compulsory and we recommend that you take your own to ensure a correct fit. Helmet makers (GPA, HKM, LAS Helmets, Lamicell, Troxel, Equithème) now offer horse-riding helmets that are ventilated, strong, light and comfortable.
- Sunhat and sunglasses (high protection) - with a cord attached so they don't fly off when riding
- Buff or bandana for protecting your neck and face from the sun, wind or rain

Upper body

- Cotton t-shirts, t-shirts in quick-drying material and long sleeved shirts to provide protection from the sun or extra warmth
- Lightweight fleece or jumper
- Waterproof jacket (made from Goretex or equivalent) and/ or (depending on the season) a waterproof vest that covers you thighs. No ponchos!!
- Thermals in case of cold weather (season dependent)

Legs

- Lightweight, comfortable riding trousers or jodhpurs - we recommend riding in them at home before taking them on holiday to ensure they don't rub
- Waterproof over trousers (made from Goretex or equivalent), especially if you don't have a long waterproof coat
- Non-irritant cotton or synthetic underwear

Hands and Feet

- Comfortable riding boots. You must wear good mountain/hiking boots (with half chaps) to deal with the descents made on foot
- Several pairs of warm socks
- Gloves - your hands are particularly exposed to the sun, wind or rain whilst riding

Night

- Blankets and duvets are provided but bring a sleeping bag liner for additional comfort. Please do not bring a sleeping bag as it's too bulky for the saddlebags.

Other useful items

- Water bottle (1.5 litres or 2 equivalent)
- Headtorch or small torch for moving around at night - bring spare batteries and bulbs
- Toiletries
- Protein or cereal bars for the longer stretches of riding
- Swiss army knife or equivalent (in checking-in luggage!!)
- Ear plugs (may be useful)
- Camera and high capacity memory card. Spare battery

Medical kit - please take what you need only and keep the limit in mind.

Make sure any allergies (to medication or otherwise) and clearly stated in your medical kit

- Any medication you regularly take
- Painkillers
- Imodium or similar anti-diarrhea medication
- Vitamin C tablets
- Sunscreen and lip balm - should be high factor
- Insect repellent
- Eye drops
- Hydrating/ soothing cream
- Plasters
- Blister plasters in case of any rubs
- Antiseptic cream, plasters, aspirin, anti-histamine, insect-bite salve etc..
- 10cm wide bandage
- Spare prescription glasses/contact lenses
- Re-hydration sachets
- Antiseptic wipes
- Handwash gel

Our Recommendations

- Backpacks cannot be worn whilst riding. A small bumbag and rug with pockets will be provided so that you can carry small items with you during the day (camera, sunscreen, lip balm etc)
- A soothing cream may be useful to treat areas irritated by long hours in the saddle
- We recommend travelling in your riding boots and carrying your hat and some riding clothes in your hand luggage - then if your luggage goes astray you are still able to ride!
- In your hand luggage carry any valuables, such as your camera, ipod, ipad etc.
- We recommend taking a copy of your passport and insurance documents with you in case you lose your originals
- If, in wishing to 'travel light', you plan to wash your clothes throughout the trip, please ensure you bring biodegradable laundry products with which to do your washing

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

1. **Travel light.** It's a little known fact, but the lighter you pack, the better for the environment as heavy bags will produce higher emissions (when flying a plane or driving a car!).
2. **Reduce plastic waste.** Take your favorite reusable bottle with you. Avoid single-use bags, cups, or straws.
3. **Preserve nature.** Always take your rubbish with you during the ride and recycle them. Leave all the flowers or plants as you found them, and never get too close when observing wildlife. Make sure to use eco-friendly products such as body wash or laundry detergent (if camping) to protect both your skin and the environment.
4. **Choose your experiences carefully.** Respect animal life by not participating in any activities that abuse wild animals (shows, elephant rides, etc.).
5. **Support local populations.** Buy local handicrafts, be respectful of customs, and learn about the culture of local communities.
6. **Share!** Raise awareness among your family and friends about sustainable tourism.

For more information please [see this page](#) .