

The Wine Lovers' TRAIL RIDE BORDEAUX, FRANCE



Who wants to go on a horse riding holiday where participants sample France's finest foods and locally sourced wines in one of the world's most picturesque settings that can only be truly savoured from horseback?



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Tania Huggatz from Snaffle Travel shares her experience of the seven-day escorted tour through the famous wine region of Bordeaux, France.

"In early May, I joined six fellow travellers in Bordeaux to begin our one week wine lovers' tour. Guided by seasoned tour operator David Delbourg and his interpreter, Britta Rafor, who speaks English, French, Dutch and German, the week ahead promised the best of French fare.

Rich history, French charm and the idea of experiencing all this from horseback had brought our group together from as far as Australia, America, Switzerland, Sweden and the Netherlands. France has a long history of horse riding. The French countryside is criss-crossed by scenic bridle paths and riding routes beckoning to be explored on horseback. Fragrant wild flowers, woods of oaks and elms, and slow-flowing streams add a layer of natural beauty to the centuries-old chateaus, castles and Roman walls throughout the region. From the saddle, we were mesmerised by the sights, sounds and smells.

A typical ride has a minimum of five riders and a maximum of 10 riders, plus two certified guides. Our horses, home-bred and trained in natural horsemanship by David, were a mixture of breeds, including pure and cross-bred Arabians, Thoroughbreds, Paints and French Warmbloods. Rotated into work every 2-3 weeks and shod every 3-4 weeks, they remain as a herd when on tour and at home on David's 75-acre property.

We rode in English saddles and were accompanied by a support vehicle for the journey from Moulis to Sauterne, 200 kilometres of nature interrupted by man-made landmarks that only added to the surrounding beauty.

Carrying our luggage and supplies, the vehicle was used to serve lunch daily while the horses were unsaddled and rested for at least two hours.

Suitable for intermediate and experienced riders, we enjoyed many opportunities to trot and canter along tracks and riverbanks. Each day, we rode for 2-3 hours in the morning and 2-3 hours in the afternoon, depending on the day's itinerary.

Day 1: On the first day of our tour, we rode from Moulis to a World Heritage Site since 2008. We stopped for lunch near the ferry terminal in Moulis to enjoy our first gourmet picnic of French bread, cheeses, meats and salads, finished with coffee and chocolate, and paired with local wines.

The following morning, we rode from the Citadel of Blaye to the Vineyard of Gravelles, first crossing over the old drawbridge through vineyards and wooded areas. Red poppies, buttercups and Shasta daisies grew wild in the fields we rode past.

That night, we stayed with a local family at their B&B where we were served a traditional French dinner. The horses remained with us overnight, grazing the pastures of gravel soil that make the Bordeaux wines so rich and flavoured.

On the third day we set off towards Libourne, the wine-making capital of northern Gironde, stopping at Castle Mayne Veil for a gourmet picnic lunch and wine tasting of Frontonac red wine; the landscapes ever-changing from vineyards to lush green fields, bordered by crumbling stone walls.

Riding through the Bordeaux region in springtime is simply idyllic. Cottage gardens overflowed with flowers so fragrant their smells wafted through the air. After dismounting and unsaddling, the horses were left on a property on the outskirts of town while we enjoyed another typically French meal at our hotel.

Day four began with a wine tasting at Belle Graves, a beautiful chateau on a hill overlooking a stunning valley patterned by distinctive rows of vineyards and softly blurred forest. Following the wine tasting, we rode to Saint-Emilion, stopping for a gourmet picnic lunch at an old farm.



Even the picnics were typical French cuisine.



Castle Lemothe



Castle of Myrat



Riding through Vineyards near Cadillac.

A World Heritage Site with two thousands years of wine-making history, the medieval village of Saint-Emilion is situated in the heart of the Bordeaux region. We had time to wander its cobbled streets, which have been planted with vineyards since the 2nd Century, before setting off on the horses for a night's stay at Saint-Jean à Blagnac.

Our final afternoon ride took us along a Roman roadway, through streams and forests, before arriving safely in Sauterne. Over our final group dinner we shared stories from the past six days.

The next morning we said goodbye to our horses and guides. The horses were loaded onto a 12-horse truck to return to David's property for a week of well-earned rest while most of us were transferred to Bordeaux airport to continue our onward travel. As I sat and watched the scenery pass by, I savoured my last moments in Bordeaux — recalling the scents of wild flowers, the flavours of French wine and food and the sound of horses' hooves.



In the morning of day five we enjoyed a wine tasting at Chateau Curros, a 12th Century castle. After a tour of the gardens, we rode through the hilly landscape past the Castle of Rauzen, built in the 13th Century. Only crickets, birdsong and the clap of horse hooves broke the peaceful quiet.

We spent the night at the Castle of Broutet, a beautiful castle pleasantly decorated with French antiques and covered with vines. The horses remained overnight on the property while we ventured into the town of Cadillac, a short 15 minutes drive, for another delightful French meal, followed by an evening stroll through the village.

Day six saw us riding through the town of Cadillac on our way to the Castle of Myrat, where we toured the castle and rose gardens, finishing with a sample of Sauterne white desert wine made from semillon, sauvignon blanc and muscadelle grapes.

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