

Behind the Scenes of EQUESTRIAN TRAVEL



River crossing in Iceland

The expertise shaping Snaffle Travel's riding holidays and global equestrian tours



The equestrian industry is as broad and varied as the people who make up its community. From grassroots riders and recreational horse owners to elite competitors and lifelong horse lovers, equestrianism spans generations, disciplines and cultures. It is no surprise, then, that equestrian travel has grown into a significant niche within the global tourism market, appealing to riders seeking immersive riding holidays, spectators travelling to iconic international events, and travellers wanting unique, horse-centred experiences.

What is less visible is the level of planning that sits

behind these journeys. Equestrian travel extends far beyond booking flights and accommodation. It involves assessing horse welfare standards, understanding riding ability and safety protocols, navigating local practices, and ensuring that both horses and riders are suited to the experience on offer. It is a specialised field that benefits from not only travel expertise, but genuine, hands-on horse knowledge.

For Australian-based equestrian travel specialist Tania Huppatz, this blend of skills has been built over a lifetime. With more than 25 years' experience as a travel advisor and over 50 years immersed in horses, her background spans hunting and showjumping, eventing and dressage. Along the way, she

has been a dressage judge, Pony Club instructor, and has trained and produced young horses. "Those experiences shape every decision I make," Tania explains. "Understanding horses, riders and the realities of different equestrian environments is critical when you're planning travel that puts people in the saddle, often in unfamiliar settings."

Finding a niche in equestrian travel

Eleven years ago, Tania chose to focus on equestrian travel and founded Snaffle Travel, recognising it as a niche within the travel industry that benefits from tailored planning and a practical understanding of horses and riders. Creating bespoke equestrian itineraries requires

the ability to assess riding standards, safety, suitability and horse management across cultures and disciplines, an often unseen but vital part of the process.

She launched Snaffle Travel with a core focus on escorted tours to major international equestrian events, alongside carefully selected riding holidays. These trips involve complex logistics, from detailed itineraries and accommodation to transport, event tickets and local operators. Having travelled to more than 70 countries, Tania has developed a broad perspective on what makes an equestrian experience both authentic and safe. While attending world-renowned events remains a privilege, Tania admits the responsibility never fades. "There's always excitement, but there's also pressure," she says. "You're constantly thinking ahead - about tickets, accommodation, transport, and making sure everyone in the group is having the experience they hoped for. It can be mentally demanding, but it's also incredibly rewarding."

Assessing equestrian destinations

When it comes to riding holidays, horse welfare and

rider safety sit at the centre of every decision and Tania recognises that for horse owners and riders, these factors are non-negotiable. "When assessing new riding destinations, I always see lessons, experience trail rides, and evaluate staff professionalism, qualifications and communication," she says. "Clear English and good rapport are particularly important when riding out, sharing local culture, and ensuring riders feel confident and safe."

Safety and horse welfare standards must meet strict criteria. Operators are expected to carry appropriate public liability insurance, demonstrate strong risk management, and maintain a solid industry reputation. Horses are assessed for suitability, workload, saddlery fit and overall care, while helmet use is mandatory. These are equally important considerations for riders planning their own equestrian travel, where due diligence plays a critical role in ensuring a safe and enjoyable experience. Tania notes that standards and horse management practices can look different across countries, something she often discusses openly with riders beforehand. "Horses may be kept or worked differently to



Tania Huppatz riding at Castle Leslie Estate, Ireland



South Africa, Giraffes, Horizon Horseback Riding - Photographer Tanya Baber



I can see for miles Rocking Z Ranch, Montana, USA - Ruth Chamberlain

what Australians are used to, so it's important to explain that context - and to ensure those differences still meet acceptable welfare standards."

On a recent visit to South Africa, she observed horses being ridden for only 15 days per month, living out year-round, checked daily, and given electrolytes after work. Guides rode with satellite phones, reflecting a strong emphasis on safety and preparation. Thorough research is critical, particularly in an era where online marketing does not always reflect reality. "I've visited centres with poor safety practices, welfare concerns, or a real gap

between what's advertised and what's delivered," Tania says. "If something doesn't meet our standards, it's simply not offered - regardless of how popular it might appear online."

Not a nine-to-five role

Like many small business owners, Tania's role rarely fits within standard business hours. Enquiries to Snaffle Travel arrive across multiple time zones, and delayed responses can mean missed opportunities, particularly when availability is limited. "I can't control when clients decide to book," she explains. "So flexibility, patience and strong customer service are essential." The role

also requires wearing many hats, from administration and bookkeeping to tour hosting, photography, writing, marketing and social media. When issues arise during a trip, particularly on riding holidays where she is not travelling with the group, Tania remains the key point of contact. "If something goes wrong, I am the person people call. I have to remain calm, practical problem-solving does not stop at borders or time zones." On several occasions, unexpected events have tested this approach. "During the World Equestrian Games in 2018, a hurricane affected one day of the event, which was cancelled, allowing the group to enjoy a relaxed day shopping instead. At Badminton Horse Trials, an asbestos fire near the coach parking area left our bus stuck at the depot on cross-country day. A contingency plan was immediately put in place, with taxis organised until police eventually allowed our driver through, and we arrived just an hour late." Situations like these highlight why every tour has a risk management plan in place, enabling quick decisions, calm problem-solving and clear communication when plans change.



Riding in the Sunflower fields, Epona, Spain



Riding western at Kara Creek Ranch, USA

Booking equestrian travel: what riders should know

Careful planning underpins any successful holiday, but equestrian travel carries additional considerations. Tania encourages riders to seek independent advice and to ensure operators meet recognised safety, welfare and insurance standards - even when booking directly. "Not all equestrian travel providers are registered travel agents, that can present financial risks if something goes wrong."

Early planning is strongly recommended, as many riding centres book out well in advance. The same applies to escorted equestrian tours, particularly those centred around major international events. Event tickets are often

released up to 12 months ahead and can sell out quickly, as can accommodation in host locations. Events such as CHIO Aachen and the World Equestrian Games have extremely limited availability, making early commitment essential.

Cost considerations and value

Riding holidays are often comparable in cost to traditional travel experiences and can represent strong value, typically including accommodation, riding, meals and authentic local experiences. "As with all travel, prices are rising with inflation, making informed planning more important than ever."

Memorable experiences

With decades of travel behind her, Tania has enjoyed many standout experiences. One of her favourites remains South Africa. "It's my all-time favourite travel and riding destination. The wildlife encounters are extraordinary, combined with the stunning scenery," she says, noting that first-time visitors should choose areas without dangerous wildlife or malaria risk, and include a separate game reserve experience.

Other highlights include a carriage-driving holiday through southern Poland, travelling between historic castles by horse-drawn carriage, and time spent at Ireland's Castle Leslie Estate,

known for its extensive riding and old-world equestrian charm. Career highlights have also included a private photo shoot with Camargue horses in France, visiting Carl Hester's yard, and meeting Alan Davies and the legendary Valegro. Media access to major events such as Badminton, Burghley, the London International Horse Show and Longines international showjumping competitions has seen Tania's event coverage published in equestrian magazines worldwide.

How equestrian travel is changing

Over the years, Tania has witnessed significant change across both travel and equestrian industries. Horse welfare standards have improved markedly, Tania noting that "reputable riding operators now survive only by delivering well-managed, professional experiences." Technology has also reshaped event attendance, with digital ticketing and event apps now commonplace. However Tania does point out that rising costs and declining sponsorship are placing pressure on major events globally. The closure of Gatcombe Park Horse Trials, changes to Royal Windsor Horse Show with dressage competitions stopped from 2025 due to a lack of sponsorship, and the



William Levett, Huberthus AC Badminton Horse trials

cancellation of New Zealand Horse of the Year highlight the challenges facing the sport. "One noticeable change has been an increased police presence at events due to animal welfare protests, which to date have been peaceful but have altered the atmosphere. The landscape is changing rapidly," Tania says. "Many iconic events may not exist in the future, making now the time to experience those still on your bucket list. Social media has also shifted behaviour, with posting competition footage increasingly discouraged due to online Keyboard warriors."

Tania has also noticed the growing influence of Middle Eastern investment in shaping elite equestrian sport, from funding and event hosting to rider development, a shift that is redefining the sport at the highest level. She adds that these regions are actively positioning equestrian sport within broader tourism strategies, creating destination events designed to attract international riders, spectators and equestrian travellers.

For riders new to equestrian travel

For those that have never considered combining horses with travel, Tania strongly



Carl Hester yard visit with Valegro and the 2023 Badminton group

encourages giving it consideration. "A riding holiday shows you a side of a destination that most tourists never see. Leaving crowded tourist sights behind, riding through private land and local countryside, experiencing places that are normally off limits. It is a personal and immersive way to travel, made even richer by learning about local culture and enjoying authentic regional food and wine."

Industry Pathway

For anyone interested in pursuing equestrian travel as a career option, Tania advises that strong administrative and computer skills are essential, along with a Certificate III in Travel. A genuine love

of travel and the confidence to travel solo to different destinations is also a must. "An understanding of industry regulations and local laws is also important, as are excellent communication skills, as much of the role involves liaising with suppliers, operators and clients across multiple countries."

A final reflection

Reflecting on a career that combines two lifelong passions, Tania feels fortunate to have built a life around horses and travel. "You can achieve anything if you set your mind to it," she says. "I feel incredibly fortunate to have worked in two fields I am deeply passionate about, to have experienced so many

Planning A Riding Holiday - Tania's Tips

Tania stresses that good preparation plays a major role in a successful riding holiday. Riders should be riding-fit before departure, particularly for itineraries involving long days in the saddle or varied terrain. Packing appropriate gear for the local climate is equally important. Well-worn riding boots, comfortable jodhpurs, gloves and a correctly fitted helmet are essentials, while layered clothing allows flexibility across changing temperatures.

Travelling on a budget

Tania suggests that there are several ways riders can make equestrian travel more affordable with these preparation and budget-friendly strategies:

- Choosing smaller or more rustic riding centres
- Opting for shorter stays
- Purchasing airfares well in advance
- Travelling in the off-season when some riding centres offer winter discounts.
- Apply to a volunteer riding program that includes free accommodation, meals, and riding in return for work at the centre.
- Booking early where discounts are offered

memorable moments along the way, and to have met inspiring people from all over the world through horses and travel."

It is a perspective shaped by decades in the saddle and countless kilometres travelled, offering insight into an industry that continues to evolve, and an invitation for riders to consider how horses might shape their future travel experiences.