

TUSCAN RIDING SCHOOL IN THE CHIANTI FOOTHILLS NEAR FLORENCE

8-day / 7-night themed guided 'English saddle' horse rides & sightseeing



Jenny Bawtree founded "Rendola Riding" in 1970, an English woman enamoured of the Tuscan countryside. It has since become a well-known horse-riding centre.

Situated at a thousand feet above sea level on the slopes of the Chianti hills, it has splendid views over the Arno valley. Guests are lodged in Jenny's home, a comfortable Tuscan farmhouse. There are seven bedrooms, all with private bathrooms, a large dining room and a sitting room with fireplace, plenty of books and a music library. At mealtimes guests sit at a long table together with their hosts. Our cook prepares delicious Tuscan dishes, accompanied by Chianti wine. The atmosphere is relaxing and friendly.

Rides for small groups are organised daily, quiet ones for novices and longer, faster rides for the more experienced. The surrounding hills, with their olive-groves, vineyards and extensive woodlands offer an endless variety of itineraries. In Spring or Autumn there are guided rides in the Chianti Classico area between Florence and Siena for fit, experienced riders visiting abbeys, castles, Romanesque churches and medieval villages. At lunchtime a splendid picnic spread is served.

The stables are situated behind the house, and the horses graze daily in the surrounding paddocks. There are eighteen at your disposal, mostly Italian bred and carefully chosen to suit all levels of ability. The saddles are English style and of excellent quality and condition. Instructors and guides are all experienced and friendly. In the ring surrounded by olive-groves small groups of beginners can take their first lessons and the more expert riders can improve their flat work and jumping. Those who desire may also help to groom and feed the horses, and take lessons in elementary horsemanship.

DISCOVER TUSCANY RIDE & WALK TOUR

Duration: 5 days (4 nights)
Dates: 31 March - 4 April; 2 - 6 June; 20 - 24 October, 2012
Cost: \$1295 per person (twin share or single)
Includes: Florence pick up & drop off, two half-days riding, one whole-day riding, guided touring to Arezzo/Cortona, walk to medieval tower, all accommodation, all meals with a choice of wines.

CHIANTI & CASTLES RIDING TOUR

Duration: 8 days (7 nights)
Departs: 21 - 28 April; 5 - 12 May; 22 - 29 September, 6 - 13 October, 2012
Cost: AU\$2540 per person (twin share or single)
Includes: Florence pick up & drop off, two half-days riding, three whole-days riding, all excursions, entry to wine-farm and castle, all accommodation, all meals with a choice of wines, except for meals in Siena.

Call OUTDOOR TRAVEL on 1800 331 582 for details or reservations

Suggested itinerary: (subject to change based on riders availability, weather etc)

Day 1. Own arrangements to reach Florence main railway station (Firenze Santa Maria Novella). At 17.50 you are met by one of your hosts, Jenny Bawtree (middle-aged, white-haired) or her son, Nicholas (tall, dark and handsome) under the SELFSERVICE sign outside the main bar (opposite platform 14) and accompanied on a forty-minute train ride to Montevarchi and then on a ten-minute journey by minivan to Rendola Riding, a 400-year-old typically Tuscan farmhouse. Settle in and then enjoy a chat and a glass of Chianti Classico wine in the garden or sitting room. Dinner and overnight at Rendola.

Day 2. After breakfast meet the horses in the stables behind the house. Set off on a two and a half hour ride through the olive groves, vineyards and woodlands of the Arno valley, passing near an 11th century tower and a 14th century church. After lunch some local sightseeing with Jenny, who is a very knowledgeable guide. First a short drive to the charming medieval village of Loro Ciuffenna, built round a ravine. Enjoy some Italian ice cream and then drive to a Romanesque church nearby with an 8th century pulpit and animal carvings. For supper a choice of genuine Italian style pizzas.

Day 3. After breakfast a two and a half hour ride on the Eastern slopes of the Chianti Mountains with panoramic views. After lunch at Rendola go by van to the Abbey of Coltibuono, and have a guided tour of the cellars and gardens, followed by a chance to sample and buy Chianti wine and local ceramics in the estate shop. Dinner and overnight at Rendola.

Day 4. Ride southwards, passing the tower of Galatrona, a lake and the ruined castle of Cennina. After a picnic in the woods above the village of Montebenichi, ride past its two castles, and then on to a riding-centre owned by a friend of your hosts, situated near the Castle of Montalto. The ride lasts nearly five hours. Dinner and night either there or back at Rendola.

Day 5. Today you ride for three and a half hours, first with frequent canters through the vast estate of Villa Arceno with its cypress avenues and extensive views, and then over the Chianti Hills, until you enter the area where the Chianti Classico wine is grown, with its symbol of a black rooster. The horses are stabled at Podernovo, a charming farmhouse used by Bertolucci in his film "Stealing Beauty", and there you will have a picnic. Then you go by van to visit the gardens and chapel of the nearby castle of Brolio, which has belonged to the Ricasoli barons since the 12th century. The most illustrious member of the family was Bettino Ricasoli, statesman, agriculturist and inventor of the traditional formula for the Chianti Classico wine. You are then driven to Siena, where you will have dinner and spend the night at an elegant 17th century mansion in the heart of the city.

Day 6. Today you are free to explore the city of Siena, with its wonderful architecture, art treasures and great shopping. Don't forget to visit the cathedral in black and white marble and to stroll round the Piazza del Campo, where the famous Palio race is held twice a year.

Day 7. Drive back to Podernovo and ride through the vast estate of Brolio. After passing the brooding castle, follow a stream through shady woods and pass the village of San Martino with its herd of long-horned Maremmano cattle. Ride along the top of the Chianti hills with stupendous views. Have a barbecue in a boar hunters' hut, then ride back to Rendola, passing the castle and village of Montegonzi.

Day 8. After breakfast you are driven to Montevarchi to meet your train for Florence. Alternatively, take the train to Rome. Own arrangements for your onward journey.



Call OUTDOOR TRAVEL on 1800 331 582 for details or reservations

DISCOVER TUSCANY RIDING TOUR

Duration: 8 days (7 nights)

Cost: \$2075 per person (twin share or single)

Dates: 7 - 14 April; 14 - 21 April; 12 - 19 May; 26 May – 2 June; 15 - 22 September; 29 September - 6 October; 13 - 20 October, 2012

Includes: Florence pick up & drop off, two half-days riding, two whole-days riding, a fun Italian lesson, a cooking lesson, guided cultural excursions to lesser known attractions including Arezzo, all accommodation, all meals with a choice of wines, except for lunch on free day.

Non-riders welcome on all these tours & may undertake other sightseeing while others ride – ask for details

Day rides or short-stay costs:

Accommodation: Simple farm accommodation twin share or single with ensuite bathroom at Rendola with daily breakfast – from \$95 per person per night.

Riding only: Euro 20 per hour - 2-3 hours riding per day recommended (paid locally) **or** day ride with picnic for Euro 100 (paid locally)

What you need to know about Rendola: Rendola is a small family-run farm on the slopes of the Chianti hills with views over the Arno valley. It is 5 km. from the nearest train station of Montevarchi (on the Florence-Arezzo line) and 10km. from the nearest Motorway exit N.25 (Valdarno, two exits south of Firenze Sud). It is easy to reach by car or by train, while being located in lovely countryside and enjoying panoramic views.

Rendola is not for people who are looking for elegance. Hens and ducks peck around the house, the family dog lies on the doorstep, and you may find the cat curled up in your chair. It is first and foremost a riding-centre: the stables are immediately behind the house, and horses graze in the surrounding paddocks. No one has to dress up on any occasion. Non-riders are welcome, of course, but they must not be shocked at the occasional whiff of manure!

The house itself is clean and pretty, but it is after all a family home, with books spilling out of the shelves and jackets hanging on the back of chairs. But this is what appeals to a certain kind of client. In fact, they hardly feel like clients, more like honoured guests. Jenny and her son Nicholas are happy to welcome country-lovers to their home and guests quickly become friends. The place is suitable also for single people, who will here feel looked after and cherished. At mealtimes the guests all sit together at a long table and there is plenty of merriment as well as good food.

The Tuscan cooking is, of course, a great attraction and at Rendola the cook has a large repertoire of pasta, rice and meat dishes. Vegetarians are well catered for. A lot of the vegetables come from Rendola's own garden, the olives for the oil are picked on the premises and eggs, turkeys and ducks are all home produced.

Jenny has many years of experience in managing a horse riding centre and living in Chianti. She has an Oxford degree and has spent some years teaching at the University of Florence. She set up the riding centre because she wanted to transmit to others her love of horses and the Tuscan countryside. She is knowledgeable about the local history and architecture as well as the flora and fauna. Nicholas is Jenny's son now works at Rendola and often delights the clients with his charm and his piano playing. Sergio is a gentle giant of a man who can turn his hand to anything: shoeing the horses, building a wall, putting in a bathroom, painting a room, looking after the garden, you name it. He is helped in turn by his son Marco, a keen apprentice. Then there is Adolfo, who works in the stables and Costanza, a radiant personality and a competent riding-teacher and guide who speaks good English. Mariella is the other guide and riding-instructor.

Riding remains our main activity. Visits to Florence, Siena or any of the art cities are not included in the program. We prefer to offer "*Toscana minore*", places and experiences that you would have difficulty in finding on your own, places, which do not attract mass tourism and are all the more fascinating for that reason.

Riding holidays are available in many other centres in Europe – particularly Italy, France and Spain.

Contact OUTDOOR TRAVEL or your travel agent for more details and reservations

- Call Outdoor Travel Toll free on 1800 331 582 or (03) 57551743 or Fax (03) 57501020
- Email info@outdoortravel.com.au
- Web: [www/http://outdoortravel.com.au](http://outdoortravel.com.au)
- Mail: Outdoor Travel Pty Ltd, PO Box 286, Bright, VIC 3741, Australia
- Travel Agent Licence No 31102