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CAMARGUE - FRANCE

RIDE ON WHITE HORSES
AMONG BLACK BULLS AND
PINK FLAMINGOES



ARE YOU READY FOR YOUR CAMARGUE ADVENTURE?

The sun is a red-hot disc in the sky, knee-deep waters are all over, the sansouire smells of its salty promise of the Mediterranean Sea. The Medieval saddle feels secure and the Provençal shirts are a confusion of colours. The black bulls of Camargue are howling their fury to be locked up and waiting for the doors to open. Horses snort and fiddle. This is it, no mistakes now, guys...

Come along with me to one of the most wondrous of the European regions, La Camargue in southern France. It is a mixture of salty winds, strong sunlight and the home to the hardy Camargue horse, a true gentleman. The nature in Camargue is black, white, pink and green, with a never-ending horizon of purple skies. The country which is not yet the Sea, but neither is it dry land any more. Sunny, wet, salty beaches, dry and crackelated, wet marshlands are our domains, and the horse of Camargue is our companion.

SMALL GROUPS, CARING GUIDES

My groups are hardly ever bigger than eight people, making it possible for each guest to feel not just like any other guest. Here in Camargue we are cared for by a set of incredibly interesting people, from the owners of our small family-run hotel to our guides, Les Gardians de la Camargue. We are guided by a very local, very colourful person like Louis – some of the best horsemen and women you will ever meet are here. I am personally always with you on these rides, to help you translate and interpret both nature and culture.

A SPECIAL TRAIL RIDE

I only do the ride 2-3 times a year, and only off-season. With Louis we manage to enter lands that are private and normally totally off-limits for tourists. You may have visited Camargue before, but you have never really seen her yet... Louis can and will take you and me for a ride we never will forget.

Camargue – Fairy Land.

We stay away from the beaten tracks, and manage to get really close to nature and local culture, thanks to Louis, our true Camarguais.

RIDES OFFERED IN 2005

March 18-25, with possibilities to stay on for the Easter festivities, June 12-19, with possibilities to stay on for the final day of festivities in the village, and September 19-27.



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PRELIMINARY PROGRAM:

Day 1 – Pick-up service in the afternoon at Montpellier airport, check in at the small family hotel close to Les Saintes Maries de la Mer. 6 PM: Pot de bienvenue, a welcome-drink with our guides Louis and Anna, presentation of the program for the next days.

Day 2 – Departure to Mas des Bernacles by minibus or in Louis's horsetruck – we are bringing our horses along. In this traditional environment we will ride out to discover the lands together with Louis. These bulls roam free and are rather wild.

Day 3 – Breakfast and departure on horseback from our hotel in the morning towards Les Saintes Maries de la Mer, where we will have lunch. After lunch we take off, with some twenty kilometers of Mediterranean beach in front of us! At the end of the trail, Louis's father waits for us with the horse truck.

Day 4 – Half-day of sightseeing: After breakfast we go for a drive to the fortified village of Aigues-Mortes, a wonderful medieval village with a wall built at the time of the Crusades. Then we take a quick stop at a Château producing the special gray wine of the Camargue, and then back to Les Saintes Maries de la Mer to go for an evening ride in the marshlands. We will do a BBQ there, if the weather is clement, otherwise a nice evening picknick.

Day 5 – Take-off on horseback from our hotel in the morning, the goal is going west, over the Small Rhône River into La Petite Camargue. This part of The Camargue is a reserve for the "native" population, and we can only enter it with a special permission. Dinner at our hotel as usual.

Day 6 – We'll meet up with Louis at his home and drive to Beauduc with our horses. Once there, we will ride off among the dunes along the beach. On the horizon we see the enormous salines at Salin de Giraud, with their mountains of unrefined Mediterranean salt.

Day 7 –We'll spend the whole day in company of Louis and the Gardians of a fine Camargue Mas where they breed Camargue horses and bulls. We ride out to the free roaming herds of bulls. Then on to the herds of Camargue mares with their colts. These mares are wild, and have only been handled the day they were branded, and can get pretty flighty and nervous. Usually tourists do not have access to this Mas. After lunch under the trees by the old house, we might even try to play the "Jeux de Gardians" in the small Arena of the Mas. Louis will show us what a true Gardian can do on horseback. In the evening we go back towards our hotel to drink a "pot de l'amitié", a drink of friendship with Louis. You can now freely air your impressions of the "Camargue Sauvage" and comment this tour. Louis will share our Farewell-dinner with us, and we can stay up late for once! The ride is over!

Day 8 – Breakfast, quick trip to the village shops for the last bits and pieces and some Camargue-salami, Provençal shirts and what have you! Then check out from the hotel and drive back to Montpellier Airport.



Meeting Place: Montpellier Airport.

Arrival Time: Guests usually arrive during the early afternoon and then transferred to the small family run hotel located near the village of Les Saintes Maries de la Mer.

Typical riding day: You will be riding Camargue-raised white horses 4 to 6 hours daily with a lengthy break for lunch. We will be riding the tough horses that are traditionally used by Les Gardians, the ranchers, to oversee ranch activities, not the normal tourist horses. There is lengthy riding on Mediterranean beaches, which are not crowded during the limited season for our rides, as well as through private farm lands by special and/or private arrangements. This is a land not typically covered on horseback due to the restrictions on moving around in the area. The riding style is Western, with long stirrups and long reins, held in one hand. Classic riders will easily adjust. Louis is one of the few local operators to use the traditional Camargue saddle for everyone who wants to try it out. There are also other kinds of saddles, should this one not fit your taste. Louis provides us all with horses from his own breeding, all trained for the work of Le Gardian de la Camargue.

Meals: Fantastic Provençal food... scallops and garlic-aioli... fresh grilled fish... juicy Camargue-steaks... potatoes "au gratin à la Française"... saffron rice and Gardian-beef-stews... salads that make your head spin, with roquefort cheese... Gorgoeus Apéritives in bars where only the locals go... and then all the wines of the region: Chateauneuf du Pape, Gris de Gris, Côtes du Rhône. As we eat a LOT during the lunches, it is also possible to go out and just have a small salad in the evening, with crunchy french Baguette-bread... But usually we have our dinners at the hotel, where the food is simple and gorgeous. If guests are happy with the local guide, Le Gardian, he usually gets a tip of around 20 Euro per person, at the end of the week. If he was happy with the guests, he will also come along on our Last Supper...

Sleeping Arrangements: The hotel close to Les Saintes Maries de la Mer is a family-run, 5 room place. Very cosy, extremely friendly and very personal. It is a place where all the local Gardians come and have an apéritif after work, and stay on for dinner if the talking is good... The rooms are small, clean, and with one or two beds. Each room has a small, but nice bathroom. We have our breakfasts here, they prepare our picnic lunches and we have dinner in the evenings.

Non-riding activities: There is no specific program for non-riders, but the region offers a lot of interesting sites to visit on your own.

Medical Requirements: People need insurance for accidents, no special shots required. Please advise us about special diets or physical conditions.

Weather Conditions: The weather during Spring and Fall is mostly sunny, but windy, bring a good wind-jacket. Temperatures vary from 15-25° Celcius (60 to 80 Fahrenheit) and the occasional shower of rain can happen. Camargue is famous for having good weather, but when it rains it pours, make sure your windjacket is also good against the rain. Waterproof boots are also a good idea, unless you bring two pairs to switch – they WILL get wet! In June the weather is warm, very warm – bring sunscreen!

Dates 2005: March 18-25, June 12-19, Spetember 19-27

Riding ability: Good, general physical condition, master the three basic gaits: walk, trot and canter

Wieght limit: 100 kg/220 lbs

Age limit: 18 years (12 years if already a confirmed rider and accompanied by tutor)

Group size: Average 4-8 riders

Price: 1350 Euro per person

Single supplement: 170 Euro

Included in the price:All activities Pick-up at Montpellier Airport
Local and English speaking guide
Shared rooms with bath. Full board

Not included: Airfares, Drinks, Tips

Bring: Camera, Swimming suit, riding clothes (several layers to be put on or taken off depending on the weather), sun protection cream, good riding boots that can take a lot of water, helmet recommended by insurance companies, windjacket

