

Feel like a gallop on the beach? Or a canter in the Quantocks? It's easily done if you book the right place, says **Gretta Madigan**, whether you prefer to take your own horse or hitch up with a local riding stable

Holidays *with* horses



Whenever I'm on holiday I find myself thinking "it is so beautiful here, I wish I could just ride over that hill." Or "wouldn't it be fantastic to gallop along that beach?" Every horserider must surely have felt the same at times. Sadly, good riding country is often hard to find at home and venturing out on busy roads has become the norm for many. Others stick to riding in arenas or have to transport their horses for miles to open countryside. Even if you're lucky enough to have good riding country nearby, a change of scenery is as good as a rest, just as much for the horse as for you.

So it's no wonder we dream of taking our horses on holiday. Not very practical, of course, if you happen to holiday in the Australian outback or the beach in Jamaica. But these days it certainly is possible, and getting more and more popular, to take your horse on holiday in the UK. So Anna, my Dales pony, and I set out to find out where we could go and how easy it is.

Packing up your horse needs a little more preparation than packing a suitcase, so it really does pay to do your homework.

There are many self-catering cottages that welcome your horse and the owner will be happy to tell you everything you need to know – will the horse be in a field or stable, on his own or turned out with others, do you need to bring food and bedding, does he need vaccinations, what is the riding like, is it easy to find your way around, can you get a lorry down the lane? Horses travel either in a trailer towed by a car or in a horse lorry, so the route you use is important. And the cost – surprisingly low in many cases – may be cheaper than leaving him at home in livery.

We visited the 5-star gold award-winning Old Lanwarnick in Cornwall. It's a luxury holiday hamlet formed from sympathetically restored barns adjoining the Domesday Book Listed farmhouse, run by Jo who, together with her partner Mike, has transformed the derelict buildings into the peaceful idyll it is now. She was able to answer all my questions, and it was good to know that there are plenty of other things to see and visit in the area. This is particularly important if non-riders are in your group.

To see whether combining riders

and non-riders works, I went with a couple of non-riding friends, who also provided moral support while driving a lorry down an unknown route. Old Lanwarnick is set in a pretty, secluded valley near Looe and Cornwall's south coast. Such places can be hard to find down small, twisting lanes, but my conversation with Jo had left me reassured. Although she provides excellent directions, she always meets her equine guests on the main road – in a big layby so there is no worrying about where to park. As she led us down the narrow lanes between blossom-filled hedges, my companions were able to admire the beauty of the flowers while I concentrated on not ploughing them up with the lorry.

"There's nothing worse than going down these lanes and wondering if you really are on the right road," Jo had said to me on the phone. No such concerns with a guide to follow, and we arrived safely. I was happy to see there was a nice easy area to park in; she understood the problems of transporting horses and, as with everything else, thought had gone into making guests as comfortable as possible.

Opposite

The beach at Par provides ideal riding

Below left

Anna settled happily in the field

Below right

Attractive interior at Old Lanwarnick; making friends in the stables





As horse owners know, and many a partner has bemoaned, the horse comes first. So Anna was offered the choice of a large airy stable, or a paddock with Jo's horses adjoining. She settled very happily in the field, while we were soon equally at home in the beautiful Hobnob barn (I forgot to ask why it's so named – you will just have to visit yourself to find out!)

We were blessed with perfect weather, so we delayed riding until the cool of the evening, though the area's miles of woodland tracks make for ideal riding or walking when the sun is hot. Dogs are also welcomed at Old Lanwarnick.

One of the disadvantages of travelling on holiday by lorry, is that it makes discovering the perfect little village pub more difficult. Most people would probably take a trailer which they can unhitch and leave at the yard, but if your only transport is the lorry you might want to choose a cottage within walking distance of

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a pub and shop. We were offered a supermarket delivery, and a Chinese take-away would deliver, but we opted for a lift to the nearby Talland Bay Hotel which combined good food and a superb view with a fascinating, quirky décor. We had a long, lazy lunch with local fish and Fowey mussels, washed down by an award winning Cornish wine – light, pink and bubbly – which seemed to match the mood perfectly.

As evening approached, we went for a ride. Jo rode her handsome Irish Draught horse, Max, and Anna and I both enjoyed the company. Jo will give you lots of different routes if you prefer to ride by yourself, but it's interesting to have landmarks pointed out and local knowledge is always helpful – where it's safe

to canter, which are very steep tracks, where you are most likely to see deer and so on.

We rode along a very quiet lane to reach the woods. We saw two cars and Jo was amazed there was so much traffic. However, Anna was able to show off to her country cousin when we met two huge vehicles that had been cutting down the larch trees. Max looked with horror at these orange dragons but Anna led him calmly past. Sadly there has been an outbreak of *Phytophthora ramorum*, a fatal disease of trees and shrubs like rhododendron, which is now threatening commercial plantations in the South West. The Forestry Commission and woodland owners are undertaking extensive felling to try to prevent the spread of the disease.

Above

First an introductory paddle

Opposite

Young riders gain skills and confidence at St. Leonards Equitation Centre; arriving at the beach

We rode for two blissful hours – just birdsong and the sound of the stream to disturb our chatter. It was up to me how far and how fast we went. There is also a nearby riding stables if you want to enjoy the luxury of Old Lanwarnick but prefer not to bring your own horse, or would like tuition. We could have gone much further, but after our journey Anna was pleased to relax in her field while I gazed at the view from the hot tub and soothed my aching muscles. There is also a gym for those who prefer a more active workout.

Next day we saw the dawn, pink and perfect. Jo had assured us that we wouldn't regret setting the alarm for 4.30 am, and so it turned out. Anna had a new companion this time – a smart Haflinger confusingly called Mac – who was an old hand at riding on the beach and would show Anna what fun it was. As the lorry only has room for 3 people, Jo piled us all into her 4x4 and trailer and off we went to the seaside. It was just like being a child again. We went to the beach at Par, not the nearest nor the prettiest but the best for riding. Horses are naturally cautious and you have to spend time getting them used to the sea – it is the sound of waves breaking that is the first frightener, and Anna was very wary of the waves coming towards her but eventually she was splashing around and playing with the water. I would

have loved to spend the whole day – and several more – there but I was only in Cornwall for one night so had to head home. With more time visitors could go to Bodmin Moor, or even stop off on Dartmoor for a ride on the way down.

And what if you don't have your own horse? Again riding can make the perfect activity on a cottage holiday. If you have horse-mad children, they will be thrilled, and often riding centres will offer a mixture of riding and horse care tuition. It's amazing that teenagers who find taking a mug to the kitchen impossibly arduous, will spend hours ensuring their pony and his stable is immaculate.

It may be tempting to wait until you arrive to start looking for somewhere to ride, but many riding schools get busy during the summer, so plan ahead. Children will love doing the research. Many riding centres show pictures of their horses and ponies on the website, together with little glimpses into their characters. Hours can be spent deciding which pony looks naughty, which one is cuddly and which one they really want to ride.

I visited St. Leonards Equitation Centre, on the Devon/Cornwall border, run by Andy Reeve and his wife Catherine. Good equestrian facilities adjoin the four cosy self-catering cottages, with instruction offered to beginners and very experienced riders alike. ➤






‘Often parents go out for the day and come home to exhausted and happy children. They can even enjoy the luxury of a lie-in when the children get up early to help with the stable chores!’

I met Fields Wicker-Miurin who has been bringing her horse, Max (perhaps horse owners need to be more imaginative with their names?) down on holiday for several years. She has the luxury of hacking on Salisbury Plain at home, so doesn't want to ride out in the countryside, but loves the opportunity to have a week of lessons.

Fields discovered St.Leonards when her husband was fishing nearby and told me enthusiastically about her holidays. “I stay in one of the cottages, don't have to worry about cleaning or laundry and have excellent tuition from Andy Reeve available every day. My horse is well looked after and I also ride the centre's own top class dressage, show jumping and cross

country horses. I'm sure there are many other people who would really enjoy a holiday like this. I can imagine a group of friends getting together, maybe hiring a horse transporter to bring the horses down if they don't have their own horsebox, and living in one of the cottages. More people should try it – it's fabulous.”

Andy and Catherine also told me about the enormous fun visiting children have. “Often parents go out for the day and come home to exhausted and happy children. They can even enjoy the luxury of a lie-in when the children get up early to help with the stable chores!”

And did my dream come true? Yes I galloped along the beach and it was all I had dreamed it would be! And I will go back! 

Above
Dogs are welcome at Old Lanwarnick, and Dartmoor is within easy reach

Where to find out more

The British Horse Society www.bhs.org.uk and the ABRS www.abrs-info.org inspect riding centres throughout the UK and you can find approved centres listed by county.

How much does it cost?

Prices vary, but at Old Lanwarnick, www.listedluxury.co.uk, you can take your horse or dog free of charge. The cottages range from £300 per week in the low season for Honeydot which sleeps 2, to £1,995 for the 3 bedroomed Hobnob in August.

At St. Leonards an hour's lesson costs from £18, and an “own a pony day” from £35, but if you are staying in their cottages rates are negotiable. They have 4 two-bedroomed cottages, ranging from £250 to £740 per week. www.stleonardsequestrian.co.uk

My number one tip – spend time talking to owners before you book. Tell them what you would like from your holiday and find somewhere that suits you.

And do remember that when travelling with your horse you should always take its horse passport along, to prove ownership, and ensure that all necessary vaccinations are up to date.

Manor Stables

Rippingale, near Bourne

Manor Stables is a beautiful former stable block set in just under an acre of grounds in the quiet village of Rippingale, between Sleaford and Bourne in picturesque Lincolnshire. It is ideal for a quiet break or a horse riding holiday – the gardens are made up of lawn, a coppice and paddock.

Retaining many original features, the cottage comfortably sleeps 6 in one double and two twin rooms, each with its own en suite shower room. There is a good size country kitchen; dining room for entertaining; a large living area with inglenook fireplace and wood burning stove – ideal for those cosy evenings in.

The Bull Inn, an award winning village pub offering fantastic traditional pub food or an a la carte menu for those special occasions, is only a minute's walk away.

Horses, riding and walking: the paddock is secure to all sides with wooden fencing, access directly from the property and plenty of grazing and fresh water available (no stable facilities, but we aim to be putting them in soon). Please let us know if you intend to bring your horse as occasionally we have other livestock grazing.

- Lots of walks in the area, some taking in local pubs
- Plenty of bridleways for both intermediate and advanced riders
- Maps and guide books at the property
- Just 10 minutes from interesting, historic Bourne
- Grantham & Stamford (great for antiques) a 30-minute drive
- Just over an hour to the seaside town of Skegness
- Double garage and ample parking for at least four cars



£254 - £601
Winter short breaks £224

Contact Chris
Mobile 07967 612524
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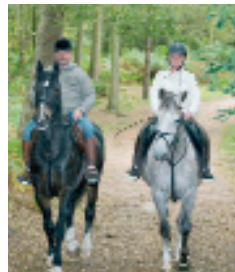
Lessons • Livery Breaking • Schooling



- BHS approved riding school & training centre, est 32 years
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Four delightful stone holiday cottages with swimming pool



Forest Holiday Cottages

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Old Lanwarnick 5★ Luxury Holiday Hamlet

... where the beauty, mystery & ancient history of Cornwall meets modern, luxury living!
Luxury self catering accommodation, horses & dogs welcome

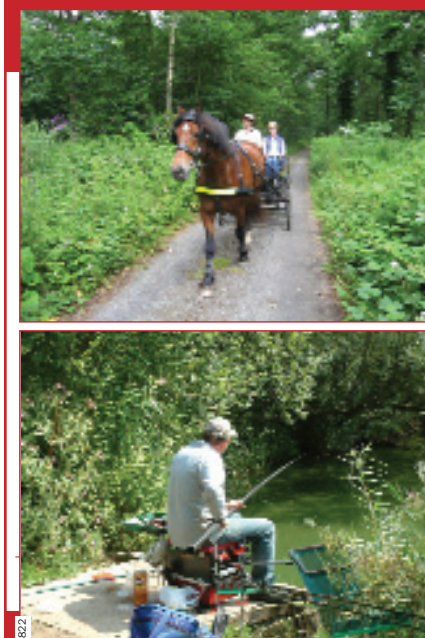
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Moorwood Equine

Moorwood equine and holiday cottage is a boutique style cottage on a livery yard and riding school, nestled in the picturesque countryside on the edge of the Peak District National Park. The cottage has been finished to a very high standard, comes with all modern comforts, and pets are welcome. With our onsite riding facilities and excellent location we are perfectly situated for exploring the national park on horse back. Horses are available on site or stabling is available should you wish to bring your own.

Tel 07554018213 E-mail cottage@moorwoodequine.co.uk
www.moorwoodequine.co.uk



Crow Hollow Cottage

Holidays with horses

This detached, recently refurbished farm cottage stands in its own hedged gardens in a secluded location with ample space for cars and horse boxes. One of its key attractions is DIY stabling at adjacent Broomhill Grange, which provides guests with a unique opportunity to discover Sherwood Forest on horseback. Sherwood Forest Visitors Centre is open 7 days a week. With 6 golf courses within a 10 mile radius and cycle trails, coarse fishing and many local historical attractions nearby, it offers a perfect holiday base.

The fully centrally heated house has a newly-fitted, well-equipped kitchen, dining area, lounge with TV/video, 3 bedrooms with washbasins (1 double, 2 twin) and a main bathroom. For those wanting a rest from slaving over a hot stove, there are several excellent restaurants and pubs nearby.

Prices from £350-£550 per week
£30 per horse, includes stable & use of field

Contact Mrs Helen Proctor Tel 01636 677847 E-mail shp18@btinternet.com Website www.crowhollow.co.uk

Edwinstowe, Mansfield



- Close to Sherwood Forest & its numerous attractions
- Many National Trust properties nearby
- Explore the local area on horseback or by foot, car or bicycle
- DIY stabling at adjacent Broomhill Grange
- Village shops 2 miles
- Bedlinen, towels, electricity & heating included

sleeps up to 6 | ★ ★ ★