

CHRISTINE CHAUVIN (Limited)
Adventures on Horseback
Personalized Travel



TRAVEL
LOG

AUGUST 2004

Greetings!

With a group of equestrian friends, in early March, we celebrated the 10th anniversary of Adventures on Horseback and my birthday (in the leap year) in the Oasis of Siwa (Egypt). Picture in your mind soft, flowing, orange and yellow sand, a landscape out of this earth, unspoiled natural beauty, amiable local faces, always smiling... It was a trip like no other, a dream come true.... largely due to the magical setting of the place but also because of the splendid affirmation of people working with vision to bring about positive effects in the lives of many. To be in the company of such people rekindles one's faith in mankind.... I will say no more and let you discover this amazing trip in the special feature written by Christina de Labouchère, one of the guests. (I intend to return to Siwa for another special ride, early October 2005.)

A pleasant surprise: upon my return from Egypt, Town & Country Travel announced they would be featuring "Adventures on Horseback" in their upcoming Summer issue. From the number of phone calls I have received, many of you have read the article! It was gratifying to be mentioned in such a prestigious publication.

Since my return from Brazil early July, I have been working diligently on my rides for 2005, of which three have brand new itineraries that are described below. I look forward to experiencing these new adventures with you in the best possible way – on horseback!

Christine



NEW RIDES PLANNED FOR 2005

ARGENTINA – TIERRA DEL FUEGO - FEBRUARY 17 – 27, 2005

On the southern shores of the Strait of Magellan, Tierra del Fuego is the last port of call before Antarctica. "The Uttermost part of the earth" as the Anglican missionary Lucas Bridges named it.

I flew there last November (spring in South America), with my friend Ines Menendez Behety who after 2 years of persistence had convinced me to accompany her. I didn't quite know what to expect having heard so many tales of gale force winds and rough elements. Not so, in fact it was pleasantly mild. I discovered a land of contrasts: endless steppes, pristine forests, lakes and snow capped mountains, partly unexplored and still untouched by the hand of tourism. A place home to an abundant variety of birds and wildlife: guanacos, red foxes, beavers ... wild horses even. A truly

unique environment and the perfect venue for a ride with welcoming people and cosy estancias to stay in.

With the valuable help of Ines (her great grandfather is a legend in these parts) I have designed a ten-day trip covering most of Tierra del Fuego. We will ride through large valleys surrounded by the immense *lenga* forest, above huge cliffs overlooking the sea where condors nest, and enjoy long canters on the beaches where some of the greatest tides take place at this time of the year. We will stay on privately run estancias where the level of comfort will surprise you.

February is one of the best times to visit this part of the world: the autumn colours are spectacular. Eight riders only!

AFRICA – KENYA – THE LAIKIPIA PLATEAU & THE GREAT MIGRATION **JULY 30 – AUGUST 14**

At the request of many clients who have come with me on several rides over the past ten years and have experienced the Okavango Delta more than once, I started working on an off-the-beaten path ride in Kenya.

Now I've mapped out what I'm sure will be a unique and very exclusive riding safari with the invaluable assistance of David Bromham and Michael Dyer who will both be on the ride. David is one of East Africa's leading guides as well as a keen horseman and polo player. Michael, of the distinguished Dyer family, is a regional Director of the Laikipia Wildlife Forum, an avid and able pilot and a polo player. We will ride his polo ponies.

The *Laikipia* plateau in central Kenya is the last stronghold of romantic East Africa: vast open ranches, shadowed by snow-capped Mount Kenya, home to ethnically diverse communities including the *Mukogodo Maasai* and *Samburu*. These indigenous tribes people have joined together in partnership with the settlers and ranchers to create a conservation and wildlife haven that spans two million acres (800,000 hectares) of wild savannah.

During the course of this riding safari we will stay in some of Kenya's most exclusive lodges as well as our own private tented camp. The last three nights will be spent in the Masai Mara to witness the thrill of one of nature's significant dramas, the great annual wildebeest migration.

INDIA – PUSHKAR FAIR & THAR DESERT RIDE – NOVEMBER 7 – 22

To combine the *Pushkar* camel and horse fair with a ride in the Thar Desert, reminiscent of the "Far Pavilions", has always been a dream of mine. Now that my ground operators have located the appropriate tented facilities, at last this can become a reality! The 2005 ride will combine staying in some of the prime heritage properties of Rajasthan, with deluxe tented camps (each tent with its en-suite facilities) and service to match. The first day's ride will take us into the *Pushkar* fair, a memorable sight to behold from horseback. After two days of riding in and around *Pushkar* we will continue towards *Jaisalmer* via *Khimsar* a stunning castle that over the years has been transformed into a gorgeous heritage property. Afterwards our deluxe mobile tented camp will be our home in the desert until we reach the outskirts of *Pokhran* the last town before *Jaisalmer*. In the desert we will come across small villages of weavers and potters (high quality durries are woven here) as well as wildlife such as the elegant *Chinkara* gazelles. From *Jaisalmer*, where we will stay two nights, a charter plane will then fly us back to *Jaipur* for a couple more days of sightseeing, shopping and parties. *I can't wait!*

These rides are already generating much interest!



RECENT COMMENTS ABOUT THE PANTANAL EXPEDITION RIDE - BRAZIL JUNE 2004

Nabil Habis

Geneva - Switzerland

I most certainly had a wonderful time !! Enriching, challenging, and fun. Thanks to your great organization, and the very best choice of hosts one could ever think of.

Sarah Trad

Beirut - Lebanon

Thank you for a magical trip, the atmosphere was great, the organization exceptional, and we really met interesting people !

Dina Debbas

Beirut - Lebanon

We had a fantastic time, honestly our stay in the Pantanal was magic. The organization was just perfect.

Candice Shy Hooper

Arlington, VA

I didn't realize when I chose your Pantanal ride as my first "adventure on horseback" it would have such a lasting impression on me. Thank you for introducing me to it in such a perfect fashion!

The Oasis of Siwa - A celebration ride!

It all began as our small plane touched down near the Oasis of Siwa after a two-hour flight from Cairo towards the Libyan border. We landed in a desert of golden dunes, wind-sculptured outcroppings of sandstone, salty lakes, natural springs and bubbling wells; home to a people of Berber descent with an intriguing history where, many moons ago, Alexander the Great had come to consult with the Oracle of Amun (Jupiter) at the temple of Aghurmi.

Greeted by Abdallah, we proceeded by jeep to the oasis and ultimately *Adrere Amellal* (White Mountain in Siwan Berber), a consummate eco-lodge that was to be our home for the next 4 days.

"Just in time for lunch", said Mounir Neamtalla, as he welcomed us into his cherished domain. Built out of indigenous material using traditional Siwan building techniques and styles that have a minimal impact on the land, *Adrere Amellal* sets an example for eco-lodge development. The setting is magical, biblical in fact. Imagine an impressive white meringue-like mountain on the shore of a lake at the edge of the largest expanse of sand in the world. A cluster of buildings built in a traditional style of sun dried salt, sand and straw that blend in perfectly with the stark beauty of the environment; palm and olive tree groves; natural springs that feed a beautiful swimming pool... no electricity, no phones... a legion of discreet smiling young men catering to every need. Paradise!

Once settled, listening spellbound to Mounir's captivating stories and his conception of *Adrere Amellal*, we enjoyed our first delicious, wonderfully refined home-grown anis and light green bean risotto in a dining room-atrium with transparent salt-walls open to the blue skies. Later on, we were introduced to our horses: a string of gorgeous polo ponies belonging to Farouk, a friend of Christine's, that had been trucked from Cairo a week before under the vigilant eye of his son Omar. The short sunset ride around *Adrere Amellal* gave us only a glimpse of what was yet to come. Returning to the stables, we met up with Farouk, who had just driven in from Cairo.

We had all met Farouk the night before in Cairo, or more precisely at his beautiful colonial home near Abu Seir, where he and his charming wife Jacqueline had graciously invited us for dinner. "How about a midnight ride?" asked Farouk as we enjoyed a digestive on the terrace facing the desert and the two floodlit pyramids of Abu Seir. The proposition held us in a moment of awe and was immediately set into action by Jacqueline's spontaneous sportsmanship in outfitting all the ladies, whilst Farouk mastered saddling everyone up to lead us out on horseback into the moonlit desert. The magic had just begun!

From then on, everyday was a new adventure ... paradise between desert and sky... the appreciation of a timeless indigenous culture. Riding like the wind with an utter sense of freedom, we lived and breathed the beauty and majestic grandeur of the desert: dunes of different shapes and colors, pools of blue appearing like a mirage, shells and fossils scattered in the sand reminding us of a time when millions of years ago the desert was a seabed. We rode with the sun high, air clear and clean, breeze light, over the next dune, through wind-sculpted rock formations... walking and talking... trotting and cantering in stride, with long gallops and quiet moments to contemplate life, until we reached the colorful Bedouin tent set up in the middle of the desert for another delectable meal, and a leisurely rest. Then our wonderful cook and his men, having cleared the sands from any traces of moments just past, with their Berber chants and song drumming on a canister or bottle, saw us off, homeward bound again.

Every night at *Adrere Amellal*, Mounir surprised us with a new candle-lit dining venue: under the stars, around an open fire or in a cozy setting. We nibbled on the worlds plumpest, juiciest, most delicious olives before sampling yet another gourmet dinner. Our spirits were high, talking and laughing, enjoying every second of these privileged moments.

One morning we visited Siwa with its donkey carts, a few spice and artifacts shops, the Siwan home museum, the Temple of Aghurmi (where Alexander the Great spoke to the Oracle), and Cleopatra's bubbling spring bath. A quick dip in *Adrere Amellal's* natural spring pool followed by lunch in the palm-grove, we again prepared for the desert, this time however in 4x4, under the expert leadership of Abdallah who wheeled us up, down and over the dunes of the great Sea of Sand until we reached the breathtaking lake of *Shiata* just as the sun was about to set - and for some a sunset swim.

As darkness began to set in, the constellations and stars sprinkled the deep blue sky with celestial diamonds' dust; a glass of hot mint tea in hand sitting around Abdallah's blazing fire we waited in silence for the full moon to rise. From the soft darkness, two shadows on horseback emerged, our saddled horses in tow. Confidently guided by our gentlemen riders Farouk and Omar - such a marvelous father and son team whose natural complicity, engaging stories and cheer of life made our experience all together most unforgettable - we set off for a full-moonlight ride. Accompanied by the reflection of the moon over the dunes, our shadows swayed in rhythm with the desert's cool breeze as we rode back to the White Mountain, a majestic beacon shining bright over the vast oasis. Dismounting and guided in a heavenly trance through the candle-lit paths, we reached our dinner spot. Late into the night, to Berber music and songs we danced around the fire after another delicious meal.

We left Siwa reluctantly, having pledged to return very soon. But as we landed in Cairo, Christine had one last surprise! She whisked us off to the El Zaahra National Arabian stud farm for a private presentation of their gorgeous Arabian stallions, mares and foals.

This was a magical celebration for Christine and her Adventures on Horseback's tenth anniversary! We had all gathered for a precious and extraordinary time. Body and soul fused together in these biblical surroundings where to this day, people and nature appear to live in perfect harmony (may it remain that way!). The place, the rides and the wonderful cast of characters come back to mind at every full moon.

Shok-ran Christine! Until we ride again....

Christina de Labouchere – Geneva (Switzerland)

Photos

Cover: Siwa – Christine
Siwa – Ines riding up a sand dune
Siwa – Lunch in the desert
Argentina – Tierra del Fuego landscape

Page 2: Kenya – Michael Dyer
India – Riding in Rajasthan

Page 4: Egypt – Cairo: before take-off to Siwa



NOTEWORTHY

Brazil - The Fasano Hotel - São Paulo

Rua Vittorio Fasano, Jardins - Tel: 55-11-3896 4000 - Fax: 55-11-3896 4155 - website: www.fasano.com.br
São Paulo's newest and most delightful property run by the Fasano family. Elegance, charm, refined comfort and impeccable service are the main features of this delightful hotel. Ten years of planning and construction were necessary to find the only location, between the strategic *Paulista* and *Faria Lima* avenues, in the fashionable district of Jardins.

Egypt – The Four Seasons Resort – Sharm El Sheikh - Sinai

Tel. 20 (69) 603 555 - Fax 20 (69) 603 550 - website: www.fourseasons.com
The newest resort in Sharm el Sheikh that combines a sense of style, a wonderful spa, excellent cuisine, impeccable service and great diving. There is a decent livery stable nearby. A perfect getaway (especially for Europeans) who want to be pampered and enjoy the sun. *The only resort of distinction in Sharm!*

2005 CALENDAR OF RIDES SET DEPARTURES

FEBRUARY 17-27	ARGENTINA <i>New</i>	Tierra del Fuego
MAY 27 – JUNE 7	BRAZIL	The Pantanal Expedition Ride
JULY 30 – AUGUST 14	AFRICA <i>New</i>	Kenya – The Laikipia Plateau & the Great Migration
OCTOBER (<i>first week, dates to be finalized</i>)	EGYPT	The Oasis of Siwa
NOVEMBER 7 - 22	INDIA <i>New</i>	Pushkar Fair & Thar Desert Ride

Please contact Christine Chauvin for details on the above rides, a tailor-made ride or a ride in other parts of the world.

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