

Holiday hotspot

Whether you want a horsey holiday at home or abroad this year, make sure it's the best ever. Alison Roper of Stonetrail Riding Holidays gives us her top 12 tips for taking your horse with you!

1 If you're aiming to holiday with your horse, research the area you plan to visit. Find out as much as you can from accommodation providers (see 'Horsey B&Bs', right) about the type of terrain, and access to and variety of routes on offer. Ask about the amount of roadwork, hill work and degree of remoteness of the routes, to make sure that it suits both you and your horse.

2 Decide on the type of facilities you require and check with accommodation providers that they have them – services offered for horses on holiday livery can vary enormously. Ask about price, route maps, stable sizes, grazing, parking for boxes, transport, availability and type of feed (hay or haylage), bedding,

access to farrier and vet, drying facilities for rugs, storage areas for tack, security of premises, and on-site riding facilities (such as a manège or schooling paddocks). If this is your first time taking your horse on holiday, try to pick an experienced provider who can offer you help and advice should you need it during your stay.

3 Consider the fitness of your horse and the amount of time you plan to ride. A hilly location will require a greater degree of fitness and if you aim to ride for longer than you normally do each week, you should plan to gradually improve the general fitness of your horse in the weeks leading up to your holiday. Consider joining your local endurance riding group and take part in pleasure rides

of varying distances – a great way to gain more experience and meet fellow endurance riders. Check out www.endurancegb.co.uk

4 Consider any unfamiliar conditions you may encounter during your holiday which may unsettle your horse – opening gates, water crossings, farm animals, even tractors – and try to accustom him beforehand.

5 Don't forget about your own level of fitness and try to build up the amount of time you spend in the saddle in the weeks before your holiday. If you plan to ride off-road, expect to have to dismount to open gates. Remember, though, the extra effort will pay off and it all means you will enjoy your riding more!

6 Make sure your horse's feet are in good order before your holiday. And consider packing an equi-boot, particularly if you are travelling long distances on remote trails.

7 Learn some basic map-reading skills. Bridleways are not always as well-marked as they should be and while the route maps provided by accommodation/livery yards are very useful, you should be prepared to rely on an Ordnance Survey map if you get lost! Essentially, you should understand how a bridleway is marked on a map and be able to judge distances.

8 Check your tack is in good condition. It is always a good idea to take some spare tack – reins, headcollar, lead ropes and saddle cloths come in useful.

9 Check out the various endurance riding websites for ideas on tack that is more appropriate for long-distance riding. Examples include saddlebags, endurance bridles (which also double as headcollars) and saddle covers (keeps your saddle dry when you stop for a rest!). There is even a stirrup extender available to buy – very handy if you find it hard to mount from the ground. If you do plan to use new tack, remember to introduce your horse to it before your holiday.

10 Invest in some hi-viz clothing. Even though you may intend to ride off-road, it is still important to be

highly visible – remember, you'll be sharing tracks with walkers and cyclists, as well as farm vehicles.

11 Consider the journey – your holiday begins when you attempt to load your horse! Make sure your box or trailer is in good order and, if towing, that your load weight is suitable for your car. If your transport has not been out of the yard for several months and your horse has not been loaded recently, it's a good idea to have some practice runs beforehand. Think about how well or for how long your horse is used to travelling and what you can do to make the journey more comfortable for him.

12 Make sure both you and your horse are adequately insured – unfamiliar surroundings can increase the risk of accidents.

Horsey B&B info...

- 1 www.bhs.org
- 1 www.ride-uk.org
- 1 www.ukchasers.com

Invest in some hi-viz clothing, even if you intend to ride off-road

Don't forget to check...

- 1 That your horse's vaccinations are up to date, as many livery owners will ask to see his passport to check equine 'flu vaccinations.
- 1 Pack a basic first-aid kit for both yourself and your horse, as well as a mobile phone. Before setting out each day, it is always good practice to let someone know your intended route and what time you expect to return.



Check out the terrain you may meet



Learn some basic map-reading skills