

A Trip to Lusitanus in Golegã by Fiona Horton



It is true to say that none of us knew what to expect on our first trip to Golegã. Prior to our trip I had this vision that Lusitanus would be an English Style equestrian centre in the middle of the country when actually it is right in the middle of the town. I know this sounds odd but the fact that Lusitanus is in the heart of the town adds to the attraction. Local people regularly pop by and watch the lessons. The whole place has a feel of being part of a community which values it. Here, equines are still an integral part of life and are ridden out from courtyards hidden behind the various townhouses at regular intervals. On Sundays men in traditional costume can be seen riding their stallions around the town or displaying their skills in the riding arena outside Lusitanus.

The second thing that soon becomes apparent is that horse riding in Portugal appears to be a largely masculine occupation which is, on reflection, unsurprising given the continuing tradition of working the land and the bulls. Excellent horsemanship is plainly evident and it is reflected in the riding which can be observed and the training and behaviour of the horses. The teaching staff at Lusitanus are all highly skilled horsemen and their instruction is patient and very knowledgeable.

I remember feeling nervous at the prospect of riding a stallion because at home only a small number of the equestrian community in the UK have experience of dealing with them so the rest of us are left with the impression that they are somehow too difficult. I imagined climbing aboard some flighty beast which jinked and reared at every opportunity. Luckily my fears were totally unfounded because the stallions at Lusitanus behaved like true gentlemen both on the ground and ridden. In Portugal stallions are the norm and geldings seem to be the exception. Children learn to ride from an early age as they do in the UK but the difference is that in Golegã the ponies that they ride are entire.

That first trip coincided with the annual gastronomic fair which also appeared to be an excellent excuse for a fiesta. The entire town turns out to try the food and watch the proceedings which involve horsemen demonstrating their skills working the bulls and impromptu displays by locals who have had one too many beers. The whole event is cheerful, light hearted and goes on long into the early hours. I remember we were shown some prized Lusitanos by a very proud man who realised we were visiting and wanted the English Ladies to see how fine his horses were.



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Golegã itself, apart from being completely obsessed with horses, is like taking a trip back in time. You feel completely safe walking around. People smile and take the time to have a chat, even to strangers like us. Old people pull their chairs on to the pavements outside their houses and pass the time chatting to each other. You don't see the usual trappings of wealth and consumerism on display but despite this (or may be because of this) it still feels very happy.

I have visited Lusitanus three times now and each time has been as good as the first. For my friends and I it much more than just a riding holiday. It is the opportunity to immerse ourselves in the art and culture of horsemanship at its best.

Lusitanus SA kindly donated a 3 Day Riding Holiday to the Silver Draw for the European Working Equitation Championships. The holiday was won by Suzy Creed-Miles from Hampshire.