



RIDE WORLD WIDE

SPAIN - The Mountains & Valleys of Gredos

Riding trip information sheet 2012

Rides in the Gredos explore the four valleys of the Sierra de Gredos, west of Madrid in Castilla, central Spain. The mountains that make up the Gredos range are situated between the provinces of Avila, Caceres and Salamanca and are crossed by the Duero and Tajo rivers. The majority of peaks are higher than 6,500 feet and the summit of the best known, the Circo de Gredos Almanzor peak, is about 8,425 feet and always snowy against the horizon. In between these imposing mountains, grassy moorland valleys, scattered with wild flowers in spring and summer, provide wonderful going for horses and the area is a lovely example of rustic, rural Spain with a landscape that is wild, natural and full of colour. The rides we offer here are organised by Maria Elena Dendaluze, a knowledgeable and experienced guide who looks after her horses and guests with the greatest care, taking pride in even the smallest detail to ensure each trip is special. Uniquely, the rides include accommodation at some of Spain's wonderful Parador hotels and this, combined with good horses, unspoilt, un-touristed countryside and a welcoming, fun and informative guide, makes them a wonderful way to experience rural Spain. Maria Elena speaks excellent fluent English and is an enthusiastic, easy-going host who is also great fun to be with. It is not surprising that many people return to ride with her again and again.



Dates For 2012 there are several different ride itineraries from set dates between March and November. 7 night rides include riding on 5 or 6 days, following routes that progress from village to village. Long Weekend Rides are for 4 nights and include 3 full days riding. In addition, rides can sometimes be run for private groups by arrangement from dates to suit - generally a minimum of 6 riders are required and a supplement is charged if the private group is less than 8. The 7 night itineraries are set from Sunday to Sunday, long weekends from Wednesday to Sunday. Please call us to discuss your plans, dates and availability.

The Horses Maria Elena has about 25 horses in all, most of which are locally bred Arab and / or Andalusian crosses. They average between 15hh and 16hh and are a very enjoyable, responsive and well schooled ride. They are also good-natured, nimble but extremely sure footed and well adapted to the going making them a real pleasure to ride. Most of the horses have been owned or known to Marie Elena since they were youngsters and they have been carefully brought on and schooled by her and her helpers. She knows them well and is expert at matching horse and rider. Tack is good quality English style with seat savers and saddle-bags provided. There is a strict rider weight limit of 90kg (14 stone) in riding clothes.

Riding There is usually between 5 and 6 hours riding a day, broken up with rests to stretch your legs, for drinks and lunch. Much of the going is good although there are occasional steep mountain passes where you will need to dismount to lead your horse and there will also be some road work each day riding through small villages, where you will be watched by locals who love to see riders on a beautiful horse. The set date rides are run for a maximum of 10 guests (there is no minimum but if less than 6 riders the itinerary may be modified a little). Rides are lead by Maria Elena (or occasionally an assistant guide), with a helper / groom on hand at lunch breaks and to look after the horses in the evenings. Maria Elena speaks fluent English and has spent a lot of time working, travelling and riding in the UK and USA amongst other places. She is well used to English standards of horse care and is great fun, enthusiastic and easy-going company. She looks after everyone very well indeed. Luggage is moved between accommodation by back up vehicle and a vehicle also meets riders at lunch-time each day.

Pace The pace is moderate overall although it varies during the week according to the terrain and can change from day to day. One or two days are slower when riding high up into the mountains, whilst on others there is scope to go faster. The Gredos area itself is used for endurance riding competitions and there are some lovely open grassy valleys (rather like moorland) where you can canter off-track, as well as wide woodland paths that provide good going. As you descend to the area around the Corneja valley, the going is generally flatter and fairly open and there are many wide, sandy tracks, the old cattle drover roads, and more chances to move on.

Riding Experience These rides are aimed at reasonably experienced riders and to participate you are expected to be a reasonably competent rider, who is comfortable and secure in the saddle and able to control a well schooled horse in open country at all paces. Although you don't need to be an expert rider, you should be used to riding over varied terrain at a varied pace with a group of horses. You should also be quite riding fit as hours can be fairly long.



Terrain The rides for the most part explore the four valleys of the Tormes, Corneja, Alberche and Tietar Rivers and take you along forested slopes of oak, pine and chestnut. Although this is a region of high mountains, there are vast open moorland pastures nestled in the valleys and this rough grassland, which is scattered with craggy rocks and grazed by wild goats, provides wonderful going for horses. In spring and summer the grasslands are covered in an array of wild flowers and you will ride through a sea of yellow broom catching the scent of wild thyme and lavender on the air as your horse brushes past. On some days, routes climb steep mountain paths; on others you ride along forested river valleys and narrow paths that pass small isolated villages with age old traditions, architecture and a unique character.

Accommodation Nights are spent in a combination of Paradors and other hotels in villages along the route. The first two and last night of the Valleys of Gredos Rides are spent at the Parador of Gredos, a hotel belonging to Spain's national chain of Parador hotels chosen for their special building or setting. The impressive Parador of Gredos was built in 1926 as a hunting lodge for Alfonso XIII and was the first establishment in Spain to be converted to a Parador. The Mountains of Gredos Ride uses Parador accommodation on 6 nights (5 nights in the Parador of Gredos and one night in the Parador in Avila) or you can choose standard but comfortable rural hotels. When not using Paradors, nights are spent in small, comfortable and carefully chosen village hotels which are varied in style and character. The standard of hotel accommodation varies a little over the course of the rides as there is limited choice in some of the smaller villages but the hotels are all comfortable and selected with care. They are all individual and of a good 2* to good 3* standard. Hotel rooms are twin bedded with en-suite shower and loo, although single rooms can usually be arranged at a supplement (please note that single rooms in some hotels are limited and, if the ride is full, you may be asked to share with another guest on one night).



Meals Breakfast, lunch and dinner every day whilst on the ride are included (dinner on the first day to breakfast on the last) except lunch in Avila on the last day of the Mountains of Gredos Ride. Breakfast is served at your hotel and is simple - bread or toast, butter, jam and tea or coffee. On some days you will then stop for an 'aperitif' mid morning, with a selection of drinks offered as well as light tapas. Lunch will normally be a substantial picnic, eaten seated at a long table set up in the countryside when you are out riding. It will generally include a selection of salads, bread and a main course such as Spanish omelette, barbecued steak or fish or a delicious Paella prepared for you in the middle of nowhere! Dinner is three courses, eaten at your hotel or at a typical local restaurant. Sometimes you have a choice from the hotel's a la carte menu and sometimes menus are fixed, although there is often a choice of meat or fish. You usually have the chance to sample different specialities of the area (eg. the delicious Avilan beef of the Gredos). Meals times are generally a little later than in England with breakfast usually at 9.00-9.30, aperitif at 12.30-1.00pm, lunch at 2.30 to 3.00pm and dinner served at about 9.30pm. A selection of soft drinks, beer, good local wines and tea and coffee are all included with lunch and dinner. Vegetarians can be catered for with prior notice - please tell us of any special diet when you book.



Weather The climate in summer is usually dry, but as you are close to the mountains the weather can be unstable with rain still possible! Temperatures are strongly influenced by the altitude, which is between 2,275 and 5,525 feet. Daytime temperatures in spring are usually around 15 - 20 degrees C; in summer temperatures rise as high as 28 degrees C and in autumn, they average 12 to 18 degrees C. Days are normally sunny with clear blue skies - the sun can be very intense because of the altitude. Evenings are cool and in March, April, early May and October a warm sweater and warm (waterproof) coat are necessary.

What to Bring We will send you a list with suggestions of what to bring when you book.

Itineraries The daily routine on all rides is generally to set off at about 10am riding for a couple of hours before stopping for a rest and aperitif to keep you going until lunch. You then ride on for about 2 hours before lunch. After lunch and a siesta until about 4pm, you will ride until early evening, stopping at about 6 or 7 pm or sometimes a little later. Examples of the 7 night itineraries planned are set out below (please enquire for the long weekend itinerary) - but please note that they are only examples of what is planned and your guides may change the day-by-day route if the weather or other local conditions require.

The Valleys of Gredos

Day 1 You will be collected from Madrid airport at a set time, usually at 3pm, and driven about 2 hours to Navarredonda de Gredos, a small village in the Gredos with a splendid view of the Almanzor peak. Time allowing, there will be a stop en route from Madrid at the historic walled town of Avila for sightseeing before driving on to the first night's hotel in the village of Navarredonda de Gredos. A welcome dinner and the night at the imposing Parador de Gredos. (D)

Day 2 Breakfast, then a short drive to the stables to meet the horses. This is an easy introductory day which allows you to get used to your horse at all paces. After mounting up set off following cattle tracks through pine woods and across open fields towards the mountains with magnificent views of the Sierra de Gredos. After a delicious picnic lunch - a paella cooked on the spot - in beautiful unspoilt countryside, return to Navarredonda by a different route. There is a small spa with a heated swimming pool in the next village and it possible to arrange a session there before dinner and a second night at Parador de Gredos. (B,L,D)

Day 3 Breakfast and return to the horses. Set off through woods and beautiful meadows along the Tormes River Valley with chances to trot and canter. Lunch at the 'Poza de las Paredes' magical spot at the Gorge of Barbellido and a great swimming spot in summer months (even in spring those who are brave enough can have a refreshing swim in the river). After lunch continue along cattle trails to the town of Navalperal de Tormes. Dinner and the night at the Hotel Rural Cruz del Gallo, a comfortable hotel near the river. (B,L,D)



Day 4 Breakfast at the hotel and then set off on a long half day ride continuing along cattle paths in the Tormes river valley passing the village of Aliseda de Tormes. There is a marked change in the vegetation as you ride deeper into the mountains and arrive at the small town of Barco de Avila where the night is to be spent. The afternoon is free to explore Barco de Avila a 15th century walled town with a beautiful medieval bridge over the river. Dinner and overnight at a lovely country hotel with spa and indoor heated swimming pool. (B,L,D)

Day 5 Breakfast at the hotel then ride on along cattle tracks, through holm oak woods and across grassy pasture heading away from El Barco. The going today is quite flat and there will be a chance to canter as you follow winding tracks through grassland dotted with huge granite boulders and rocky outcrops. Arrive in the village of Puente del Congosto and stop for a picnic lunch near the river. In the afternoon a short ride takes you to a lovely small country hotel just outside the village of Hoyorrendondo where the night is spent. The horses are turned out to graze in the fields around the hotel and there will be time for a drink in the garden, whilst watching them. (B,L,D)

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Day 6 After breakfast at the hotel, set off riding. This is a day of contrasting landscapes starting in the open flat country of the Corneja river valley until a mid-morning aperitif stop. Follow the Corneja river to its source, stopping for a picnic lunch near one of the many old water mills, which used to produce most of the flour for this part of Castile, along its banks. In the afternoon follow an ancient Roman road to the Puerto de Chia (5,686 feet) for a breathtaking panoramic view of the Corneja Valley on one side, and the Alberche river on the other. Descend to San Martin de la Vega where the horses will spend the night. A short transfer to a charming rural hotel in Barajas de Gredos. Dinner and the night at Barajas de Gredos. (B,L,D)

Day 7 Breakfast and transfer back to meet the horses. Set off riding back towards the Sierra de Gredos with some great views of the distant peaks. Descend towards the Tormes valley where the ride started and stop for lunch near the river. A short afternoon ride takes you back to the stables in Navarredonda de Gredos. Farewell to the horses before being driven the few minutes from the stables to the Parador in Navarredonda where the final night is spent. After settling into your rooms meet up for a drink on the terrace, with its glorious views over the pine forest towards the mountains, and then a farewell dinner before your last night at the Parador. (B,L,D)

Day 8 Breakfast in the hotel, then you will be driven to Madrid (arriving about noon) for your flight home. (B)

Mountains of Gredos Ride

This itinerary is designed to make the most of some of the best riding in Spain during months when the heat can drive many from the saddle. With full day rides, opportunities to swim in the rivers and mountain gorges, diverse landscapes, great mountain views and pristine mountain rivers, the ride is a fine blend of the altitude of the mountains and the alpine valleys (all above 1500 m). In general, the daytime temperature in Navarredonda de Gredos during July and August is 25°C, with a night time minimum of 12°C.

Day 1 You will be collected from Madrid airport, usually at 3pm and driven about 2 hours to Navarredonda de Gredos, a small village in the Gredos with a splendid view of the Almanzor peak. A welcome dinner and the night at the Parador de Gredos (or the Hotel Rural la Dehesilla). (D)



Day 2 Breakfast, then a short drive to the stables to meet the horses. This is an easy introductory day, which allows you to get used to your horse at all paces. After mounting up set off following cattle tracks through pine woods and across open fields towards the source of the Tormes river, with magnificent views of the Sierra de Gredos. Stop for a delicious picnic lunch, a paella cooked in beautiful unspoilt countryside. After a siesta, ride back to Navarredonda by a different route. Dinner and a second night at Parador de Gredos (or the Hotel Rural la Dehesilla). (B,L,D)

Day 3 Today's ride takes you along the river to Hoyos del Espino, before climbing up to Hoyos del Collado. Following an ancient cattle path you reach Navacepeda de Tormes before descending towards the Tormes river and the Gorge of Barbellido. Lunch at the beautiful Pozo de las Paredes, with a 14th century bridge. Ideal for a swim! A short afternoon ride with magnificent views to the village of Navalperal de Tormes. Dinner and the night at Hotel Rural Cruz del Gallo. (B,L,D)

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Day 4 From Navalperal you once again take the cattle path to Navaceda de Tormes and on to the Tormes river itself. Lunch is at a fisherman's hut at Hoyos del Collado another ideal spot for bathing. The afternoon to relax in the shade by the river before heading through the scented pinewoods back to the stables in Navarredonda. Dinner and overnight at the Parador of Gredos (or the Hotel Rural la Dehesilla)



Day 5 In the morning climb to the heights of Cañada del Horno, through open fields and dense broom areas, with a great panoramic view of the Alberche river valley. Lunch is at a bar in the village. Ride on in the late afternoon with great views of the Sierra de Gredos, descending towards Barajas de Gredos and the stables in Navarredonda. Dinner. Overnight at the Parador of Gredos (or to the hotel in the village). (B,L,D).

Day 6 Breakfast and ride towards the heights of the Sierra de Gredos with magnificent views. Climb to the Covacha gorge and descend towards the gorge of Barbellido. Lunch by the river, an excellent spot for a swim. In the afternoon climb to the heights of Siete Fuentes and descend to the pinewoods of Hoyos del Espino. Ride back to the stables in Navarredonda de Gredos. Dinner and night at the Parador of Gredos (or to the hotel in the village). (B,L,D)



Day 7 After breakfast in the hotel you will be driven about an hour to the lovely walled city of Avila. Avila is one of the World Heritage Cities of Spain, one of 660 cultural sites in the world that are considered of outstanding universal value. The day to visit this 11th century city and your own arrangements for lunch - see below for further information on Avila. (Further recommendations for visits, tours and restaurants will be provided locally). Dinner and night at the Parador de Avila or the 4 star Hotel Palacio de los Velada (or the Hotel Las Cancelas). (B,D)

Day 8 Breakfast and then transfer to Madrid airport (arriving about noon) for your flight home. (B)



2012 Dates & Rates

Please note that due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, ride rates are now quoted in euros. The sterling price will be the equivalent sterling rate using the euro/sterling exchange rate in force when you book/pay.

The Valleys of Gredos Ride

8th to 15th April	3rd to 10th June	23rd to 30th September
22nd to 29th April	17th to 24th June	7th to 14th October
6th to 13th May	26th August to 2nd September	21st to 28th October
20th to 27th May	9th to 16th September	

Price: Euros 1700 per person (single supplement 150 euros, payable in Spain)

The Mountains of Gredos Ride

15th to 22nd July	29th July to 5th August
22nd to 29th July	5th to 12th August

Price:

With Parador accommodation on 6 nights - Euros 1525 per person (single supplement 180 euros, payable in Spain)

With standard hotel accommodation - Euros 1300 per person (single supplement 130 euros, payable in Spain)

Long Weekends

28th March to 1st April	13th to 17th June	19th to 23rd September
4th to 8th April	18th to 22nd July	3rd to 7th October
18th to 22nd April	25th to 29th July	17th to 21st October
2nd to 6th May	1st to 5th August	31st October to 4th November
16th to 20th May	8th to 12th August	7th to 11th November
30th May to 3rd June	5th to 9th September	14th to 18th November
		21st to 25th November

Price:

4 nights Parador Euros 800 per person (single supplement 100 euros, payable in Spain)

4 nights Rural Hotel Euros 700 per person (single supplement 60 euros, payable in Spain)

Rates **INCLUDE** all riding, 7 nights (4 nights for long weekends) twin hotel accommodation (single room if paying supplement), meals from dinner Day 1 to breakfast Day 8 (or 5 for long weekends), except lunch on Day 7 of the Mountains of Gredos Ride), mid morning aperitif most days, wine, beer and a selection of soft drinks with meals and also transfers from / to Madrid airport with the group at set times on the first and last day.

Rates **EXCLUDE** international flights / travel to Madrid and taxes, personal medical / travel insurance (which you must have), lunch on Day 7 of Mountains of Gredos Ride, any extra drinks at bar stops, before meals etc, any visa fees, extras such as telephone calls, laundry and drinks at hotels etc., charges for transfers outside the set times and any tips you may wish to leave.

Rates are based on a minimum of 6 ride participants; if there are less the ride will still go ahead but the itinerary may be varied, if less than 4 riders there may be a supplement for transfers.



Single supplements - Rates assume twin bedded rooms in hotels and the single supplement is payable if you are travelling alone or if you wish to book a single room (NB some of the hotels used have a limited number of rooms and if the ride is full you may be asked to share with another guest for one night even if paying a single supplement). If you are travelling alone and are prepared to share with another (same sex) guest on the ride to save paying the supplement, we can sometimes arrange this – let us know and we will see if we can find someone to share with you - if there is no sharer, the supplement will be charged.

Rides can be booked exclusively by private groups. For the above rates to apply, a group of 8 riders is required, but rides can be run for smaller private groups at a supplement. Please call for details. Other dates, in addition to the above, can also sometimes be arranged for private groups on request.

Flights - You need to fly to Madrid for these rides and the meeting point is Madrid airport. There are several flights a day to Madrid from London - British Airways have regular flights from Gatwick and Heathrow and Iberia fly several times a day from Heathrow. Easyjet also usually have a daily flight from Luton and Gatwick and there may be other 'budget airline' options from London or regional airports, depending on the season. You need to aim to arrive in Madrid by about 2.15pm at the latest on the first Sunday (or Wednesday for Long Weekends) and should book a return flight which leaves **after 13.30** on the final Sunday to allow time for transfers. The transfer takes about 2 ½ hours each way. Fares to Madrid vary but expect to pay from around £120 to £200 per person economy return. If you would like help booking flights or a fare quote please contact us - we can book British Airways scheduled flights for you. Our ATOL number for flight bookings is 6213.

Transfers - Please note when organising flights that there is **one set** transfer for the group on the first / last day of the rides. The pick up is normally 3 pm on the first day and the drop off is about 12 noon on the last day. If you cannot get to Madrid in time for the pick up or if you need to arrive in Madrid earlier than the drop off time on the last day, it might be possible for the group to wait a short time / leave a little earlier but you will probably have to pay extra for a private transfer / taxi (we can help arrange this).

General visa and health information (NB this is only a brief outline - further information will be sent to you if you make a confirmed booking.)

Visas If you hold a full British passport you do not need a visa for visits to Spain whatever the length of stay, although for visits of over 90 days residence permits are required. Please check up to date requirements with the Spanish consulate.

Health No vaccinations are needed by EEC residents to enter Spain (according to the Spanish and World Health Organisations). If you have a particular condition requiring special medical treatment, in case of emergencies you should carry a letter from your own doctor translated into Spanish describing your condition and the medicine / treatment required.



Additional information on the area for non-riders / and riders before or after a ride:

Non-riders can follow any ride if they rent or bring their own vehicle, meeting up with riders in the evenings for dinner and spending nights at the same hotels. Sometimes it may be possible to also meet up at midday for lunch, but this depends on accessibility of the lunch spot. The cost for a non-rider would basically be for accommodation and meals only. This is a tailor-made option so if you are interested please contact us for rates. The area of the Gredos is a Natural Park and there is some wonderful walking and hiking. The Tormes river also has good trout fishing from April to August - if you are interested in this please contact us as a permit is required. There is also some excellent birdwatching which is best in May.

The region is in the heart of Castille where some of Spain's most historical towns are found. Avila, Segovia, Salamanca and Toledo have all been declared World Heritage Sites by UNESCO.

Avila is a medieval town, surrounded by walls constructed in the 11th and 12th century (2500m in length, 88 towers, 9 gates). These walls were built to protect the Spanish territories from the Moor and are still pretty much intact. Known as the "City of Saints and Stones", it is the birthplace of St Theresa and the burial place of the Grand Inquisitor Torquemada. Avila has kept its medieval austerity and the purity of form can still be seen in its Gothic cathedral and the fortifications which are the most complete in Spain. There are charming squares and beautiful quiet pedestrian streets which make it a wonderful historic town to explore on foot. A night here is included in the Mountains of Gredos Ride and we thoroughly recommend planning a night here before the Valley of Gredos Ride. The Parador is a unique, very comfortable place to stay in the centre of the city and there are a number of other smaller, stylish hotels that are also very good. If you stay the Saturday before either ride in Avila it is usually possible to meet the transfer vehicle in Avila (which is an easy train ride from Madrid) on the first Sunday of the ride.

Websites worth visiting are: <http://whc.unesco.org> & www.spain.info/tourspain & www.avilaturismo.com
www.paradores-spain.com

Segovia has many magnificent monuments including a Roman Aqueduct built in the 1st & 2nd C AD and a castle - Alcazar - dating back to the 12th Century where Isabella la Catolica was proclaimed Queen of Castile.

Salamanca was conquered by Hannibal in the 3rd Century AD. The university of Salamanca, which was founded in the 12th Century, is the oldest in Spain and one of the oldest in Europe. There are many fascinating monuments to explore.

Toledo the medieval capital of Spain, is one of the most impressive historical - artistic complexes anywhere in the world. The town, perched on a hill and skirted by a sharp bend in the river Tagus has remained largely unaltered since the end of the Middle Ages. Romans, Visigoths and Moors lived there in successive centuries, each leaving a mark in the development of the city. Alfonso VI, king of Castile, conquered the city in 1085 and thenceforth three ethnically distinct communities grew up - Christians, Jews and Moslems all leaving a profound mark on its architecture and culture. Of all cities in the area, Toledo is impregnated with a fascinating history and culture. A few days exploring on foot, with a night or two in the Parador, a lovely 4 * hotel, is a wonderful addition to any ride. (draft 19/12/11)

