



# Accommodation & Stabling for the Self-Guided Ride Market

**In recent years a number of signed and mapped riding routes, or 'trails', have been opened in Scotland and more are proposed. There are niche business opportunities close to the routes to offer accommodation and other services to riders staying away from home to enjoy the trails. The information in this guide is a general introduction for those considering such an enterprise.**

## WHAT ARE TRAIL RIDERS LOOKING FOR?

- Riding routes within 2-3 hours trailer/horsebox drive of home.
- Good quality accommodation for horse and rider in same location, close to route.
- The maximum amount of off-road riding.
- Scope for varied pace over different types of landscape.
- Clear route maps/guides, preferably provided free of charge.
- Well signed routes with gates that can be opened and closed from horseback.
- Start point/parking accessible by horsebox/trailer (no very steep hills or narrow twisty lanes).
- Secure parking with plenty of turning space.
- Easy booking for accommodation, ideally one-stop booking for the whole trip.
- A drink on arrival, an evening meal, breakfast and packed lunch option.
- Optional luggage transfer
- Longer, circular routes (50 miles +) offering three or more day-long rides
- Friendly, welcoming hosts.

If you can offer all or most of the above, and are happy and confident about dealing with both people and horses, offering overnight accommodation for trail riders and their horses could suit you.

## THE CUSTOMER PROFILE

The majority of riders interested in self-guided trail riding are female aged 35-65. Most ride in pairs or in small groups of three or four staying and stabling together. Few riders choose to ride alone, it is safer and more sociable to ride in company.

Most riders consider taking breaks between May and October, with spring and autumn being most attractive. Preferences vary – short breaks and weekends are favoured, but some riders are looking for longer trips of a week or more.

## FOR RIDERS – ACCOMMODATION & MEALS

Farmhouse or B&B accommodation with an evening meal, or better still a local pub within easy walking distance for dinner, is the most popular choice. A packed lunch from the accommodation provider is usually an essential part of the service, as suitable lunch stops are few and far between.

Interest in self catering is relatively low, but will appeal to some if stabling and grazing are available and there is direct access to a variety of good off road routes. Relatively few riders are interested in bunkhouse or budget accommodation.

A warm welcome and hosts sympathetic to horse and rider needs are the most important features. Riders may arrive elated after their ride – or they may be wet, cold and exhausted. It is important to be sensitive to how visitors feel, after hours in the saddle they might just want to say hello and put their feet up. As host, it is your job to get them settled in and comfortable. Accommodation essentials are a friendly welcome, a hot bath, drying facilities for clothes, secure tack storage and good food. Ensuite facilities are appreciated, but not necessary.

## FOR HORSES – STABLING & GRAZING

Grazing is slightly favoured over stabling by trail riders, allowing horses to walk off stiffness after a long ride. Because of interest in spring and autumn breaks stabling and turnout facilities are desirable.

Grazing must be securely fenced, free from poisonous plants and other hazards (e.g. loose wire or other items that present an accident risk) and should have access to some shelter. Grazing should be 'clean' (horses using the paddock should have been wormed regularly, droppings should be picked up in small fields and, if possible, grazing rotated with other livestock to avoid it becoming horse-sick).

Visitors should not be asked to share grazing with other groups' horses, or with your own horses. Turning out horses that do not know each other is asking for trouble. Even normally biddable horses bite, kick or gallop about when establishing a pecking order.

If stabling is not provided, somewhere safe, enclosed and preferably dry near the tackroom is required for riders to groom their horses and saddle up. Low cost additions that will be greatly

appreciated by riders are facilities to wash horses down (a tap and hose pipe on suitable standing) and grooming kit.

Where stabling is provided, individual stables should be a minimum of 10' x 12'. Good quality hay and bedding will be expected. Most riders will be happy to muck out, but you should provide the necessary tools and explain whether this is part of the deal in the booking information. Whether horses are to be grazed or stabled, fresh hard food (such as sports mix) should be available. Generally riders will pay more if they need you to buy in a special bag of feed. Both grazing and stabling must have safe access to clean water.

Have readily available up to date contact details for a local farrier, a vet, a horse transporter and a garage to address the common problems that arise.

## ADDITIONAL SERVICES

Consider additional services that you can offer which will make your destination more attractive to riders, or which can add to your income.

Attracting non-riding partners or family brings in extra income. Being able to include non-riders may make it easier for riders to take a holiday. Non-riders might like to walk, fish, cycle, golf or try other activities available locally. There may be the opportunity to offer extra services to them, such as cycle hire.

Many riders will pay extra to have their luggage, rugs and feed moved for them to their next nights accommodation. There may be scope to develop luggage transfer in conjunction with other accommodation or service providers.

Other services might include:

- Secure trailer/horsebox parking.
- Emergency transport for horse and rider in case of accident, transport to farrier.
- Transport for horse and rider back to base from linear rides.
- Hire of saddle bags and map cases.
- Guided rides.
- Pairing service matching up lone riders with others.
- Map reading or other training sessions for riders.

## THE TRAILS

To appeal to riders 'trails' need to be in attractive countryside and largely 'off-road' – that is avoiding roads and only limited distances on stony tracks or forest roads. How far riders plan to travel in a day, and the time they take to do it, varies. However, rides of 15-20 miles/day taking 4-5 hours tend to be the most popular and are a good rule of thumb. Use this as a guide to assess routes that riders might take from your base and to identify other accommodation providers you could work with to make attractive circular or linear rides of different durations.

## LINEAR AND CIRCULAR ROUTES

Linear rides have the appeal of undertaking a journey from one place to another, but rely on transport back to base, or someone to move the box/trailer, or retracing steps. Circular routes are preferred by most riders, allowing new countryside to be enjoyed each day, but ending up back at the horsebox.

'Petal' routes are different circular rides from a single base. These appeal to riders keen to stay in the same place and are well suited to short or weekend breaks. However, to hold customers for more than a couple of nights accommodation providers need





to be able to offer direct access to a variety of off-road routes with different scenery or features of interest. For example beach riding has a huge appeal as part of a range of riding options during a holiday.

### ROUTE MAPS

A map can be relatively simple if it advises users to buy the relevant Ordnance Survey map for route finding on the ground. Ideally maps should be supplied free

(or downloadable freely from the internet), and should be updated regularly to reflect route changes and any amendments to accommodation providers lists. Useful additions are notes on the riding surface and gradients to help riders judge suitability for their ability and fitness. In some areas maps linked to route networks are available, for example the South of Scotland Countryside Trails and Tweed Trails.

### GROUP WORKING

There is a direct relationship between ease of booking and uptake of self guided routes.

Because a circular or linear ride will involve staying at different overnight stops, your business can be much more successful if you work with other accommodation providers to offer a 'package'.

Being able to organise accommodation for the whole trip, find out about the route, stabling, luggage transfer, and so on, with one phone call will make a significant difference to the number of bookings you are likely to receive.

There are various ways of working collaboratively, with shared responsibility for dealing with bookings, or one partner allocated as the contact point. However the group is put together, co-operative working is well worth considering because, by pooling marketing budgets, businesses can share the cost of advertising, websites, print, etc – and provide a better service.

### TAKING BOOKINGS

#### Planning before the start is vital.

Think about putting together a booking form and information pack (or join *Horses Welcome*, which provides pro formas and is a valuable starting point).

- What information do you need to have from the visitor in advance?
- Will you charge a deposit?
- What do riders need to know from you?
- Can you supply maps, or can you advise on who does?
- Horse owners main concern is the welfare of their animals, so be aware of horse health issues. Ask visiting riders to ensure their horses have a clean bill of health on your booking information (flu vacs and tetanus injections up to date, and recently wormed). It should go without saying that any horses living on your premises should be in good health, or isolated from visiting animals.

- Most riders would appreciate being supplied with emergency contact information (farrier, vet, emergency pick up and a number where they can contact you) with their booking form – also advice about reliability of mobile phones in the area. Having this information will make life easier for them – and you – if there is a problem.
- Advice on what to carry (such as first aid kit), watering points, toilet stops, local history, things to do in the evenings and activities for non-riders are useful, and show that you have a customer focus.
- If you have ridden the local trails yourself you will be in the best position to help or give visitors advice.

### MARKETING

Horse & Hound, Riding Club newsletters, Scottish Northern Equestrian Magazine and Your Horse are the most read publications by the trail riding target market, but an advertising campaign can be costly and does not necessarily bring high returns. Feature articles in the equestrian press can be effective if you are able to secure them.

Regional and national events such as the Borders Festival of the Horse, shows and horse trials can be cost effective places to promote your services, particularly if group marketing. Other opportunities include BHS, local riding club, SERC or affiliated bridleways group newsletters.

The internet is growing in popularity as a means of researching holidays, to the point that a website is almost a business essential. A well thought out site allows maps, booking forms and other paperwork to be supplied quickly and cheaply as downloads. Riders can even have a virtual tour of the facilities. By answering the most common questions on your website you can save yourself a great deal of time on the telephone, and of course email messages can be received or responded to at any time of day or night.

### INSURANCE

Insurance is a complicated subject and outwith the scope of this summary. However, be aware that before offering **any** service you need to check the legal and insurance implications.

**Adequate insurance cover is an essential, not an optional extra.**



## WILL IT PAY?

Trail riding is a relatively new addition to the attractions offered in Scotland. This means that there is no guarantee as to how many visitors you will attract and few statistics to build estimates on. Those considering developing an enterprise should be realistic about the size and value of the market.

- Most riders expect to pay no more than £50/day in total for horse and rider accommodation and food, many expect to pay less.
- Income and employment are likely to be seasonal and part time.
- To be successful you must be good at dealing with people as well as horses.

Providing riders requirements are met, those most likely to make money from this type of enterprise are B&Bs, stables and farms looking to diversify or add to the income of their existing business. Large scale capital investment at present is not recommended.

If you feel that B&B for trail riders could be an enterprise for you, a review of the in depth Equestrian Tourism Research Project is strongly recommended.

This research was commissioned by VisitScotland, The Southern Uplands Partnership, British Horse Society Scotland, British Riding Clubs Area 1, Scottish Border Paths, Scottish Borders Council, South Lanarkshire Council, Dumfries and Galloway Council and Scottish Enterprise Dumfries & Galloway to identify demand and riders requirements in the south of Scotland. The research report can be downloaded from the Southern Uplands Partnership website : [www.sup.org.uk](http://www.sup.org.uk)

## FIND OUT MORE

BHS Ride UK : [www.ride-uk.org.uk](http://www.ride-uk.org.uk)

Horses Welcome : [www.bhsscotland.org.uk](http://www.bhsscotland.org.uk)

South of Scotland Countryside Trails :

[www.southofscotlandcountrysidetrails.co.uk](http://www.southofscotlandcountrysidetrails.co.uk)



## THE 'HORSES WELCOME' SCHEME

*Horses Welcome* is a new scheme set up by the British Horse Society Scotland as a self-financing marketing tool for those providing overnight stays for horse and rider. The scheme was piloted in the south of Scotland in 2005 and will expand across Scotland from 2006 with the site and services developing as membership grows.

The aim is to encourage riders to take their horses trail riding away from home, confident about the accommodation that they have booked. *Horses Welcome* is the first quality assured accommodation for horses in the UK.

To take part accommodation providers complete an application form and pay a fee of £45 to join and receive an initial inspection, plus £35 per year to be part of the scheme. The inspection forms the basis of a short report shown with a photograph (supplied by the business) on the *Horses Welcome* portal website, [www.horseswelcome.org.uk](http://www.horseswelcome.org.uk)

The scheme provides participating businesses with:

- Recommended standards for horse and human accommodation.
- Subject to acceptance, an entry on the *Horses Welcome* site with the option to link to their own website.
- Advice for riders that businesses can use with their promotional material.
- A pro forma booking agreement and declaration.
- An information and advice pack.
- The *Horses Welcome* logo for use while part of the scheme.
- 'Care and Custody' insurance cover.

For more information on *Horses Welcome* contact:

**The British Horse Society Scotland on 01764 656334  
or visit [www.bhsscotland.org.uk](http://www.bhsscotland.org.uk)**



*The Southern Uplands Partnership is a registered charity started by local people, keen to maintain healthy communities and countryside and to see a vibrant economy in the south of Scotland.*

*If you would like to know more, or join, visit the Southern Uplands Partnership website:*

**[www.sup.org.uk](http://www.sup.org.uk)**