

St. Valentine's Blind Date Ball

It's a chance for a double love affair when you pair an Irish riding vacation with single horse enthusiasts.

By Timory Wilson

Discover Ireland's stunning countryside on horseback as you embark on a singles riding vacation, which may lead you to your true love on Valentine's Day. The St. Valentine's Blind Date Ball vacation in Ireland, available Feb. 12 – 17 in 2007, was designed by Cross Country International (CCI) with the single horse enthusiast in mind.

In addition to four days of three-hour riding excursions on trained Irish Sport Horses, clients take part in a Valentine's Day Blind Date Ball at the Dunraven Arms Hotel in Adare, the small luxury hotel where CCI clients also stay during their vacation.

During the ball, clients are set up on blind dates with men and women of similar age from local fox hunting groups, says Karen Lancaster, CCI founder and president. The ball features a cocktail party, dinner and plenty of dancing for dates to get to know one another.

"If clients don't hit it off with the person they were set up with, then there are plenty of other people around (at the ball)," Lancaster says. And the results have been memorable as one past client found her true love, which later resulted in marriage.

Lasting friendships are also found. Pamela Lawson, a lawyer from Las Vegas, went on the St. Valentine's Blind Date Ball vacation in 2006 and says it was first class all the way.

"We had a great meal and dancing. I hung out with the man I ended up sitting with at the ball," explains Lawson. She still keeps in contact with him. "I loved the Irish people, too. They are such fun-loving, friendly people and their accents are great."

Even if you don't find your true love in Ireland, you can still relish in your true passion—horseback riding.

Under the guidance of qualified instructors, clients ride well-mannered and athletic Irish Sport Horses at the renowned Clonshire Equestrian and Polo Centre in Adare.

"Most riders should already be comfortable with walking, trotting and cantering with confidence, but during the riding sessions, clients can choose to have lessons with qualified instructors," Lancaster says.

Lawson continues to rave about the wonderful gray Irish Sport Horse she rode while on the trip, especially how easily her mount took to the jumps on the cross-country trails.

"We would go in the morning to have an indoor riding session for beginners or advanced (riders)," Lawson says. "We'd have a one-hour lesson and then go to more jumping outside. Then we'd go back to the hotel for lunch, before mounting up again to go on cross-country trails."

CCI developed the idea of offering singles riding vacations because a majority of clients are single, looking to meet people who have similar interests who will "put up with their riding," Lancaster says.

Although CCI will continue booking clients until the last minute, she advises people to sign up for the vacation six to eight weeks in advance when airfare isn't too pricey. If you can't make the blind date ball in Ireland, CCI offers 13 other singles equestrian vacations including Riding and Romance in Rome.

As someone ready for an adventure and a trip abroad in Europe, Lawson says she was extremely pleased with the riding vacation.

"The trip was a big plus all around—horses were great, instructors were great, accommodations were wonderful."

For more information, visit <http://www.equestrianvacations.com/>.