

Sport

Wet and wild

If you're a fan of four-leggeds, saddle up for the desert ride and ocean swim at Jebel Ali Golf Resort & Spa. Horse-mad **Ana Fatakhova**, tells us more. *Words: Karen Iley*



PHOTOGRAPHY: VAMAX PHOTO

Imagine riding off into the desert, cantering over dunes, the sun setting in the distance, before trotting into the waves of the Arabian Gulf for a swim with your mount. It may sound like the stuff or romantic movies but, believe it or not, if you and your kids know one end of a horse from the other, you can do just that down the road at Jebel Ali Golf Resort & Spa. We simply had to learn more, and horse-mad Ana, 13, who rides there three times a week, was only too willing to enlighten us.

'I usually take lessons in the paddock which I absolutely love, but occasionally I get to do something really special – the ride and swim. I help the grooms saddle up. It's important you do it correctly otherwise the horse will feel uncomfortable, and the last thing we want is the saddle to slip when we're galloping through the dunes. Going out in the desert is totally different to riding in the paddock where the horses take their job very seriously. There, they're working, behaving themselves and trying hard. In the desert, they seem to sense they are free and they tend to go a bit wild. They just want to have fun like us, I guess. It's great for the riders too, because we get to feel the breeze and see the beautiful landscape – it's so different to [central] Dubai and, right now – before they build anything else – it's just plain desert.'

'We ride out with Kicki [Nordlander, the instructor at the school] for about an hour and soon the horses come awake and they really want to go! I love the thrill of galloping really fast, but it's true you have to be a good rider to go out in the desert. Kicki

knows exactly what her riders and horses are capable of. If you're not so experienced, she'll give you a horse that is really happy and calm and not hard to ride. All the horses are different. Some are lazy, some are crazy but the chances of falling off are slim because Kicki will only put you on a horse that suits you and your abilities.

'After such a fabulous ride, we're all hot and sweaty – that's the riders and the horses. All we want to do is either have a shower or dive straight into

the ocean! We all have a drink then we walk the horses down to the waves, although some of them get so excited about swimming that they start rolling in the sand, which is really funny to watch. Most of them absolutely love being in the water. Sometimes we go up this far (*points to her chest*) but it's not dangerous. They're just paddling really and enjoying the bath! It's very good exercise for the horse and the rider – it's not easy to walk through water so it builds muscle tone.

'The horses are very well trained, so they listen to you and love to walk beside you. Some of them put their noses in the ocean, shake their heads and blow bubbles. The best bit about it is that you really bond with your horse. After galloping around the desert, it's great to have some quiet time where you get to pet, kiss and splash them. And the salty sea water is so good for them, it softens and relaxes them – just as a bath would make us feel good.

'For kids who are competent riders, it's fun to do as

a special treat. I've done it with my sisters, Liza, 15, and nine-year-old Victoria. We love it. Provided you know how to act around horses and don't get stressed out, it's fun for everyone. It's like being with friends.'

Fancy a go yourself? A 45-minute swimming session with the horses costs Dhs300 per person, a beginners 45-minute walk and 45-minute swim is Dhs450 per person. For intermediate and advanced riders, a 60-minute outdoor ride and 45-minute swim is Dhs500. The stables at Jebel Ali Golf Resort & Spa also offer pony rides and lessons from Dhs150 for a 30-minute riding lesson, Dhs190 for a 45-minute lesson to Dhs200 for a one-hour outdoor ride. The stables operate Tue-Sun 7am-noon; 4pm-7pm.

Contact *Jebel Ali Golf Resort & Spa* on 04 883 6000; jagrs@jaihotels.com or *Kicki Nordlander* on 050 189 0425; k_nordlander@hotmail.com

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