

Name Ursula Schweiger O'Connor

Nicknamed Uschi, Ursula Schweiger O'Connor, alongside her husband Raymond O'Connor, runs Island View Riding Stables in Grange. Although involved with horses in Ireland for over 18 years, Ursula grew up in Bavaria, Germany, and comes from a family with no interest in horses. "My mother didn't even want me to go horse riding, so I worked at a local stables in return for free lessons. I always had an interest in horses. I think horses are no big deal for children who grow up with them, but having had no exposure to horses, I wanted to know what they were all about!"

Island View Stables are involved in all things equine. They give group tuition (entertaining many hen parties), one-on-one instruction and instruct in the skill of carriage-driving. They also breed horses and have a selection of well-schooled horses and ponies for sale. However, the stables are most well known for its beach rides, particularly the island ride where participants can explore the sites of ancient farm life on the stable owned island, where Raymond's family originated.

"A lot of tourists come to Ireland with a dream of horse-riding on a beach", says Ursula (think waves crashing in on their left, sand dunes on their right, hair blowing in the wind, while cantering along the sand like a pro – you've all seen the Fáilte Ireland ads) and this suits us perfectly as we make the dream come true" ... the hair blowing somewhat hampered by the compulsory riding helmet !!!!!

For those of you who are *horsey* but have thus far found it difficult to find equine activities where you can include your non-horsey friends, Island View runs an interesting package where they will take you and your friend out with two guides meaning you can both ride at our own pace. Families are also catered for whereby nervous riders or small children are taken on a lead rein, so the Mums can enjoy their ride knowing that the little ones are well taken care of. A gentle ride on the beach makes for a perfect family outing.

Ursula wears a lot of different hats. "In wintertime I update the website and deal with holiday enquiries. During the summer I'm teaching, and I'm at reception. I spend time in the yard chatting to people and I can supervise the children (Elisa, 13 and a boy John-Alfred, 9) doing their homework. The whole family is involved in the business. Granny minds the phone at reception and keeps us going with her lovely home baking and the dinners."

In the last few years Ursula has been very active promoting the business, County Sligo and the region abroad to attract holidaymakers from Mainland Europe. This has proven quite successful and it has "taken up the slack" created by the down turn in the Irish economy. "The "green, clean image" that Ireland enjoys abroad is a major selling point and Sligo is the perfect spot for a family activity holiday." says Ursula .

Ursula is the also the only Level 2 Centered Riding® instructor in the country. Centered Riding is a different way of teaching which allows for clearer communication between the horse and rider. It focuses on body awareness, and coaches in riding from your core. Centered Riding will also help a nervous or over-anxious rider to relax and get confident.

"The job satisfaction is 100%" says Ursula. "I couldn't keep going 7 days a week if I didn't love it. It's a tough but very rewarding way of life."