

MY FARMING WEEK | URSULA SCHWEIGER O'CONNOR | ISLAND VIEW RIDING STABLES

'The job satisfaction is 100%'

Nicknamed Uschi, Ursula Schweiger O'Connor, alongside her husband Raymond O'Connor, runs Island View Riding Stables in Grange, Co Sligo. Although she's been in Ireland for 13 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. 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 engaged in all things equine, with the exception of show jumping. They give group tuition (entertaining many hen parties), one-on-one coaching and provide training in carriage-driving. They also breed horses. The stables, however, are most popular for their guided beach rides where visitors can enjoy the view of Donegal Bay from horseback as they gallop along Trillick Strand between Grange and Mullaghmore.

Even more noteworthy

are the island rides offered by the stables where participants cross the Atlantic Channel to O'Connor's Island, the stables' uninhabited private island from where Raymond's family originates.

"A lot of tourists come to Ireland with a dream of horse riding on a beach and this suits us perfectly as we make the dream come true!" says Ursula. (They 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 Fálte Ireland ads.)

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 a convenient package where they will take you and a friend out with a guide each, allowing both riders to travel at their own pace.

Ursula wears a lot of different hats. "In wintertime I update the website and deal with inquiries. During the summer I'm teaching and I'm at reception. I can spend time in the yard chatting to people and I can ensure my kids – Eliza (12) and John-alfred (8) – do their homework!"

"The whole family is involved in the business.

Granny minds the phone at reception and makes the dinners."

Ursula is the only Level II Centred Riding instructor in the country, having done most of her training in Switzerland. Centred 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. Centred Riding will also help a nervous or over-anxious rider to relax.

"The job satisfaction is 100%," says Ursula. "I couldn't keep going seven days a week if I didn't love it. It's a way of life." **✪**

