

WILD WOMEN
expeditions

ICELANDIC HORSEBACK RIDING TACK
AND SKILLS



For more information please contact: adventure@wildwomenexpeditions.com or call 1 (888) 993-1222.

Wild Women Expeditions Basic Icelandic Horseback Riding Tack and Skills

Getting Started

Grooming

- Brush off loose dirt/debris from the area where the saddle will sit.

Tacking up

- **Saddle** follows the curve of the horse's back. Further back than on most horses.
- **Girth** a hand width back from the horse's front leg.
 - Tighten firmly (ask for help if you need it!). Dismount and re-tighten after a few minutes (guides will usually do this for everyone).
- **Bridle**: You will receive your horse with the bridle and reins attached.
- **Noseband**: slide over nose, position four fingers up from the nostril
 - two fingers between the strap and bridge of the nose.

Safety

- Approach the horse from the side.
- When walking around the back of the horse, walk closely, keeping a hand on the horse so they know you're there, or walk far enough away that they can't reach you if they kick (further than you might think).
- When leading or holding the horse, never loop the rein around your hand.
- Always wear a properly fitting helmet
- When riding in a group, don't go ahead of the lead horse.

Riding skills

Mounting/dismounting

- Mount and dismount from either side of the horse.
- **Mounting**: Mount from higher ground if possible and/or ask for help.
 - Face the same direction as the horse
 - Hold the reins as you would to ride
 - You can hold the saddle or mane if necessary
 - Place foot closest to the front of the horse in stirrup and lift yourself up, getting your body weight quickly over the horse, and swinging your other leg over the horse's back.
 - Place your foot in the second stirrup **before sitting down**.
- **Dismounting**: take both feet out of the stirrups and swing one leg over the back of the horse. Slide off the saddle to the ground.

Posture

- Upright and relaxed, weight on your sit bones, and balls of feet, heels down
- Hips go with the motion of the horse.
- Posture will vary with the different gaits of the horse and terrain.
- Your anklebone, hip, shoulder and ear should all line up vertically.
- Your posture should allow you to feel grounded and secure, yet light and supple

Going up/down hills

- Lean forward when going up a hill.
- If necessary, you can hold the front of the saddle or grab a handful of mane.
- When going downhill, lean back in the saddle, using your core for balance. Stay at a walk.
- Lead horses up /down very steep or rocky/uneven hills.

Communicating with the horse

Rein aids

- Keep “good contact with the horse’s mouth,”
- Elbows slightly bent, straight line between elbow and the horse’s mouth.
- **Going Forward:** Follow the movement of the horse’s head with elastic connection.
- **Turning (left):** Pulse the left rein while “giving” with the right rein; vice versa to go right.
- **Stopping:** Slowly draw back on the reins, then quickly release. If the horse doesn’t stop, be more insistent, pulsing the reins more strongly each time.
- **Emergency stop:** pull back on one rein only, allowing the other rein to be loose and forcing the horse to turn so it must slow down.

Leg aids

- **Going Forward:** Squeeze and release lower legs
 - A series of short insistent “kicks” is more effective than either one big kick or a squeeze that’s held for more than a second or two
 - If the horse doesn’t respond, get increasingly insistent.
- **Stopping:** Keep lower legs relaxed away from the horse. Stop moving your body with the horse.

Seat aids

- **Going Forward:** allow your seat and hips to follow the movement of the horse.
- **Turning:** look where you want to go and point your chest in that direction, which will automatically shift the weight in your seat.
- **Stopping:** allow your weight to sink through your seat.

Putting it all together:

- **Going Forward:** Squeeze and release lower legs, follow the movement of the horse with your seat and hips, keeping your reins elastic as your arms and hands follow the horse's mouth. Then do as little as possible!
- **Turning:** Turn your head and shoulders in the direction of the turn, draw back on the rein on that side, while "giving" with the other rein.

Stopping: Sit heavily into your seat to restrict movement, slowly draw back on the reins and quickly release. If the horse doesn't stop, become more insistent by pulsing the reins more strongly each time. If necessary, employ the emergency brake, turning the horse to one side by drawing back on the rein on that side.

Gaits of the Icelandic Horse

- **Walk** – A 4-beat gait, used on rough terrain, going up and down hills, and when we want to enjoy the scenery. Posture is upright and relaxed, grounded and fluid with the horse's movement. We will spend most of our time walking
- **Tölt** – A smooth 4-beat gait similar to a walk, but faster. Speed can vary from a fast walk, to gallop. To initiate tölt, sit deeply into your seat; squeeze and release your lower legs. You must have good contact with the horse's mouth. If the reins are loose, the horse may trot instead. We will spend a fair amount of time tölting.
- **Trot** – a 2 beat gait (opposite diagonal legs move at the same time), which is the bounciest of all the gaits. To initiate a trot, lean forward, lighten your seat, squeeze and release your lower legs. The horse may need to warm up in trot before they will be comfortable in tölt. Most horses prefer to trot on rocky or uneven ground.
- **Pace or Flying Pace** – Only some Icelandic horses are capable of the flying pace. In this gait, the horse's legs move in lateral pairs. This becomes a very smooth gait at faster speeds, but can feel bouncy and wiggly at slower speeds, sometimes called "piggy pace."
- **Gallop/Canter** - The gallop is a 3-beat gait, which can be quite fast. To allow the horse to have greater range of motion, put more weight in the stirrups to lighten your seat. It is often easiest to initiate and balance when galloping uphill. Ask the horse to gallop by moving one leg back slightly, and giving the horse a quick tap with your heel.