

What to Expect at Surtung

Hi my name is Jenny. I just returned from my second trip to Surtung where I participated in courses with Emelie Cajsdotter as part of the Friskerod Academy. Horses play a big role in the course, as does the land and many other living things we encounter.

When people have asked me about my experience, I tell them about this amazing lady and her family with a horse sanctuary who communicates with them and other species, advocates for a non hierarchical relationship between all species, and has amazing stories to share.

Often the next question is “did you ride a lot?” and while sitting on/being carried by a horse is most definitely part of the experience, it is not required. It might only be once or twice. The horses decide whether they want to carry someone, not the people (non-hierarchical, remember?) Usually there are no saddles or bridles, sometimes a halter and a lead rope. Sometimes you are being carried on a horse that is completely free – willingly, with no equipment, no control, and nothing to bind you together but mutual trust. That might sound terrifying but I never felt safer. It's also exhilarating in a way I can't describe.

So other than sitting on horses what do you do? The horses and other creatures/beings on the farm and land give you exercises to do. Those are usually meditative in nature, conducted outdoors and often involve other living things: plants, trees, mountains, water, rocks... wait I thought you said *living* things. That is correct, Grasshopper :-)) I understand but you'll see. If you haven't read Emelie's book or listened to a podcast where she's been a guest, you should probably do that first, but I do feel it would be helpful to share with you a little about what to expect.

It is not a retreat. I looked up a definition according to AI, our new data go-to:

A retreat provides a dedicated space and time away from daily routines to focus on personal or group goals, fostering reflection, rejuvenation and growth. It can involve disconnecting from distractions, connecting with nature and engaging in activities that promote self-discovery, healing and strengthening relationships.

Okay so maybe it's a little bit of a retreat... but it's not a retreat “as seen on TV” so to speak. The money you pay for the courses is to support the animals and sustain the land. The portion for food and a place to stay is minimal. Doing your part to contribute changes the dynamic there- is no separation between those offering the experience and those paying to be there.

So what's different? Everyone stays at The Farmhouse or camps outside. All the meals are together (more on that later.) There is minimal privacy - folding screens to separate sleeping spaces, but no private rooms. There are shared bathrooms. Lots of outside peeing during daily activities! Porta-potties are not a thing. Everyone is a bee in the hive. That is, there is a cleaning /task schedule and everyone takes turns doing things like cleaning bathrooms, sweeping floors, taking out the trash, etc.

Staying at Surtung is a little like camp (and I hated camp), but you're not really roughing it. All the creature comforts/amenities are there, plus there are wonderful volunteers who prepare all the meals (and ahem, desserts!) for everyone. Everyone eats together, including Emelie and usually her kids, who are fabulous. Everybody takes turns cleaning up. You feel included, a part of things, always. There is no us and them differentiation between Emeile, the volunteers, and those there for the courses. We are all humans together.

So what makes Surtung so special?

- Horses everywhere. Outside your window. Laying down next to you at the beach preserve. Breathing with you, sharing experiences with you, and letting you see their world.
- Connecting with trees, plants, rocks, water, other species and entities – in your own personal way.
- Learning how to live in non-linear time from the experts...many of whom resemble tiny, fierce ponies.
- Above all, being able to experience the possibility of a different, older/newer way of living in this world.

Here are the takeaways.

It's not bootcamp, but it's not a spa package either. You never feel as if you are paying for the experience- you're contributing out of love because you feel that ancient longing to connect.

The place, the horses, the learning - it's not there to "heal" you. If anything it's a portal that provides the opportunity for you to deepen your own connection to this life, this world, and all its beautiful energy inside you and around you.

And oh - there's lots of chocolate.

Have fun!