

# Andean Adventure, Ecuador

## Itinerary

**Day 1:** The meeting point is in Quito.

From Quito you are driven north by road (c. 2 hours). Pass by the snow-capped Cayambe Volcano on the way.

The following is the proposed itinerary, but please note that changes are possible due to weather and other local conditions. Any changes are made with your best interests in mind.

Meet the horses and set off on an introductory ride into the Zuleta Valley. Early settlers came to this area centuries ago for its fertile soil.

Lunch will be a picnic out on the trail.

Descend into the valley and reach the first overnight stop – a working dairy farm and Andalucian stud.

Once settled, there may be time to view the collection of Inca and pre-Inca ceramics on site.

Riding time: c. 4-5 hours.

Dinner and overnight at Hacienda La Merced, (or similar).



**Day 2:** After breakfast, set off on horseback. Along agave-lined tracks, pass by fields of lupins, quinoa and beans. Today's route takes you through a different part of the pastoral Zuleta Valley, which was sculpted at the end of the Ice Age by glacial retreat.



Stunning views accompany your ascent out of the valley, through pine forests and out onto the slopes of Imbabura.

Lunch is a picnic along the way.

Wind your way along rural tracks and across country lanes. Later, arrive at your overnight stop.

Riding time c. 6-7 hours.

Dinner and overnight in San Clemente (or similar).

**Day 3:** After breakfast, head out on the horses. Negotiate some steep gorges and pass by herds of animals. Leaving the valley behind, emerge from woodland and glimpse the San Pablo Lake below.

Lunch will be a picnic out on the trail.

As the landscape flattens out a little, there may be the chance for some canters. There are impressive views of Cayambe and Imbabura all around.

Say goodbye to your horses and be driven just north of Cotopaxi National Park, (a journey of around 2.5 to 3 hours).

Riding time c. 6 hours.

Dinner and overnight at Chilcabamba Mountain Inn (or similar).

**Day 4:** An exhilarating change of scenery. Set out on fresh horses, ride along a wide riverbed and onto the plains of Cotopaxi.

As you ride into the national park, discover important geological features produced by both ice age and volcanic activity. There may be the chance for some long canters across the flat grassy plains. As you speed through the rolling hills, you may be lucky enough to

see some of the herds of wild horses that roam the park.

Stop for a picnic lunch along the way.



Cross old lava flows and then follow an Inca route to your overnight stop which is beautifully situated at the centre point between the four mighty Andean peaks of Ruminahui, Pasachoa, Sincholagua and Cotopaxi.

Riding time c. 5-6 hours.

Dinner and overnight at Hacienda Los Mortiños (or similar).

**Day 5:** It is a long ride today; some 45km through the northern section of Cotopaxi National Park and onto the remote eastern flanks of the volcano.



Journey far off the beaten track, over flat plains, marshlands, rock fields and riverbeds. You may spot deer, foxes, eagles, hawks, falcons and caracaras. For part of the way, follow an Inca route that led down to the Amazon.

Lunch is a picnic along the way.

Later, emerge into another river valley and your overnight stop becomes visible amongst the hills. Your destination is incredible; a remote place where the velvety night sky is packed with stars including the Southern Cross.



Riding time c. 7-8 hours.

Dinner and overnight at El Tambo, a remote inn built of Inca stone.

**Day 6:** Today's ride takes you out into the 'paramo' vegetation of the Quilindaña Mountain. A circular ride, usually accompanying the 'chagras' – local horsemen that live and work in this area.



As you ride high up in the hills, keep an eye out for the Andean Spectacled Bear which is sometimes seen in this area.

You may help the chagras search for cattle they have been unable to locate in the far reaches of the hacienda lands or help them bring cows down off the hills into the corral. The chagras have a specific dress of wool ponchos and goatskin chaps, which are ideal for the conditions.



The fascinating tack has been specifically adapted over the centuries, since the Spaniards first brought horses to South America and the local horse has also developed into the 'Ecuadorian criollo' horse, ideally suited to the conditions.

Riding time c. 6 hours.

Dinner and overnight again at El Tambo.

**Day 7:** You might wake to stunning views of the Cotopaxi & Quilindana Volcanoes, perhaps stretching as far as the Antisana Volcano on the horizon.



Head out on a long ride taking you close to the foot of Cotopaxi, via a wide, glacier-formed valley. The terrain is very diverse, rough 'paramo' grassland, rivers, boulder fields and wetlands.



Lunch will be out on the trail.

Later in the day there is usually the chance for some long canters across the huge expanses of the National Park. Pass by a restored hilltop Inca fort.

Be met at the national park gates where you say goodbye to your horses and the guides who have helped you along the way. Be transferred back to Quito (c. 2 hours' drive).

Riding time c. 7 hours.

Overnight at a comfortable hotel in the Mariscal or La Floresta part of Quito, (usually Casa Aliso, or similar). Dinner is to your own account tonight.

**Day 8:** Following breakfast, return to the airport or continue your onward travel plans.