

# Colonial Hacienda, Ecuador

## Itinerary

**Day 1:** You will be collected from the Mariscal part of Quito, usually around 08:00. But the address and precise time will be confirmed in your final travel documents.

From Quito be driven into the northern highlands (a journey of c.2 hrs.). The drive takes you through an arid valley with avocado orchards then into Imbabura Province 'the land of the lakes'.

Visit the famous Otavalo market. As well as the bustling craft market and stalls with exotic fruit, there is a food market where the locals -dressed in their very distinctive traditional costume- come down from their tiny farms in the mountains to sell their farm produce and buy their weekly supplies.



Then follows a short drive to a hacienda frequented by the great South American liberator, Simon Bolivar. Members of the charming family (horse fanatics themselves) that have owned the hacienda for several centuries greet us warmly. With its courtyards, ornate fountains, terraces and gardens graced with citrus, palm and monkey puzzle trees it is an ideal location to leisurely drift into the relaxing Andean surroundings.

Please note that the itinerary may be modified if there are four guests or fewer. Local conditions and weather can sometimes cause the itinerary to change. Below is a sample itinerary, but the route can sometimes run in reverse. The order of the accommodation and the route can sometimes change, but always with your best interests in mind.



The introductory ride (c.3-4hours) will take you along the tracks and through the tiny fields and hamlets of the surrounding area. It is common to see the very friendly but dignified locals in their immaculate traditional dress working in the fields by using hand tools or cattle to work the land. These tiny fields are surrounded by stone walls and earth banks topped with sisal plants and an array of wildflowers. The ride will begin slowly so that you can try out your horse; the guides and grooms are always at hand to help.

On return from riding, have a welcome drink, often accompanied by the music of an excellent Andean band.

Dinner and overnight at Hacienda Pinsaqui, (or similar).

**DAY 2:** Leave this hacienda behind and ride on to another colonial hacienda, (c. 5 hours). Ride past tiny hamlets of adobe huts, through woodlands, cross rocky gorges and wind our way around the patchwork fields of quinoa, potatoes, maize and tree tomato orchards. Magnificent views of the San Pablo Lake and the jagged Mojanda summit as we ride across the slopes of the sacred Imbabura Volcano (extinct) - the focus of many Inca legends. As well as seeing a great variety of exotic Andean fruits and other crops, you might meet the locals in vibrant traditional dress going about their daily tasks, the children shepherding the unruly pigs and sheep -trying to keep them off the crops. A fascinating insight into Andean country life.



In the late afternoon, perhaps wander through the beautiful flowering gardens admiring the avocado trees, bromeliads, orchids and kitchen garden with passion fruit, tree tomato and a host of other interesting plants.

This afternoon there may be an optional visit to a family of local weavers, (no additional cost). Drive through small villages with thriving cottage industries, to visit a family of local weavers.



This family still produces exceptionally fine, unique rugs using the ancient pre-Inca back strap loom that most weavers have abandoned in favour of more modern looms. The wool is still dyed using plants and then hand spun as the family sticks rigidly to the traditional weaving processes.

Dinner and overnight at Hacienda Cusin, (or similar).

**DAY 3:** A stunning ride into the beautiful pastoral Zuleta Valley (c.6-7hours). Along country lanes then through eucalyptus forests, rise out of San Pablo Valley enjoying wonderful views across the lake and also of Imbabura volcano, riding onto the plains beyond for the chance of some faster-pace riding. Views of Zuleta valley, the verdant gorges and the 'paramo' (the unique Andean habitat of high grasslands) as you pass dewponds and hedges of aloe

vera and spikey agave (sisal) atop mud walls. Following sandy tracks, you then descend into the Zuleta valley with dramatic views across to the hanging valleys and rocky ridges above.

With views of the ancient tumuli and earth pyramids erected by the pre-Inca population, ride on to the middle of this tranquil valley, seldom visited by tourists. There may be a chance to see the mighty Andean Condor as well as other species such as hummingbirds and bright scarlet flycatchers.



In the afternoon, perhaps walk to a nearby village to see examples of the hand embroidery that has made the valley famous.

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

**DAY 4:** This morning there may be the chance to get to know about the Andalucian breed, the farm owners will chat with you about their champion horses.

Ride along grass tracks, soon gaining height. Leaving the valley floor there are spectacular views to be had: north down the Zuleta Valley to three peaks on the horizon and west across the array of patchwork fields, every imaginable shade of green to Imbabura peak. You may be lucky enough to catch sight of the Andean Condor.



Ride up out of the valley through a large eucalyptus forest. Canter along the shady tracks between the rows of tall eucalyptus is a different experience to what you have encountered on the ride so far. Often you will meet the locals with small herds of sheep, goats, pigs and cattle.

Head out across the Pesillo plains, into the Cayambe Valley dominated by the snow-capped Cayambe Volcano, which straddles the Equator Line arriving at a typical village square we leave the horses, (c. 4 hours of riding). A short drive takes you to a beautiful old hacienda for a delicious home cooked lunch with traditional dishes. After lunch, visit a nearby rose plantation if there is time.

Then cross the Equator Line and travel (c. 2-3hrs), bypassing Quito, to another comfortable hacienda.

Your accommodation for this evening features a swimming pool, jacuzzi, sauna and Turkish Bath. There is sometimes the chance for a massage (payable locally).

Dinner and overnight at La Carriona (or similar).



**DAY 5:** The day starts with a drive to meet the horses. Leaving the farmlands behind, a spectacular ride awaits (c.7 hours). Cross the Sincholagua foothills to the northern edge of the Cotopaxi national park. Perhaps start with some canters through dramatic Andean scenery, then traverse a series of huge gorges along tracks and riding across the remote 'paramo' wilderness.

Then descend and, once on the pasturelands, there may be the chance for some exhilarating canters across the pastures and ride towards Cotopaxi National Park approaching the perfectly conical shape of the snow-capped Cotopaxi Volcano (the highest active volcano in the world). Sincholagua, a rocky summit that dominates the skyline, clearly marks the continental divide – the precipitation that falls the western side runs down and ends up on the

Ecuadorian coast, in the Pacific Ocean, while that of the eastern sides eventually joins the Amazon and goes on to the Atlantic Ocean, via Brazil.



Having avoided the fighting bulls (the hacienda you cross is famous for its feisty Spanish bulls!), turn westwards, cross a river and arrive for the night at your accommodation.

The accommodation this evening will be either at a hacienda or a mountain inn. The decision will be based on the number of guests (one has too few rooms to accommodate larger groups). Both lodgings are situated in idyllic locations with stunning views, cosy rooms and excellent food.



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

**Day 6:** A day riding in the wild open expanses of the Andean highlands enjoying the open terrain (c.6 hours). There are no signs of habitation and many spectacular views of the close-by Cotopaxi snow-capped volcano to be enjoyed.

Ride into Cotopaxi national park to cross the wide, barren plains at the base of the Cotopaxi Volcano. Perhaps ride close to the wild horses that inhabit the park on your way across the plains. Part of this ride follows the main Inca highway which linked Quito with Cusco as well as the Inca route leading down to the Amazon. Ride to the old Inca fort that guarded this

supply route. The ground is covered with tiny pumice stones and lichen on this arid plain created by lava and ash from Cotopaxi volcano.



Then ride across a very surprising 'lunar landscape' – huge boulders and hard baked ochre-coloured mud, between fascinating glacial and volcanic features and onto rolling grassy hills perhaps for some faster paced riding. After a picnic lunch amidst this stunning scenery, ride out of the national park to a recently converted old Jesuit Hacienda seeped in history and now a very comfortable highland hacienda.

Dinner and overnight at Hacienda Santa Ana, (or similar).

**Day 7:** Set out on horseback for a ride amid the vast Andean scenery, cross a river and head north down a scenic valley towards civilization and Quito (c. 5-6 hours). Pass polylepis trees ('paperbark trees'), alisos and other native trees and plants. Cross wooden bridges, ride through streams and along sandy tracks. There should be the chance of some final canters across the pastures, avoiding encounters with the fighting bulls. You may meet the local horsemen (chagras) checking the cattle and perhaps see Andean Condors en route, as well as eagles, hawks, kestrel, fox and deer.



Descend into the valley along a lane bordered with native trees and shrubs. Hummingbirds, finches,

flycatchers and other bird species often flit tree to tree in front of the horses. On reaching cobbled roads again, it is time to say goodbye to the horses and the chagras who have helped you along the way.

Transfer by vehicle to Quito, a journey of around 1 hour and 15 minutes.

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

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