



ECUADOR ANDEAN HACIENDAS TOUR

An insider's look at the culture and history of the highlands



DURATION: 9 days / 8 nights
SEASON: Year-round
DEPARTURES: Guaranteed with a minimum of 2 participants
TRIP RATING: Moderate Cultural Tour, Grade (II) - A superb, country-inn-based adventure, ideal for couples, families, photographers, and any traveler who wants an in-depth introduction to the incredible cultural diversity and history of the Ecuadorian Andes. It is an active program that features optional day hikes of 2-3 hours in duration at elevations up to 12,300'.

2024 DATES : On request any week throughout the year.

INTRODUCTION:

Ecuador's highlands feature some of the most beautiful countryside vistas in South America. In this majestic region, we encounter old farms or "haciendas", dating back centuries. Their proprietors still work the fertile rolling hills, and have opened their doors to visitors interested in traditional Andean culture. In this setting, we are swept away to a land where time stands still. The tranquility, here at the center of the world, is arrayed with patchwork fields, awe-inspiring glaciated volcanoes, lush cloud forests and centuries-old colonial villages. Handicrafts flourish, including wood carving, leather working, ornament making and intricate weaving. In addition to exceptional cross-cultural opportunities, we find unique species of flora and fauna in well-protected ecological reserves.

Our first night is spent near Quito's airport in a country-inn, then we head south along the Avenue of the Volcanoes to hike the bamboo forested paths of Pasochoa Nature Preserve, and further up to the slopes of Cotopaxi National Park, an extinct volcano. Continuing north to the fertile valleys and rolling hills of the Lake District we stop en route to visit the intriguing Chochasqui ruins. We have plenty of time to explore and enjoy the colorful, well-known Otavalo Indian Market, to watch the trading and meet some of the local residents. Staying in comfortable haciendas along the way, our days are filled with hiking, horseback riding, birding and mountain biking, always learning more about the fascinating history of the area from our native guide. Many of the haciendas date back to the 17th century, with some even remaining in the same families, passed down from generation to generation. We are enriched by the friendliness and warm hospitality of our hosts and are reluctant to end this relaxing sojourn. We return to the capital where we have a brief tour of colonial Quito.

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DAY-BY-DAY ITINERARY:

DAY 01: USA / QUITO

We arrive this evening to Ecuador's Andean capital, **Quito**, set in a wide valley between rugged volcanic peaks, at an invigorating 9,350-foot elevation. We are met at the airport (7,875') by a Southwind representative and transferred to the comfortable [Hostería Rincon de Puembo](#), a charming colonial style country-inn located just 20 minutes from the airport. If arriving earlier to Quito, you may prefer staying at the [Hostería La Carriona](#), a former hacienda built over 200 years ago and located about 45 minutes from the airport in the beautiful valley of Los Chillos. Meals are on your own.

DAY 02: PASOCHOA / HACIENDA SAN AGUSTIN DE CALLO

Following breakfast, we drive south through the fertile Los Chillos Valley, once the breadbasket for Quito. The **Pasocha Protected Forest** provides an ideal location for a 2-3 hour hike. This nearly 1,000-acre Andean forest is administered by the nonprofit Fundación Natura (World Wildlife Fund affiliate). It's located at a brisk 9,000' elevation in an untouched gorge. Here we find the only remaining primary Andean forest in Ecuador's central valley, home to orchids and an abundance of birds, including partridges, turtledoves and some of the 120+ species of hummingbirds in Ecuador. We have lunch at the nearby **Hacienda Hualilahua**, known for its colonial paintings dating back to the 17th and 18th centuries. The hacienda is landscaped with lush gardens and is involved in organic farming and raising cattle. Later, a short drive through patchwork countryside leads to [San Agustín de Callo](#) (9,855'), one of the oldest, finest and most prestigious haciendas in the Andes. Built on the foundations of an Inca palace, its farm is still operational today. Ruins dating back over 550 years can be found nearby. There may be time for strolling the quiet country lanes before dinner. **Driving time: 2.5 Hours** (B,L,D)

DAY 03: COTOPAXI NATIONAL PARK / SAN AGUSTIN DE CALLO

After breakfast we follow the valley up to **Cotopaxi National Park**, home of the world's highest active volcano. Cotopaxi's cone-shaped peak (19,350') dominates the landscape for miles around. We walk near **Limpipungo Lake**, enjoying a variety of birds and scenic vistas of nearby Ruminahui Peak. The dominant ecosystem here is *humid páramo*, a zone unique to the tropical Americas and found only between 10° North latitude in Costa Rica and 10° South in northern Peru. We find unusual species of flora like the puya, senecio (rabbit ears) and chuquiragua and typical grasses such as stipa-ichu and pajonal. Alpine-like wild flowers such as gentians and lupines dot the landscape. There should be nice opportunities to photograph Cotopaxi's summit. Lunch is at the nearby Tambopaxi Hostal (12,305'). In the afternoon, weather permitting, we may drive up to the base of the mountain and approach the Jose Ribas Hut, the starting point for ascensions on Cotopaxi's snow fields and glaciers. Back at [San Agustín de Callo](#), a delicious 4-course dinner is served in the historical dining room. **Driving time: 2.5 Hours** (B,L,D)

DAY 04: LAKE DISTRICT

Today we drive north along the *Avenue of the Volcanoes*, named for the eleven snow-capped, volcanic peaks that line either side of the central valley. We head north through the twisted canyons of the Guayabamba River toward the fertile valleys of the Lake District and Lake San Pablo, stopping at sites of interest en route. Near the town of Tabacundo, we stop at the **Cochasqui ruins** to visit this pre-Inca astronomic observatory and ceremonial center featuring 15 pyramidal structures. It is believed that the complex was constructed by the Cara Indians starting around 950 AD, and in 1979 was named a Cultural Patrimony of Mankind. We continue towards the town of Cayambe, which offers majestic views of the snow-capped Cayambe Volcano (19,107') and the Middle of the World site of Quitsato on the Equatorial Line. After a short drive we find the charming [Hacienda Cusin](#) (8,530'), a renowned farmstead that will be our home for the next two nights. We enjoy dinner together this evening in the elegant dining room. **Driving time: 3.5 Hours** (B,L,D)

DAY 05: HACIENDA CUSIN

Today we can relax and enjoy the amenities of the Hacienda Cusin. There are a variety of guided activities like hiking, horseback riding and mountain biking, where we can discover the charm of the backcountry. In the nearby **Condor park**, a bird sanctuary and rescue center, we can learn about a variety of native birds such as eagles, hawks, owls and condors. The park also features nice gardens with unique flora to discover; or you may prefer to get to know the local residents in nearby villages such as Cotacachi, well known for its leather works. Lunch is at Puerto Lago hotel & restaurant overlooking Lake San Pablo. Some guests may prefer to simply read or relax in the library by the fire or enjoy a soothing massage. This quaint inn is one of the oldest haciendas in the country, dating back to 1602. Seven guesthouses offer views of the beautiful gardens. Situated just 12 miles north of the equator, this area is known for sunny days and a climate described as an "ever-blooming spring." This evening, we return to [Hacienda Cusin](#) to enjoy the inspired menu of Ecuadorian food. (B,L,D)

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DAY 06: CUICOCHA LAKE / HACIENDA PINSAQUI

Following a hearty breakfast, we drive northwest into the **Cotacachi-Cayapas Ecological Reserve** for an easy and scenic 2-3 hour hike above **Lake Cuicocha** (10,500'), formed in the crater of an ancient volcano. Along the way we have good views of the snow-capped Cayambe (18,995'), Imbabura and Cotacachi volcanoes. High altitude bird species such as the carunculated caracara, cordillera snipe, Andean hillstar, páramo pipit, and Andean lapwing may be seen, as well as hawks and hummingbirds. At Cuicocha's edge, we might spot some of the waterfowl which inhabit the region's many lakes, including the speckled teal, American coot, or yellow-billed pintail. In the afternoon, we drive to the lovely [Hacienda Pinsaqui](#) (8,530'), where we spend the night. There should be ample time to stroll about the grounds or go for a horseback ride before sunset and dinner. **Driving time: 1.5 Hours** (B,L,D)

DAY 07: HACIENDA PINSAQUI

There is time today to explore the nearby farmlands or to learn about the unique history of this hacienda, which has been in the Freile family since 1888. Simón Bolívar stayed here when the famous South American liberator traveled between Ecuador and Colombia. It is also here that one of Ecuador's most important friendship treaties, between these same two countries, was signed. High draped windows filter late day sun on ornate furnishings and chandeliers. Tiled floors and masonry walls reverberate the sounds of a working hacienda, with the peaceful ambience that can only be found in the countryside. We lunch today at the **San Clemente community** (9,485'), located in a higher valley outside Ibarra on the hills of the Imbabura volcano, with time to explore the area on foot and learn about the history and traditions of this Quichua Karanqui people that welcome travelers as part of an Ecotourism initiative. We return to [Hacienda Pinsaqui](#) in the late afternoon, stopping en route at **Peguche** to visit a textiles or Andean instruments workshop. (B,L,D)

DAY 08: OTAVALO / QUITO

Saturday is the main market day. We get an early start to arrive in the town of **Otavalo** just as trading is getting under way. This famous weekly market dates back to before the Inca occupation, when Indians from the lowland jungles would visit the highlands to trade their products. It is now one of South America's largest and best markets. We join dozens of locals and visitors wandering through the main plaza where the handicraft stalls are set up. We find a multitude of crafts such as wood carvings, textiles and leather goods from all over the country. There will be plenty of opportunities to purchase some of the exquisite woolen products or embroidery work for which the Otavalo weavers are renowned. Afterwards, we drive to a nearby **rose farm** for a short visit to learn about the cultivation of some of the 300 varieties of roses that are currently found in Ecuador. We continue to the lovely **Hacienda La Compañía** that has its origins in the 17th century and has remained in the Jarrin family for 5 generations, partaking in a delicious traditional lunch before we continue towards **Quito** (9,350'). In the late afternoon, we enjoy a brief guided tour of the colonial capital. Strolling along cobbled streets, beneath whitewashed adobe walls and ornate balconies, we visit the beautiful La Compañía or San Francisco churches with their ornate, gold-plated altars and collections of colonial paintings. We check-in at the [Patio Andaluz](#), a colonial mansion and one of the city's original buildings, now a beautiful and charming hotel. A national treasure, this hotel holds centuries of history within its walls. In the heart of the city's culture, travelers are treated to culinary delights of fine restaurants and nearby churches, museums, libraries, shops and folklore. **Driving time: 2.5 Hours** (B,L)

DAY 09: QUITO / USA

Transfer to the airport this morning with check-in assistance for your return flight home. (B)

NOTES ON THE ITINERARY: Although we do our best to adhere to the schedule listed above, the day-by-day activities on this itinerary are subject to change for numerous reasons beyond our control including group considerations, weather, trail/road conditions or flight delays and plane schedule changes. This program is suitable for physically fit participants accustomed to outdoor activities age 7 and older. Driving times and altitudes are approximate and times indicated are NET. They don't include lunch breaks, rest stops, time to explore villages or the forest, etc.

2024 LAND COST:

2-3 participants:	from \$6,050 p.p.d.
4-6 participants:	from \$5,600 p.p.d.
7-12 participants:	from \$5,300 p.p.d.
Single Supplement:	from \$1,450

p.p.d.=per person based on double or triple occupancy not including airfare.

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Note: End of the year or holiday departures could have a Land Cost surcharge of 10-15%. Please check with your personal Southwind Travel Consultant for more details.

ESTIMATED AIRFARE: The Land Cost DOES NOT INCLUDE ANY FLIGHTS. Southwind's ticketing specialist can assist with all your air travel – providing an airfare quote to match your itinerary, personalized support for seating, monitoring schedule changes and coordinating directly with the airlines if any adjustments are needed. You'll also benefit from access to lower contract fares for some routes. Ask about Business Class which is often a good value flying to Ecuador. Flights to Quito are offered by American Airlines (from Miami), United (Houston), Delta (Atlanta), JetBlue (Ft Lauderdale) and LATAM Airlines (Miami). Round-trip airfare from US gateway cities to Quito is about \$600-900 per person. You have the option to arrange your own flights or redeem award travel yourself if you prefer. Tickets should only be purchased after Southwind notifies you that your trip is confirmed. The airlines request that tickets match your passport name. Upon receipt of your deposit, Southwind provides flight booking details for your travel dates.

HOTEL UPGRADE: We can reserve the elegant **La Mirage Garden Hotel & Spa** in the Lake District near the town of Cotacachi, or the historic **Hacienda Zuleta** located in a valley one hour from Otavalo, for an additional fee. Due to the small size of these hotels and high demand, these reservations are recommended at least 4-5 months in advance. Upgrades are subject to availability and cannot be guaranteed. Please contact our office for details.

SERVICES INCLUDED:

- Comprehensive **pre-departure planning packet** and expert travel advice.
- All **in-country transfers** as scheduled. Ground transportation in spacious and comfortable private vehicles with professional drivers.
- Local and return flight reconfirmation, **in-country airport check-in and luggage assistance**.
- All **accommodations in first-class (4 star)** hotels, hosterías and unique haciendas as listed (or at similar boutique style facilities) on a shared basis with private bath. Advanced bookings are recommended if you require double beds (King/queen) for couples, or plan to arrive early or extend your stay.
- All **meals** indicated on the itinerary (B=breakfast; L=lunch; D=dinner). **Vegetarian diets accommodated** on request (advance notification required). For other diets, consult your travel specialist before making a reservation.
- All **guided tours** (as listed) conducted on a private basis by knowledgeable, English-speaking native guides specializing in the local culture and natural history of the Andes (includes applicable entrance fees).
- A local English-speaking guide/escort is provided for the trip (Day 01-08). An assistant guide is provided for groups with 9 or more participants.
- Single Supplement provides single room accommodations in all hosterías and haciendas. Due to the limited number of rooms at these facilities, making reservations several months in advance is recommended.

NOT INCLUDED:

- US domestic nor international flights.
- Tours, meals (at about \$25-40 each per person) or other services not listed on the itinerary.
- Early arrivals, dayrooms or late check-outs at hotels.
- Alcoholic beverages nor items of a personal nature; such as clothing, equipment, laundry and phone calls.
- Tips to the local staff.
- Expenses incurred in preparation such as, but not limited to, non-refundable airline tickets or travel insurance, nor additional expenses resulting from flight delays, schedule changes, cancellations, or missed connections.

OPTIONAL TRIP EXTENSIONS: Guests with extra days may wish to extend their trip to the Galápagos Islands, Amazon rainforest, Cuenca and the southern highlands or Mindo and the Western Cloud Forest. All extensions require a minimum of 2 participants. To view the extensions on our website, click on ['Extend Your Trip'](#).

WEATHER: Overall, its equatorial location gives Ecuador a typically mild climate, with temperatures varying more by altitude than by season. Although literature describes the country as having a wet and dry season with the latter occurring in the highlands from June to September and November to January, the likelihood of rain exists year-round. Temperatures in **Quito** range from the low 40's at night to the low to mid 70's during the day (daytime temps may be as low as 50-55°F on overcast days).

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Highland weather can change suddenly so one should expect variable weather patterns and should be prepared for any type of condition including intense sunshine, heat, cold, rain, snow or sleet. A typical weather pattern involves a general build up of clouds at midday and short, often intense, rain showers in the afternoons. These showers seldom last all day, especially during the dry season, but it can be overcast for an entire day or two. Ecuadorians are proud to point out that in the highlands you can experience all four seasons in a day.

TRAVEL INSURANCE: We strongly recommend purchasing coverage to protect your trip investment. Travel insurance is important in case of unexpected events prior to departure causing the need to cancel or change your dates. Weather, natural events, medical reason, quarantine, local strikes, personal injury/illness (for you, your traveling companion or family members at home), could require itinerary interruption or changes. Missed connections, delayed arrival, lost/delayed baggage or the need for medical attention or evacuation are also reasons why coverage is important. Southwind recommends **Travel Insured International** which offers coverage options at a good value. If you, your traveling companion or a family member has a pre-existing medical condition, you can still receive coverage if a recurrence of the condition forces you to cancel your trip, but you do need to purchase a plan **within 21 days of your deposit**. Southwind can provide eQuote for insurance to review upon receipt of your deposit and Trip Reservation eForm.

[Learn more about coverage offered by Travel Insured International](#)

HOW TO SIGN UP: Please complete Southwind's [Trip Reservation eForm](#). There are fields for up to 6 travelers per form with the same address. The deposit is **\$1,500 per person**, [please click here to pay your deposit](#) by any major credit card through our secure CardConnect system. In the "total amount due" box, enter your deposit amount (without a comma) based on the number of travelers in your party. If you prefer, you can also call us at 1-800-377-9463 to make payment arrangements by phone or send a check. You will receive confirmation of your deposit.

Reservations can be accepted up to 60 days before departure, provided services and space are available. Due to the popularity of Ecuador's highlands, we recommend making reservations at least 3-4 months in advance. Once your trip is guaranteed to operate, you will receive comprehensive pre-departure planning documents by email.

Land Balance: Final payment is due at 120 days by Visa, Mastercard, Discover, American Express or check. You will receive a trip invoice indicating your balance due.

Cancellation Fees and other policies are outlined under the current [Terms & Conditions](#) on Southwind's website.

We look forward to having you travel with us in Ecuador!

Southwind Adventures, Inc

Your Latin America Travel Specialist since 1990

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