

Vacation on Horseback



Hacienda Zuleta is the most exclusive barn in Ecuador and combines excellent horses with outstanding service on the most famous colonial hacienda the Andes have to offer.

The 2.100 hectares (5.200 acres) estate counts 3.000 sheep, 600 head of dairy cows and 120 horses.

It is the home of the Plaza family, a lineage of people who are all gifted with advanced riding skills. Some have bull fighting experience; others show their horses in dressage or play polo, and all come to Zuleta during holidays to ride for their pleasure.

Hacienda Zuleta is known not only for its prize winning pure andalusians including and precious stallions, but especially for its very own breed-the Zuleteño. The Hacienda was the first to bring pure bred horses to Ecuador, starting with Quarter Horse and Thoroughbred and changing to Andalusians in the early 60ties. The Zuleteño is a combination of those three breeds and is known for its qualities as a very noble, gentle and versatile horse.

You can be part of numerous daily activities around the breeding barn: foals are born every month, weanlings cry for their mothers, the horsemen train young colts and fillies or refine canter aids in the ring. Go visit the different herds in the fields, or encourage the playful foals to canter with you.

Every horse is known for its specialities. Some have advanced training in dressage and Spanish riding others in taking perfect care of small children, and you will be able to pick your favorite horse of the herd, for your whole stay, or just for the day's activity.

As the Hacienda consists of thousands of hectares of farm land, pasture and forest, including rivers, mountains and a huge Páramo reserve, you can spend full days just riding from one end to the other and exploring all the valleys, slopes and hills. The majestic Andean condor will be flying above you. You can meet foxes and spectacle bears on the trails in the forest, alpacas and thousands of sheep up on the high plateaus and definitely hundreds of big dairy cows on their walk to the milking sheds. Some of the trails will lead you to Zuleta Village, where women wear their traditional indigenous clothing, people work their fields the old way and wave as you ride by, all kinds of domestic animals run free, everybody knows each other and almost no fences are seen.



Horses and donkeys are still used for transportation, the local carpenter extends his workshop to the main road and on every second doorstep someone is doing embroidery.





Sample Itineraries

Hacienda Overview

The herd will be waiting for you to choose your horse for the first ride and you will get the chance to try it in the ring at all paces. A bilingual riding instructor is available for your questions. After lunch we will ride up to Santa Rosa, through forest and dense vegetation up to a view point from where you have an overview of the whole Zuleta valley. As we will be right above the Condor centre and close to a feeding point, we will most likely see a wild condor fly by. Up here you will also have the best bird's eye view of the ancient pre-Incan Caranqui pyramids that are spread all over the property. The loop continues with beautiful vistas of mountain slopes painted by that special afternoon light, and maybe a family of spectacle bears or foxes will come to say hello. Leaving the forest we will canter over a field with high grass, before we have to focus on our balance when the horse starts to climb down. Upon reaching flat grounds with the barn at a short distance the horses will volunteer a last gallop with some jumps over small ditches, before we collect them to reach the hacienda house and barn. A nice glass of wine in the living room, a roaring fire, comfortable sofas and a chat with your host will entertain you until dinner time.

Condors and pyramids

Breakfast at Zuleta is great, healthy and abundant so there is no need to hurry. The herd will be waiting for you to pick your horse for today's trail to the Condor Project. We will be riding on Hacienda grounds through eucalyptus valleys to the far eastern end, passing by milking sheds and pastures. After traversing an artichoke field, crossing a rocky river at a picturesque bridge and passing by the polo horses and the colts, we canter over an open field along the steep slopes that rise more than 1000m up to the paramo, make our way to an acacia forest and into the valley of the Condor. At the avi-



ary you will see majestic birds from a short distance and we will be waiting for some wild ones to land at the surrounding rocks of the narrow valley. While the horses rest and graze we visit the trout farm and glance into primary forest with its thousands of different leaves, ferns, bushes and running water everywhere. The way back to the hacienda takes us through pasture where we have to open one or the other gate and can ride to the top of one of the 1.000 year old truncated pyramids. These structures are made of dirt and were used as ceremonial places by the ancient Caranqui culture. Share pictures during lunch, have a tasty coffee in the living room, then choose between a riding lesson in the ring or an exciting trip to our 50 hectare cross country field where you can explore a great variety of terrain at a fast pace in the golden afternoon sunlight. The fireplace in your room will be lit and a hot bath is waiting for you to close the day in the most relaxing way before dinner.

La Rinconada and Saddle Maker

As your dining experience at Zuleta unfolds, you will be surprised how sustainable the Hacienda is, so today we will invite you to a guided visit of Zuleta's cheese factory and organic vegetable garden. Take your time to see everything, taste a fresh carrot or cape gooseberry, wander through the stunning fields of flowers and see the paramo garden on the way to the barn, where your horses are already waiting for a new adventure.

Today's ride will lead you to the charming parish capital of Angochagua and into Rinconada valley. Heading out of the hacienda at the east end, we follow a cobble stone road into this tiny hillside village where time stands still. We will dismount the horses at the plaza and visit the church and the community school, before we descend through the woods into the pastoral Rinconada valley. A sandy road through hedges of agave and adobe walls leads us into a remote and independent community, rarely visited by any foreigners. We will have a little snack at the shores of a roaring river, where cows come to water and local women wash clothes. With incredible views of the primary forest on hanging gorges and of waterfalls coming from the rocky ridges above, we head southwest to the other side of the wide valley. Some long canters on endless sand tracks lead us to our lunch spot, where a comfortable tent is already waiting.

The horses rest while you are served a three course cooked picnic lunch and enjoy the view of the town of Ibarra, lying



more than 1.000 meters below. After lunch we still have some ground to cover, so we say goodbye to our catering and keep following the road to a pass between Cunru and Cubilche mountain. We will see different plants like the spikey sisal and aloe vera and cross a desert like area. Once we crossed the pass beautiful Zuleta valley spreads out in front of us. The horses get fresh energy by sensing home and with some luck we will see the snowy slopes of Cayambe, illuminated by the orange afternoon light in front of us.

Before entering the gate we stop at a local saddle maker, as you probably have started to love the half chaps you are wearing. You will meet 70 year old, Oswaldo Sarsoza and learn how he makes the chaps and the various tack he produces for Hacienda Zuleta. Orders can be placed right there.

Cusin peak experience

With new energy we start again on a difficult and long ride up to the paramo, the high grasslands and reach the peak of Cusin volcano, one of the most ancient mountains in the Ecuadorian Andes. The ride starts through our neighbor hacienda La Merced, with some long canters and jogs along soft grassy and sandy trails. Once we reach the foot of Cusin, the pace slows down to a steady walk, as the horses have to climb 1.300 meters in altitude during the next few hours. At each turn air gets slightly colder and the view grows increasingly spectacular, showing the Mojanda range, Imbabura with the lake and Cotacachi. Our trail is frequented only by park rangers and some locals who come up to get “paja” for their thatched roofs.

The horses will be breathing hard and there is no obvious trail we are following, but the guides find their way in this sea of grass. You will truly experience the remoteness of the paramo lands, and as the Cusin lies like an island in the middle of the two Andean ranges, you will have a breathtaking 360° view of several snowcapped peaks in the south, like Cayambe, Cotopaxi (at 100km distance!), Antisana and Illinizas. If the wind is not too strong we will have a picnic lunch right on top of Cusin, otherwise we ride down to a more protected spot. Up there we might get visited by a condor, eagles, deer or foxes. Even pumas have been seen. Today our picnic will come out of the saddle bags, including hot soup, a main dish and desert, good substance for the journey home. The mountain tracks are amazing, including rocky parts, caves, and other volcanic formations. As we are riding over plains and down some very steep parts, over a stone field and through washed out canyons

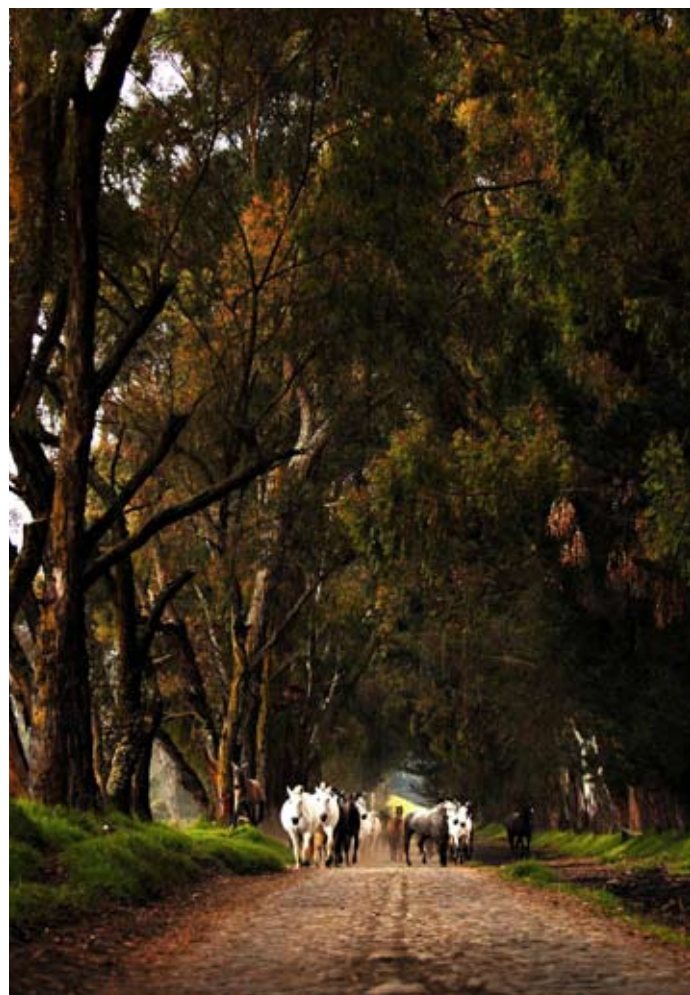


we need the full attention of both rider and horse, but once we reach flat ground we will break into a releasing canter over a huge plateau with oat plantations. As we crossed the Cusin volcano on an almost straight line, we will be coming back to Zuleta from the opposite direction, through eucalyptus forest and with long canters. Coming back to Zuleta you should pamper your muscles with a 1 hour, full body massage, Giovanni, the massage therapist from Otavalo is really an expert.

San Marcos (part of the Cotacachi – Cayapas National Ecological Reserve)

Time is flying by, but here comes the best ride. Today we will go to San Marcos lagoon with 65 km of ground to cover. Starting with an early breakfast, we leave Zuleta not later than 9am heading south on the main road through the village. Everybody will ask us where we are going and when we say “San Marcos” they are impressed by our fortitude! The day starts with a steady pace, long jogs and canters, not too fast to preserve energy.

Riding out of Zuleta valley and in the direction of Cayambe, we will see some old women collecting logs and loading them on a donkey’s back. We cross a small river and come into Pesillo, a very rural village, not ever visited by foreigners. It feels like being on an expedition some centuries ago, as we cross Pesillo, and ride into the long valley of Olmedo, which reveals our destination in the far distance. Stunning views of Cayambe, now really close by and of remote pastoral valleys, roaring rivers and forgotten villages combined with our steady jog let time stand still. Around noon we enter the Cayambe Coca national park and the scenery changes immediately. A huge canyon opens to our right, with rocky walls of 200m and more. The vegetation changes slightly too, as we ascend to the higher paramo levels. Rare birds and plants are everywhere, water leaks through the volcanic stones and cold winds come down from Cayambe, the majestic giant now right in front of us. Just when the climate seems to be too rough, we take a left and follow a winding road downhill, protected from the wind and cold. And there it is, hidden in the mist, a volcanic lake, surrounded by virgin forest, with crystal clear water and absolute solitude – except for our comfortable lunch tent of course! And we do appreciate a luxurious, hot lunch after such a ride. When we come home to Zuleta shortly after nightfall, the horse’s shoes will sparkle on the cobblestone, and with that magical moment we close our day.



Herding horses

Do something really great in the morning before your daily activities: bring in the herd! You have to be at the barn at 6:45am to ride out to the pasture with one of the horsemen. Most horses are already waiting at the gate, but some prefer to stay, so you will get into the field and herd them, sometimes a challenging task. At 7am the sun comes over the mountains, the whole herd of approximately 50 mares, geldings and foals is on its way and you see all the flaring manes and tails in front of you. They head right to the barn, so you have nothing else to do but listen to the sound of 200 clapping hoofs and enjoy the moment.

These tours are just a sample of the many options we have at Zuleta. Please remember that pace, distance and destinations depend on you, almost everything is possible for us and our great horses.



Enjoying Horses at Hacienda Zuleta

About Our Horses

By crossing Andalusian, Thoroughbred, and Quarter Horse, we have created our own special breed - The Zuleteño Horse. We have all levels of horses, from beginner to advanced.

About the Tack

We use comfortable Western tack, to which we add extra cushioning for longer rides. Bridles and saddles are handmade locally.

About Our Horses Training

Our horses respond best to light, but clear signals. They are used to being ridden with a soft hand and slack in the reins.

They are taught to neck rein, which means they respond to pressure from the reins on their neck to change direction – Just move your hand to the side you want to go.

To stop, lightly pull on the reins by bringing your hand back towards you.

Make sure to release any pressure on the reins once the horse does what you want it to do.

Riding Activities Offered

- Trail riding
- Bareback riding
- Riding lessons
- Days rides with picnic lunch

Horseback Riding with Safety

Your safety and well-being is our priority as you enjoy time with our horses. For this reason, we want to review important safety information with you before you ride.

Selecting an appropriate horse

- Please let us know your riding experience so we can help you find a suitable horse.
- We would also appreciate knowing if you have knee, hip, back problems or other medical conditions that could affect the ride.
- You can also search through our horse catalogue (folder located in the living room) to find your perfect match.
- If you are a beginner, we suggest you spend about 10 minutes in our riding ring getting a feel for your horse before you go out on the trail.

Your Guide

- A local guide (spanish speaking) will accompany you on any kind of ride. Your guide will be someone with a lot of horse experience and complete knowledge of the area and its different trails.
- Always stay behind your guide, allowing them to lead the way. Never pass the guide!
- The guide reserves the right to prevent anyone from riding whose behavior endangers the safety or welfare of other riders or horses.
- He carries an emergency kit and walkie talkie to be in con-

tact with the office.

What to Wear

- To be comfortable, wear long trousers and closed-toed shoes, such as boots.
- We encourage all riders to wear a helmet and chaps (which we can provide).
- In case of rain, you will have to stop. If you would like to put on the ponchos we provide (attached to the front or back of your saddle).
- Please tell a guide if you wish to put on or remove clothing as if it could spook your horse.

Size of your riding group

1- 5 riders = at least 1 guide

6 - 10 riders = at least 2 guides

Maximum of 10 riders (plus guides) in one group

If all riders are beginners or children, maximum of 5 riders.

Other things to keep in mind

- We put a limit of 100 kg on the weight of a rider.
- Only one person can ride a single horse (parents CANNOT ride with their kids)
- Feel free to ask for help or ask us questions!

Enjoy riding our special zuleteño horses!

