ANDANDO TOURS
Mainland Ecuador & Galápagos Islands

2011

Cotopaxi and Quilotoa

Cuello de Luna and the Emerald-Green crater

We leave Quito from the south travelling alongside the length of the city out into the valley below. The Avenue of the Volcanoes opens up before us and we head south towards Cotopaxi, one of the highest active volcanoes in the world.

We cross over the tracks of the old 'Ferrocarril', Ecuadorian Train network that ran 965km across ten provinces to the coast and is in the process of being restored.

On our way down the Avenue we stop in at the Hacienda La Alegria for a typical highland breakfast of humitas, fresh eggs, fruit juices of mora and naranjilla and cow's milk from the dairy.

DAY 1

We will take a walk around this old working hacienda and learn about Humboldt's expedition to the cordillera, the natural mineral waters of the region and the surrounding haciendas with Incan ruins. If it is a clear day there will be spectacular views of the Avenue of the Volcanoes.

Cotopaxi at 5,898m is one of the highest volcanoes in the world and easily the most visited summit in Ecuador due to its easy access for amateur climbers and experts alike.

Our drive through the park brings us out onto the plain of Laguna de Limpiopungo, a lake fed by water from the volcano Rumiñahui which towers over it. It is thought that the Inca Rumiñahui hid his gold up on the mountain and many search parties have set out to find it, some never to be seen again. At the water's edge the park wildlife come to refresh themselves; ducks, swallows, frogs and toads, and you may spot an eagle or a great Andean Condor.

From Lake Limpiopungo we will walk over fairly flat terrain to the Incan ruins of Pucara, a lookout fortress used to control the communication route from the highlands into the Amazon Jungle. If the sky is clear we can catch beautiful views of Cotopaxi and the surrounding volcanoes; Ruminahui, Sincholagua, Pasachoa and if we are lucky, the shy Antisana. At Pucara our guide will tell us the legends of these ruins and we will have a rest, a cup of tea and a snack.

We head down from the car park to begin our next walk to El Porvenir, a hacienda set in the foothills of Rumiñahui. Here we will have a filling typical highland lunch and a real ´chagra´ will meet us and talk about his traditions and customs; including the famous 'chagra' festivals held in Machachi.

From here we head to the Hacienda Hato Verde for the night where we will enjoy an evening meal and a hot drink by the fireside.

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DAY 2

Our day starts early at the hacienda's dairy, helping to milk the cows followed by breakfast and a little of the history of the hacienda. From Hacienda Hato Verde we head south along the Avenue of the Volcanoes, this stretch dominated by the magnificent peak of Cotopaxi and neighbouring Rumiñahui, Sinchologua and the Ilinizas.

On through the countryside, sheep and llamas graze in the surrounding fields and farms as we come to the highland towns of Pujilí and La Victoria, renowned for their beautiful ceramics. We will stop here at a ceramics workshop to see how they work in clay and the techniques they use to paint final products. You will then have a chance to create your own ceramic. In Tigua we call in at the workshop of local artist, Julio Toaquiza, who paints on sheep skin in the naïf style, colourful scenes of highland festivals and folkloric characters, typical of this region.

In Quilotoa crater, a nice, easy walk takes us down, some 200m, to the shore of the dazzling emerald-green Laguna Quilotoa. The lake was formed when, after several violent eruptions the crater filled with water creating a stunning, natural wonder.

On foot or horseback up to the top to enjoy a country picnic; hot soup, sandwiches and cake before our journey back up the Avenue of Volcanoes to Quito.

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