



Horseback
Riding
Excursions

Horseback Riding Excursions

Horseback riding has been a Plaza family tradition for over a hundred years. Hacienda Zuleta is known for its beautiful Zuleteño horses – a unique mixture between the Spanish-Andalusian, the Thoroughbred, and the American Quarter Horse. The outcome of this crossbreeding is a robust and noble Andean horse with the perfect disposition for trail-riding.

The rider will have the unique opportunity to explore the stunning Andean countryside on different trails that go from 9,000 to 11,000 feet above sea level. You will be in safe hands with our knowledgeable, friendly local guides, or we can provide a bilingual speaker for an extra charge. All rides include a tasty snack, complemented with our homemade fruit juice. Full-day rides include a delicious picnic with a luxury option for an extra charge on certain routes. We can also tailor-make routes based on your interests and experience – please ask for more details.

For your convenience and security, we provide a complete Andean saddle (very similar to the Western saddle) with a deep seat and comfortable sheepskin lining. You are also provided with a rain poncho, rubber boots or half chaps, and a helmet.



Short Rides

The Waterfall Ride

Another popular ride takes you along cobblestone roads to the north, affording gorgeous views of the mountains, to an area called La Cocha (lake, in Kichwa). We pass green pastures dotted with woods and more of Zuleta's renowned Caranqui pyramids.

Upon reaching a stone bridge, we head towards Rinconada Santa Marta and discover El Molino – the Hacienda's restored water mill. Here we dismount and take a short walk through lush vegetation to a roaring waterfall on the Tahuando River. On our return, we pass by Rosario's farm where you can admire the Hacienda's beautiful Andalusian stallion. Finally, we continue down a long avenue where, depending on your comfort and experience, you can trot or canter back to the Hacienda.

Estimated Time: 1-1/2 /2 hours

Difficulty Level: Easy

Minimum Age Requirement: 6 years

Suggested Departure Time: 10 AM or 2 PM

Elevation: 2,964-2,870 m/
9,724-9,416 ft

Equipment: We recommend bringing sunscreen, mosquito repellent, a camera, and a jacket. In the rainy season rubber boots are advised



Visiting the Community of Zuleta

For those wishing to see a little more of the area's culture, we can take you around the quaint village of Zuleta. First, we leave via the Hacienda's main gate and pass embroidery shops specializing in this beautiful art developed throughout centuries. After the ride, you can purchase high quality crafts and souvenirs handmade by community members. We ride up to the cemetery and reach the top of the village where, on a clear day, you can admire the spectacular snow-capped Mount Cayambe. Traditional adobe-and tile-roof houses dot the landscape, surrounded by patchwork fields. Afterwards, we return through the village, passing the church, the community field, and the town hall. On the way, you can see more views of the valley and the day-to-day lives of the people as they work the land and embroider traditional clothes.

Estimated Time: 1-1/2/2 hours

Difficulty Level: Intermediate

Minimum Age Requirement:
6-8 years

Suggested Departure Time: 10 AM or 2 PM

Elevation: 2,964-3,234 m/
9,724-10,610 ft

Equipment: We recommend bringing sunscreen, mosquito repellent, a camera, and a jacket.



The Condor's View

Experience Zuleta through the eyes of a condor as we take the route up Santa Rosa hill behind the main house. The ascent opens onto spectacular views of the Hacienda, the surrounding fields, and the nearby village. We then reach a charming reservoir nestled in the hills with a tiny waterfall further on. Climbing higher, past eucalyptus saplings, we reach cypress and pine groves and the stunning Vista Condor. Here you can admire views from above La Rinconada de San Pedro Valley, the Condor Huasi Project facilities, and the Caranqui pyramids. If we are lucky we may also see wild condors soaring on the mountain thermals. Continuing down a dirt trail through aromatic woods, the Hacienda can be glimpsed from different angles. This route also offers opportunities to spot different wild flowers and plants, such as native bromeliads and heliconias whose fruits are a spectacled bear's delight.

Estimated Time: 1-1/2/2 hours

Difficulty Level: Easy

Minimum Age Requirement: 6 years

Suggested Departure Time: 10 AM or 2 PM

Elevation: 2,964-3,000 m/
9,724-9,842 ft

Equipment: We recommend bringing sunscreen, a camera, and a jacket.



Rounding Up the Herd

A special opportunity for early risers and cowboy wannabes! This lovely ride – also known as La Manada (the herd) – takes the same route past pastures and mysterious Caranqui mounds as the Condor Project trail, but in the early morning when mists often cover the mountainside.

You will join your local groom as he rounds up our herd of over-forty Zuleteño horses from their pastures amongst the pyramids and drives them back to the Hacienda. In this magical atmosphere you can see their playful and mischievous personalities in action as you trot home with them. If you would like to take part, please inform your host the day before (up to 6 PM).

Estimated Time: 1/1-1/2 hours

Difficulty Level: Intermediate

Minimum Age Requirement:
6-8 years

Departure Time: 7:15 AM

Elevation: 2,964-3,018 m/
9,724-9,901 ft

Equipment: We recommend bringing sunscreen, mosquito repellent, a camera, and a jacket.



Half Day Rides

The Condor Project

Our most popular route is to the Condor Huasi Project facilities located in La Rinconada de San Pedro Valley. Here you can learn about Zuleta's wildlife as well as our efforts to protect and nurture endangered condors and spectacled bears. We ride past the Hacienda's pastures, milking sheds, and trout farm via pretty cobblestone roads. You will see many ancient Caranqui tolas – pyramids dating from before the Inca conquest. On the way back, you may choose to climb the highest ceremonial pyramid, which offers great views of the area. You may also see wild condors taking advantage of the high winds on the mountainside. The ride includes an hour-long talk, approximately, at the Condor Huasi facilities.

Estimated Time: 4 hours
(including 1 hour talk approx.)

Difficulty Level: Easy

Minimum Age Requirement: 6 years

Suggested Departure Time: 10 AM or 2 PM

Elevation: 2,964-3,018 m/
9,724-9,901 ft

Equipment: We recommend bringing sunscreen, mosquito repellent, a camera, and a jacket.



Zuleta Cultural Tour

For a more in-depth look at the history and culture of Zuleta, we take you through the village to an interesting house museum at the community's highest point. Here you will find many well-preserved examples of Zuleta's traditional farming, weaving, and cooking implements as well as weapons, fine leatherwork, and other interesting ephemera. If the weather permits, we will see stunning views of snow-capped Mount Cayambe and the surrounding landscape. On the way, we will also stop by the community's famous embroidery shops where you can learn about this centuries-old art and purchase some lovely gifts later if you wish. The ride incorporates views of the cemetery, town hall, and church as well as some historic adobe-and-tile-roof houses. There is also an opportunity to see a local leather specialist who makes all of the Hacienda's saddles and leatherwork. To take full advantage of this ride, we recommend taking a bilingual guide for an extra charge.

Estimated Time: 3-4 hours

Difficulty Level: Easy

Minimum Age Requirement:
6-8 years

Suggested Departure Time:
8:30/9 AM or 2 PM

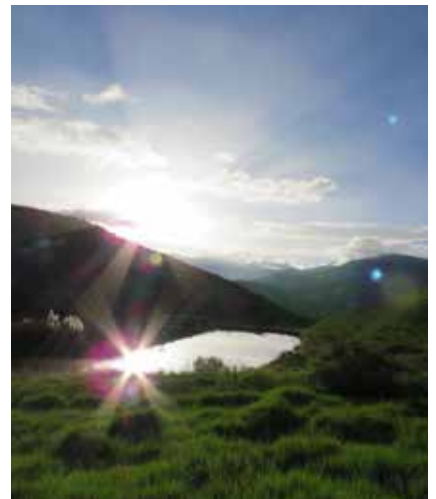
Elevation: 2,964-3,018 m/
9,724-9,901 ft



Uphill Riding

Stand on the shoulders of the mountains as we venture to the pinnacle of Santa Rosa. First, we climb winding paths, glimpsing the Hacienda through eucalyptus trees. We then pass a small reservoir and waterfall as we continue on to the high pastures where the entire valley opens up before us. On a clear day, we can see snow-capped volcanos Cayambe and Cotapaxi to the left in the distance, with Mount Imbabura towering across the vale. Further north, the mountains meander down beyond Angochagua and La Rinconada to the city of Ibarra, while behind us lies the mysterious wilderness of the Andean páramo. We circle round to the Vista Condor to catch magnificent views of La Rinconada de San Pedro Valley, with its condor facilities and Caranqui pyramids, before returning home through fragrant cypress and eucalyptus groves.

Estimated Time: 3-4 hours
Difficulty Level: Intermediate
Minimum Age Requirement: 6-8 years
Suggested Departure Time: 8:30/9 AM or 2 PM
Elevation: 2,964-3,239m/
9,724-10,921 ft
Equipment: We recommend bringing sunscreen, mosquito repellent, a camera, and a jacket.



Riding to Mount Cunro

This ride gives us a chance to see a different side of the Zuleta valley. We leave from the main gate, passing through the village, then climb through pastures and fields towards Mount Cunro, an extinct volcano. If weather permits, we may see behind us the glorious Mount Cayambe, a snowy peak with an elevation of 5,790 masl (almost 19,000 ft!). Cunro dominates this side of the valley – a vast, conical hill jutting from the foot of Mount Imbabura and surrounded by woodland at its base. We pass through cool eucalyptus groves and, at the summit, enjoy views of Zuleta's green, furrowed mountains stretching all the way from the Hacienda through to Angochagua and towards Ibarra. After a short rest, we descend back to the village and return to the Hacienda.

Estimated Time: 3-4 hours
Difficulty Level: Intermediate
Minimum Age Requirement: 6-8 years
Suggested Departure Time: 8:30/9 AM or 2 PM
Elevation: 2,964-3,300 m/
9,724-10,826 ft
Equipment: We recommend bringing sunscreen, a camera, and a jacket.



Angochagua Cultural Ride

We head north of the property, past Rosario's milking sheds and verdant fields, where we can take a quick detour to the waterfall if you wish. At the Hacienda's limits, we reach a road leading to the picturesque farming community of Angochagua, nestled in a crook of the mountains. Following a stream, we visit the Andean home of Fernando Colimba, a native of the area, who built the classic adobe and thatched roof property as a house museum to preserve his local culture. Here he demonstrates age-old techniques for grinding corn and spinning wool and shows us old artefacts from the area's agricultural past. We return, riding up the shoulder of Mount Cunro and through the community to see these old farming ways in action. Please tell your host in advance if you wish to do this ride so that we can arrange for the museum to be open. An English-speaking guide is advised but not absolutely necessary.

Estimated Time: 3-4 hours

Difficulty Level: Intermediate

Minimum Age Required: 6-8 years

Suggested Departure Time:

8:30/9 AM or 2 PM

Elevation: 2,964-3,100 m/
9,724-10,170 ft

Equipment: We recommend bringing sunscreen, a camera, and a jacket.



Full-Day Rides

The Condor, Community, and Waterfall Ride

For more experienced riders who like a faster pace, we can take you round all three routes in a wide loop as you put our beautiful horses through their paces. At a trot or canter, we take in mountain views and rich pastureland as well as experiencing the culture and art of the Zuleta community and its history in the form of the magical Caranqui tolas. You will also learn about the wildlife of this fascinating area at the Condor Huasi Project facilities. After this ride, you will truly feel part of Hacienda Zuleta and its equestrian legacy!

Estimated Time: + 5 hours

Difficulty Level: Intermediate

Minimum Age Requirement:

6-8 years

Suggested Departure Time:

8:30/9 AM

Elevation: 2,964-3,018 m/

9,724-9,901 ft

Equipment: We recommend bringing sunscreen, a camera, and a jacket.



Ride to Mount Cubilche

This beautiful ride takes us through the community and up Mount Cubilche as fields and mountains unfurl behind us. Snowcapped Mount Cayambe and Mount Antisana are visible on a clear day as we climb higher, past eucalyptus groves and corn fields. The mountains part on our right as we pass the forested Mount Cunro and we have a view, as we look down through the blue yonder, of the city of Ibarra. We cut through an area called Pan de Azúcar – so named for its sugar-loaf shape – and then on to a plateau dotted with wild flowers and ponds – perfect for a fast canter! The road continues winding up to small pine forest near the final ascent to Cubilche where you guide your horse around myriad, scented trees. At last we reach the start of the páramo – the high grasslands – where you are greeted with views of the entire valley from Ibarra to your left, Angochagua, the Hacienda in the center, and all the way over to towering Cayambe. At the top of Cubilche we find three beautiful lakes – part of the volcano's caldera. Finally, we loop back via a different route through Zuleta village, giving you more opportunities to trot and canter if you wish.

Estimated Time: + 5 hours
Difficulty Level: Intermediate
Minimum Age Requirement: 6-8 years
Suggested Departure Time: 8:30/9 AM
Elevation: 2,964-3,400 m/
9,724-11,154 ft
Equipment: We recommend bringing sunscreen, a camera, and a jacket.



The Lake View Ride

The route to Vista Lago, or the Lake View, gives you an excellent experience of the range of vistas and landscapes that surround Zuleta. We follow the route up Mount Cubilche, past the community's fields, eucalyptus groves, and, in good weather, expansive views of Ibarra, Mount Cayambe, and Mount Antisana. After about two hours, we reach a scented pine forest and take the path beside it, curving around the mountain to further vistas of the nearby valleys. On the other side of Cubilche, we discover the landscapes of Mount Imbabura and the stunning San Pablo Lake – Vista Lago. Set in a wide basin surrounded by volcanoes, the lake provides a glorious backdrop to a delicious picnic. We also get a chance to see Zuleta's flocks of sheep grazing in the high pastures. Once rested, we choose between different options to return to the Hacienda, depending on your preference, taking in more countryside and mountain landscapes.

Estimated Time: 6-7 hours
Difficulty Level: Intermediate
Minimum Age Requirement: 6 years
Suggested Departure Time: 8:30/9 AM
Elevation: 2,964-3,400 m/
9,724-11,154 ft
Equipment: We recommend bringing sunscreen, a camera, and a jacket.



La Chimba and Indigenous History

This ride is a mix of landscapes and history. We ride over the hills behind the Hacienda, enjoying the pastures and woods of La Merced. Descending into farmland, we can trot and canter for longer periods until we reach the village of Pesillo with its quaint topiary cemetery and communally-owned hacienda. Riding through the settlement and crossing a rushing river, we come to La Chimba – home to the remarkable resting place of local heroine Tránsito Amaguaña – an indigenous woman who fought for the rights of her people. The burial site is a large stone cairn-like structure that, at certain special times of year, marks the passage of the sun. There is a fascinating little museum with information on Mama Tránsito's life and struggle, along with beautiful murals and a permanent exhibition on indigenous faces and dress by local photographers. After enjoying a lovely picnic, we choose between return routes – passing back via Pesillo and over Santa Rosa, where we can experience the stunning views of Vista Condor, or through the farm and woodland of La Merced, seeing the reservoir in the setting sun.

Estimated Time: 6-7 hours
Difficulty Level: Intermediate
Minimum Age Requirement: 6-8 years
Suggested Departure Time: 8:30 - 9 AM
Elevation: 2.964-3.100 m/
9.724-10.170 ft
Equipment: We recommend bringing sunscreen, a camera, and a jacket



Angochagua and La Rinconada Cultural Ride

One of our favorites! This ride combines a tour of the local valleys of Angochagua and La Rinconada, where majestic mountains rise steeply above us, and the rich rolling countryside of La Magdalena and Cunro, where imposing Mount Imbabura dominates the horizon. You can prioritize the cultural aspects, such as visiting Angochagua's church and Fernando Colimba's house museum, where he will demonstrate the use of old-fashioned tools and farming methods. Or, if you are an avid rider with a need for speed, we can cover a lot of ground, passing through the different landscapes of each valley, crossing bridges, and seeing unique crops, such as tree tomatoes, growing in nearby fields. We finish up by passing the lovely painted houses of La Magdalena on our way to the shoulder of Cunro, where the entire valley opens up in stupendous views. We can either have our lunch here or back in the mountain-nestled community of La Rinconada, then return under the forested hill of Mt Cunro and through Zuleta itself.

Estimated Time: 6-7 hours
Difficulty Level: Intermediate
Minimum Age Required: 6-8 years
Suggested Departure Time: 8:30/9 AM
Elevation: 2,964-3,100 m/
9,724-10,170 ft
Equipment: We recommend bringing sunscreen, a camera, and a jacket



Hacienda to Hacienda - Zuleta to Cusin

A chance to experience another beautiful hacienda! Hacienda Cusin is a restored, seventeenth-century estate, even older than Zuleta, and full of Old World charm with sumptuous gardens, colonial style rooms, and loads of history. Following a path through the community and up the side of Mount Cubilche, we reach the incredible views of Vista Lago (the Lake View). We then wind our way towards Hacienda Cusin, which is close to the lake and Mount Imbabura, surrounded by classic Andean countryside. Close by is the Monastery of Cusin along with a lovely animal enclosure filled with horses, llamas, chickens, ducks, and even a few rabbits, showing the range of livestock haciendas used to keep. Enjoy a fabulous lunch, then take a stroll to discover Cusin's secrets before we return home with plenty of opportunities to trot and canter.

Estimated Time: 6 hours

Difficulty Level: Intermediate

Minimum Age Requirement: 6-8 years

Suggested Departure: 8:30/9 AM

Elevation: 3,500 m/11,482 ft

Equipment: We recommend bringing sunscreen, a camera, and a jacket

Includes: Lunch at the exclusive Hacienda Cusin - a reservation is required



Ventana Grande

If you are an experienced rider and love adventure, this is the ride for you. The trip begins as we climb the hill known as Santa Rosa, and follow the Fox Trail to the top where stunning vistas await us. We continue ascending and see the vegetation shift from tall trees to bushes. At last we come to the páramo's tall grasslands – a unique high-Andean bio-sphere. We follow the undulating course of La Rinconada de San Pedro towards the distant craggy summit known as Ventanas (windows). The reason for the name becomes clear when we reach Ventana Grande – a massive volcanic rock formation that acts as a window on the mountainscape beyond. There are no words to accurately describe the desolate beauty of the surrounding valleys. We can admire the natural wonder as we stop for lunch and photos, before returning via the same route, experiencing the magnificent views in reverse.

Estimated time: 6-7 hours

Difficulty: Advanced

Minimum Age Required: 12 years

Suggested Departure Time: 8:30 AM

Elevation: 2,964-3,975 m/
9,724-13,041 ft

Equipment: We recommend bringing sunscreen, a camera, and a jacket. At high attitudes, it can be windy and cold so you are advised to dress in warm layers.



The Towers

For another view of Zuleta's páramo, we take the opposite route, cantering first down long tree-lined avenues past Rosario's farm and the Hacienda's pastures. At a stone bridge, we take the road up the mountain, ascending the highest of the Caranqui mounds which has become part of the ridge, then venturing upwards. We follow switchbacks, seeing Zuleta's tolas and fields become a patchwork quilt, as the view opens up to include the distant haze of Ibarra and, if the day is clear, the volcanos of Cusin, Imbabura, Cayambe, and Antisana. The crags of Ventanas and the páramo become come into view as we ascend, with fields and woods giving way to the classic tall grass. Finally, we reach the lookout near the electric towers that link power-lines across the remote highlands. The scenery from here is truly stupendous, with 360 degree views of the Avenue of Volcanos. Here we rest and partake of a classic Zuleteño lunch before returning down the mountain, for more cantering when we reach the valley.

Estimated time: 6 hours

Difficulty: Advanced

Minimum Age Required: 12 years

Suggested Departure Time: 8:30 AM

Elevation: 2,964-3,975 m/
9,724-13,041 ft

Equipment: We recommend bringing sunscreen, a camera, and a jacket. At high attitudes, it can be windy and cold, so you are advised to dress in warm layers.



The Ventanas Loop

If you have the heart of an adventurer, why not join the Ventana Grande and the Towers rides and do the entire páramo loop? The route takes a total of 12 hours, so we start early, ascending the hill of Santa Rosa and passing through aromatic forests to the páramo, where the grass reaches our horses' bellies. Like true caballeros, we ride through this green sea as the Andes spread out around us. Prehistoric boulders are strewn across the landscape as we approach the rocky pinnacles of Ventanas. Below we can see the tiny outlines of the Condor Huasi cages and the Caranqui mounds as we travel through the true lands of the condor. Finally, we reach the glorious rock formation of Ventana Grande – a window on the world below. Through its portal we glimpse the distant mountains receding into obscurity. After a delicious lunch, we continue on, forging through the grass as the landscape gives us more picture-perfect views. At last we arrive at the towers on the far side of La Rinconada de San Pedro and wind our way down the mountain-side, spotting the communities of Angochagua, Rinconada, and the city of Ibarra to our right. Once we reach the valley floor, if the horses still have energy, we can speed back to the Hacienda for a well deserved evening meal.

Estimated time: 12 hours

Difficulty: Advanced

Minimum Age Required: 12 years

Suggested Departure Time: 7 AM

Elevation: 2,964-3,975 m/
9,724-13,041 ft

Equipment: We recommend bringing sunscreen, a camera, and a jacket. At high attitudes it can be windy and cold, so you are advised to dress in warm layers



Páramo Cusin

Another páramo experience from a different vantage point. Mount Cusin sprawls over the southwestern side of the Zuleta Valley, giving us views of San Pablo Lake and Mount Imbabura to the north and snow-capped Cayambe to the south, along with a host of others. We start by cutting through the farmland of our neighboring hacienda, La Merced, and over the crest of Santa Rosa. Here we can trot and canter as the pastureland turns to meadows and then to woodland groves. We curve upwards towards Cusin, past gullies of eucalyptus and shepherds with their herds, until the incline becomes steeper and the pace slows to a walk. Here the horses forge their way up towards the high grasslands, climbing 1,300 meters during the next few hours. At each turn, the air gets colder and the view grows increasingly spectacular, featuring the Mojanda range, Mount Imbabura, San Pablo Lake, and Mount Cotacachi. This is a rare sight with only a few park rangers and locals in search of thatch venturing this high. The land is a mixture of strange volcanic formations, caves, and a field of stone. Keep your wits about you at this point, but trust in your knowledgeable guides to lead you safely as you continue to see the snow-capped peaks of Cayambe, Antisana, and Cotopaxi in all their glory. As usual, a wonderful picnic is included, and when we reach flat ground again, we can break into a releasing canter over a vast plateau. The journey back includes more chances to trot and canter as the loop takes us through the spread-out rural community of Zuleta. A taxing but incredible ride and an opportunity not to be missed!

Estimated Time: 6-7 hours

Difficulty Level: Advanced

Minimum Age Requirement:
12 years

Suggested Departure Time:
8:30 AM

Elevation: 2,964-3,100 m/
9,724-10,170 ft

Equipment: We recommend bringing sunscreen, a camera, and a jacket. At high altitudes it can be windy and cold, so you are advised to dress in warm layers

