



Cayambe-Cotopaxi Skills Expedition

Quito, Ecuador

PROGRAM ITINERARY

PROGRAM DETAILS: With two days of skills instruction, those with little technical climbing experience have the opportunity to ascend Cayambe (18,997 ft) and Cotopaxi (19,347 ft) of classic snow and ice routes.

DIFFICULTY GRADE: Beginner to Moderate

PREREQUISITES:

- Like most all mountaineering trips, a solid level of physical fitness is required to assure an enjoyable time
- Previous experience camping in a backcountry environment and carrying gear, or multi-day backpacking trips or treks
- Previous climbing experience is not required

PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS:

- Long walks of 4 to 10 hours.
- Each climber carries his or her own personal equipment. Staff assistance is provided for group gear. Personal porters can be arranged. The average day pack will weigh between 5 and 15 lbs; climbing bags typically weigh between 25 and 35lbs.
- Moderate to big gains drops in altitude (400 to 1000 m; 1300 to 3200 ft).
- Lodging in camps, in mountain huts, and in town (twin share accommodation).

PROGRAM COST INCLUSIONS & EXCLUSIONS:

Inclusions: Lodging in hotels, haciendas, huts, and tents on a shared basis for the dates of your program (available on a private basis by special arrangement, subject to availability, and at added cost); Meals while at huts and while climbing; Group cooking equipment; Admissions to museums and national parks; Group climbing equipment; Transportation during trip.

Exclusions: Airfare; Personal equipment; Meals in cities, hotels, haciendas, and lodges; Gratuities to guides; Government and airport taxes; Inoculations; Personal insurance; Excess baggage.

ITINERARY

Part One: Cayambe - Cotopaxi Skills Expedition

Day 1: Arrive in Quito

This is the first scheduled day of the program. Arrive in Quito and meet your guide and other members of the expedition at Hotel Reina Isabel at 19:00 (unless otherwise noted in your Final Trip Letter). The first day is designated for traveling to Ecuador and becoming situated in the country. For those who arrive early, we will provide you with a variety of sightseeing options including a tour of the historic colonial sector of Quito and El Panecillo overlooking the city.

- **Accommodations:** Hotel Reina Isabel
- **Meals included:** Breakfast*



The colorful rooftops of Quito.

Day 2: Quito City Tour

After meeting the rest of your group for breakfast at 08:00 am at the hotel, the guide(s) will brief you on the details of the expedition and conduct a gear check before leaving on a city tour to visit the colonial part of town including the Basilica, la Compania, San Francisco, the first religious building constructed by the Spanish in South America by the Spanish. If time allows, we can also drive up the hill of El Panecillo where there is an impressive statue (the Virgin of Quito) and a great view of the whole city. In the afternoon, you may also have the chance to visit the Native South American souvenir market.

- **Accommodations:** Hotel Reina Isabel
- **Meals included:** Breakfast*

Day 3: Acclimatization Hike Cerro Pasochoa (4,199m/13,776 ft)

The Pasochoa Wildlife Refuge has been protected since 1982, and exists as it did in pre-Columbian times. In the forest below Cerro Pasochoa, we will hike among stands of pumamaqui, polyapis, podocarpus, and sandalwood trees as we watch for some of the more than one hundred species of native birds.

- **Accommodations:** Hotel Reina Isabel
- **Meals Included:** Breakfast, Lunch*



Shadows passing over the Cerro Pasochoa ridge with views of Cotopaxi.

Day 4: Acclimatize Hike Rucu Pichincha (4,697m/15,413 ft)

We head to the East of Quito to the Pichincha Massif for our final acclimatization hike on Rucu Pichincha. This hike involves first taking a cable car ride above the city, then hiking on trail through rolling hills with a few rock scrambles for good measure. The summit provides views of the central valley from high above Quito. In the afternoon, we travel to one of the oldest haciendas in Ecuador, Hacienda Guachala (built in 1580) for the night. The hacienda is a beautiful property, maintaining its rustic charm, and was used by Edward Whymper before his first ascent of Cayambe in 1880.

- **Accommodations:** Hacienda Guachala
- **Meals Included:** Breakfast, Lunch*

Day 5: Travel to Cayambe Refuge

We make our way through the small village of Cayambe to have a close look at the simple rural architecture, which typifies villages in the Andean foothills. The road changes as we gain more elevation becoming more and more rigorous. Depending on road conditions, we may hike the last section of road and allow the jeeps to go on ahead with our equipment. When we reach the famous Cayambe Refuge, we will be treated with breathtaking views of the precipitous Glaciar Hermoso, the “beautiful glacier”. In the afternoon, we will take a short hike above camp as far as the entrance to the upper glacier. This trip may take up to two hours in total. In the evening, if the skies are clear, we will enjoy the alpenglow at sunset showing our route up the south and western flanks of Cayambe.

- **Accommodations:** Ruales Berg Orleas Hut
- **Meals Included:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 6: Skills Practice on Cayambe / Glaciar Hermoso

Much of this day will be spent discussing and practicing alpine climbing skills to prepare for our summit attempt on Cayambe. The glacier above the hut provides an excellent classroom for learning and reviewing basic glacier travel skills, ice axe and crampon technique, and self arrest. After spending the day on the ice, we return to the comfort of the refuge and discuss our plan for summit day.

- **Accommodations:** Ruales Berg Orleas hut
- **Meals Included:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 7: Cayambe Summit Attempt (5,790m/18,996 ft)

We start our climb in the middle of the night, making use of the firm snow conditions caused by the cooler night time temperatures. The route takes us up varied terrain on rock until we reach the glacier; we then configure our teams for glacier travel. The snow and ice climbing on Cayambe is moderate, and the steepness tops out at a comfortable 35 degrees. Our first major landmark is the Picos Jarrin

(5,300m/17,390 ft), a big rock outcrop where we have a good opportunity for a break. Above this point the route becomes a bit steeper and more exposed to weather. As we near the summit, the final obstacle presents itself as a steep face passable through good route finding. We usually need to traverse around seracs and crevasses in order to gain the summit. The traverse creates an exciting finish to one of the great classics of equatorial climbs. Descend and spend the night at Hacienda Guachala.

- **Accommodations:** Hacienda Guachala

- **Meals Included:** Breakfast, Lunch*

Day 8: Travel to Cotopaxi Region (Recovery Day)

We leave Cayambe and travel to one of the excellent haciendas or lodges located on the north side of the Cotopaxi National Park (most commonly we stay at Tambopaxi). We review the workings of our team on our climb of Cayambe and discuss the coming ascent of Cotopaxi. This will be a well-earned day of rest, but you'll also enjoy stretching your legs on a walk and enjoying the great views.

- **Accommodations:** Tambopaxi Cotopaxi Lodge

- **Meals Included:** Breakfast*

Day 9: Travel to Cotopaxi National Park and José Ribas Hut

Today we drive down the "Valley of Volcanoes" and turn east to Cotopaxi, eventually finding ourselves on a small altiplano beneath Cotopaxi National Park's towering summits: Ruminahui (4,755m/15,602 ft), Sincholagua (4,986m/16,360 ft), and Quilindana (4,917m/16,134 ft). We are fairly likely to get good sightings of wild horses, llamas, and condors while driving up to 4,602m/15,100ft. From there, a forty-five minute climb with full packs takes us to the José Ribas Hut on Cotopaxi's flank at 4,794m/15,729ft.

- **Accommodations:** José Ribas Hut

- **Meals Included:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



Looking into the Cotopaxi crater.

Day 10: Climb Cotopaxi (5,897m/19,347 ft) - End of Part 1

On summit day we will leave the hut well before dawn in order to have firm snow conditions. We first climb non-glaciated slopes and then ascend a series of uniform snow and ice ramps of 30 and 35 degrees to reach a glacial platform at 5,181m/17,000ft. As dawn arrives, we enjoy views of the massive glacial slopes of 5,758m/18,714 foot Antisana, which rises to our north. We belay across occasional snow bridges, skirt large crevasses, and ascend moderate terrain towards the huge summit cone. We reach the base of the 400-foot rock wall Yanasacha (which means "black wild place" in Quechua), and to its side encounter a gaping bergschrund at the base of the final glacial slopes that we must climb to reach the summit. We move onto a steeper ice face, up to about 55 degrees. From there we belay up

some of the most enjoyable snow and ice climbing pitches in Ecuador. The gradient eases off as we reach the crater rim and continue along easier slopes to Ecuador's second highest summit. From the top we enjoy views of nine major equatorial peaks, the seemingly limitless Amazon Basin to our east, and Cotopaxi's spectacular 1000-foot deep summit crater directly below us. We drive back down to our hacienda in the central valley where we enjoy a celebratory meal together.

Those continuing with Part 2 will spend the night at a local lodge (exact location depends on availability).

- **Accommodations:** Local lodge near Cotopaxi National Park
- **Meals Included:** Breakfast, Lunch*

Part Two (optional): Chimborazo Ascent

Day 11: Travel to the flank of Chimborazo

We drive south, down the "Valley of Volcanoes" along the Pan-american Highway through the towns of Latacunga and Ambato. We will stop along the way for lunch. In the afternoon we move up onto the eastern flanks of Chimborazo where we spend an evening in a lodge at 3,499m/11,480 feet. It sits picturesquely in grassy plains below Chimborazo and allows us to rest and enjoy views of the Ecuadorian Altiplano surrounding Chimborazo and Carihuairazo (also known as "Chimborazo's Wife").

- **Accommodations:** Urbina Mountain Lodge
- **Meals Included:** Breakfast*

Day 12: Travel to Chimborazo Basecamp

From the lodge on the eastern side of Chimborazo we drive to the western side of the volcano passing through the town of Riobamba. Chimborazo Province is very hilly and is populated by a very high percentage of indigenous people. Great views of the Chimborazo massif, the surrounding rolling terrain and wild vicuñas and llamas will be had during our drive. Around noon we will reach the Carrel hut (4,800m/15,700 ft) for lunch. The afternoon will be used to complete a two hour hike to the Stübel Camp. Climbers carry their own personal gear to camp while porters carry water, tents, and food. In preparation for our alpine start, around midnight we will have an early dinner. Despite the building excitement for the next day's summit climb we will go to bed early, with anticipation for a safe and rewarding climb in the morning. If conditions on the mountain are different and a direct route is more favorable, the team may stay in the Whympfer or Carrel huts and make the summit attempt from there.

- **Accommodations:** Stübel Camp
- **Meals Included:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 13: Chimborazo Summit (6,310m/20,703 ft)

From Stübel Camp, we follow the Stübel Glacier until it joins the Castle Saddle (5,499m/18,044 ft). It takes an average of eight hours to get to the Whympfer summit from Stübel Camp. By the time we reach the 18,500 foot level (5,640m), we will have surmounted most of the technical challenges on the mountain, and on the remainder of our route we will ascend compact and moderately angled snow. The summit crater area is a vast one that is normally covered in its entirety either in soft snow or nieve penitentes. Although this is our longest day, we will be well acclimatized from the conditioning we have achieved on our previous climbs. Round trip we will spend 10 to 12 hours on route, which includes some ice ramps, snow bridges, and sections of icefall. It is a very interesting route on an impressively large mountain. We will descend to the Carrel Hut and then continue in our vehicle to the lower altitude and oxygenrich town of Baños at the edge of the Amazon Basin.

- **Accommodations:** Hotel in Baños (or camp/ hut depending on how the climb goes)
- **Meals Included:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 14: Chimborazo Summit Attempt Contingency day

Should Day 13 be needed to wait out inclement weather, we will make our summit climb on this day. If we climb on Day 14, we will hike out after our ascent and drive to Baños where we will spend the night in a hotel. Once in the semitropical town of Baños we will rest, relax, enjoy good food, and some time in the hot springs.

- **Accommodations:** Hotel in Baños
- **Meals Included:** Breakfast, Lunch*

Day 15: Return to Quito – End of Part 2

We will have an easy morning in Baños and return to Quito in the afternoon. The last evening is usually spent recounting, celebrating our successes, and discussing plans for future adventures.

- **Accommodations:** Hotel Reina Isabel
- **Meals Included:** Breakfast*

***Note**

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