



American  
Alpine Institute

*The Spirit of Alpinism*

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## El Altar Expedition

Quito, Ecuador

### PROGRAM ITINERARY

#### **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.

#### **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.

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

The Pasocha Wildlife Refuge has been protected since 1982, and exists as it did in pre-Columbian times. In the forest below Cerro Pasocha, 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.

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

We head 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 Guachalá (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.

#### **Day 5: Illiniza Hut**

We enjoy our last breakfast at the hotel and drive from Quito to the Illiniza trailhead and hike into Illiniza Hut. The hut is beautifully situated at 15,250ft below the col between Illiniza Sur and Norte. To reach



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the hut we hike through grassy plains following braided streams into the sub alpine environment. We will spend the night in the hut.

#### **Day 6: Climb Illiniza Norte (16,817 ft)**

The climb of Illiniza Norte is mostly a 3rd and 4th class scramble and an extremely aesthetic climb on high quality rock. Our route begins sharply from the hut and gains a narrow ridge requiring roped belays, we then drop behind the ridge into a gully system of solid 4th class rock eventually opening up onto the jagged summit ridge where we enjoy excellent views of, Cotopaxi (19,347 ft) and Antisana (18,891 ft) and our next objective: Illiniza Sur. Night in Illiniza Hut.

#### **Day 7: Climb Illiniza Sur (17,267 ft)**

The glaciers of Illiniza Sur have changed dramatically over the last half-century. The normal route varies from year to year and often times involves steep snow and ice up to 60 degrees. This is truly an all day climb and we will take full advantage of an alpine start (pre-dawn) to ensure our success on this technically demanding and rewarding summit. We will return from our climb to our final night in the Illiniza Hut.

#### **Day 8: Hike out, stay in Hacienda**

We will hike out and spend the day enjoying well-earned rest at the Hacienda just west of El Altar. Rest days in Ecuador are an unexpected highlight for many. Today you'll have a chance to enjoy local food for a fraction of what you would expect to pay in North America and enjoy interacting with the extremely friendly local Ecuadorians. Night at hacienda.

#### **Day 9: Drive to Riobamba, then to Quimag**

A bumpy day of travel lands us in Quimag, our departure point for El Altar. Here we will confirm our arrangements with the campesinos (people of the country) regarding our pack mules which will assist us with transporting our gear to base camp. Night in Quimag Hacienda.

#### **Day 10: Hike into Campamento Italiano**

Our mules will carry the bulk of our gear as close to the Italian Base camp (15,090 ft) as possible and we will backpack in the remaining distance. Italian Camp is situated southwest of Obispo (17,451ft), the highest and southernmost peak of "The Altar". From camp we have excellent views of the approaches and upper reaches of our possible routes including the Italian Route, Calavario Ridge, and Icefall Route. Camp at Italian Camp.

#### **Day 11: Climb El Altar (17,451 ft)**

We will begin our summit day with an alpine start to take advantage of the snow conditions during the cold evening and early morning temperatures. There are several routes to the summit from the Italian camp all of them can involve steep snow and ice travel up to 80 degrees and mid-fifth class rock climbing up to 5.7 in difficulty. This climb is the culminating experience for the program and offers



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excellent technical climbing is further improved by stunning views of Sangay (17,160 ft) from our belays. Expect the summit day on el Altar to be at least 10 hours. Camp at the Italian Camp.

**Day 12 - 14: Extra day for weather, rest, or hiking out**

This day is a cushion day figured into our itinerary. We will take advantage of this additional day to “wait out” inclement weather on any of our summit days with the intention of climbing the following day (if and when the conditions improve). If all of the climbs go according to schedule we may chose use this day for resting at the Italian camp, exploring additional parts of the southern end of El Altar, or hiking out to Quimag. Camp at Italian Camp or Quimag.

**Day 15: Return to Quito**

Our final day in Ecuador. We travel back to Quito and prepare for flights home the following day. This will be our last evening in Ecuador also, it is usually spent recounting and celebrating our successes amongst making plans for future adventures. Last night at hotel before flying home.

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**\*Note**

**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.