

Riding

Latin America

Visiting a country in South America, Central America, or Mexico will give you an authentic cultural and equestrian experience.

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY SHAWN HAMILTON

When choosing a country to visit for an international riding vacation, the opportunity to practice the Spanish language with locals has weighed big in my decisions. The food, the people, and the respect and care for the horse that the Latin American culture encompasses can also help tip the scales.

Here are a few of my personal favorite rides in Spanish-speaking Latin American countries.



Experiencing Cuba is a truly unique experience. Note that the visa process for U.S. residents is complex, with travel only permitted for certain reasons.

CHILE TO ARGENTINA: CROSSING THE ANDES

This is definitely one of my most adventurous and scenic rides. Beginning in the small Chilean town of Los Andes, we ventured high into the Andes Mountains, following the historical path of San Martin who freed the people of Chile in 1817.

Climbing to 14,500 feet, the mountains change their shape and color around every corner. Cooking dinners over the fire and waking up to different scenery each morning as the camp is moved are highlights of the trip. The mules do the bulk of the work, carrying the tents, tables, chairs, all the food, and the delicious Argentinian Malbec wine.

To prevent the passing of equine disease, the Chilean horses are untacked and all the gear is carried over the border to the Argentinean horses that complete the 10-day excursion ending in Uspallata in the Mendoza province

of Argentina. This is an adventure for any rider's bucket list.
unicorntrails.com/latinamerica/chile/chiletoargentina-acrosstheandes



CUBA: TABAQUEROS TRAIL

After living in Cuba for just over two years, I thought I had seen the whole country, yet this Tabaqueros Trail ride with Unicorn Trails took me to a small corner of the island in the Pinar Del Rio Province that I had never experienced before.

You'll ride through the tobacco farms among the karst topography of Valle Viñales, climbing the hills around Lake Guabina at the Finca De La Guanine pinto breeding farm, then go deep into the vast forest of the Mil Cumbres and gallop along the beach at Playa Este. Experiencing

the real Cuba is the perk of this experience.
unicorntrails.com/latinamerica/cuba/tabaquerostrail



ECUADOR: AVENUE OF VOLCANOES TRAIL

This Ecuadorean adventure begins in comfort at the incredibly hospitable Hacienda La Alegria, sipping wine in the hot tub while taking in the spectacular views.

The climbing starts on the way to Hacienda Bomboli, riding through a cloud forest of tropical

Crossing the Andes on horseback at heights of 14,000 feet in altitude is a journey you'll never forget.



Visitors ride around the crystal blue waters at Quilotoa Volcano in Ecuador.



plants and an abundance of natural orchids, and continues into small villages of the high Andes where locals travel only by foot, mule or horse.

Local farms cling to the sides of mountains, where crops change depending on the elevation as the horses pick their way to and around the great Quilotoa Volcano, full of crystal blue waters.



This ride took us deep into the heart of Ecuador. unicorntails.com/latinamerica/ecuador/avenueofvolcanoestrail

MEXICO: RANCHO LAS CASCADAS

Rancho Las Cascadas feels like home to me now after visiting so many times over the years. Just over an hour outside of Mexico City, you can watch the sunset while sipping on a margarita in the hot tub, lounge by the infinity pool, have

Plenty of nature and small town excursions make for a well-rounded trip at Rancho Las Cascadas in Mexico.



a relaxing massage, or take in a yoga class in their beautiful new studio by the waterfall.

The riding is perfect for any level of equestrian, and it's a great place to test your riding vacation skills as the hours in the saddle are completely up to you. Avid riders can venture out for full-day rides, taking in long gallops, lunch at a local restaurant in a small Mexican village, and picnicking beside a river. Others can choose shorter rides that return to the ranch and enjoy lunch in the sunroom by the pool.

Excursions to small towns for shopping, a local market, and a UNESCO World Heritage Site



are all easy day trips that make for a memorable all-around vacation in Mexico. rancholascascadas.com

MEXICO: ROUTE OF THE SIERRAS

We had the honor of being the first public guests of this private family ranch in the San Miguel Tecpan region of Mexico that has now opened its doors to riding vacation enthusiasts.

The incredibly trained horses respond quickly to the faintest of aids and take riders high into the forested mountains to enjoy incredible views of the valleys below. The diverse scenery of plateau lakes, vast vistas, and wide-open trails led us to riverside picnic lunches before returning back to the ranch for gourmet home-cooked meals and singing around the campfire under the stars. The hospitality that we were given made us feel like part of their community,



and I know that I will return many more times. unicorntails.com/latinamerica/mexico/routeofthesierras

PANAMA: SANTA FE JUNGLE RIDE

What an experience this ride was! Galloping up mountains on sure-footed horses, swimming in the river with them, riding to a waterfall to cool off, and crossing a suspended bridge high above a river were just a few of the amazing highlights.

A sunset barbecue beside the river, eating at a local organic farm, and experiencing the small village of Santa Fe gave us the true feeling of what it means to live there. The ride is what dreams are made of—the views, the jungle, the



horses, the river, and the hospitality were all five-star. unicorntails.com/latinamerica/Panama/tropicaljunglentrail

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