

Hacienda Manteles

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It seems that no matter how amazing, some destinations simply get overlooked more than others. Ecuador is perhaps more diverse than any country on the continent with its four regions (Galapagos Islands, Coast, Sierra, Amazon jungle), colonial heritage, and incredible gastronomy, but it is often passed over by travelers to nearby Peru, Colombia, or even Brazil.

And within Ecuador itself, certain locations seem to get less attention than others, like Llangantes National Park. Of the more than 40 protected areas in Ecuador (counting national parks and ecological reserves), Llangantes never receives its due.

Looking at the map Llangantes is almost the exact center of Ecuador, surrounded by Antisana Ecological Reserve to the north, Sangay National Park to the south, and Cotopaxi National Park and Chimborazo Wildlife Reserve to the northwest and southwest, respectively. And to the East is all that defines Ecuador as a tropical destination: the Amazon Basin.

So from Llangantes Park it seems that travelers really have nowhere to go except, well, everywhere.



And the place from which one can best explore Llangantes (and virtually everything else in mainland Ecuador) is Hacienda Manteles, tucked away, but certainly not hidden from the thousands of travelers who have made their way to this secluded hacienda.



"We have a strategic location for getting to know the Andes and the Amazon," says Maria Clara Duran, Commercial Manager, for the hacienda. "Llangantes is one of the least explored [national parks] because of its geography and vegetation." Manteles protects hundreds of acres of primary cloud forest and Páramos which border the park. This private reserve provides a "buffering" area to the park.

parks, and a chance to see everything from spectacled bears to exotic birds (more than 250 documented species in the park).

Llangantes park is one of the greatest natural attractions in Ecuador, with a smaller human footprint than other more frequented

Hacienda Manteles, a hideaway, tucked into the mountainside, is named for the once, waving meadows which gave the distant landscape the appearance of large tablecloths, or "manteles." The hacienda sits merely 8km from Patate, a mountain village, high above the Patate River, nestled in one of the innumerable mountain ridges of the Andean Cordilleras. The main drag of Patate is a version of small town (South) America and takes all of two minutes for a round-trip cruise through the main street.

Nearby is Baños, a town to be enjoyed by day (it is considered the adventure tourism capital of the region) offering every imaginable adventure sport and even more incredible natural beauty.

In the evening there is no better retreat than the warm confines of a multi-generational, family hacienda, which is all the warmer with their great meals and huge hearth - a front row seat to perhaps the greatest night time show in the southern hemisphere.

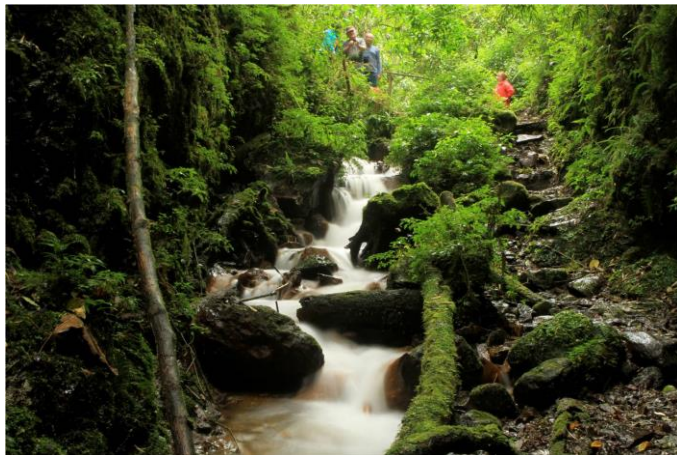
The Tungurahua Show

The most spectacular sight at Manteles is not the birdlife, or even the spectacle bears that inhabit the property. Manteles, unlike so many other haciendas in the region, has the perfect location from which to view the sporadic and unpredictable eruptions of Tungurahua Volcano.

With Manteles located one hour away, and upwind from the volcano, visitors are at a safe distance from spewing rocks, ash, and lava.

Unfortunately the Tungurahua show is not one that can be turned on and off. So if you are one of the visitors who misses out, then simply take advantage of the daytime views.

Take a trek from the hacienda house up the western ridge, or ask Cesar Duran, Hacienda owner, to drive you. What you will find is a view that is hard to replicate anywhere else. Looking south you will see Tungurahua and immediately to the east is Chimborazo, Ecuador's highest peak, at 6,310 meters.



Though seemingly only a stone's throw away on a clear day, Chimborazo is the highest elevation near the Equator making it the closest point on Earth to the sun. And next door to Chimborazo is Carihuairazo, a snow covered peak reaching more than 5,000 meters. On a clear day it is both breath-taking and humbling. Duran is proud of the view and calls it the top of the world even though the surrounding peaks tower 2000 meters above Manteles.

Exploring Manteles

Hacienda Manteles is home base for nature lovers and adventure seekers. Visitors to Manteles enjoy all of the following: mountain biking, hiking, horse riding, bird watching, canyoning/repelling, zip-line canopies, rafting, canoeing, and camping.



If you want an easier pace, though, that still leaves you with a memorable impression, then try cultivating your own dinner. After taking an enjoyable 20 minute walk around the fields of Manteles, picking some of their homegrown products, you can use them to prepare your own meal back at the hacienda kitchen.

And whether you spent the day hiking or climbing, a massage or facial treatment will leave you refreshed and ready to set out the next day, for either more adventure or more relaxation.