

Visit to local communities and sites of interest

### **Iruguincho**

Iruguincho is a small, rural town near the Cotacachi - Cayapas Reserve. People there work and subsist on basic agriculture. Recently, the community became involved in tourism, providing its visitors with local guides and horses. From here, you can coordinate a day hike to one of the best preserved pre-Colombian temples in the area (3 hours), called "Churo" (Quichua name for snake or sea shell), due to the temple's shape that has the figure of a shell. This sanctuary was the site of worship of the Cayambe volcano.

The community offers short walks into the cloud forest, during which you'll visit a beautiful waterfall and, if you wish, immerse yourself in the Timbuyacu hot springs (owned by the community, very simple but a unique experience). Ask for Galo Vargas in the village; he can get horses for long trips and could be a good local guide for the Cotacachi - Cayapas Reserve (Spanish only).

Currently there is no accommodation available in Iruguincho, but the community is planning to offer home-stay accommodation in the near future. In the meantime, you can camp near the town or stay in Tumbabiro (see Tumbabiro section).

### **Cahuasqui**

Cahuasqui is a beautiful little town. People here depend on agriculture as their livelihood and still use ancient methods, which have remained intact for centuries.

There are about 20 funerary and ceremonial tombs spread out around the Cahuasqui plateau. This was a strategic stronghold of the Caranqui culture, from 500-1500 AD. C.

In Cahuasqui, you can still observe agricultural terraces where cotton and corn grow. The people of the town continue to grow corn and other vegetables, following their grandparents' ancestral traditions.

This town has a giant ceremonial pyramid that has been partially destroyed due to use of these lands for planting and agriculture. However, this site is still worth visiting.

In Cahuasqui's small park, there is still evidence of the only Caranqui calendar that exists in Ecuador, carved in a huge stone. To protect this archaeological piece, the local people mounted this calendar on a cement base, so half of it is buried but the main facade can be seen.

There is a small private archaeological museum in the central square (in the park), near the church. Ask for Pablo Montalvo, a young enthusiast and collector of archaeological pieces. He would be very happy to show you his museum for free, but will also be happy to receive a small tip (Spanish only). He could also be helpful as a guide to the tolas (mounds) and pyramids in the area.

## **Tumbabiro**

Tumbabiro is a small town, located 40 minutes northwest of Ibarra. Most of the people who live in this area still cultivate according to traditional methods. Many of the buildings around the main square are ancient, built with adobe, mud bricks and wood. There are also a number of important adobe walls in the surrounding area.

There are several paths and roads around the area, many of them free of traffic. There is an abundance of wildflowers and birds in the area; as well as traditional farming practices that you'll likely see in action!

The central square offers a quiet atmosphere and, on the weekends, you can observe the men of the village playing a traditional game called "Pelota en mano" on the weekends. You can also take buses to Urquí and Cahuasqui and Ibarra from here.

Only 4km north of Tumbabiro, near the village of Ajumbuela, there is a Caranqui pyramid. It is covered by vegetation, but you'll also find ceramic fragments in excellent condition, dating from 500 - 1500 A. C. More information in English, German and Spanish can be found at Hostería Pantaví, as well as the option to hire guides.

## **Chota Valley**

Located 34 km north of the Province of Imbabura is the Chota Valley, home to the Afro-Ecuadorian community. These people originally came to Ecuador as slaves and many are now engaged in agriculture and sugarcane production.

The community still maintains an authentic culture expressed through music and dance. The rhythm of "la bomba" is a typical dance and a mix between African and indigenous cultures. It involves a dance where women move their waist while holding a bottle on their head and

wearing colorful skirts, while men dress in white. The music is rhythmic, following the percussion of drums.

The village welcomes tourists by providing them with the basics, including accommodation for \$8 per night which includes breakfast. Handicrafts, clay masks, candlesticks and other objects are sold to the public.

### **Salinas Valley**

Only 30 km north of Ibarra is Salinas, a small town that received its name thanks to the high concentration of mineral salts in the area. Until only recently, people would extract mineral salt according to traditional methods. You can visit a salt mine and see just how they do it. Ask in the village for details.

The valley is dedicated to the cultivation of sugarcane and was once an important market and meeting point for the indigenous people. Located to the north of Ecuador, this valley is the easiest route to the coast (crossing the Andes) and to the south, towards the Amazon. For this reason, historically, it has been considered a strategic point.