



El Paseo Del Chagra

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## El Paseo Del Chagra

The Chagra are known as the Spirit of the Highlands and can be described as Ecuador's cowboys. It is not just a title, but a way of life. Chagras are famous for their exceptional horseman skills and their unwavering dedication to their horses. They are dependent on their horses to take care of their cattle, which they farm in the Andean landscape. This close relationship between the Chagra and their horses makes everyday life for the farmers possible. They also play a vital role in one of Ecuador's biggest festivals of the year, namely El Paseo Del Chagra



Chagras also farm a variety of other livestock, such as chickens and guinea pigs. Their families, their wives and children, cultivate their small crop land, which is limited in variety due to the extreme altitudes in which they live. Rodeos and cattle runs are a part of their lives, and Chagras are easily distinguished by their traditional riding gear. They ride in chaps (known to locals as zamarro), a scarf, hat, poncho and boots. Their horses are equipped with comfortable western saddles that feature saddle padding and a rope that is called a beta that is used by the Chagra as a lasso.



Each year hundreds of Chagra, dressed in traditional riding attire, come down from the mountains and surrounding areas to participate in the El Paseo Del Chagra, which is held in the month of July in the town of Machachi, just outside of Quito. The festival forms part of the agricultural festivities of the city, and has its roots in the year 1877. This is the year that the Cotopaxi volcano erupted for the last time and the locals begged the pastor to relocate the Lord of the Santa School. Other big eruptions followed many years later, but nothing that could be classified as historic. The move of the school led to a mass and procession of horsemen, which became the Chagra Processional Walk, and the Paseo Del Chagra.

Hundreds of horsemen therefore take part in this event, riding their best horses through the streets of Machachi. The festival is accompanied by traditional foods, such as potato dishes, pork meals and locally grown corn. It is most definitely a festival that all horse enthusiasts will enjoy and a great way to experience the culture of Ecuador.