

## Cristo Rey Mountain Pilgrimage

Weight limit: 110kg

Nearest airport: Leon, Mexico

9 days / 8 nights / 6 days riding



Discover the annual Mexican Cristo Rey pilgrimage on horseback. Since 1956, each year in January, devout Mexican Catholics have followed the hoofprints of martyrs through the desert to the foot of a 23-metre statue of Cristo Rey. Started in 1956, the horseback pilgrimage takes place every year in the month of January as a sign of faith and devotion. Almost 4000 Mexican riders will come from all over Mexico. During the ride, you will join local riders and form a procession to the mount of Cristo Rey. You will share with them their traditions, their gastronomy, their music and their beliefs, all on horseback through the rural roads, mountains and villages.

## Level of riding and fitness

You'll need to be a confident rider secure in walk, trot and canter, and with a reasonable level of fitness to enable you to spend most of the day in the saddle. There are some narrow, steep paths to navigate so you should be comfortable with this. The minimum age for this ride is 14 years old, riders aged 14-18 must be accompanied by an adult and a signed letter of consent from the parent/guardian needs to be provided before they can take part in the ride.

## Guides & Groups sizes

You'll be guided by Angel, a highly experienced tour operator and guide who has created this trail with a focus on creating authentic, equestrian and cultural experiences. Angel has built a network of friends and contacts across the trail route so you will receive a warm welcome when passing through the remote villages and hamlets dotted along the trail.

The group size is 4-12.



## Horses & Tack

You'll be riding Quarter horses or Mexican Criollo horses. All the horses at this destination are fit, responsive and willing, ranging from 15hh - 16.2hh. The horses are extremely fit and are able to cover the long distances with ease. You can tack up your horse each day if you like or this can be done for you by one of the guides. The tack used on the trail is either Mexican or Western although 2 English saddles can be used if requested.

## Accommodation and Dining

Each night except 1 is spent in comfortable and authentic local haciendas and hotels along the trail route. For one of the nights on the pilgrimage, you will stay in "glamping" tents with all facilities available for you. Rooms and tents are available on a sharing basis. Single rooms may be available on request and at an extra cost, but cannot be guaranteed.

Meals are based on regional Mexican food and include: beef, pork, chicken, eggs, fruit, vegetables, cereals, rice, milk, coffee, natural fruit juices and purified bottled water. During the trail most of the food is prepared by the rural communities you visit, and in many cases traditional, prehispanic, ancestral recipes are used so the flavours and textures are unique and can be very different from what many may think of as classic Mexican food. Lunch is eaten at picturesque spots on the trail and set up with tables, chairs and a canopy. The food could be a tasty hot stew, peppers stuffed with cheese and quesadillas alongside a generous helping of beer and wine. Dinners are generally taken either in local restaurants or at the hotels where you stay overnight.

## Itinerary

### **Day 1 - Monday 3rd January**

The meeting point will be at 12:30 hours in the city of León Guanajuato, in the lobby of the Hotsson hotel. From there you will be taken to a local saddlery shop which sells traditional clothing in case you wish to dress up for the pilgrimage. After browsing you are transferred c. 2 hours to a former Jesuit Hacienda located between the mountainous area of Sierra de Lobos. This comprises 2650 hectares of beautiful landscape with more than three million native oak trees of the region. Some are over 500 years old. Here you will enjoy a rich welcome dinner and a comfortable bed for the night

## **Day 2 - Tuesday 4th January**

After a delicious breakfast at the Hacienda, you will be transferred to the community of El Salto del Ahogado where your horses are waiting for you. You will join a group of riders from El Torreón and together you all depart in the direction of Nuevo Valle de Moreno. This day you will ride for 8 hours through ancient roads in the mountainous area of Santa Barbara, accompanied by a contingent of Mexican riders until you reach the community of Nuevo Valle de Moreno where you will stay overnight. You'll have dinner with a local family who will open their doors to you, and spend the night camping.



## **Day 3 - Wednesday 5th January**

After a quick and early breakfast (c. 5am) you will be on horseback by 6am to head out together with the glinting spurs and accoutrements of hundreds of Mexican riders. You will watch the sky turn pink as the sun rises and then you'll be amazed by the numbers of riders heading in the same direction, moved by their faith. On reaching Tuna Mansa on the slopes of Cubilete mountain (considered the geographical centre of Mexico) you'll stop for lunch, prepared by your support team.

In the afternoon you can marvel at the strength of your horses as they ascend 657m over 7.6km to reach the summit of Cubilete where the monument to Cristo Rey is located. Here you will

gather amongst a melee of horsemen and horses who have travelled from different parts of Mexico to reach this spot. You will witness the hospitality of Mexicans and receive invitations to different campsites to enjoy food and drinks. Later you are transferred to your comfortable accommodation - the Parador Sangre de Cristo or similar (shared rooms but split for males/females).

#### **Day 4 - Thursday 6th January**

After a delicious breakfast at the Parador, you will attend the celebration of Holy Mass on horseback with the presence of the Archbishop and with more than 2,500 horses and riders. Today you will spend much of the day enjoying the traditions and sharing the culture with the riders from different parts of Mexico, as well as from different countries. Lunch will be the typical food of the region served by a recognised traditional cook from the Sangre de Cristo area.

After lunch you are transferred to Hacienda Jesus Maria, a charming hotel located in a historic place and part of a sustainable tourist complex of the Sangre de Cristo community along with Caminos D'vinos vineyards.

#### **Day 5 - Friday 7th January**

After breakfast in the hacienda and having concluded the pilgrimage together with local riders, you will continue your adventure.

The journey on horseback takes you through what is known as the "The Mystery Villages". It is about three old communities where you will see the history of firstly, the Chichimeca indigenous people, secondly the Cristero region (the old Cristero War) that has inspired Hollywood and lastly silver mining. The communities are Sangre de Cristo, Mineral de la Luz and San Ignacio. These three communities are the oldest in the state of Guanajuato and are of great historical and cultural value. This was one of the most prosperous mining enclaves in the region. Even in the 19th century, the inhabitants of the area were in the thousands and had, for example, their own bullring, tobacco factory and profitable farms. At the end the 19th century, the three villages became ghost towns. In 1929 this territory was reincorporated into the municipality of Guanajuato and today has about only 300 inhabitants. Accommodation is at Hacienda Jesus Maria or similar.

#### **Day 6 - Saturday 8th January**

After a delicious breakfast in the hotel, you will continue to ride your horses in the direction of "El Varal", a nature reserve that is located in the north of the state of Guanajuato. It adjoins the rural communities of Joya de Lobos, Santa Rosa, La Concepción and Los Mexicanos. The Encino

Forest has many native species including the Madroño and Pinguica. It is also a natural habitat for mammals such as the white-tailed deer, wildcat, cacomixtle (ring-tailed cat), skunk and long-nosed bat. There are also over 170 species of birds including Coopers's hawk, the peregrine falcon and the horned owl. Today's journey takes you to the valley of the blue birds, where you will set up camp and enjoy the night camping in this magnificent setting. It is a true natural paradise where you will have the opportunity to enjoy a safari style camp and where you can enjoy a night of ranchera barbecue, campfire and guitars. Accommodation is camping.

### **Day 7 - Sunday 9th January**

After breakfast in the camp accompanied by the singing of birds and the spectacular view of the magnificent natural setting, you will continue on your last day on horseback to the rural community of Santa Rosa. You will ride beside the spring's ancient path which borders a mountainous area and passes through a cavern that houses a spring of crystalline water which filters through the Peregrina mountains. You will continue ascending and descending through natural landscapes of the forest, which is home to hundreds of animal species, such as the puma, the coyote, raccoons, armadillo and many others. You will eventually reach Santa Rosa where your adventure on horseback ends. Accommodation tonight is at Ranch la Mesa.

### **Day 8 - Monday 10th January**

After breakfast at the ranch you will be transferred to the city of Guanajuato for a walking tour to discover the unique city. The first known inhabitants were the prehispanic indigenous Otomi, later displaced by the Chichimeca and then then Purepecha. The oldest known name for the area is Moo-o-ti which means 'place of metals'. Later it was called Paxtitlan by the Aztecs, meaning 'place of straw'. The current name of Guanajuato comes from the Purepecha "Quanax huato" which means 'hilly place of frogs'.

Mining has been conducted in this area long before the Spanish arrived and the Aztecs had a presence here specifically to look for metals to make ornamental objects. Some stories from this time state that the area was so rich in minerals that nuggets of gold could be picked up from the ground.

A farewell dinner will be taken at a traditional thematic cantina, where you can enjoy Mariachi music and an authentic Mexican party. Accommodation is at the Posada Guanajuato or similar.

### **Day 9 - Tuesday 11th January**

Enjoy your last breakfast at the hotel before departure.

## Flights & Airport transfers

Do not book flights until you have received the Booking confirmation email from [saddletravel.com](http://saddletravel.com).

We strongly recommend arriving in Mexico 24 hours prior to the start of the ride to allow for any flight delays. Meet your hosts at the meeting point (Guanajuato city) at 12:30 in the lobby of the Hotsson hotel on Day 1 of the trail. Please arrange departure flights for after 2pm on the last day of the trail.

### Airport Transfers

Transfers from Leon Airport to Guanajuato city are approximately \$30 each way per group.



## What to bring

We recommend wearing your riding boots when travelling and carrying one set of riding clothing and your helmet in your hand luggage, so should your luggage not make it to the destination you'll still be able to ride. You will be provided with the following items: saddlebags, picnic mat, water bottle and bandana.

Please use the packing list as a guideline, bearing in mind the time of year you are riding.

- Riding hat/sunhat or cap
- Sunglasses
- Sun block
- Comfortable riding boots
- Comfortable shoes for after riding
- Light summer shirts
- Long-sleeved shirt
- Jodhpurs/leggings/trousers comfortable to ride in
- Waterproof jacket in case of rain
- Light jacket for warm weather
- Sweater
- Leggings or chaps
- Gloves
- Canteen
- Camera

## Climate

January to March is cooler than the rest of the year with temperatures between 17 to 23°C during the day. April to June is drier and hot (between 25 to 40°C) and from June to September expect more humidity and a temperate climate between 17 to 25°C. July to September is when rain is most likely, usually in the evenings. October to December is considered winter, rain is unlikely and temperatures are between 17 to 23°C.

## Health

For health and vaccine recommendations, please consult your healthcare provider at least 8 weeks before your trip.

Country specific information can also be found at the National Travel Health Network and Centre website: <https://travelhealthpro.org.uk/countries>.

## Travel documents

For entry requirements to Mexico for UK citizens, please visit the Foreign Travel Advice website:

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/mexico/entry-requirements>

For any other nationalities, please contact your local embassy to check entry requirements.

Having the correct travel documents is entirely your responsibility.

## Currency & Tipping

The currency of Mexico is the Mexican Peso although US dollars are widely accepted along with credit and debit cards. You can exchange money in banks or in casas de cambio in towns and cities. The dollar sign is used to refer to pesos in Mexico; prices in US dollars are usually marked US\$ or USD.

We recommend tipping about US\$5-10/day but this is not at all compulsory. Tips are best given to your host who will arrange distribution amongst all the staff. During the rest of your stay in Mexico tipping is the norm, except in taxis.

## Riding Declaration

“I am confident and in control at trot and canter out in the open and over uneven ground. I’m able to mount and dismount unaided and have a good level of current riding fitness. I do not suffer from any illness or disability that could prejudice my safety or that of others.”

## Cancellation policy

Payment & Cancellation Terms [saddletravel.com](http://saddletravel.com)

Holidays are confirmed with a 20% non-refundable deposit. The full balance is due 56 days before the start date.

If you cancel your booking less than 56 days before the start date of your trail we are entitled to receive full payment, less refunds as follows:

42 days or more before booking date - 50%

30 days or more - 30%

less than 30 days - nil

***Book with confidence – Covid Guarantee:***

*If the ride operator is closed or you are unable to travel due to lockdown:*

*1/ The deposit is reissued as a rebooking voucher to rebook anytime.*

*2/ Any balance payment will be refunded to you in full within 1 week of departure date.*

## Insurance

All saddletravel.com customers are required to take out appropriate travel insurance that covers horse riding and holiday cancellation. Proof of insurance details will be required during the booking process.



## Contact details

+44 1497 888 228 WhatsApp  
[trails@saddletravel.com](mailto:trails@saddletravel.com)

saddletravel.com  
The Coach House  
Clyro Court  
Clyro  
Hereford  
HR3 5LE  
Wales

CN: 05411320

<https://saddletravel.com>