



## ECUADOR HIGHLIGHTS

Ecuador is a land of exceptional geographic and biological diversity, no more clearly displayed with its amazing Galapagos Islands.

The Ecuadorian Andes are dominated by an avenue of volcanoes, 25 of them active; several of these, including Tungurahua and Sangay, have erupted in recent years. In Cotopaxi, Ecuador boasts the world's highest active volcano, while the summit of Chimborazo, an extinct volcano and Ecuador's highest peak, is the furthest point from the Earth's centre.

With such mountains to play with so close to Quito, it's small wonder that Ecuador is becoming increasingly popular for trekkers and climbers searching for Andean beauty in off-the-beaten track areas.

A must-see for Ecuador and indeed South America is a visit to the Galapagos Archipelago, where Charles Darwin's words may echo through your mind. This wildlife paradise, lying 1,000 km off Ecuador's shores, can be a life-enhancing experience. Nowhere else in the world is the wildlife so obligingly tame, the islands so rugged and the highlights so many.

More wildlife and fantastic culture awaits those that journey to Ecuador's Amazon region, to the East of the Andes, brimming with animals and folklore, which your local guide will be delighted to explain.

The Pacific coast boasts palm-fringed beaches and a warm year-round climate, for those that wish to relax by the sea at the end of an adventure holiday.

Ecuador's climate varies according to season, altitude and region. The best time to visit the Andes is the dry season (June to Sept and Dec to Jan). The Galapagos can be visited at any time; July to September is cooler and drier, with the sea a colder 20°. January to March is hot and humid, with the ocean warmer, and May or November are great months to visit as the currents are changing, bringing lots of marine life to the islands.

## Trekking

Ecuador offers a variety of trekking, from high paramo to cloud and rainforests, and with wet and dry seasons that vary from region to region, good trekking can be found year-round.

Our Heights of Ecuador trip combines a stunning four day acclimatisation trek on Chimborazo (6,310m), Ecuador's highest peak, with ascents of Carihuayrazo, Ilinizas Norte and Cotopaxi (5,897m).

A shorter trek at lower altitude is the hike in Podocarpus National Park, blending Andean highlands with the Amazon basin, allowing the possibility of sighting woolly mountain tapirs, and mountain toucans.



Chimborazo Volcano, Ecuador



Experiencing Andean culture

In contrast, the Abraspungo Trek on Chimborazo means you're likely to sight vicuñas, and get views of the Altar and Tungurahua volcanoes. On the final day's trek, you can ascend the non-technical Carihuayrazo peak (5,018m).

The Altar volcano (5,320 m), in Sangay National Park, is one of Ecuador's most beautiful mountains. Our trek here takes us past multi-coloured glacial lakes, including its bright green, ice-berg filled crater lake. The trek also takes us around Altar's steep crater edge, and gives great panoramas of snow-covered Chimborazo and Sangay.



## Climbing

Ecuador's wide array of snow peaks will appeal to first-time climbers and technical mountaineers alike.

For beginners we offer a mountaineering course on Cotopaxi or Cayambe, which can be followed by the guided ascent of a suitable peak or peaks. We also offer a range of relatively low and non-technical trekking peaks which would suit relative novices or as acclimatization for a higher peak.

For experienced mountaineers, we provide a full logistical service, including fully-qualified guides and back-up team for all of Ecuador's famous climbable mountains.



Sunrise on Cotopaxi

## Acclimatisation/Trekking Peaks

These non-technical peaks are suitable for acclimatization prior to tackling one of Ecuador's big volcanoes. We recommend several days in the highlands and at least two such peaks before doing our mountaineering course or attempting peaks over 5,500m:

Active volcano Guagua Pichincha (4794m), just outside Quito, is readily accessible and offers fabulous views from the crater's rim.

Ruminahui (4634m) is a good acclimatisation warm-up within the Cotopaxi National Park, and offers magnificent views of Cotopaxi.

Imbabura (4630m) overlooks Otavalo - it is a long walk up, with a short scramble near the summit. The summit ridge offers great views of Imbabura's impressive open crater and Lago San Pablo below.

Illinizas Norte (5126m) is an excellent acclimatization peak with a bit of a scramble to the summit and magnificent views. It looks like a large pile of rubble, but is pretty stable.

Carihuayrazo (5100m) is an ideal acclimatisation peak, in conjunction with the Abraspungo trek. There is loose rock and scree to cross above the glacier, then a scramble to the summit.

## Mountaineering - the big volcanoes

Ecuador offers a wealth of challenging peaks.

**Cotopaxi (5,897m)**, Ecuador's 2nd highest peak, is a near-perfect snow-capped conical volcano, situated in Cotopaxi National Park. We drive to just below the refuge (4,800m), from where it's a 6-8 hour ascent to the summit, mostly on steep snow and ice slopes. First climbed in November 1872 by Angel Maria Escobar (Colombia) and Wilhelm Reiss (Germany). Last erupted in 1904.

**Cayambe (5,789m)** is the highest and coldest point on the equator. It is the only place on earth where the latitude is zero degrees and so is the temperature. Long thought to be extinct, Cayambe is now deemed to be active and is closely monitored. We take a 4WD vehicle to the refuge (4650m) and summit from here. A bulky mountain boasting huge glaciers, it is not as steep as Cotopaxi but the ascent takes approximately the same time (6-7 hours).



Illinizas Refuge

**Chimborazo (6,310m)**, Ecuador's highest peak, is an impressive mountain. Measured from the centre of the earth, it is the highest mountain in the world. Chimborazo is the southernmost peak in the Cordillera Occidental chain. It was first climbed in 1880 by Jean Antoine and Louis Carrel (Italy) and Edward Whymper (UK). The best climbing season is late January and early February.



**Antisana (5,758m)** is big, wild, remote and crevasse-covered. Climbing it is serious business, and is as technically difficult as Cayambe. This peak has seen relatively few ascents.

**Illinizas Sur (5,263m)**. This steep, technical peak is summited via a steep route requiring knowledge of self-arrest, glacier travel and crevasse rescue skills. The route is suffering from glacial retreat.



Giant Tortoise, Galapagos

## Galapagos Islands

The Galapagos archipelago comprises over 50 islands of volcanic origin spread over 4,500 square kilometres, some 1,000 km off the coast of Ecuador. A cruise or hotel-based within these islands is an amazing experience for anyone of any age. The islands are a paradise of stunning volcanic landscapes and fearless animals.

There are designated visitor sites on each of the islands, where boats land, and where there are defined trails to follow. Giant tortoises, fur seals, sea lions, sea iguanas, and the comical blue-footed boobies, are just some of the animals and birds that will entertain you as you wander through their island homes.

Under water, if snorkeling or diving, is just as lively. Sea lion pups will play with you and compete for your attention as you gaze at manta rays, turtles, sharks and fish swimming or coasting gently in the currents.

Since each island has its own unique landscape and species of animal and plant life, every day is a new adventure. (Occasionally the captain may have to vary the itinerary due to National Park regulations, weather conditions or domestic flight alterations).

Trips vary by length, type of accommodation (boat or hotel) and islands visited, as tourist numbers are strictly controlled. Most trips last a week, and broadly speaking you need to choose to visit the northern islands or the southern islands with that week. Or visit all of them with a two week cruise.

On our website you'll find a large - though not exhaustive - selection of our Galapagos boats and hotel-based trips.

Most guides, captains and crew members are born and bred Galapageños, happy to show you the islands as only a native can. Our English-speaking naturalist guides have studied and trained at the Charles Darwin Scientific Station, with long years of experience guiding in the Galapagos Islands.

## Amazon Jungle lodges

Some 40% of Ecuador is Amazon rainforest. We offer several trips to eco-lodges in Ecuador's wildlife-rich Amazon basin and cloud forest that allow you to venture into beautiful primary forest.

Typically, you fly from Quito into the rainforest, and then take a motor boat up river to your lodge. Once settled in, the 4-9 day programme sees you explore the region.



Sani Lodge, Amazonian Ecuador

Native guides lead you on forest trails where you will see monkeys, tortoises, frogs and an array of birds including toucans and macaws. Large mammals like jaguar, tapir and giant anteater have been spotted hereabouts, but are elusive.

The luxurious community-run Napo Wildlife Centre, set in pristine rainforest, is part of a conservation project in the fauna-rich Yasuni National Park, the largest tract of tropical rainforest in Ecuador.





Or stay nearby at Sani Lodge, which boasts an exclusive position on an oxbow lake, making it one of the finest lodges in Ecuador.

If you are looking for an even more in-depth experience you could stay with and experience the daily lives of the Huaorani. The tribe still maintains their traditional lifestyle but they are no longer nomadic hunters, leading a more settled and open existence in the humid tropical forests of Ecuador.

The Huaorani territory takes in some 1.7 million acres. By inviting small numbers of people to share their world for short periods, they intend to keep their culture alive and have opted for sustainable tourism.



Cheeky Squirrel Monkey

## Cloudforest

There are also several cloud forest reserves on the eastern slopes of the Ecuadorian Andes. The Maquipucuna Reserve, in the heart of Ecuador's cloud forest, is only 50 miles from Quito. It boasts many endangered and endemic species, including 350 bird species (including quetzal, toucanet and an active Cock-of-the-Rock lick) and 50 mammal species, such as the spectacled bear.

The Reserve has 15,000 acres of primary and secondary forest within three different zones: pre-montane humid forest, low-montane humid forest and montane humid forest (between 1200m and 2700m). Most of the annual rainfall of between 1,500 and 3,000mm falls between Dec and April. Our programmes, from two days upwards, include hiking trails, birdwatching, swimming in rivers and waterfalls, mountain biking or just relaxing in hammocks at the lodge.

## Archaeology and Culture

The southern highlands offer much. Cuenca, Ecuador's third largest city and one of its most attractive and historic. From here you can visit the Cajas National Park, which protects 29,000 hectares of mostly paramo moorland and glacial valleys (3000m - 4700m), with 300 lakes. Bird, animal and plant life are an added attraction; with luck you'll spot condors, deer and foxes. We also visit the impressive Ingapirca sacred ruins (3230m), the major Inca archaeological site in Ecuador.

Then there is Baños and Riobamba, commercial towns with many markets which attract people from villages all around. The city has magnificent views of Chimborazo, Sangay, Altar and Tungurahua. There are eco-lodges to stay at, and wide range of activities from biking to rafting to hikes to waterfalls, all perfect for day trips for adventure seekers or families.

Another highlight is to drive the Quilotoa loop, a rough road through spectacular highland landscapes. There is the superb Quilotoa crater lake as well as the national parks featuring Chimborazo and Cotopaxi.

Ecuador's fascinating, historic capital, Quito, has many options to explore from museums to city tours to cathedrals and likes to impress with its UNESCO world heritage Old Town.

Shoppers will love the busy Indian market town of Otavalo, South America's biggest and one of its best handicraft markets.



Colonial Quito

Otavalo also hosts fascinating produce and livestock markets where a wide range of produce is sold and bartered by colourfully-attired locals.

Ecuador has a long list of famous Haciendas, some close to Quito, others further afield, where you can enjoy top hospitality alongside experiencing the lifestyles of the ranchos that live here.



## Language Courses

Speaking some Spanish makes travelling in Latin America an even more rewarding experience. We offer relaxed Spanish syllabuses in two Ecuadorian cities; Quito and Cuenca. At both sites, courses are available all year round and at all levels. Group classes have a maximum of 4 students, with one-to-one tuition also available at all levels.

Cultural and social activities are offered at least twice a week, and include salsa classes, cooking and excursions.

Ecuador's capital, Quito (2850m), is a lively city. It has an exciting nightlife and colourful street culture, with markets selling handicrafts and clothes. Our school is located in a beautifully-converted mansion, surrounded by gardens, in a quiet residential area. It has a heated pool, hot tub and Turkish bath, dancing area, student common room, library, 15 classrooms and a restaurant.

Cuenca (2530m) is the cultural capital of Ecuador and is its third largest city.

It has a well-preserved colonial atmosphere. It enjoys a mild year-round climate and is an ideal base for trips to the Cajas national park and the southern highlands. Our school building overlooks the Tomebamba River in the city centre, with seven classrooms, a small garden, common room, library and video room.

## Horse riding

From a farm, home of our guide's horses, in the foothills of snow-capped Antisana volcano just outside Quito, we offer a range of short riding tours for riders of all levels of ability and experience.

Longer rides, set date departure rides and rides between luxurious historic haciendas are also available. Choose our Colonial Hacienda Tour for a higher level of comfort or the Ride Around Cotopaxi trip for a more rugged trip with simpler accommodation and some camping.

## Rafting

On our one-day to 5-day trips, beginners and experts alike can enjoy riding rapids from Class II to IV+.

We provide the equipment and you the paddling power as the boat rides over the big surges. Besides the adrenaline rush, the waterways will take you through pristine jungle canyons to camps on sandy beaches, and introduce you to exotic wildlife and local people.

The Rio Toachi and Rio Blanco drain down the western slopes of the Ecuadorian Andes through beautiful subtropical forest. They are a mix of exhilarating Class 3 and 4 rapids with serene stretches where river otters might be seen. The Rio Misahualli offers some of the most challenging rafting, not only in Ecuador but in the world. It runs through a deep canyon full of virgin jungle and cascading waterfalls, and is packed with unforgettable rapids, such as the Tunnel, Paranoiac and legendary Land of the Giants.



White Water Adventures



Beach days at the Pacific

## Mountain biking

Ecuador offers some fantastic biking routes, from scintillating one-dayers to varied and exciting five-dayers.

Blast down Cotopaxi from 4500m on dirt roads and single track through paramo and pine forest to 3200m. Or extend this day trip, and enjoy amazing downhill ride along the "Grand Canyon", from 4500m to 2800m.

Longer trips are possible, biking through an amazing variety of climatic and ecological zones, from the paramo of Cotopaxi and Chimborazo, via dramatic temperature and vegetation changes, to the steamy Amazon basin.



## Pacific Coast

Ecuador's Pacific coast boasts some stunning highlights and great opportunities for R&R. Besides palm-fringed, sandy beaches and a warm (year-round) Manta allows you to explore South America's only dry tropical forest and - between June and September - to spot humpback whales.

The base is Puerto López; a small fishing town whose beach markets sell fish of all shapes and sizes, including hammerhead sharks. Explore Los Frailes, a series of gorgeous beaches and cliffs that you walk to along a 4km track, through the dry tropical forest of the Machalilla National Park. You can visit Isla de la Plata (1.5 hours by boat), which boasts colonies of sea lions and numerous seabirds, including boobies, pelicans and frigate birds. You are likely to see dolphins, rays and, from June to September, humpback whales.



Exploring Galapagos

## Family Fun

More and more families are discovering that their ideal trip is waiting for them in South America, and Ecuador is the perfect family destination.

Parents and children all adore the Amazon and the Galapagos Islands. The wildlife is as varied as it is colourful. In the Galapagos, animals have no fear of humans and venture close, giving families a unique interaction with wildlife, be it diving in the sea with sea lions or gazing a dancing Sally Lightfoot crabs.

If it is mountains and thrills you seek, fly to the mainland where the Andes await. The snow capped giants of the Avenue of the Volcanoes captivate kids and provide a veritable adventure playground. You can swoop down Cotopaxi volcano on a bike, white water raft in canyons or trek to Inca ruins. You can try canyoning, canoeing or bathe in waterfalls.

All this before you throw in the amazingly diverse cultures, friendly people and fascinating histories of Ecuador. Discover it today.

