

Avenue of the Volcanoes

13 days | Quito to Guayaquil



Discover the heart of the Ecuadorian Andes with this adventure from colonial Quito to coastal Guayaquil taking in the market town of Otavalo, impressive Cotopaxi National Park and its snow-capped volcanoes, the glittering Quilotoa crater, gorgeous Cuenca and a thrilling ride on the 'Devil's Nose' train.

HIGHLIGHTS AND INCLUSIONS

Trip Highlights

- Quito and the Centre of the World – touring of the UNESCO-listed colonial city and a visit to the Equatorial Monument
- Otavalo – rich cultural heritage and excellent handicrafts market full of artisan goods
- Cotopaxi National Park – the Avenue of the Volcanoes with visits to the Quilotoa crater and Limpiopungo Lagoon
- Indian markets in the Cotopaxi region
- Baños – enjoy a stroll in the spa town
- Route of the Cascades – the impressive Devil's Cauldron
- Alausí and the Devil's Nose – ride the 100-year old train along its dramatic zig-zag mountain route

- Cuenca – the colonial jewel of the south with overhanging houses along the Tomebamba River and a visit to a Panama Hat factory
- Gualaceo Valley – local handicrafts and scenic villages
- El Cajas National Park – glacial lakes and small forests of quinoa trees

What's Included

- 12 nights STANDARD accommodation. Upgrading to SUPERIOR or DELUXE accommodation options are also available upon request. Accommodation rating – See Trip Notes for details
- 12 breakfasts, 9 lunches and 5 dinners
- Airport arrival and departure transfer on day 1 and day 13
- Services of local English-speaking specialist guides
- Entrance fees to all sites included in the itinerary
- Tour of Quito, Cotopaxi National Park, Gualaceo Valley, Otavalo Market and El Cajas National Park on a private basis
- Return train journey from Alausí along the Devil's Nose
- All relevant transfers and transportation on a private basis unless otherwise stated
- Spirit of the Andes Express train excursion (departs Fridays)

What's Not Included

- International flights and visas
- Laundry, drinks and items of a personal nature
- Tipping – an entirely personal gesture

DETAILED ITINERARY

Day 1 : Quito

¡Bienvenidos a Ecuador! Upon arrival you will be met at the international airport and transferred to your hotel in Quito where the rest of the day is free. **Overnight - Quito**

Day 2 : Quito and the Centre of the World

This morning visit downtown Quito and its architectural treasures. Quito's UNESCO-listed colonial quarter is one of the largest and best-preserved in South America. Your stroll takes you through Independence Plaza, past the Cathedral and the Presidential Palace, and on to the temple of La Compañía de Jesús with its dazzling gilded interior and the impressive façade of the Monastery of San Francisco. Touring continues with the Equatorial Monument that marks the exact point of the Middle of the World. With a latitude of 0°, you can stand with a foot in each hemisphere and collect a certificate for having crossed the Equator. Next visit the Ethnographic Museum to learn about the different Native American groups living in

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Ecuador. Lunch is served at a local restaurant.
Overnight - Quito (B, L)

Day 3 : Otavalo Market



Quito – Otavalo – Quito. Enjoy an excursion to the market town of Otavalo today. Rich in ancestral cultural heritage and set amongst stunning Andean scenery of mountains, waterfalls and lakes, Otavalo is one of Ecuador's most popular destinations. Arriving in time to fully appreciate the activity of Otavalo market, peruse the stalls of ponchos, scarves, blankets, handbags and much more. Here you can practice your bartering skills and pick up a bargain. Unlike other Ecuadorian markets and their raucous noise, Otavaleños barter in silence. Then visit the Indian village of Peguche where artisans weave in their own homes, before returning to Quito. **Overnight - Quito** (B, L)

Days 4-5 : Cotopaxi National Park



Quito – Cotopaxi. Travelling south on the Pan-American Highway arrive at the Cotopaxi National Park, an ecological sanctuary centred around the soaring Cotopaxi Volcano. An introductory briefing at the Interpretation Centre will introduce you to the flora and fauna of the Andean paramo or moorlands. Put this knowledge into practice with a walk around the Limpiopungo Lagoon where you can observe a variety of birds and

occasionally wild horses. On clear days the Cotopaxi Volcano provides a stunning backdrop. Enjoy lunch high up in the Cotopaxi before heading down to the cosy Hacienda La Cienega – home for the next two nights.

On day 5 enjoy a scenic journey to the rim of the Quilotoa crater lake. Formed by the collapse of the Quilotoa Volcano after several catastrophic eruptions some 800 years ago, the crater lake is a vivid turquoise-green colour due to the dissolved minerals in the water. Spend time walking around the rim with a lunch box provided for a picturesque picnic
Overnight - Cotopaxi National Park (B:2, L:2, D:2)

Day 6 : Indian markets

Today visit one of the colourful Indian markets in the area where men and women in native dress sell their wares from neatly piled fresh produce to brightly woven sweaters. Indian markets have changed very little in 500 years and each plaza has its own product to sell. Here you'll find everything from livestock to esteras (straw mats), sugar cane cakes to clay-pot pans. Later in the afternoon head down into the valley to your cosy hacienda - home for the night. **Overnight - Cotopaxi** (B, L, D)

Day 7 : Route of the Cascades



Cotopaxi – Baños – Riobamba. This morning embark on a spectacular journey to the handsome town of Riobamba. The Devil's Cauldron is the first stop, an impressive cascade surrounded by subtropical vegetation and colourful orchids. The adventurous can descend down to the cascade bottom for a closer look whilst others can appreciate the overwhelming force and sound of the rushing waters from a lookout point. After lunch continue to the town of Baños, famed for its hot

springs and thermal waters. The drive finishes alongside Chimborazo, the highest mountain in Ecuador, where photo opportunities abound. **Overnight - Riobamba** (B, L, D)

Day 8 : The Devil's Nose



Riobamba – Alausí – Cuenca. Depart early this morning for a dramatically scenic journey along ravines and river gorges, and Indian villages and cultivated fields, arriving to the small town of Alausí. Here you will board a train following the Devil's Nose route, an 800-metre descent along zig-zagging railway line culminating at the Condor Puñuna museum run by the local Nizag community. The round trip brings you back to Alausí where you continue by coach to the Inca Fortress of Ingapirca. Enjoy lunch in the area before proceeding to Cuenca, the colonial jewel of the south. **Overnight - Cuenca** (B, L, D)

Days 9-10 : Cuenca



Set above the grassy banks of the Río Tomebamba, Cuenca is an attractive mix of cobblestone streets, whitewashed buildings and handsome plazas. Today enjoy a tour of Plaza of San Sebastian, a colourful artisans market where you can pick up local handicrafts. The Museum of Modern Art features an impressive collection of contemporary fine art whilst nearby the main square is home to the imposing blue-domed Cathedral. Admire the city's overhanging houses before stopping for lunch. In the

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afternoon visit a ceramics handicraft shop and the production of Panama hats at a local factory before transferring to your hotel in Cuenca. The following day is a free day for you to explore Cuenca independently. **Overnight - Cuenca (B:2)**

Day 11 : Gualaceo Valley

Today you will discover the artistry of local communities in the picturesque Gualaceo Valley. Starting at San Bartolome where guitars are made by hand and artistically finished, continue to the small town of Chordeleg and its gold and silver jewellery stalls. Chordeleg is also known for its green and yellow pottery. Lunch is taken at a very pleasant country inn, surrounded by flowering gardens close to the Santa Barbara River. Continue to the village of Gualaceo, famous for its Sunday market, and on to the weaving village of Bulcay. The day concludes with a visit to an orchid garden before returning to Cuenca. **Overnight - Cuenca (B, L)**

Day 12 : El Cajas National Park



Cuenca – Guayaquil. Departing Cuenca this morning journey through the El Cajas National Park, an expanse of glacial lakes, Andean cloud forests and volcanic peaks. Stop for a stroll at Llaviucu Lake and to admire the views at La Toreadora Lake. Later continue to the coastal city of Guayaquil. The rest of the day is free for you to explore the numerous barrios, each with their own distinct flavour. **Overnight - Guayaquil (B, L)**

Day 13 : Guayaquil

Today marks the end of your adventure through the heart of Ecuador. Consider extending your stay with a Galapagos cruise. Departure airport transfer included. (B)

Tipping

Tipping is an essential part of the culture. For a job well done, we would suggest for your tour guide: USD\$5-6 per traveller, for each day of sightseeing.

For your driver and On The Go Representative we'd recommend USD\$2-3 per traveller for each day of service. Tipping is an entirely personal gesture and ultimately the amount is up to you.

Accommodation ratings

On our Private trips, you can often choose your style of accommodation. The price quoted on our website is reflective of the included accommodation, please see the "included" section on the first page of this document for details. Should you opt for an alternative hotel category, this will be confirmed in writing with the respective price on your invoice.

For further details about the indicative hotels, please see the "hotels" tab on our website. Here we rank hotel's in their respective country (REGIONAL CATEGORY) - but we also tell you how it ranks by Western standards (OUR CATEGORY).

STANDARD - Equates to a Western 3-star standard, always featuring en-suite rooms and usually a restaurant.

SUPERIOR - Equates to a Western 4-star standard, featuring en-suite rooms and usually a restaurant and often a swimming pool and/or a fitness centre.

DELUXE - Equates to a Western 5-star standard, usually featuring spacious, en-suite rooms, a restaurant, swimming pool and fitness centre and an array of amenities, excellent service and customer care.

LUXURY - Equates to a Western 5-star plus standard - the creme de la creme. Featuring spacious, en-suite rooms, a restaurant, swimming pool and fitness centre and an array of amenities, this accommodation is a cut above the rest. Sheer opulence!

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Ecuador Country Guide

Ecuador - Fact File

- Official Name: Republic of Ecuador
- Capital: Quito (population 1.4 million)
- Government: Multiparty Republic
- Population: 13.4 million
- Total Area: 283,560 kilometres squared, including the Galapagos Islands (slightly smaller than Nevada, USA)
- Official Languages: Spanish. Others: Amerindian languages (especially Quechua)
- Religions: Roman Catholic 95%
- Voltage: 110 volts. Sockets are a mixture of the European, two-pronged round variety and US flat-pin.
- Time Difference: For time differences please visit www.timeanddate.com
- International airport departure tax: US \$25. This is sometimes included in your airfare - please check with your airline before departure.

Ecuador - Visas

Most nationals, including citizens of the EU, North American and Australasia do not need a visa to enter Ecuador. Entry is granted on production of a passport valid for more than six months, a return air/bus ticket and proof of funds to support yourself for the duration of the stay. You'll be issued with a T-3 tourist card on arrival, which you should keep safely with your passport as it will be collected when you leave the country. The tourist card can allow up to 90 days stay, although it's up to the immigration official to decide whether you're allocated 30, 60 or 90 days on arrival. Visa requirements do change periodically so you should check for the latest information on your specific visa requirements with your local Ecuadorian embassy or consulate well in advance of your planned date of travel.

Ecuador - Climate

Ecuador is divided into the coastal plain (costa), inter-Andean central highlands (sierra), and flat to rolling eastern jungle (oriente). There's no real summer and winter in Ecuador, with weather patterns varying according to geography, and temperatures determined more by altitude than by season or latitude. As a general rule, the warmest and driest months in the sierra are June to September, though this is complicated by various microclimates found in some areas.

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Outside these months, typical sierra weather is characterised by sunny, clear mornings and cloudy, often wet, afternoons. In the oriente, you can expect it to be warm, humid and rainy throughout the year, though there are often breaks in the rain between August and September and December to February.

In the lowland areas it can get particularly hot on clear days, with temperatures easily topping 30°C. The coast has the most clearly defined wet and dry seasons, with the best time to visit being from December to April, when you'll get frequent showers but also clear blue skies and warm weather. From May to November, the southern coast, in particular, is often overcast and relatively cool, with less chance of rainfall.

Check the weather chart on our website or visit www.worldclimate.com to get an idea of what the weather will be like on your trip.

Ecuador - Money

Important

In Latin America you will have problems changing the US\$100 CB B2 2001 series notes and it is important you do not to bring them. In some countries banks won't even take them. The serial number is located in the top left hand corner and bottom right hand corner on the side with the President's face. This serial number starts with CB and then a few more numbers and then directly under that B2. At the bottom of the note near the signature of the Treasurer it says which series of notes it is and it is there that it says 2001 series.

Local Currency

In April 2000, the government in Ecuador decided to 'dollarise' the economy due to the instability of their own currency, the sucre. The country now uses the US dollar as its own currency, which means that you do not need to change money on arrival (if you bring sufficient US dollars with you). If you do need to change money into dollars, you can do it at the bank after exiting the luggage hall or use one of the ATMs outside the terminal. Remember that if you are travelling through to other countries in South America, Ecuador is the best place to load up on US dollars cash without paying high charges. Having said that

we do recommend that you bring as much US dollars cash as you feel comfortable carrying as it is not always easy to get money out on credit and debit cards. You should carry your US dollars in small denominations (US\$1, US \$5, US\$10 and US\$20 are best) as there is always a shortage of change.

Although bank cards are often the easiest way to go, there are times where they will not work for you even if your bank at home tells you it will! Do not rely on your card as your only source of money. Always have a few back-ups with you.

Ecuador - Local Transport

Most of Quito is easy to visit on foot, although there is a cheap trolley bus system which travels from north to south of the city. There are also normal buses which are cheap but can get very crowded. We recommend that you use taxis at night as they are fairly cheap but also have meters so you do not need to worry about bartering to get a good price – just make sure the driver puts the meter on when you get in.

In other Ecuadorian towns and cities walking is basically the best and cheapest way to see the sights.

Ecuador - Food & Drink

As a guideline a simple snack (e.g. a sandwich) can cost as little as US\$2, a light meal will cost around US\$4-5, and even a meal in one of the best restaurants in Quito or Cuenca costs very little in comparison to what you would expect to pay at home (usually around US\$30-40). Obviously this depends on what you order and if you have wine or other drinks which will certainly increase the bill.

All drinks such as water, soft or alcoholic drinks are at your own expense at all times. The following is a guideline for drinks bought in a shop in the street. Prices in restaurants and hotels can sometimes be more than double the prices specified below;

- 1 litre of water - US\$1
- 30cl bottle of soft drink - US\$0.70
- 30cl bottle of beer - US\$1.20
- 50cl bottle of beer - US\$1.70

Food

In Ecuador the basic diet focuses around chicken, beef or seafood, mostly with french fries or rice (or both) and possibly a little salad. Ceviche is fish marinated in lemon juice, onion and hot peppers traditionally served with corn on the cob and tostado (roasted maize). Other popular dishes include fritada (roast pork), lomo ala pimiento (pepper steak), humitas (ground corn steamed in a maize leaf) and quimbolitas (similar to humitas but with corn-flour and cooked in banana leaves). For a simple fish, you should ask for pescado which can be grilled, pan fried with breadcrumbs (apanado) or served with a sauce. An interesting local speciality is cuy (pronounced: cooee). This is roasted guinea pig which some people say tastes like chicken, others, like cooked cardboard!

Maize and potatoes feature in many dishes, particularly soups. Locro de papas is cheese and potato soup, sancocho de yucca is vegetable soup with cassava or manioc root and sopa de bola verde is vegetable banana dumpling soup. Typical snacks are empanadas (little fried pasties usually filled with meat, chicken, cheese or even prawns) and patacones (fried vegetable banana chips, served as a side dish).

Much of Ecuador's food is not too hot and spicy but you will find a bowl of aji (which is a chilli or hot pepper sauce) on most tables which can be added to spice things up.

Vegetarians

If you are a strict vegetarian you may experience a distinct lack of variety in the food available, especially in small towns. You might find that you are eating a lot of omelettes and other egg dishes. Our tour leaders will do their best to organise interesting vegetarian alternatives for included meals, but your patience and understanding is requested.

Drinks

You should be wary of drinking the local tap water. Bottled water, carbonated soft drinks and fruit juices are widely available and are generally safe to drink. Please note however that fruit juices are sometimes made with unboiled tap water and could upset your stomach. An easy way around this is to

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order juice 'con leche' (with milk) instead. The choice of different juices is incredible e.g. mora (blackberry), piña (pineapple), naranjilla (mixture between mandarin and orange), maracuya (passion fruit), tomato de argol (like a tomato but with a harder texture), guanabana (custard apple) and curia (which has a great taste – just try it!).

In Ecuador some of the hotels we use have bars or serve alcoholic drinks. If there is not a bar in the hotel then there is sure to be a bar within walking distance. In more up-market hotels, imported beers and spirits are available but usually at a high price. If you are happy to drink the local spirits then there is an array of rums, aguardiente (a kind of ouzo) and imported Chilean and Argentine wine can sometimes be found cheaply. There are various brands of beers including Pilsener, Club and Biela.

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