

ECUADOR AND THE GALAPAGOS ISLANDS

Travel guides to Ecuador and the
Galapagos Islands

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ECUADOR

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Welcome

This brochure on Ecuador & the Galapagos Islands is part of our growing series of in-depth travel brochures for selected countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Our aim is to provide you with a wide choice of travel and holiday ideas that bring out the best in each destination, so that you can pick the holiday that suits you the best.

In each country we focus on travel experiences rather than just staying put at the beach. We highlight the distinctive places to visit, ways to gain insights into local cultures and communities, the best opportunities to see wildlife, as well as great beaches and characterful hotels. There are different ways to get around too, from joining a small group with a knowledgeable local guide, to having a private guide or driver all to yourself.

Also included in the mix are special options like walks in the Andes and birdwatching at all levels.

We bring all this together for you in a well-organised trip that makes the best use of your precious time and the budget you decide on. We would like to be thought of as providing the best choices, excellent service, and excellent value.

Geodyssey is not an ordinary travel company. We started life in 1993 as a travel specialist for Venezuela, an extraordinary country for which we developed our own dedicated and personal style that many people seem to like. We have grown, but we are still a small team and we really care about each and every customer. Travel is our passion, and we want to share that with you. Each of us has travelled widely in our destinations (and beyond), so if one of us happens not to have been to a particular place we offer, the chances are that someone else on our team will have been there, probably several times.

When you are deciding where to go for your next holiday you'll want to turn to someone who really knows the area you'd like to visit. For Ecuador & the Galapagos Islands we hope you will choose us.

Gillian Howe
Managing Director

Making a booking

The Booking Information supplement that comes with this brochure covers dates, prices, and how to book.

It's good to know that when you book your holiday with Geodyssey you not only get the benefit of our in-depth knowledge of our destinations from many years of making travel arrangements to Latin America, and our up-to-date knowledge of the best places, old and new. You also get our experience in designing holidays for different tastes and budgets, the confidence that your money is fully protected, and the reassurance that if anything goes wrong while you are

away you have a network of helpful, knowledgeable and resourceful people locally and back in the UK to support you. We're a phone call away when you are planning your trip, preparing to leave, or out in your destination.

When you get back we will send you a short questionnaire to make sure everything went well and to gather your comments on the places you visited. We will also ask what you think of us. More than 95% of our customers describe their overall level of satisfaction with their holiday as "Excellent" or "Good", with over 90% rating it as "Excellent". A staggering 99% rate the service that our office

provides as "Excellent".

We protect ALL our customers

The air holiday packages in this brochure are ATOL protected by the Civil Aviation Authority. Our ATOL number is 5292. ATOL protection extends primarily to holiday arrangements that include air travel for customers who book and pay in the UK.

Geodyssey also provides equivalent financial protection for customers who do not buy flights from us and for customers who book and pay from outside the UK.

For more information please see the Booking Information supplement that comes with this brochure.

Contact us

Geodyssey Ltd
116 Tollington Park
London N4 3RB England
www.geodyssey.co.uk
T: 020 7281 7788
F: 020 7281 7878
E: enquiries@geodyssey.co.uk





Quito

Quito's large, well preserved, historic centre of cobbled streets and impressive colonial buildings is the largest and most important in Latin America, and the first to be awarded the status of UNESCO World Heritage site.

Directly on the equator, beneath towering volcanoes, Quito's importance extends deep into prehistory.

Quito was founded a thousand years ago as the centre of the Kingdom of Quito, an alliance of regional peoples whose earlier history is only now being uncovered, that eventually formed the northern part of the Incan empire.

Razed in the conquest, Quito was reconstructed under the Spanish who built 40 churches and 16 convents and monasteries with cloisters, plazas, courtyards, chapter rooms and refectories. They combined European renaissance and baroque styles with indigenous and mestizo influences, often reusing Incan foundations and recycling fine Incan stone blocks. The result is a uniquely Andean capital, connecting centuries of changing civilisations.

At the centre of the whitewashed walls and pan-tiled roofs of the Old City is the Plaza de la Independencia, a large and attractive square impressively surrounded by the four pillars of colonial society: the Cathedral, Presidential Palace, Archbishop's Palace and Municipal Palace (now a modern replacement). With its well kept flower beds this bustling location makes a good place for the city's well-to-do to congregate and talk, with a few having their shoes shined while they watch the world go by.

Entering from the heat of the equatorial

sunshine through huge carved doors into the cool dark interior of a colonial church in the Old City you are first met by the rich scent of incense from palo santo wood. The interior sparkles with hundreds of twinkling devotional candles. On approaching the central aisle a vast altar gilded in gold or silver leaf succeeds in its intention of instilling awe. The most ornate, the Church of La Compañía de Jesús, constructed by the Jesuits in 1605, has a lace-work façade of twisted columns, sacred hearts and cherubs carved in volcanic rock, while the inside was laden with a reputed 7 tonnes of gold leaf. One can only imagine the impact such temples made on local people whose worship of the sun was to be converted to the worship of the Christian deity.

There are about a thousand private homes amid the fine religious and public buildings of the Old City. The most prestigious 19th century houses have three internal courtyards. The first, opening to the street, was used for receiving visitors and typically has a fountain in the centre. The second was for household chores such as drying the laundry, and the third was for livestock such as hens, guinea pigs and horses. For a glimpse inside one of these houses we recommend a visit to the highly decorated María Augusta Urrutia Museum.



To meet the need for religious art for the new churches the Spanish encouraged local painters and sculptors to adopt the European style, creating a blend of indigenous and European art that became known as the Quito School. In sculpture the features of Christ and the saints are European but the proportions of their bodies are Andean: broad-chested and short-legged. Andean plants and animals were introduced, and sun motifs were incorporated into church decoration. The great artists in this tradition worked between 1660 and 1765, but today a school for street children teaches the historic techniques and is open to visitors.

The Virgin of Quito, a painting by Bernardo de Legarda, a master of the Quito School, was the inspiration for the 30m high statue that stands on El Panecillo hill overlooking the Old City. It depicts the Virgin Mary with silvery wings standing on an orb with a serpent curled around her feet and chained to her arm.

Beyond the Old City, Quito is developing fast. Constrained by the steep sides of Pichincha volcano to the west, the new city extends north and east, with busy commercial streets, trendy shopping areas, modern museums and city parks giving way to light industry, poor barrios and comfortable suburbs. The Mariscal area is conveniently central, and has good shops, restaurants and hotels.

Quito's altitude of 10,000 feet tempers the equatorial heat to that of a year round Mediterranean spring. Take it easy for the first few days while your red blood cells adjust to the noticeably thinner air.



The middle of the world

The pre-Hispanic people of the Kingdom of Quito knew full well that they lived at the equator: they had solar observatories and temples to the sun and used astronomical measurements to govern their agricultural calendar. To underline the point, the original meaning of 'Quito' is said to be 'centre of the earth'. In European terms, the location of zero degrees of latitude was first derived by a mission led by Charles Marie de la Condamine in 1736, when Ecuador was still part of the Viceroyalty of Peru. A sturdy monument set in a small theme park now straddles the French line in celebration of this triumph of geodesy, which by measuring the length of a degree of latitude proved that the earth bulges at the equator and thereby that Newton's theory of gravity was superior to Descartes'. 200m to the north the eclectic Inti-Nan museum is positioned at 00°.00'00" latitude according to modern GPS measurements and provides an off-beat take on equatorial phenomena such as spiralling bath water and eggs balanced on the point of a nail, with an introduction to how local people lived in the olden days. Modern Ecuadorians take pride in their position in the middle of the world. Not only did it name their country, the equator brings unexpected benefits such as the ability to grow long straight-stemmed roses, now exported far and wide.

Where to stay in Quito

Quito has a wide range of hotels, some good, some exceptionally good. For a first visit you're bound to choose to stay in the Old City, where several colonial mansions have been converted to characterful hotels, and where you can step out into cobbled streets that are busy by day but quiet at night. For a change try La Mariscal, Quito's liveliest area packed with shops, bars and restaurants, or one of the quieter areas with good connections out of the city - Quito's traffic can be a nightmare. Here are some suggestions: we know lots of others.



Casa Gangotena TOP RANGE

Old City

Casa Gangotena is a newly-restored historic mansion overlooking Plaza San Francisco in the heart of the Old City. The 31 rooms combine contemporary design aesthetics with antiques, fine furnishings and modern technologies. Rooms vary in size, all have a/c, en-suite bathrooms (most with separate bath & shower), telephones, wifi and TV. A Balcony Junior Suite on the first floor looks on to gardens and Virgin of Quito. 8 Plaza View Rooms enjoy views across the Plaza. The hotel's restaurant serves classic Ecuadorian dishes and fine international cuisine.



Plaza Sucre MID-RANGE

Old City

Hotel Plaza Sucre is a good functional mid-range B&B located in Quito's historic quarter, four blocks back from its main sights and squares.

There are 25 comfortable guest rooms each with TV and private bathrooms. The rooftop breakfast room has wonderful views out to the Panecillo monument which stands guard over the city.

For other meals there are several restaurants in easy walking distance in the well-policed historic centre.

Hotel grades

- MID-RANGE A good standard option to suit the cost-conscious traveller
- UPPER RANGE A notch or two up, with prices to match
- TOP RANGE At the top end of what's available



Patio Andaluz UPPER RANGE

Old City

A stylish, comfortable 4* hotel that has recently been sympathetically converted from a colonial mansion and is arranged around three internal courtyards. Located a few steps from the Plaza de la Independencia, it is extremely convenient for sightseeing among the impressive colonial buildings, museums, ornate churches and romantic plazas of the Old City. The rooms are typically very spacious with heavy dark wood furnishings and ecclesiastical overtones.



La Casona de la Ronda UPPER RANGE

Old City

Hotel Casona de la Ronda is recently opened small boutique hotel in a characterful restored mansion on Calle Morales, one of the oldest and most traditional streets in the historic La Ronda area. The hotel's 22 rooms are set around a central courtyard. Each has an en-suite bathroom, hand-carved furnishings, wooden floors, king or queen-sized beds, anti-noise windows, wifi, phone and cable TV. In the 1930s the narrow cobbled streets of La Ronda brought poets, painters and writers. Much of this old character persists, with galleries, cafes, bars and small shops.



Relicario del Carmen UPPER RANGE

Old City

An attractive, small hotel set in a tall historic townhouse located in Quito's old quarter a block back from Plaza de la Independencia and the Government Palace. There are 18 rooms, varying in size some with more light than others. Richly decorated with lots of colonial antiques and soft furnishings. Excellent breakfast (the best we've had in Ecuador) but no other meals are served. Other than the breakfast room there are no public social areas. It is worth noting that there are lots of stairs to upper rooms and no lift.



Casa Aliso UPPER RANGE

La Floresta

Once a private home, this 10 room guest house is in the quiet up-market residential suburb of La Floresta, 12 min from the airport, 5 min from the colonial centre. The rooms have been individually designed and decorated and include phone, cable TV, free wifi, and safe. The bathrooms have phone, bathtub with shower, bathrobes and hair dryer.

The guest house has a small garden and restaurant. There are some excellent restaurants a very short taxi ride away.



Boutique Mansion del Angel UPPER RANGE

between the Old City and downtown

A recently converted colonial mansion turned charming boutique hotel located between Quito's historic quarter and the Mariscal district. Guests are welcomed in a sumptuous living room furnished with antiques, the smell of chocolate permeates the air. The bedrooms are decorated in a romantic style—gilt cornices, cherubs, four-poster beds strewn with rose petals, and lots of lace. Afternoon tea is served daily. There is a small back garden with easy seating where the owner's friendly dog can be found lazing in the sun.



La Rabida MID-RANGE

La Colon

Hotel de La Rábida is an renovated traditional Quito home which has been turned into a rather charming small guesthouse. It is situated in a quiet residential neighbourhood in the modern part of Quito 10 min from La Mariscal. Each of the 11 rooms have private bathrooms, cable TV direct dial telephone, soft down comforters and electric heating units. Facilities include a restaurant/cafe serving European-Ecuadorian cuisine, a characterful lounge with log fire and small library and a patio garden which is home to Brownie, the hotel's pet rabbit.

Worth a mention

Casa San Marcos Historic Quarter UPPER RANGE

A real gem. Well located in a restored 17th century mansion this 6 room discrete boutique hotel is sumptuously decorated with art and antiques.

Anahi La Mariscal MID/UPPER RANGE

A 15 room hotel in a quiet area in easy reach of La Mariscal's lively shops and restaurants. 15 rooms, all different, some with balconies.

Cafe Cultura La Mariscal MID/UPPER RANGE

A delightful mid-range boutique hotel located in the heart of modern Quito with 26 quirkily muralled bedrooms. Atmospheric public areas.

Hacienda Rumiloma slopes of Volcan Pichincha TOP RANGE

Brilliant exuberant atmospheric hacienda high above the city, lushly and comfortably styled, passionately run by its owners (he's an Ecuadorian mountaineer, she's Irish and a racehorse owner). Great walks, open fires, good food—and an Irish bar.

Le Parc Juan Montalvo UPPER RANGE

Uber-styled luxury hotel beamed from Milan into a slim tower block. Great rooms. Sushi on the ground floor, Dom Perignon on the roof terrace.

Nu House La Mariscal MID-RANGE

On trend alt-boutique high tech cool hotel bang in the heart of La Mariscal. Noisy on Friday and Saturday. Breakfast at cafe opposite.



Andes

An extraordinary number of high volcanoes, wonderful scenery, colourful farming communities, expert weavers and crafts people, historic haciendas, and untouched nature make Ecuador the epitome of the Andean world.

Wonderful scenery is commonplace almost everywhere you travel in the Andes, but the central highlands south of Quito offer some of the loveliest mountain scenery in the country. The fertile valley between the main eastern and western sierras has been heavily populated since pre-Incan times. Large haciendas control the best land on the valley floor, while higher slopes are farmed by Quichua-speaking families who wring small crops of potatoes and maize from precipitous fields and terraces. Their winding lanes and peaceful hamlets, coupled with immense views, volcanic peaks, beautiful crater lakes, and ‘perpetual spring’ weather, make many parts of the sierras especially good for walking and trekking.

The Incan Royal Road between Quito and Cusco in Peru followed the valley’s contours, as does the modern Pan-American Highway and the old railway line, whose westward branch plunges down the Devil’s Nose towards the Pacific.

THE AVENUE OF THE VOLCANOES

In this part of Ecuador, the Andes are at their most volcanic, with over fifty peaks (a good number of them active) pushing upwards from the colliding tectonic plates below. Alexander von Humboldt described the route south from Quito to Riobamba as the ‘Avenue of the Volcanoes’, with the peaks of the twin sierras

arrayed on either side.

Driving south on the Pan American Highway on a fine day gives dramatic views of Pichincha (4,675m), Atacazo (4,463m), Corazón (4,788m), Ilinizas (5,248m), Carihuayrazo (5,028m) and Chimborazo (6,310m) in the western chain, while seen to the east are Paschoa (4,199m), Rumiñahui (4,712m), Cotopaxi (5,897m), Quilindaña (4,877m), Tungurahua (5,029m), El Altar (5,319m), and Sangay (5,230m). The snow-line is usually around 5,000m.

The most impressive of these are Cotopaxi and Chimborazo.

Cotopaxi is one of the highest active volcanoes in the world. Its perfectly symmetrical cone covered in a thick blanket of snow and ice rises gracefully from a beautiful high plain of grasslands grazed by herds of wild horses who gather to drink at the lovely Limpiopungo lagoon—a good spot for waterfowl and other birds, with the jagged white peaks of nearby Rumiñahui volcano reflected in its surface.

Walking in Cotopaxi National Park you will notice volcanic debris of pumice and ash amid the tiny páramos plants. On a day trip it is possible to drive as high as 4,600m on the slopes of the volcano then hike up a scree to reach the snout of its glacier at 4,800m. The thinness of the air means this short distance



The Incas at Ingapirca

The Incan empire began to expand in Peru in 1438 and spread into Ecuador through a series of conquests and alliances dating from 1516. Less than twenty years later it had been extinguished by the Incan civil war and the Spanish conquest. In this short space of time it had a remarkable effect, both culturally in the organisation of society and the introduction of the Quichua language, and physically in terms of roads and buildings. The most important Incan site in Ecuador is at Ingapirca, north of Cuenca. Here a temple complex incorporating classic Inca stonework with precisely fitted ‘pillow’ blocks is built upon earlier Cañari structures.

Ingapirca lies in a graceful setting on a low hill. At its centre is a substantially intact temple of the sun, with inwardly tapering walls of supremely well-fitted stone blocks and a trapezoidal doorway, hallmarks of the finest Incan construction. Laid out around the temple are the low remains of a great plaza, and of a good number of buildings that must have included official residences, stores, houses, barracks and a tambo or inn for travellers on the Royal Road between Quito and Cusco in Peru.

The nearby town of Cañar is notable for fine weaving and its busy Sunday market.



can take well over an hour.

Chimborazo, long extinct, is the tallest mountain in Ecuador. Due to the bulge in the Earth at the equator its summit is the furthest point from the centre of the planet, surpassing even Everest. It was first climbed by English climber Edward Whymper in 1880. Day walkers who have acclimatised well to the altitude can trek to the edge of the glacier with 'los hieleros' (the ice men) who collect blocks of ice every week to supply stallholders in Riobamba market.

Quilotoa 'loop' Laguna Quilotoa is a breathtaking emerald green lake lying hidden until the very last moment behind the steep walls of a 3km wide volcanic caldera. It is well worth walking from the crater's rim down to the lake shore 300m below, returning by mule. A small country road passes near the crater and links a number of local villages in a circular route, each with its own character. The larger villages hold markets on different days of the week: at Saquisilí, the Thursday market fills seven small plazas and connecting streets. Naïve paintings are a speciality of Tigua. Springs and spas Because of the geothermal activity in the Andes sulphur baths and hot springs are a welcome diversion. Whatever their therapeutic claims, the experience of bathing outside in steaming bubbly water after a day in the highlands is not to be missed. Some, such as those in Baños are aimed at the local family market, while others, notably Termas Papallacta in the north, make foreign visitors and sophisticated spa enthusiasts from Quito their priority.

OTAVALO

At Otavalo, a small town two hours north of Quito, the craft traditions of indigenous Ecuadorians take centre stage. Its Saturday market is widely reckoned to be the biggest and best in South America for textiles, ethnic jewellery, and traditional crafts. Rows and rows of well-stocked stalls offer countless variations on traditional themes, many adapted to visitors' current tastes. A large food market and animal market complete the scene. The craft and food markets continue in smaller form throughout the week.

Otavalo men wear black hats over long black hair tied in a single plait, with a blue poncho, white trousers and sandals. Women choose colourfully embroidered white blouses beneath finely woven shoulder wraps and as many chunky gold necklaces as they can decently afford, with a full black skirt (often finished with a gold braided hem) adorned with an intricately woven cloth belt.

In colonial times the indigenous people of Otavalo were put to work in obrajes, or weaving workshops, to produce textiles, wool and cotton for their Spanish masters. Though the skills of the craft were instilled by force, today they are cherished and passed from each generation to the next. Otavaleños now stand out as proud examples of prosperity and cultural confidence that other highland communities are becoming keen to emulate.

There are many craft workshops in villages around Otavalo where you can see a range of crafts in action from traditional weaving on shuttle and backstrap looms, to pan pipes being made (and played).



Craft villages

Gualaceo, Chordeleg and Sigsig are not names that trip easily off an English tongue, but these three small towns are famous in Ecuador for their markets and the handicrafts produced here and in surrounding villages. In this region the rich culture of the cholos cuencanos, whose ancestry mixes Inca, Cañari and Spanish blood, sits confidently between the indígenas and the whites. Traditional cholo dress includes Panama hats for both men and women, and richly coloured ponchos, usually burgundy or red—upgraded to beautifully woven ikat ponchos for fiestas.

The region is home to artisans of all kinds: embroiderers, weavers of ikat and other textiles, Panama hats and baskets, gold and silversmiths producing fine filigree and other jewellery, wood carvers and potters. Near Chordeleg, San Bartolomé specialises in guitar making, and San Juan is a centre for Panama hat weaving. Back strap looms are favoured by weavers of ikat dyed shawls, belts and other traditional items. Fruit and flowers are grown in these warm valleys. An orchid farm is open to visitors, and here and there small family farms offer decent guest accommodation with the opportunity to help milk the cows and walk or ride country trails in a rural idyll far from any road.



The caldera of several of Ecuador's extinct volcanoes are now filled by crater lakes. The most accessible of these is the beautiful Laguna Cuicocha ('Guinea Pig Lake' in Quichua), situated just north of Otavalo on the southern slopes of Cotacachi volcano. Islands in the lake resemble a pair of guinea pigs, and are said to have been used as a prison by the Incas. A pleasant day's walking takes you around the rim of the crater, with llamas carrying your lunch.

ANTISANA AND PAPALLACTA

To the east of Quito, the only road rises to a high pass between the four snow-capped peaks of Antisana volcano (5,758m) to the south and the mountains of Cordillera El Diviso to the north, both of which are protected ecological reserves.

There are excellent short walks in the hills near the road in landscapes of open páramo (high moorlands), forested ravines, rocky outcrops and glaciated lakes. It is often possible to see condors cruising the sky.

Back at ground level this area is rich in thermal waters and a stop in the hot springs and spa at Papallacta is a must.

MINDO CLOUD FORESTS

The western mountains shield Quito from the moist air of the Pacific, which saturates their seaward slopes. Here dense cloud forests provide some of the most biodiverse environments on the planet as birdwatchers, orchid specialists and butterfly enthusiasts will testify. The pleasant small town of Mindo has come to be the focus for ecotourism visitors to the area, with small lodges in the town and its surroundings.

Hummingbirds are a particular favourite, zipping between the feeders that lodge owners provide, displaying a staggering variety of plumage in metallic greens, blues, rusts and oranges, some with exuberantly long bills, others with impressive tails, wacky little crests or even little 'boots' of white feathers.

HACIENDAS

Several of Ecuador's haciendas—large private estates scattered throughout the highlands—

make characterful and comfortable places to stay in a variety of styles and sizes, from sprawling mansions to ancient farmhouses much adapted over generations.

The best land in the highlands was parcelled out to the conquistadors and the settlers that followed in the form of *encomiendas*—entitlements to tributes in cash, produce and labour from the 'indians' (a hated name, 'indígenas'—indigenous people—is much preferred). In return the settlers were entrusted to convert their charges to Christianity. Initially a practical encouragement to colonisation with altruistic overtones, the system became subverted to the simple accumulation of wealth, reducing indigenous people to extreme poverty and serfdom.

By the late 1690s the *encomiendas* were in decline as the indigenous population was reduced by epidemics, drought and earthquakes. They were replaced by the *hacienda* estates and a new system of serfdom called *huasipungo*. The workers' obligations continued but they were allowed tiny allotments in which they were expected to grow their families' food in their spare time. Typically these plots were on the steepest, least fertile parts of the estate. This system was not replaced until a 1964 land reform which entitled the *indígenas* to own land their families had farmed for centuries.

The *haciendas'* land has been significantly reduced by further reforms, and their owners have diversified. Many now receive paying guests. Origins aside, they are fascinating places to stay, often set in beautiful gardens, furnished with family heirlooms, and with log fires lit against the evening air of the mountains. Horse riding is commonly available but note that few can supply hard hats, so bring your own if you wish to ride.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

On any visit to the Andes you will certainly see a great many people wearing traditional dress of many kinds. The strength and vibrancy of indigenous cultures, which have persisted since pre-Incan times, gives the highlands a special flavour.



Cajas National Park

The road from Cuenca to Guayaquil and the Pacific coast winds through a high pass in Cajas National Park. At the top of the pass, the Andean watershed is closest to the Pacific: a raindrop falling here could travel just 200 miles westward to the coast, or more than 4,000 miles east to the Atlantic.

The park's walking trails follow truly remarkable scenery, making for some really lovely day walks and longer treks. In contrast to the sharp young peaks of the central highlands, the older mountains of Cajas have been glaciated to leave a landscape of craggy hills, gentle valleys, rocky outcrops and more than 300 lakes—a unique environment that has been accorded RAMSAR protection. Elfin forests of polylepis 'paper bark' trees are very characteristic. The peeling reddish bark of these twisted trees protects them from being overwhelmed by the weight of epiphytes, bromeliads and arboreal ferns which cling to their branches. The forest floor is carpeted in deep velvety mosses. The whole effect is of a mythical forest in which Bilbo Baggins might appear at any moment. In remote areas dense cloudforests are home to a few remaining spectacled bear and possibly mountain tapir, while wild llamas and alpacas graze the open grasslands in good numbers. The park holds special attractions for birdwatchers (see page 38).



The deep south

A maze of older, lower, mountain ranges whose valleys have long lost their fertility, give southernmost Ecuador a quiet remoteness. In Saragura, the local Salasaca dress in black or dark blue out of mourning, it is said, for the Inca Atahualpa who, as every schoolboy knows, was captured by Pizarro's small band of men at the start of the conquest and shamefully executed despite the delivery of a huge ransom in gold.

Beyond Loja, a quiet county town, lies Podocarpus National Park, whose forests over a great range of altitudes make it an important destination for serious birders. Nearby Vilcabamba enjoyed a period of fame in the 1970s when the Readers Digest claimed it was home to many centenarians, including an ancient of 128. The claims were discredited but the idea has stuck and the town has become home to ex-pats fostering an alternative lifestyle in the 'Valley of Eternal Youth'.



A quarter of Ecuador's population are indigenous. The largest of the indigenous 'nations' is the Quichua, who are spread in various groupings throughout the highlands and in Peru (where the spelling is 'Quechua'). Quichua is their language of choice, though most are bilingual in Quichua and Spanish.

Traditional costume is used in the highlands to show one's standing as a true runa (Quichua for 'person') and to denote the local community to which you belong.

Different styles, designs, and colours of ponchos and blouses, skirts and trousers, belts and hair bands are worn by the men and women of each highland community. Hats too show where you are from. Felt trilbies trimmed with peacock feathers are favoured by men and women around Quilotoa. Around Riobamba, Cañarís wear straw bonnets of the type our grandmothers wore to school, while their neighbours, the Puruwas, choose white straw bowlers. The Salasaca, in the south, wear broad brimmed white hats with ponchos and shawls dyed the darkest blue-black in mourning for the Inca Atahualpa.

How you wear your clothes is important too: a shawl tied with a knot indicates an unmarried woman, whereas a clasp or ornate pin shows she is married.

Keeping up appearances nourishes a craft industry that extends through every village and almost every household. You will see ladies spinning yarn by hand, even while carrying a load of fire-wood along a mountain trail. Skeins of dyed wool dry on washing lines, sheaves of toquilla straw for hats hang to dry by the road, and home weavers work looms of uniquely Ecuadorian design.

All this creativity can be seen, and bought, in markets throughout the highlands, in different villages according to the day of the week. It's a time for locals to socialise and catch up on news, as well as browse colourful displays of textiles, clothes and hats, bulging sacks of maize, quinoa, lima beans and potatoes, piles of fruit, chilli peppers and spices, and useful assortments of buckets,

rope and utensils.

It is more than likely that at some stage your visit will coincide with a village fiesta, may be to celebrate a day in the traditional calendar—perhaps a solstice or equinox, a Catholic holy day or saint's day, or a local wedding. Each is celebrated at length and with fervour.

CUENCA AND THE SOUTHERN ANDES

Cuenca is a very attractive and historic city with strong echoes of its colonial and prosperous early republican past. To its north, Ingapirca is the most important Incan site in Ecuador, and Cajas National Park offers wonderful highland landscapes for walkers. A string of villages, each with its own heritage of traditional crafts, lies among the warm valleys south-east of the city.

Further south, a jumble of much older mountains replaces the volcanic peaks and high plains of the central Andes and makes life hard and travel slow. Well off the beaten track, Podocarpus National Park attracts dedicated birdwatchers and the small town of Vilcabamba on a back road to Peru was once reputed to hold the secret of eternal youth.

CUENCA

Capital of the south, Cuenca is a comfortable rather reserved city with a well-preserved and restored colonial centre that has earned it UNESCO World Heritage Site status. Its cobbled streets, colonial churches and whitewashed buildings echo those of Quito, on a smaller scale, with a quieter provincial air, and at a lower altitude. Situated in a fertile valley at the confluence of four rivers, it enjoys the perpetual spring climate of the highlands.

Cuenca dates back to AD 500, and was a notable Cañari settlement when the Incas expanded north from Peru to establish their city of 'Tomebamba' as one of the very finest of its day. But all was soon laid low in the Incan civil war between rival brothers Atahualpa and Huascar. The Spanish rebuilt the city in a fine renaissance style, with well-laid out streets and plazas. Cuenca's architecture, much of which dates from

the 18th century, was 'modernized' in the economic prosperity of the 19th century.

The streets of present-day Cuenca are filled with the life of a provincial capital, with a host of small shops and colourful markets. Fronting the central plaza is the rather splendid 'New' Cathedral, started in 1885. Its large blue-tiled domes, towers, arches and buttresses present an impressive sight, and contain below them a large nave that addresses one of the most ornate gilded altars one could wish to see, spangled by the light from windows lavishly furnished with stained glass. At the other end of the square is the Old Cathedral (El Sagrario), a much more humble building with whitewashed walls (incorporating some Incan stonework) and a single bell tower.

Many of Cuenca's more important buildings are made in the colonial baroque style using locally quarried marble. The houses of the well-to-do, mostly dating from Cuenca's heyday, reserve the best of their charms to graceful inner courtyards. The wealth of those times is evident not only from the size of the houses but also their interior décor: one private mansion boasts wall-coverings of stamped enamelled tin plate specially imported from Europe to resemble the embossed leather that was fashionable at the time.

The boom times of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century came partly from the export of quinine, harvested from the bark of the local cascarilla tree for the treatment for malaria, and partly from the Panama hat industry. Small workshops in the town apply the final stages of production to semi-finished hats drawn from the 'craft villages' (see below), and export the results all over the world. The trade route first passed through Panama from which the hats took their name in Europe, a sleight that still rankles. If Panamas are your style then spend the extra to buy a superfino that can be rolled up in your luggage but will spring back into perfect shape for the Members Pavilion at Lord's.

Haciendas and hotels for touring

There are good options for the traveller almost everywhere, especially in the Andes, where the proud owners of several historic haciendas have turned their ancestral homes into characterful country hotels. There are all types: hearty farmers guesthouses, eco-focused activity centres, and gentleman's country estates. Crumbling mansions in the cities have been restored into plush boutique hotels. There are even mountain spas with thermal waters.



Termas de Papallacta MID/UPPER RANGE

Antisana NP

A delightful lodge with spa and outdoor thermal pools for its guests. High in the Andes a 40min drive east of Quito, 32 rooms with private bathrooms each just a few steps from a thermal pool are dotted about in gardens, including 13 cabins with living room and fireplace. On a clear night it is lovely to slip into the warm water with the snowcapped peak of Antisana moonlit in the distance. A main block houses the restaurant and spa. Self-guided trails lead to the *paramo* for walkers and birders. Other thermal pools open to the public are popular with Quito week-enders.



San Agustin de Callo TOP RANGE

Cotopaxi area

Built on the site of an Incan palace (one of the two most important Incan sites in Ecuador) this hacienda is a working farm offering luxury accommodation and a wide range of activities with an unrivalled glimpse into Ecuador's rich and colourful past, serving as Inca fortress, Augustinian convent and temporary home for the French Geodesic Mission whose scientific results helped to determine the true shape of the planet. All the bedrooms have views of the main courtyard and Tungurahua and Chimborazo volcanoes.



Hacienda La Ciénega MID-RANGE

Lasso (Cotopaxi area)

One of the oldest haciendas in Ecuador, La Ciénega is a characterful property with an attractive courtyard and gardens. Set in extensive grounds it is approached along an avenue of fragrant eucalyptus trees. Its well-regarded restaurant, 34 guest rooms and suites are set around a series of attractive courtyard gardens, some of which are recent additions. La Ciénega offers rooms with colonial and 19th century furnishings and has many other reminders of its past, including a private chapel. Horse riding is usually available for guests.



Hacienda El Porvenir MID-RANGE

Cotopaxi area

A traditional high mountain hacienda with a nestled in the foothills of Ruminahui volcano, a nice spot from where you can explore Cotopaxi. There are a choice of bedrooms style. Some are en-suite. The restaurant serves local Ecuadorian food. Always a hearty alternative place since we've known it years ago, the hacienda has grown into a wonderfully atmospheric well-run enterprise with wide appeal. A wide variety of active and adventure excursions is available at reasonable extra cost such as horse-riding, hiking, mountain-biking and helping out on the farm.



Hacienda Pinsaqui MID/UPPER RANGE

Otavallo

An impressive hacienda steeped in 3 centuries of history (Simon Bolivar stayed here), set in attractive gardens complete with llamas, 5km outside the town of Otavallo below Imbabura volcano. Full of atmosphere, with weavings, antiques and mementoes. Some of the hacienda's 30 guest rooms have four poster beds, all have open fires and en suite facilities (some with jacuzzi) and are furnished with antiques and colonial style reproductions. There is a well-appointed restaurant, and a terrace snack bar. Good for walking, and for riding and mountain biking (at extra cost).



Mantaraya Lodge MID/UPPER RANGE

Puerto Lopez, Pacific coast

An Ecuadorian take on mediterranean style: a small hotel with 15 comfortable rooms with private bathroom, all with either a balcony or a terrace, and a range of activities for guests to enjoy. There is a swimming pool, restaurant serving local and international food and internet connection. Situated in the Machalilla National Park, 15min from Puerto Lopez (where boats leave for day trips to Isla de la Plata), and close to the archeological site at Agua Blanca, this is a reasonable option for a few days at the coast.



Hotel Santa Lucia UPPER RANGE

Cuenca

A mansion built by the provincial governor in 1859, set around 3 internal courtyards in the manner of the best houses of that time, in the heart of Cuenca's historic district. Restored and converted into a first rate hotel in 2002, the style is traditional and opulent with polished wood floors, luxurious fabrics and period furnishings, with the courtyard layout bringing a sense of quiet spaciousness. Hotel Santa Lucia has 20 bedrooms, each well furnished and generously sized, and is conveniently located for city sightseeing and access to the surrounding area.



Boutique Mansion del Rio UPPER RANGE

Guayaquil

A grand 1920s 'European' villa looking out across the Guayas river, set around an inner courtyard, converted to a boutique hotel with very impressive public rooms with painted ceilings, chandeliers, marble floors and wooden staircases. Some guest rooms are in this style, others are executive style; all have en suite facilities, a/c, TV, wifi, hair dryer, etc. Good location in the historic Santa Ana district, not far from the Malecon. The hotel has a fine restaurant and a terrace bar with river views.

Worth a mention

Hostal Posada del Tigra near Quilotoa MID RANGE

Family-owned and run guesthouse in a charming 130 year old working hacienda in a beautiful location. Snug well-heated rooms. Hearty cooking with own organic ingredients. Friendly welcoming atmosphere.

Hacienda Manteles near Baños UPPER RANGE

Charming, homely guesthouse in the countryside close to the Patate valley with an attractive garden setting. Approx 45min drive from Baños. 17 comfortably furnished rooms all with private bathroom and hot water, some with wood burning stove. Guests stay on a half-board basis.

Hacienda Cusin Otavallo MID/UPPER RANGE

A characterful historic 17th century hacienda located near to the market town of Otavallo. Log fires, beamed ceilings, local crafts, antiques, very interesting gardens. Lots of activities available at the hacienda and around.

Hotel Abraspungo Riobamba MID-RANGE

Renovated and much extended colonial hacienda in the countryside outside Riobamba, good for access to Chimborazo volcano etc. All rooms have private bathroom with hot water, telephone, TV. The characterful restaurant on site is well-rated, and there is a pleasant bar.





Amazon

The best rainforests in the Amazon are those closest to the Andes. To experience its wildlife you need only make a short hop from Quito.

Eastwards, the Andes descend quickly from the sierras, losing 10,000ft in altitude in less than 30 miles. By this point the Amazon basin has already started although it is still another 2,000 miles before the land descends the final 1,000ft to meet the sea.

The little town of Coca lies where the Río Coca joins the Río Napo, which eventually joins the Amazon. Though Coca is only 40 miles from the sierras, it is at the edge of the rainforest (and would be well within the forest but for man's activities—farms are expanding and oil has been found nearby). Coca is also called Puerto Francisco de Orellana, after the Spanish captain who set off downriver in 1541 to find food for a stranded party of soldiers. Orellana claimed the weight of water flowing from the Andes was so strong his boat could not return; instead he carried on—reaching the mouth of the Amazon over a year later.

Beyond Coca, the habitat is little touched and you are rapidly in the world of the rainforest and its peoples. Today, Coca, which has a small airport

and can also be reached by road from the mountains, is a setting off point for a small number of wildlife lodges a few hours further down the river that are accessible only by boat.

Rainforest tourism is a growth activity for Ecuador, with a scattering of small lodges close to the mountains. The principal three lodges down the Napo river: Napo Wildlife Centre, La Selva, and Sacha Lodge, are the best situated and best fulfil their role. Each provides a good level of comfort, knowledgeable guides, and excellent opportunities to experience the forest from trails, by boat, and from canopy towers.

What will you see in the Amazon? First, there is an astonishing variety of trees and forest plants, many with unusual survival mechanisms or folk uses. There is much to learn from the smaller things—flashing blue morpho butterflies, tiny colourful frogs, leaf cutter and army ants. And then there are birds. In this part of the Amazon the number of different bird species is staggering—each Napo river lodge has recorded well over 500. Clay licks provide macaws, parrots



and parrakeets with a digestif against the toxins that forest trees use to protect their fruit.

Most large animals, such as tapir and jaguar, are very hard to find. They can easily slip away in a jungle where sight-lines are short, and where local people are hunters they have every reason to do so. Monkeys are quite easy to see, including howlers with their compelling eerie roar, lively spider monkeys that crash overhead in family troupes, and little capuchin monkeys that delicately clamber on lower branches, unsure whether to be curious or fearful. You may also see one or two of the smaller squirrel monkeys, marmosets and tamarinds, capybara and perhaps an armadillo or an anteater. Agoutis are common, but as lunch on legs for many predators including man, they are understandably nervy. Rivers and lakes generally produce caiman and piranhas, with giant otters and anacondas a possibility.

Throughout Ecuador's rainforests there are people following a life of hunting, gathering, and subsistence farming. It is a privilege to meet them, to hear about their communities, their use of the forest, the skills of their shamans, and the proper use of a blow-pipe or bow and arrow. Such contact brings its own responsibilities so that local people control the impact on their communities and earn a just reward. Yachana Lodge (p15) in particular is working with this in mind.



Where to stay in the Amazon



Sacha Lodge

Napo River

Sacha Lodge is set in a private reserve two and a half hours down the Napo River from Coca. The lodge stands by an oxbow lake reached on a boardwalk that runs through seasonally flooded forest.

Efficiently run, Sacha receives a larger number of visitors and offers substantial well-maintained accommodation. Facilities include two opportunities to experience the forest at canopy level or above: a canopy platform in a kapok tree, and three high metal towers with observation platforms below, at, and above the canopy, between which a 275m metal walkway runs at around tree top height. There is a good variety of excellent excursions, and a team of experienced guides supported by assistants drawn from local communities.

Cabins are sturdily built in timber, fully screened, with 24hr electric lighting and gas heated hot water showers. There are two en suite rooms per cabin: noise transmission can be an issue if adjacent guests keep different hours. A lounge bar and communal dining area are housed in a large thatched rotunda, with a smaller bar/dining area overlooking the lake. Sacha Lodge's bird list claims 586 species. Other wildlife includes an impressive list of monkeys, many of which are readily seen, plus sloths, ant-eaters, armadillos, racoons, small cats, tapir and reports of puma.



Napo Wildlife Centre

Napo River

A little further downriver on the south side, Napo Wildlife Centre is located in its own 82 square mile reserve area within the Yasuni National Park—a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve that has highest tree diversity in the world. The Centre was created and built by the Añangu community in partnership with charitable foundations.

The fast boat from Coca drops you by a beautiful creek that meanders into the forest. Here you are met by the lodge staff in small dug-out boats who paddle slowly to introduce the plants and wildlife of the forest as you travel (the journey can last 1½–2½ hours), emerging at a beautiful oxbow lake with the lodge on the shore.

The lodge offers individual adobe style cabins, spacious and well-screened, with 24hr electricity, fans and gas-heated hot water in en suite bathrooms. Comfortable bar and dining areas are in an large and airy main building, with a roof viewing platform. There is also a canopy platform set in a 120ft ceiba tree, a good network of trails, and a selection of excellent river excursions. The lodge is well run mostly by local people trained in the early years of the lodge's foundation. The terrain around the lodge (terra firma and varzea) with by small hills that add a variety of habitat, so increasing the number of species that can be seen. An excellent range of wildlife, birds, plants, trees is almost guaranteed and the lodge's recorded lists of birds, mammals, etc are top rate.



La Selva Amazon Ec lodge and Spa

Napo River

La Selva Lodge is set on an oxbow lake bordering Yasuni NP 3 hours from Coca by boat, followed by a short hike and dugout ride across the lake paddled by staff. Each cabin has a private bathroom, hot shower, electricity, mosquito nets and ceiling fans; some also have hammocks. The 12 suites have rainforest showers, panoramic windows, private balconies and luxury bed linen. 3 scenic rooms offer private balconies with lake views. 3 family suite cabins have two separate rooms and a jacuzzi. There is a 135ft observation tower set in a giant kapok tree. Trail and canoe excursions access terra firma and varzea forest, palm swamp and two oxbow lakes. An excellent variety of birds and other wildlife can be seen, with several monkey species, sloth and caiman.

Yachana Lodge

Napo River, between Tena and Coca

Winner of prestigious ecotourism awards, this small lodge by the Napo river "excels in introducing guests to, and encouraging participation in, local ways of life". Set in a private reserve partly funded by Rainforest Concern, guides from local communities take you on jungle walks to experience the rainforest from a wildlife perspective. You are also invited to meet and engage with local people and to try everyday tasks such as gold-panning, using a blow-pipe and throwing a spear. It is also possible to participate in a cleansing ceremony. Accommodation is in simple neat cabin and lodge rooms all with private bathrooms and warm water showers. Electricity is from solar power. Profits support a community education and development foundation.

Sani Lodge

Napo River

Sani Lodge is owned and operated by the Sani Isla Comuna community with about 35 members as chefs, boat drivers, native guides and waiters on a rotating system that offers everyone an opportunity—so some may be less experienced, calling for extra patience and good humour on your part.

The lodge has 10 spacious individual thatch-roofed cabanas for double or triple occupancy, each with a modern bathroom and screened windows to guard against insects. Lighting is solar powered, with natural-oil lamps also available. The bar, lounge and open-air dining room overlook the lagoon. Cooking deploys fresh, local ingredients in versions of international dishes.



Anakonda

Napo River

Ecuador's first luxury Amazon cruiser. 40 passengers in 18 spacious cabins all with a/c, 24hr electricity, private bathrooms with hot water (some cabins can be interconnected to suit families). Dining room, bar, observation deck with outdoor Jacuzzi and al fresco lounge. 25 person crew inc paramedic, 4 nature guides and 4 local guides. Operates all year. In the high water season, small launches venture deep into the flooded forest. 3, 4 or 7 night itineraries from Coca.

Cotococha Lodge

Tena

Overlooking the Napo river near Tena (upstream from Coca), this small lodge offers an all-round experience of rainforest wildlife, jungle hikes, and visits to local communities. The forest is somewhat less diverse in terms of wildlife, but access is by road, from either Quito or Baños. 17 neat and spacious private cabins, traditional in style, with private bathrooms with hot water, set in gardens around a lodge with comfortable bar, dining room and lounge. Lighting in the cabins is by oil lamps.

Manatee River Boat

Napo River

This 90ft river boat offers a relaxing way to enjoy a taste of the rainforest. She cruises the Napo river stopping for jungle walks, trips by small boat into flooded forest or quiet lagoons, with visits to a canopy tower and a salt lick. Carrying just 30 passengers, there is ample deck space and a comfortable bar and dining room. All cabins have a/c and private bathrooms.



Isla de la Plata

9km offshore, Isla de la Plata is a small uninhabited island skirted by cliffs. It is home to colonies of Nazca, blue-footed and red-footed boobies, magnificent frigatebirds and, seasonally, waved albatross. Sea lion and fur seals are occasional visitors.

Isla de la Plata is well worth a visit at any time of year. Between June and October, Humpback Whales are regularly seen in the surrounding waters, along

with large schools of dolphin and pods of Sperm, Pilot, False Killer and Killer Whales.

It is quite a stretch to compare Isla de la Plata with the Galápagos Islands, but the very pleasant day trip to the island (just up the coast from the bay pictured on this page), goes some way to indicate what is on offer 600km further into the Pacific.



Pacific

Another world again, Ecuador's Pacific coast is busy with trade, fishing and farming. It's only slowly waking up to visitors—but well worth a few days if you've time to explore.



The Andes fall away rapidly to the west, leaving a broad swathe of lowlands between cloud forested hills and the Pacific coast.

The western lowlands are home to half the country's population, with a different racial mix that includes an African heritage from the slave trade that brings an easy-going style in contrast to the more conservative life of the highlands. Banana growing and shrimp farming are prime activities here.

GUAYAQUIL

Life in the country's largest city is one of everyday commercial bustle. As the local saying goes, 'Guayaquil earns the money, Quito spends it'.

A cruise along the river frontage overlooking the muddy waters of the wide Guayas river, presents a diorama of the city's history. The wealth brought by the cacao trade, when Ecuador was the world's largest exporter, is exemplified by the Mercado Sur, a palace of iron and glass designed and prefabricated in France by Eiffel himself; it is now an exhibition space.

Dockside wharfs and warehouses convey the importance of the maritime trade, while the new Yacht Club expresses the city's international cool—a theme extended by the new 'Malecon 2000', an attractive broad promenade of gardens, fountains, shops and restaurants that has helped the city to redefine itself with new confidence. Many of the fine

buildings behind the Malecon have been impeccably restored.

At the end of the walkway, steps lead up to the lighthouse and church on Santa Ana Hill. This area was formerly a slum but with great vision and the support of local residents its large wooden houses have been renovated and colourfully painted, and the area turned into a pleasant mix of housing, gift shops, art galleries and cafés.

Other sights around the city include a modern cathedral fronted by a plaza whose trees are home to a profusion of iguanas, who come to the ground to be fed like ducks in the park. There are good Botanical Gardens too.

RUTA DEL SOL

From Chile to Peru, the Pacific coast of South America is chilled by the cold waters of the Humboldt current. Fortunately, its influence stops well south of Guayaquil so Ecuador's Pacific coast enjoys the warm waters of the tropics and many days of clear skies.

Resorts close to the city can be crowded, but the 'Ruta del Sol', the coast road north of Salinas to Manta, is a delight. Broadly speaking, the further north you go the quieter and nicer the beaches and coastal villages become, with a scattering of small hotels.

Salinas itself has high rise blocks that attract the local well-to-do in la temporada—Ecuadorians' holiday season from December to April.

MACHALILLA NP

Towards the northern end of the Ruta del Sol, Machalilla national park is a real jewel. The main section of the park protects a full transect of vegetation from arid scrub and tropical dry forest near the sea, through moist forest, up to true cloud forest: great for hiking, birdwatching and just being out and about.

Within the park, the indigenous Manteño community of Agua Blanca welcomes visitors. Volunteers show you their village and the smallholdings where they grow grenadines, papaya, mango, oranges, limes, maize, chilli and much more. At the river the village laundry is washed by hand using the fruit of the barbasco tree as a soap. You may be invited to bathe in a sacred sulphur lake, where the whole community gathers for ceremonial bathing at solstices and equinoxes. A viewpoint looks from this dry lightly forested area towards the lush hills of San Sebastián.

An archaeological site near the village has been excavated to reveal the remains of 3 solar centres for measuring the sun's motion and a large ceremonial hall where stone jaguar thrones were positioned every 5 paces. A small museum contains relics and artefacts including thrones, funerary urns, tattoo stamps and spondylus shells. It is a fascinating glimpse of pre-Incan society, made possible by its direct descendants.

Also within the park is the beautiful bay of Los Frailes: a paradisiacal long sweep of fine sand, with little shade.

Planning your trip to Ecuador

The best of Ecuador

Since launching Geodyssey in 1993 we have always prided ourselves on creating travel ideas that are individually adapted to each country we offer. Each of our destinations is very different, and each has its own ways to discover and enjoy it.

Ecuador certainly has a lot to offer, and in a small space, much more for its size than any other in South America. To get the most from a trip to Ecuador the best options are:

- **Private guided touring** Travelling with your own local guide really does add a lot to the experience of Ecuador. You'll have a rich experience with lots to see and do each day. **page 22-27**
- **Small group holidays** On our 'Ecuador Odyssey' holiday you join a group of like-minded travellers on a convivial fully-escorted trip around the country. **page 28-29**
- **Active Ecuador** A walking holiday is a great way to explore the Andes, take in some fabulous scenery, relax and get fit. There are lots of other options too. **page 30-33**
- **Birdwatching** Ecuador is one of the world's best birdwatching countries, with a huge number of birds, fabulous scenery, good places to stay, and reasonably short distances to travel. **page 34-39**
- **The Galapagos Islands** The closest to Eden, a unique experience of the natural world. Best enjoyed on a cruise properly controlled by the National Park and fully contributing to the islands' conservation. **page 40-47**



The right design for you

Our specialists have carefully designed each sample holiday in this brochure to be the best of its type. You can choose with confidence one of those itineraries 'off-the-peg', just as it stands. We can also design something just for you on a fully 'tailor-made' basis.

Our specialists are available to advise you. There is plenty in this brochure to help you plan your trip before you contact us, but if you are in a hurry please at least just browse these pages to get the flavour of what's possible before you call!

Off-the-peg holidays

Choose a holiday design straight off-the-peg for the best possible value.

The designs shown in this brochure have been specially created to focus on highlights that most of us with a real interest in Ecuador will want to see and experience.

By choosing one of these carefully crafted designs 'off-the-peg', ie exactly as it is described, you have the advantages of a private trip (not in a group) to start on any date, with a thoughtfully designed itinerary, at a very competitive price. There is often a choice of hotel selections at different budgets.

While an 'off-the-peg' design cannot be changed without increasing the price, you can easily add extra days at the start or end of the holiday. You might add a Galapagos cruise, of course, or spend a little longer in Quito, for example.

The letters "B", "L" and "D" (for breakfast, lunch and dinner) indicate the meals that are included in the prices in the Booking Information insert.

How to book your holiday 'off-the-peg'

To book your holiday 'off-the-peg', select your favourite holiday design from this brochure, check our current Booking Information supplement for prices and latest details, then contact us with the dates you'd like to travel.

We will answer any questions you have, update you on any changes in the itinerary since this brochure went to press, go through any hotel choices etc with you, and discuss flight options. You can book your flights independently or through us.

When you send in your signed booking form and payment our specialists will make the reservations. If a hotel etc in the design happens not to have availability for your dates we will suggest a suitable alternative at similar cost.



Tailor-made holidays

Use our tailor-made service to see Ecuador exactly the way you want.

On a fully tailor-made holiday your entire trip is designed day-by-day to suit you. Our specialists have lots of ideas and some great suggestions. They know what's available and they really understand how the country works.

A tailor-made holiday allows you choose the way you travel, the type of hotels you prefer, and the things you like to do. You can choose whether to have a private guide for all or any part of your trip. You can build in a special interest (such as walking, archaeology, local cultures, wildlife, or bird watching) for most of your time, or just a day or two. It's up to you.

How to book a tailor-made holiday

First look through the holiday designs in this brochure and pick the ideas that appeal to you the most, perhaps from different designs.

Then call us with your choices and questions and we will discuss them with you and prepare a full written proposal. We can modify this as often as necessary to create your perfect trip. Meals can be included or left for you to decide as you go along.

There's no commitment until you are ready

When you are happy with a proposal, send us your booking form and payment and we will put everything in place. There is no commitment until you send us your booking form.

A tailor-made service naturally adds a little to the overall cost of a holiday, but you're making sure that you get the most from your valuable holiday time and from the rest of your holiday budget.





Practicalities

When to visit Ecuador

There are large variations in climate around the country, primarily due to differences in altitude.

Andes

In the Andes, **June to September** are generally drier and clearer than the rest of the year (6-7hrs of sunshine as opposed to 5-6hrs at other times).

For the rest of the year, from **October to March**, a typical sierra day would start with a sunny clear morning, clouding over later in the afternoon perhaps with some rain. Cloud and rain are created by the mountains, so vary widely as you move around them.

The wettest weather in the Andes is in **April**, extending either side into parts of March and May.

There is little difference in temperature around the year. See the weather chart for Quito.

Amazon

In the Amazon, warm temperatures and high levels of humidity are the norm. It rains too (hence the rainforest), but not as much as you might think. You would be unlucky to lose more than half a day to rain in a 4 day visit - but it does happen.

Pacific

The Pacific Coast is popular with locals from Christmas to Easter, when it is very hot, with mostly clear skies but frequent showers. From June to October it is cooler and drier but with misty mornings. See the chart for Guayaquil.

Galapagos

For seasons on the Galapagos see page 43.

Where to stay

- **In Quito** Quito has a good selection of hotels, with plenty of characterful options at many levels of comfort and price. See page 7 for examples.
- **Touring the Andes** A good number of historic haciendas have been converted into characterful country hotels. 'Haciendas and hotels for touring' has examples on page 13.
- **Amazon lodges** There is a very good choice of excellent lodges in the Amazon that are reasonably easy to reach and offer amazing experiences of Amazon nature and its communities. For details turn to page 17.
- **Nature lodges** For lodges that are especially good for nature see page 24.

Hotel grades

We use the following to indicate relative prices:

- **MID-RANGE** A good standard option which we think is comfortable and pleasant but with few frills and at a price to suit the cost-conscious traveller. Guest bedrooms all have private bathrooms, of course.
- **UPPER RANGE** A notch or two up, with prices to match
- **TOP RANGE** At the top end of what's available. A special place to stay, but at the top of the market price-wise.

Food

The best Ecuadorian cooking, which you can find in a number of the finest restaurants in Quito or Guayaquil, is very good indeed, and worth exercising your credit card on.

As you travel around outside the big cities you will find that standards are pretty good, mostly matching what you would expect from the level of accommodation you are staying in, and the location.

In the country you can expect hearty fare, nothing too elaborate, usually a selection of local recipes and 'international' favourites - steaks, pizzas and so on. Soups are especially good. Vegetarians will get by.

With excellent local beer, served ice cold, and good wines from Chile and Argentina, you'll get along very nicely.

Guides

Having a guide with you is far and away the best way to learn about Ecuador.

Galapagos guides are incredibly well-trained, speak fluent English and are a fount of knowledge.

Guides on the mainland are almost as excellent, well-trained to earn their licences. You could have a guide throughout your trip (see our 'Guided touring' on pages 18-21 for examples), or just while you are touring.

Take the family

Ecuador and the Galapagos are both great for adventurous families, with fabulous experiences to inspire young minds.

There is a lot to see within reasonable travel times, and hotels to suit most budgets. Much will depend on the age of your children and your family's interests - talk to our experts to create the perfect trip for all of you.

Connections

If you have time and would like to combine your trip to Ecuador with a visit to another country in Latin America, then please call us to discuss your options.

Much depends on which airline is offering efficient connections at reasonable fares.

We know Ecuador

Geodyssey's in-depth knowledge of our destinations is legendary. Our Ecuador specialists have travelled the length and breadth of the country over a long period. We go back again and again, researching ideas, checking hotels, meeting guides and testing routes.

Our knowledge is kept up-to-date by working with Ecuador every day, by contact with our local partners around the country, and by the feedback we receive from our clients when they get back.

We have lots of practical experience in designing trips that really work well for different customers with different tastes and budgets. That's what we enjoy best of all.

Our experts are a helpful bunch, so when you are ready just give them a call and talk things through. Their expertise is yours when you want it.

We are trusted by demanding clients

We plan trips to Ecuador every day of the week for our clients. They are a great bunch of people: school teachers, doctors, cabinet ministers, business people, retirees, honeymooners, young professionals in couples and groups, birdwatchers, walkers, wildlife photographers, and many more. They are all demanding in their different ways.

At the end of their trip they generally award us very high ratings (98% rate our specialists as 'Excellent'), so we must be getting most things right.

Conde Nast Traveler magazine once expressed it well when they included Geodyssey in their Special Agent list:

"This list represents those who have impressed me the most with their knowledge of specific destinations and types of travel. They also possess a certain degree of frankness, friendliness, taste, the willingness to work with a range of customers and budgets, and an understanding of the types of experiences that Conde Nast Traveler readers want."

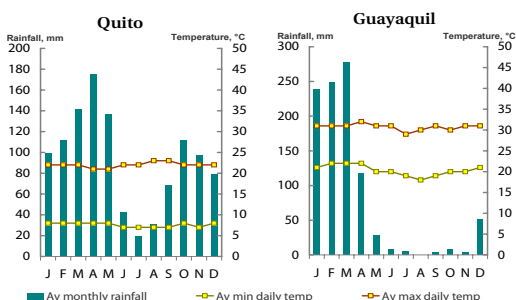
You can do anything

Because we know a lot about Ecuador we offer lots and lots of choice. Whether it's a relaxing break you are after, a see-it-all touring holiday, something with a wildlife focus, expert bird watching, activities from day walks to serious trekking, scuba diving and more.

So if you have something special in mind, there's a very good chance that we already have experience of designing something similar. Go on, try us.

When things go wrong

It's good to know that when you are on your holiday you have got the support, knowledge and back-up you need locally and from here in London. If something goes wrong, we're here to help fix it for you.





PRIVATE GUIDED TOUR IN QUITO • CHOICE OF ANDES, AMAZON & GALAPAGOS OPTIONS • MID-RANGE HOTEL IN QUITO (OR UPGRADE)



STARTS ANY WEDNESDAY

Andes, Amazon and Galápagos

A classic combination of Ecuador's worlds: Quito, the Andes, the Amazon and the Galápagos Islands.

Quito One of South America's most evocative cities

Amazon Select the Amazon experience that suits you best from any of those on page 17.

Andes Choose from:

- **Otavaló's** crafts and markets
- **Cotopaxi's** dramatic scenery for walking etc
- **Mindo** the natural world of the cloud forest

Galapagos Islands Pick the boat of your choice. A 4 night cruise makes a 14 day trip in total.



Here is how these choices connect together.

Quito

Day 1 You are met on the arrival of your international flight at Quito airport and are transferred to a 3* hotel (or your chosen upgrade), your base for 2 nights.

Day 2 BLD In the morning your private English-speaking guide will meet you at your hotel and take you on a walking tour of the Old City.

After lunch, visit the Equator at either the unconventional Inti-Nan museum or the Mitad del Mundo complex.

Alternatively you could take the cable car up Pichincha volcano, which would be best done in the morning, with your time in the Old City moved to the afternoon.

Amazon

Day 3 BLD You are collected from your hotel for the journey to the Amazon, chosen from the examples on page 17.

Usually this involves an early start, a short flight and a journey by boat at the other end to reach your destination in the rainforest.

A 3 night stay is the norm for a visit to a land-based lodge, and is assumed here.

Days 4-5 BLD In the Amazon.



Andes

Day 6 Returning to Quito, you are met at the airport and driven to your choice of three destinations in the Andes, for a two night stay.

Your time is free in each location to relax at the hotel or for optional excursions which can be arranged by you locally at extra cost.

Otavaló B (markets and craft villages) Stay at either Hacienda Pinsaqui and Hacienda Cusín (described on p13). Both are convenient for visits to Otavaló and its neighbouring villages.

Cotopaxi BLD Stay at El Porvenir (p13), a beautifully located small hacienda style lodge situated on the edge of Cotopaxi national park, offering hiking, biking and riding.

Mindo (Andean cloud forests) BLD Stay in your choice of cloud forest lodge in the Mindo area (see p24).

Day 7 Free at your hacienda or lodge. Each has options for things to do, some at extra cost.

Day 8 Morning free. Afternoon transfer back to Quito. Overnight at the same hotel as Day 1.

Galápagos

Day 9 BLD Transfer to the airport at Quito for a flight to the Galápagos, where you join your chosen boat for a voyage around the islands.

Day 10 onwards BLD Galápagos cruise.

Departure

Final day of cruise Disembark from your boat in time for a midday flight to Guayaquil, which is timed to connect with international overnight flights to Europe.

The Booking Information insert that comes with this brochure provides guide prices for most combinations.

A Taste of Ecuador

A great value short tour for solo travellers and those combining a short visit to the mainland with a Galápagos cruise.

Quito

Day 1 You will be met on arrival at Quito airport and transferred to a 3* hotel well located in the Mariscal section of town. This will be your base for all four nights.

Cotopaxi National Park

Day 2 BLD This morning you are driven along the first section of the Avenue of the Volcanoes and into Cotopaxi National Park. Driving into the park area you pass below snow-capped Cotopaxi volcano, with great views all around. There are great opportunities for photographs. Lunch is included at a local restaurant.

In the afternoon you continue southwards rejoining the Avenue of the Volcanoes to visit the colourful Thursday market at Saquisilí, and return to Quito.

Quito

Day 3 B A guided city tour of the historic quarter of Quito is arranged for you today.

The shared tour includes a visit to the Parliament building, St Augustine Convent, Independence Plaza bordered by the Cathedral, Presidential Palace, Municipal Building and the Archbishop's Palace and a visit to the Church of San Francisco which has the painting of the winged Virgin of Quito at its main altar.

You are then driven out of the city to visit the Equator monument.

The afternoon is free in Quito, perhaps to visit museums or, if the weather is fine, to ride the cable car to the top of Pichincha.

Otavaló Market

Day 4 BLD An early start to join a shared full day tour. You are driven through the countryside to Otavaló.

You will have plenty of time to enjoy the lively and colourful markets, with a wide choice of textiles, handicrafts and jewellery. Look out for locals dressed in blue ponchos, white trousers and long plaited hair.

Lunch is included either at a restaurant beside San Pablo lake or a local hacienda.

Day 5 B This morning you are collected from your hotel and driven to Quito airport for your onward connection: perhaps a flight to the jungle, to the Galápagos or home.

Excursions are shared with other participants who may be of any nationality.



STARTS ANY SATURDAY



UPPER OR MID-RANGE HOTELS STARTS ANY FRIDAY

Haciendas of Distinction

Visit many of the highlights of Ecuador with the rich hospitality of the country's most characterful haciendas and fine hotels. Some guided touring is included.

Quito

Day 1 You are met on your arrival at Quito airport and driven to **Hotel Patio Andaluz or Mansión del Angel**. This is your base for your first 3 nights in Ecuador, allowing you to discover Quito while acclimatising to the altitudes of the Andes.

Day 2 **BL** An experienced local guide meets you at your hotel to introduce you to Quito and Ecuador in the course of a leisurely morning's walking tour of the historic quarter. The streets of the Old Quarter are closed to traffic on Sundays, and there are often colourful events in one or other of the principal plazas. In the afternoon you might like to continue exploring the city on your own (within a very short walk of Hotel Patio Andaluz are the City Museum, the delightful House of María Augusta Urrutia and La Compañía church), or relax in your hotel.

Day 3 **B** A free morning in Quito. As today is a Monday, you will be able to get a better look inside Quito's churches to appreciate their breathtaking gold and silver altars, and perhaps to ride the cable car to the top of Mt Pichincha with its extensive views over the city and to the Avenue of the Volcanoes. In the afternoon your guide takes you to other parts of the city and its surroundings, including a visit to the Equator monument.

Cotopaxi National Park

Day 4 **BLD** Today you are driven south along part of the Avenue of the Volcanoes to Cotopaxi National Park. You visit the beautiful Limpiopungo Lagoon at 3,800m and enjoy the high páramos vegetation, with miniature asters and crocus-like flowers nestling amid lichens and mosses. If you are responding well to the thinness of the air there is the option of walking up to the volcano's glacier. Then continue to your choice between **Hostería La Ciénega** or **Hacienda San Agustín de Callo** for a two night stay.

Day 5 **BLD** Free day for walking, riding or relaxing at Hostería La Ciénega or Hacienda San Agustín del Callo.

Baños

Day 6 **BD** Today you will be driven along the Avenue of the Volcanoes to Baños where you stay for 2 nights at Hostería Luna Runtun.

Day 7 **BD** Free day to enjoy the hotel and spa.

Riobamba

Day 8 **BD** After a leisurely morning free at Hostería Luna Runtun you will be transferred to Riobamba where you stay for one night at Hotel Abraspungu, a comfortable country inn style hotel just outside the town, ready for an early start next morning for the Devil's Nose Train.

Devil's Nose Train

Day 9 **BL** The engineers who constructed the Trans-Andean Railway between Guayaquil on the coast and Quito in the mountains faced incredible challenges of terrain.

Their most outstanding accomplishment was the section completed in 1902 known as the Devil's Nose, where the track descends an almost perpendicular wall of rock in a tight switchback—one of the great railway journeys of the world. To make the trip even more memorable it used to be the thing to travel on the roof of the train, but in these days of health & safety precautions you will be sitting inside.

You leave from the small station at Riobamba. The single track journey twists and turns through Andean villages and pretty valleys, carrying you over bridges and across steep ravines as you descend to the village of Alausí. From here you descend the Devil's Nose switchback, pause, then ascend and return to Alausí.

Ingapirca

You are met off the train to be driven by shared small coach to Cuenca, with a stop to visit the Inca ruins of Ingapirca (p9).

Cuenca

At historic Cuenca, the principal city of the southern Andes, you stay for three nights in the historic quarter at **Mansión Alcázar** or **Hostería Santa Lucia**.

Day 10 **B** You are collected from your hotel for a morning tour of Cuenca. In the afternoon you are free to relax at the hotel or perhaps to explore some more of the city by yourselves. Don't forget to buy a Panama hat!

Day 11 **B** A free day in Cuenca. Though there is plenty to see in the city, you could choose to arrange an optional excursion, eg to Cajas National Park or nearby villages famous for their crafts.

Otavalo

Day 12 **BD** Today you will be transferred to the airport at Cuenca for the short flight back to Quito. On arrival, you will be driven to Otavalo and your choice of one of four distinctive hotels: **Hacienda La Zuleta**, **Hacienda Pinsaqui**, **Hacienda Cusin**, or **La Mirage**.

Day 13-14 **BD** Two free days at your chosen hotel near Otavalo. Optional excursions can be arranged locally.

Day 15 **B** Morning visit to Otavalo Market. On Saturdays all four separate markets will be in full operation—the early morning animal market, the handicrafts stalls, fruit and vegetables and the Indian market where the locals buy their unique items of dress.

In the afternoon you are transferred to Quito airport for your onwards flight to the Galapagos, or home to the UK.

Quito city break

Get to know this fascinating city, from the earliest peoples, the Incas and the conquistadors to its bold contemporary styles.

Quito

Day 1 You are met on arrival at the international airport and driven to your hotel in Quito where you stay for the next 6 nights.

Colonial Quito

Day 2 **B** Your local English-speaking private guide to the city collects you for a walking tour of the old city of Quito, stopping to see colonial churches, monasteries and museums.

Lost civilisations of La Florida and Tulipe

Day 3 **BL** Today is dedicated to pre-Hispanic Quito. With your guide you visit the new archaeological site at La Florida, and the world of the Quitus people who inhabited the valley of Quito before the arrival of the Incas. You then travel out of the city, first stopping to visit the Equator before continuing on to Tulipe in the cloudforest.

Tulipe was a main ceremonial worship site of the Yumbo people, who inhabited the north and northwestern valleys and mountains around Quito from around 800 to 1660 AD, controlling a crucial trade route between the Pacific coast, the Andes and the Amazon. The Tulipe site includes some 2,000 modest pyramids and mounds, stone-lined ceremonial immersion pools, and petroglyphs.

Contemporary Quito

Day 4 **B** Today you are taken to explore the contemporary side of Quito. Start with a ride on the 'Teleferiqo' cable car rising high above Quito for panoramic views over the city at 4,000m.

Next you cross the city to visit Ecuador's most famous modern artist's masterwork, Guayasamin's striking Chapel of Man. You could visit the small botanical garden in La Carolina park before some shopping in the modern Mariscal area of the city, perhaps at the Ecuador Gourmet Gallery.

Day-trips

Day 5 **BL** Escape the city on your choice from the following:

- Papallacta: hot springs and hummingbirds
- Antisana Reserve: condors and snowy peaks
- Indian market: which market depends on the day of the week
- Cotopaxi Volcano: with lunch at a hacienda and visit a rose farm
- Mindo cloudforest: orchids, butterflies and hummingbirds

Quito

Day 6 **B** This morning you return to Quito's historic quarter to visit the mansion of María Augusta Urrutia, a museum of high society life in 19th century Quito. You then visit Escuela Taller, an excellent charitably funded workshop school to train underprivileged youths as professional artisans from plumbing to painting in the style of the Quito School. Afternoon free.

Day 7 **B** You are collected from your hotel and driven to the airport for your onwards flight to the Galapagos, or home to the UK.

Naturally Ecuador

Ecuador's mountain forests are very special habitats for a rich diversity of life. As you descend from the highest elevations you pass through many different zones, each with its own ecosystems of trees, plants, birds and animals. These lodges offer great opportunities to experience the richness of these natural worlds.

Western Andes



Bellavista MID-RANGE
Mindo

Set in a 700ha private reserve in the Tandayapa Valley at 1,650–2,350m, Bellavista is a great place to stay for bird watching and nature walks. The lodge building with the restaurant and several bedrooms is a thatched geodesic dome overlooking the forest. There are conventional alternatives. An expert resident guide is usually on hand for birdwatchers on a shared basis.



Septimo Paraiso MID-RANGE
Mindo

A charming mid-range lodge with comfortable and well-maintained rooms. A good base for birders and natural history lovers. Located in the valley bottom at Mindo, Septimo Paraiso is like an assemblage of rambling Swiss chalets. It offers comfortable well-maintained and characterful wood-walled rooms, each with private bathroom, run with verve by its passionate owners. The lodge is set in a 300 hectare private reserve at 1,050–1,650m with a selection of short and long trails leading directly from the lodge. There is a nice swimming pool.



Mashpi Lodge Biodiversity Reserve TOP RANGE
near Tulipe

Mashpi is an award-winning modern lodge in 1000 ha of cloudforest reserve, with capacity for 36 guests in 18 spacious rooms with floor to ceiling glass facing the forest. Naturalist guides are on hand to accompany you on forest trails. A 2km aerial tram runs above the tree tops with a unique perspective on the forest. At a 'casa campesina' the local community shows how they cultivate crops of yucca, heart-of-palm, coffee and cacao. There is a butterfly vivarium and a serpentarium. Guided night hikes are an exciting choice. The lodge offers jacuzzi, sauna, turkish bath and optional spa treatments.

Northern Andes



Hacienda La Zuleta TOP RANGE
countryside east of Otavalo

A 16th century working hacienda 2h north of Quito high in the Andes at 9,600 feet whose owners count 2 presidents among their forebears. 15 guest bedrooms are individually decorated with antiques, embroidered linens, each with its own fire place, with either garden or mountain views. Regional cooking prepared with locally produced organic ingredients. Activities include walking, riding, biking, and seeing the working life of a hacienda. A project to increase the condor population is under way.



El Crater MID-RANGE
Pululahua

Hotel El Crater is an impressively designed modernist hotel on the rim of a long extinct volcanic crater, close to the equator line, with panoramic views in both directions from its picture windows. The hotel has 12 rooms equipped with king size or double beds, orthopaedic mattresses covered with natural fibres, eiderdowns and natural down pillows as well as pure wool blankets. Other amenities include central heating, frigo-bar, DVD player, TV.



Hosteria Spa Pantavi MID-RANGE
Imbabura

Hosteria Pantavi is a charming country lodge set in a restored hacienda surrounded by well-maintained gardens located between the Chota valley and Tumbabiro in Imbabura province. There are 15 rooms in total made up of standard rooms and suites. Each of the rooms has a private bathroom, cable TV and is decorated with characterful local artwork. Facilities include a swimming pool, spa offering a variety of different treatments and restaurant.

Eastern Andes



Cabanas San Isidro MID-RANGE
near Baeza

A basic but comfortable lodge, good for birders and walkers in the eastern Andes at 2,000m on slopes still retaining extensive humid forest. 10 wooden cabins with private bathroom a small porch with hummingbird feeder, coffee maker, sitting area. There is wifi in the dining room, white light for insect observation and a book exchange. It's a great place for butterflies, birds (310 species) and other wildlife including large mammals. 30 hummingbird species come to the feeders including Long-tailed Sylph and Gorgeted Woodstar. There is an orchid garden, Antpitta feeding station and trails down to 1,850m in the subtropical zone.



Wildsumaco UPPER RANGE
Loreto road

Comfortable birders lodge on the eastern slopes of the Andes at 1,400m. It is a 4hr drive from Quito and a 2hr drive from Coca. The lodge has fabulous views from its deck. Rooms are spacious with private facilities (hot water showers) and electricity for recharging camera equipment. The elevation of their forest reserve spans 1,200m - 1,500m and the trails give a mix of cloudforest species, foothill specialities and Amazonian birds in subtropical rainforest.



Guango Lodge MID-RANGE
Papallacta

Guango Lodge is a mid-range family-run lodge located in the village of Papallacta near Antisana NP at about 2700m, surrounded by humid temperate forest and within easy reach of high Andean *paramo*. All rooms have private facilities and hot water. Hummingbird feeders on the property a very good variety of species, including the endemic Sword-billed hummingbird. There is a simple restaurant serving local Ecuadorian cooking. This is a sister property to Cabañas San Isidro.

Hotel grades

- MID-RANGE A good standard option to suit the cost-conscious traveller
- UPPER RANGE A notch or two up, with prices to match
- TOP RANGE At the top end of what's available



PRIVATE GUIDED TOURING • UPPER RANGE HOTELS

Creature Comforts

Ten days of rich experiences in comfortable unhurried style, with an emphasis on nature. Out and about each day, good food and impressive hotels, haciendas and wildlife lodges each night.

Quito

Day 1 You are met on arrival at Quito airport and driven for a 2 night stay at an upper-range hotel in a beautifully restored grand house in Quito's historic quarter.

Day 2 **BL** Today you are taken on a guided tour of historic Quito. On sunny days the whitewashed buildings sparkle like sugar in the clear mountain air as you wander atmospheric cobbled streets lined with monasteries, convents and mansions, many with ornate façades and richly decorated interiors.

Street vendors offer sticky meringues, bunches of roses, ice creams, party balloons and piñatas (brightly painted paper sacks chock-full of sweets for children to burst). Little shops display corn, quinoa, beans, cinnamon, annatto, cumin and much more. A religious procession may pass, the faithful throwing rose petals in its path. Ornate churches, such as the magnificent baroque La Compañía de Jesús with its impressive carved and gilded altars, showcase the 'Quito School'. Take a moment watch the world go by in Plaza de la Independencia, overlooked by the Presidential Palace and the Cathedral—a favourite spot for the city's well-to-do to congregate.

You might choose to stop at the Casa del Alabado museum, with a fine collection of Pre-Hispanic ceramic artefacts beautifully displayed in a restored colonial mansion. The Maria Augusta Urrutia Museum is not to be missed, a mansion that offers a fascinating insight into high society life in 19th century Quito. Lunch is included at a restaurant overlooking one of the main squares.

Hacienda Zuleta

Day 3 **BLD** Today you are collected from your hotel for the drive north through a region where craft traditions take centre stage.

Nearing Otavalo you visit weaving workshops in the village of Peguche, and may call on a family of pan-pipe players and see where the pipes are made—with enthusiastic demonstrations.

Next visit the beautiful crater lake of Cotacachi and continue to Cotacachi itself, an entire town dedicated to leather. Dozens of shops and smart boutiques offer everything from skilfully made handbags, wallets and jackets to tack for hard working horses.

Stopping for a fine lunch at 'La Mirage' (a Relais & Chateaux member) you continue to the prestigious Hacienda Zuleta, your base for the next 3 nights—a very large working hacienda of pasture, forest and protected primary forest owned by your hosts the Plaza-Lasso family, whose illustrious ancestors include 2 presidents of Ecuador.

Day 4 **BLD** Today you can explore the trails at Hacienda Zuleta, walking or riding. Out and about over these 2 days you should have a good chance to see Spectacled Bear. You'll also be taken to their *Condor Huasi* rehabilitation project, where wild condors fly high in the hills over their temporarily captive cousins.

If you enjoy riding, and have the skills, the hacienda's stables are

among the most renowned in Ecuador with nearly 100 horses, 20 of which are 'Zuleteño', the hacienda's own cross of Spanish, Andalusian, English and Quarters.

When we were last at the hacienda we watched a horse-whisperer at work in the corral, gently bringing a nervy young stallion to accept saddle, bridle and rider.

Day 5 **BLD** Second full day at the hacienda for further hikes, rides and wildlife. The farm's 300 Holstein-Friesian cows produce organic milk for 11 varieties of semi-aged cheeses, cream, yoghurt and cream cheese made on the premises. Guests can see the little cheese factory at work through a large observation window. There is an extensively and attractive planted kitchen garden.

Otavalo, rose farms and the Equator

Day 6 **BL** A visit to Otavalo's justly famous crafts market, followed by lunch at a local hacienda.

At a rose plantation you'll see how Ecuador's long-stemmed roses are grown. You travel to the Equator, passing the monument to the 1736 French line, to the true line 200m away. The small Inti-Nan museum (rickety but fun) presents an eclectic mix of folk exhibits and 'scientific' demonstrations straddling the true line.

Stay the night at a modernist hotel on the rim of an extinct volcano, with panoramic views in both directions.

Mashpi Rainforest Biodiversity Reserve

Day 7 **BLD** Driving down the western slopes of the Andes you call at the El Pahuma Orchid Reserve, then continue to Mashpi Biodiversity Lodge (see opposite)—a stylish new cloudforest lodge & spa, where you stay for 2 nights.

The Mashpi reserve is set in a prime location for keen birders, the Tumbes-Chocó-Magdalena region—a biodiversity hotspot. Less avid birders are sure to enjoy the jewelled hummingbirds, flocks of parrots, colourful toucans plus the orchids and bromeliads, iridescent morpho butterflies and amphibians of the cloud forest trails.

Day 8 **BLD** A day at Mashpi. Resident guides will accompany you on the trails. Make sure you try the lovely spa.

Hacienda Rumiloma

Day 9 **B** A leisurely start then visit the astonishing Tulipe archeological site, whose importance is only beginning to be appreciated, en route back to Quito.

Your final night is at the delightful Hacienda Rumiloma perched high on the flank of the Pichincha volcano with a commanding view over the city. The rest of the day is free for you to enjoy the hacienda's facilities.

Day 10 **B** When the time comes, you are collected and driven to the airport for your onward flight to Galapagos or home.



PRIVATE GUIDED TOURING • UPPER RANGE HOTELS

Among mountains

A week's tour of Quito and the northern Andes.

Quito

Day 1 You are met on arrival at Quito airport and transferred to a comfortable 3* hotel, your base for 2 nights.

Day 2 **BL** In the morning your guide will take you on a walking tour of the Old City. After lunch, visit the Equator at either the unconventional Inti-Nan museum or the Mitad del Mundo theme park. Return to hotel. Your evening is free to eat at the hotel or take a taxi to a restaurant of your choice.

Otavalo

Day 3 **BD** After breakfast, transfer to Otavalo to stay 2 nights at Hacienda Cusín or Pinsaqui (see panel opposite). Your guide and vehicle are at your command for excursions in the area, including the famous market, Cuicocha lake, and the craft villages around the town.

Day 4 **BD** Excursions in and around Otavalo

Antisana

Day 5 **BD** Continue your tour eastwards to the mountain landscapes of Antisana national park, staying at the spa resort of Termas de Papallacta. Cabins are built around a series of thermal pools and a selection of treatments is available at the spa at additional cost.

Cotopaxi

Day 6 **BL** Drive around the mountains to Cotopaxi national park, exploring the Limpiopungo Lagoon, driving part of the way up Cotopaxi itself with the option of walking up a scree a further 200m to the mountain refuge and the edge of the glacier. Return to Quito to stay overnight at the same hotel as before.

Day 7 **B** You will be collected from your hotel in time for your onwards flight. Flights to the Galápagos or the Amazon leave in the morning. Overnight flights to Europe leave in the afternoon.

If you start this tour on a Tuesday Wednesday or Thursday it can be sequenced to visit Otavalo on its busiest market days.





UPPER OR MID-RANGE HOTELS

Lost Civilisations

Exciting discoveries are unveiling a 'new' Andean past, with the Quito valley at its centre, connected with the Amazon and the coast, and holding a special, perhaps mythical position as a gateway to creation—a creation placed not in the heavens but deep in the earth, here at the Middle of the World. Tantalising ideas on which to unfold the dramatic arrival of the Incas, and the Spanish conquest.

Quito

Day 1 You will be met on arrival at the international airport and driven to a hotel in Quito where you stay for the next 4 nights. Rest of the day free to relax after your long international flight.

City Museum & Casa del Alabado

Day 2 This morning you will be collected from your hotel by your English-speaking private guide who will take you to visit the delightful Casa del Alabado museum, which houses a fine collection of Pre-Hispanic ceramic artefacts beautifully displayed in a restored colonial mansion. You will also visit the Museo de la Ciudad, an attractively informative museum dedicated to the social history of Quito and set in a restored colonial building that was once a hospital.

The rest of the afternoon is free to explore the historic quarter. Stroll around impressive plazas, convents and monasteries contained within a few streets.

Cable car, Rumipamba & Central Bank Museum

Day 3 This morning your guide collects you from your hotel for a ride on the *Teleferiño* cable car, which rises high up above Quito for wonderful panoramic views over the city.

The ride begins on the city's western fringes, climbing the flanks of the massive Pichincha Volcano from 3,000 up to 4,000 metres.

Next pay a visit to Rumipamba, an archaeological site overlooking the city, with Incan walls, vestiges of domestic dwellings, and 'coluncos', crucial trade pathways that run from the Andes to the coast. The network of coluncos was dug by the Yumbo people, who inhabited the north and northwestern valleys and mountains around Quito from around 800 to 1660 AD.

Stop for lunch at Hacienda Rumiloma, perched high on the flank of the Pichincha volcano with a commanding view down upon the city.

Back in Quito you will be taken to the Central Bank Museum, where an impressive archeology room displays artefacts from the pre-ceramic era (4000 BC) to the end of the Inca era (1533 AD)

La Florida and Tulipe

Day 4 Today you visit, with your guide, the newly discovered La Florida Archaeological Site. This is an intriguing site which reveals the world of the Quitus people who inhabited the valley of Quito before the Incas. It is a burial site comprising ten 15m wide cylindrical chambers into which the Quitus carefully stored the bodies of their important dead: returning them to Pacha Mama-Mother Earth. They were provided with ceramics, gold ornaments, wood carvings and, most highly prized of all, spondylus shells carried from the ocean along the *coluncos* you saw yesterday.

Travelling out of the city you visit the Equator, passing the monument to the 1736 French expedition's line, to the true line

200m away. You visit the small Inti-Nan museum (rickety but fun) which presents an eclectic mix of folk exhibits and 'scientific' demonstrations straddling the true line.

You then cross high passes and continue down to Tulipe in the cloudforest. Tulipe was the main ceremonial worship site of the Yumbo, who inhabited the north and northwestern valleys and mountains around Quito from around 800 to 1660 AD and controlled a crucial trade route between the Pacific coast, the Andes and the Amazon to the east. According to one current theory the Yumbo migrated away to the Amazon after a great eruption of the Pichincha Volcano in 1660. The Tulipe site comprises some 2,000 pyramids and mounds, each modest in scale but a vast array in total. Water was of great significance to the Yumbos and the most immediately striking feature of the site is the geometrically shaped and aligned large, sunken, stone-lined immersion pools which had great ceremonial importance. There is a helpful interpretation centre at the site.

Cuenca

Day 5 This morning you fly to Cuenca in the southern Andes, where you are met on arrival and taken on a tour of this historic city, with its flower-filled plazas, cobbled streets and ornate colonial buildings with ancient wooden doors and ironwork balconies. The period of prosperity brought by the export of quinine and 'Panama' hats is reflected in the French and neo-classical style influences in the architecture. You stay here for 3 nights.

Ingapirca & Cañari culture

Day 6 This morning you are driven with your guide along the Pan-American Highway through dramatic Andean landscapes, to Ingapirca, originally a temple built for sun-worship, and today the most important and well-preserved Inca complex in Ecuador. You explore the ruins and visit the site museum. Depending on the day of the week, there are opportunities to visit picturesque Cañari markets for an impression of traditional Cañari crafts and customs, or local indigenous communities, artisans, beautiful churches and other highlights of the area.

Cajas National Park

Day 7 Today you are taken to visit Cajas National Park, with its beautiful mountain landscapes of dramatic rock outcrops, glacial lakes, high moorlands and forest. Take a nature walk, perhaps around a small tarn, and explore unusual elfin forests of paperbark *polylepis* trees. Lunch is picnic style.

Puerto Lopez

Day 8 Flying to Guayaquil you are met by your local guide and driven via Salinas to Puerto Lopez at the northern end of the *Ruta del Sol*. You stop at the Los Amantes de Sumpa Museum, which houses displays offering an insight into the ancient cultures of the

region. The museum is built on a burial site said to be the home of the oldest human remains yet found in Ecuador. Continue on to Mantaraya Lodge, a well-run small hotel set in the hills near Puerto López where you stay for the next 3 nights. Its colourful adobe-style buildings are set around a lovely pool.

Machalilla, Agua Blanca & Los Frailes

Day 9 Today you visit Machalilla National Park. The main section of the park protects a full transect of vegetation from arid scrub and tropical dry forest near the sea, through moist forest, up to true cloud forest: great for hiking, birdwatching and just being out and about.

Within the park, the indigenous Manteño community of Agua Blanca welcomes visitors. Volunteers show you their village and the smallholdings where they grow grenadines, papaya, mango, oranges, limes, maize, chilli and much more. At the river the village laundry is washed by hand using the fruit of the barbasco tree as a soap. You may be invited to bathe in a sacred sulphur lake, where the whole community gathers for ceremonial bathing at solstices and equinoxes. A viewpoint looks from this dry lightly forested area towards the lush hills of San Sebastián.

The archaeological site near the village has been excavated to reveal the remains of 3 solar centres for measuring the sun's motion and a large ceremonial hall where stone jaguar thrones were positioned every 5 paces. A small museum contains relics and artefacts including thrones, funerary urns, tattoo stamps and spondylus shells which were used as currency.

This is a fascinating glimpse of pre-Incan society, made possible by its direct descendants.

Also within the park is the beautiful bay of Los Frailes: a paradisaical long sweep of fine sand, though with little shade.

Day 10 Today you are free to relax and enjoy your hotel facilities or perhaps take the boat trip at additional cost to Isla de la Plata, a small uninhabited island skirted by cliffs 9km offshore. It is home to colonies of Nazca, blue-footed and red-footed boobies, magnificent frigatebirds and, seasonally, waved albatross. Sea lion and fur seals are occasional visitors. It is well worth a visit at any time of year, especially if you are not also visiting the Galapagos. Between June and October, Humpback Whales are regularly seen in the surrounding waters, along with large schools of dolphin and pods of Sperm, Pilot, False Killer and Killer Whales. It is quite a stretch to compare Isla de la Plata with the Galapagos Islands, but the very pleasant day trip to the island goes some way to indicate what is on offer 600km further into the Pacific.

Guayaquil

Day 11 Today you are driven back to Guayaquil airport in time to catch your onwards flight home, or to the Galapagos, Quito, or perhaps Peru.



PRIVATE GUIDED TOURING • UPPER OR MID-RANGE HOTELS



PRIVATE GUIDED TOURING • MID-RANGE HOTELS

The Avenue of the Volcanoes and the Devil's Nose Train

A one week itinerary to discover the heart of the central Andes along Humboldt's 'Avenue of the Volcanoes', and its great colonial cities of Quito and Cuenca. Ride 'the most difficult railway in the world' and pause to see the Incan ruins of Ingapirca.

Quito

Day 1 You are met on arrival at Quito airport and transferred to a comfortable 3* hotel, your base for 2 nights.

Day 2 **BL** In the morning your guide will meet you at your hotel and take you on a walking tour of the Old City. After lunch, visit the Equator at either the unconventional Inti-Nan museum or the Mitad del Mundo theme park. (A ride on the Pichincha cable car is an option if time allows and conditions are good.)

Avenue of the Volcanoes

Day 3 **BLD** Your guide will collect you from your hotel for the drive down the Avenue of the Volcanoes.

On your way you visit Cotopaxi NP, exploring the Limpiopungo Lagoon, and driving part of the way up Cotopaxi. From here you can walk a further 200m to the mountain refuge, but take it slowly—the mountain air is thin.

You descend to stay at Hacienda La Ciénega (see p13) for 2 nights.

Day 4 **BLD** A pleasant day's touring, visiting the villages around the 'Quilotoa Loop'. Your guide will help you decide whether to complete the whole loop, or to use part of the day for a walk in this beautiful Andean countryside.

Day 5 **BL** Continue south this morning along the Avenue of the Volcanoes to Riobamba, pausing in the village of Salasaca to visit a simple weavers workshop.

Your guide escorts you on a short city tour of Riobamba before arriving at your hotel in a converted hacienda just out of town.

Devil's Nose Train and Ingapirca

Day 6 **BL** An early start this morning for an exciting ride on the Devil's Nose train, as described in Day 12 of our 'Ecuador Odyssey', on page 28. After your train ride you visit the Incan site of Ingapirca and travel on to a characterful 3* hotel in Cuenca for a 2 night stay.

Cuenca

Day 7 **BL** Your guide and vehicle are at your command today for your choice of exploring Cuenca itself, walking in Cajas national park, or touring the craft villages to the south of the city.

Day 8 **B** Your guide takes you to the airport for your return flight to Quito to connect with your international flight home or to continue your trip, perhaps to the Galápagos or the Amazon.

Designed to start on any day except Wednesday.

Pacific coast

Another of Ecuador's worlds. Take the *Ruta del Sol* from Guayaquil to sleepy fishing villages, wild Pacific beaches, whales and the wildlife of the Isla de la Plata, and traditional communities with links deep into the past.

Day 1 **LD** You are met on arrival at Guayaquil airport, which has international and domestic connections, or collected from your hotel in the city, by a Spanish speaking driver and transferred to your choice of hotel in the Puerto López region at the northern end of the Ruta del Sol for 4 nights.

With an early start, your driver can include a number of stops en route. There are small archaeological sites, a nature reserve at Cerro Blanco, and several birding sites. Stop for lunch at Hostería Farallón Dillon, a quirky nautical theme restaurant-cum-antiques barn.

Hotel Atamari offers spacious well appointed cabins set around a cliff-skirted promontory, with wonderful views for whale-watchers and sunset-gazers. There is a good sized swimming pool and a rocky path descends to a secluded beach at Ayampe.

Mantaraya Lodge is a well-run small hotel set in the hills near Puerto López. Its colourful adobe-style buildings are set around a lovely pool.

Hosteria Mandala, right on the sands in Puerto López, is a low-key barefoot eco-style hotel with thatched cabins in well-tended gardens.

Day 2 **BLD** A full day visit to Machalilla National Park. Visit the indigenous village of Agua Blanca (p11), where a guide from the village will show you around and introduce you to their still traditional way of life. A visit to the archaeological museum is also included. In the afternoon visit Los Frailes beach within the park.

Day 3 **BLD** Today you make a full day visit to Isla de la Plata aboard one of the twin-engined motor boats that ply this route. This is a shared boat excursion. Pelicans and other sea birds can be seen during the 1½hr crossing; between June and September there is a very good chance of whales and dolphins. A local guide joins you for a tour of the island amid colonies of boobies and frigatebirds, with other species depending on the season.

Day 4 **BLD** Free day which you might spend by the hotel pool, or at a local beach. Perhaps take a local taxi to visit the Presley Norton archaeological museum and the small museum of Río Chico. In season, whale-watching is possible from the shore.

Day 5 **B** Morning private transfer with Spanish speaking driver back to Guayaquil for onward connections in the afternoon.





Ecuador Odyssey

Our small group ‘grand’ tour of mainland Ecuador visits many of its classic highlights in a trip combining Andean highland scenery, impressive Spanish colonial architecture, dramatic volcanoes, spectacular wildlife and birds, plus insights into the rich cultures and crafts of Ecuador’s indigenous peoples.

We stay in well-located comfortable tourist class hotels and lodges throughout and spend a good amount of time in each region, with lots to see and do each day. We are escorted by an experienced knowledgeable local guide with excellent English. The tour ends in Guayaquil—ideal for flights home or optional extensions to the Galápagos Islands.

Quito

Day 1 We meet in Quito in the early evening at our preferred hotel in the Old City, where we stay two nights. You will be met on arrival at the international airport and driven to the hotel.

Day 2 BLD After breakfast we explore the Old City on foot. Today is Sunday and traffic is banned. Church bells ring out as we stroll around impressive plazas, convents and monasteries contained within a few streets.

On sunny days the whitewashed buildings sparkle like sugar in the clear mountain air. A religious procession may pass while onlookers throw rose petals in its path. Street vendors ply colourful wares—watermelon slices, ice creams, sticky meringues, bunches of roses, party balloons and piñatas (brightly painted containers full of sweets).

Shopkeepers display sacks of corn, quinoa, beans, cinnamon, annatto and cumin. Between services we visit ornate churches with rich oil paintings, gilded altars and aromas of candles and wood incense.

We drive to El Panecillo where the statue of the Virgin of Quito stands above the Old City. There are great views across the city to the surrounding volcanoes, given clear skies.

After lunch we visit the Equator, passing the monument to the 1736 French expedition’s line, to the true line 200m away. We visit the small Inti-Nan museum (rickety but fun) which straddles the true line and presents an eclectic mix of folk exhibits and ‘scientific’ demonstrations.

Amazon

Day 3-5 BLD This morning we fly to Coca in the Amazon to board a covered river boat for the 2 hour trip to the Napo Wildlife Centre’s 82 square mile reserve (see p17). To minimise disturbance to wildlife, and maximise our chances of seeing it, we switch to

dugouts seating 4-6 people. We are paddled along a blackwater creek, stopping to watch wildlife on our way to the lodge, our base for three nights.

Resident naturalist guides take us on safari each day, introducing us to the life of the rainforest. We visit two parrot clay licks, have good chances of seeing giant otters in the lake and streams, several of the eleven species of monkey found here, and much else besides. There is a small chance of finding more elusive animals such as jaguar, puma, tapir, giant anteater and giant armadillo. The bird life is remarkable with over 550 species recorded.

All rooms have private bathrooms, hot water, 24hr electricity, ceiling fans, insect screens and balconies facing the lake.

Otavalo

Day 6 BLD Today we fly back to Quito and drive north to Otavalo (p10), where we stay for 2 nights in either Hacienda Cusín or Hacienda Pinsaqui (p13). We may be able to visit a rose nursery en route.

Day 7 BLD The people of Otavalo and surrounding villages are masters of artisanal crafts. During the day we visit weaving workshops in the village of Peguche, and may stop to visit a family of pan-pipe players and workshops where the pipes are made—with enthusiastic demonstrations.

We visit the beautiful crater lake of Cotacachi volcano (p11), and continue to Cotacachi itself, an entire town dedicated to leather goods. Dozens of small shops and smart boutiques offer everything from skillfully made handbags, wallets and jackets to equestrian items for local farmers.

Day 8 BLD Today being Saturday three distinct markets take place in different parts of Otavalo.

You can join an optional pre-breakfast trip to watch farmers trade cows, pigs, sheep and hens at the livestock market. It’s an



SMALL GROUP TOUR (A PRIVATE TAILOR-MADE VERSION OF THIS TOUR IS ALSO POSSIBLE)

evocative scene, but is not for everyone (there are terrible squeals from young pigs having their teeth examined by sturdy ladies in billowing skirts, and worse).

We re-group for breakfast, then visit the other two markets.

At the *Mercado de Ponchos* you will find every kind of handicraft including wall hangings, naïve art, ceramics, costume jewellery, woven agave knot-less bags, Panama hats, hand-knitted sweaters, woollen scarves and gloves, rag dolls, masks, wood carvings, and musical instruments—and, of course, ponchos.

The domestic market sells fruit, flowers, vegetables, groceries and meat, and expands on Saturdays to sell the traditional Otavaleño clothes that are worn with great pride. Watch the interplay between traders and their clients: by custom they haggle in silence.

We lunch at a restaurant on the shore of Lake San Pablo at the foot of Imbabura volcano, then drive to up to the moors (p5) for two nights at *Termas Papallacta* (p13), a comfortable mountain lodge around thermal springs.

Papallacta

Day 9 BLD Today is a free day to relax and enjoy the mountain setting and the hot springs. There are short trails for those who just want to stretch their legs, and longer ones for more dedicated walkers. Birdwatchers will particularly enjoy the abundance of hummingbirds.

The hotel's many thermal pools, steaming and bubbling in the open air, are free for hotel guests and there are optional steam rooms, massages, mud wraps and other spa treatments at reasonable extra charges.

Cotopaxi

Day 10 BLD We drive south along part of Humboldt's 'Avenue of the Volcanoes' to Cotopaxi National Park. On a clear day the views of volcanoes are spectacular.

Cotopaxi is the highest active volcano in the world, and one of the most beautiful. Its perfectly symmetrical cone is topped by a gleaming snow cap. We drive up to 4,500m, with wonderful views when the weather is clear. If you are responding well to the altitude you might walk (slowly) the short distance to the mountain refuge at 4,800m, and maybe a little further to touch the lowest tongues of the glacier's blue-white ice. Many prefer to stay

behind enjoying stunning views.

We visit the beautiful *Limpipungo Lagoon* where herds of wild horses and llamas come to drink. There are vestiges of Incan stone walls and the ruins of the Incan fortress of Pucara.

We descend by road to spend a night at the delightful *Hacienda La Ciénega* (p13).

The Avenue of the Volcanoes

Day 11 B There will be time this morning to appreciate the hacienda's gardens, 19th century furnishings and chapel, before we continue south along the Avenue of the Volcanoes to Riobamba. Pausing in the village of Salasaca we visit a simple workshop where *mama chumbi* (belts) and *wawa chumbi* (hair braids) are woven in intricate patterns on back-strap looms using wools stained with dye from the agave cactus. Each belt can take 15 days to make.

We make a short tour of Riobamba and its market where local *Purhuá* women wear white bowler hats and red ponchos. We stay for one night in a good quality hotel in a converted hacienda just out of town.

Devil's Nose Train and Ingapirca

Day 12 BLD An early start this morning for an exciting ride on this single track (1.067m gauge) *autoferro*. Dress warmly in layers for the chilly morning air.

As well as spectacular views of five volcanoes—mighty Chimborazo, Carihuayrazo, Altar, Tungurahua and Sangay (weather permitting, of course)—your journey gives a fresh perspective on Andean life. You look into backyards, gardens and workshops as you rumbles through villages, and passes through fields of corn, potatoes, carrots and lima beans, across grassland and alongside lakes to the small town of Alausí, by which time the morning will have become noticeably warmer.

From here, train and engineering buffs get their excitement, as the line crosses deep gorges spanned by narrow iron bridges and zigzags in sharp switchbacks down the 'Devil's Nose'. The journey is then reversed. Alighting at Alausí we drive 2 hours south to Ingapirca.

Ingapirca (see p9) is an important classic Inca site on the Royal Highway from Cusco to Quito. We visit the ruins and stay nearby at a simple hotel in pretty gardens.

Cuenca

Day 13 BL If you are up early today, there is the option of a dawn walk above Ingapirca. After breakfast we drive to the craft villages of Chordeleg, Gualaceo and Sigsig (p12), where a strong tradition of skilled handicrafts can be traced back to pre-Incan cultures. We arrive in the historic city of Cuenca with its flower-filled plazas, cobbled streets and ornate colonial buildings with ancient wooden doors and ironwork balconies.

The period of prosperity brought by the export of quinine and 'Panama' hats is reflected in the French and neoclassical style influences in the architecture. Several mansions of that period are now characterful well-appointed hotels, such as the one we will stay in for the next two nights.

Day 14 BL We tour the city of Cuenca today, including the principal sights such as the new and the old cathedrals, but also taking the time to explore some of the characterful lesser buildings.

There will be an opportunity for some shopping, including a visit to one of the best Panama hat stores.

Cajas National Park

Day 15 BL This morning we visit Cajas National Park (p11), with its beautiful mountain landscapes of dramatic rock outcrops, glacial lakes, moorland and forest. We take a nature walk, perhaps around a small tarn, and explore unusual elfin forests of paperbark trees.

After a picnic lunch in the national park we drive to Guayaquil, on the Pacific coast, where we stay one night at a 4* city centre hotel near the 'iguana square' by the Cathedral.

Guayaquil

Day 16 BL Ecuador's largest city and main port is undergoing quite a transformation.

We take a morning walk along the revived Malecón—a smartly decked promenade fronting the river, then explore the stepped streets of Santa Ana Hill (p19).

In the mid afternoon we drive to the airport for flights home, or onwards to the Galápagos Islands for optional extensions.

For departure dates and prices please see the Booking Information insert which comes with this brochure.

Active Ecuador



Ecuador Adventures

A circular route through the eastern Andes, right down to the Amazon, is an ideal trip for active couples, friends and families in search of spectacular scenery, and a glimpse of the different lives of traditional communities.

Quito

Day 1 You are met on your arrival at the airport and transferred to your hotel in a modern district of Quito for 2 nights on a B&B basis.

Day 2 **BL** This morning you are collected from your hotel by your English-speaking guide for the ride on the Teleférico cable car which rises high above Quito for wonderful panoramic views over the city. The ride begins on the city's western fringes, climbing the flanks of the massive Pichincha Volcano from 3,000 up to 4,000 metres. You then visit the Museo de la Ciudad dedicated to the social history of Quito, set in a restored colonial building. After lunch you explore the Old City on a walking tour with your guide.

Papallacta hot springs

Day 3 **BLD** You are collected from your hotel for the drive up the eastern cordillera of the Andes, crossing the highest mountain pass in Ecuador. It can be foggy up here but with clear skies there are magnificent views of Antisana volcano and the surrounding *paramo*. Travel on to Termas Papallacta, a comfortable mountain lodge set around thermal springs where you stay the night on a full-board basis. Your guide takes you on a hike on a short trail just to stretch your legs, or a longer one if you prefer. You can also take the plunge in the hotel's many thermal pools, steaming and bubbling in the open air. Steam rooms, massages, mud wraps and other spa treatments are at reasonable extra charges.

Cotococha Jungle Lodge

Day 4 **BLD** In the morning continue east by road through the cloud forests pausing at a lodge known for hummingbirds, including the sword-billed hummingbird whose slender beak is longer than its body. You can do a short hike here before continuing to Cotococha Amazon Lodge, on the shores of the Napo River. After lunch at the lodge there is a choice of activities: a 3 hour walk in the rainforest, or a visit to a local community reached by a short canoe trip.

For the walk you don rubber boots provided by the lodge. Your guide will help you identify medicinal plants, and explain their characteristics and how traditional communities use their medicinal properties. You should also find a great variety of insects, birds and small groups of monkeys weaving through the trees. After about 3 hours you return to relax, freshen up and have dinner.

To visit a local community you take a short canoe trip downriver to a Shiripuno village which is pleased to invite visitors to experience a traditional way of life in the Amazon forest. Local ladies will receive you and chat about their traditions and lifestyle, show you how they cook and weave cloth, and how dance features in their lives. A huge stone marked with ancestral petroglyphs expresses their nature-oriented beliefs. You can return to the lodge or continue a short distance upstream to a river beach to walk (1hr approx) through secondary rainforest to the lovely 'La Cascada de Latas' waterfall, take a dip perhaps and return the same way.



GUIDED ACTIVE & ADVENTURE • MID-RANGE HOTELS



PRIVATE GUIDED TREKKING • MID-RANGE HOTELS AND RUSTIC GUESTHOUSES

the Amazon, with lots of outdoor action each day. An adventure, close-up experience of nature, spectacular communities in the mountains and the rainforest.

Day 5 BLD After breakfast you are taken by canoe through the rainforest to a regular checkpoint at Misahualli village, where there is often a troupe of capuchin monkeys in the trees, then on to the Arajuno river. Here you stop to visit a rescue centre that is usually caring for a variety of toucans, parrots, monkeys, capybara, and sometimes even ocelots. After a riverside picnic you stop at a river landing where a family with contacts with the lodge demonstrate traditional gold panning, making pottery, brewing 'chicha', and hunting with blowpipes. You return to the lodge on a forest trail.

Baños region

Day 6 BLD You continue to the Baños region, breaking the journey at Puyo at a small balsa wood workshop for brightly painted gifts. The road climbs the gorge of the Pastaza River declared 'A Gift to the Earth' by WWF, a 50km corridor from rainforest to high mountain passes. There is a spectacular waterfall at El Pailón del Diablo (Devil's Cauldron). You stay 2 nights full board at a 300-year old hacienda tucked into the mountains in the village of Patate.

Day 7 BLD Lots of soft adventure options today based around the hacienda, including hiking, mountain-biking and horse-riding (all at reasonable extra cost). There is also a heated indoor swimming pool, a spa and gym. Your guide is at your disposal for a trip into Baños or elsewhere in the area.

Cotopaxi

Day 8 BLD Time to turn northwards along the Avenue of the Volcanoes to visit Cotopaxi NP. Cotopaxi (p9) is the highest active volcano in the world, and one of the most beautiful. You drive up to 4500m, with wonderful views when the weather is clear. If you are responding well to the altitude you might walk (slowly) the short distance to the mountain refuge at 4800m, and maybe a little further to touch the lowest tongues of the glacier's blue-white ice. Herds of wild horses and llamas come to drink at the beautiful Limpiopungo Lagoon below. There are vestiges of Incan stone walls and the ruins of an Incan fortress. Descend for 2 nights full board at a characterful hacienda with an accent on outdoor action.

Day 9 BLD Free day at your hacienda for options that include walking, horse-riding, mountain-biking and canopy tours, all at reasonable extra cost. Your guide returns to Quito today.

Quito

Day 10 B On your transfer to Quito by road you might be able to call at a local market, such as at Saquisilí. On Thursdays, the big market day, four separate markets take place—an early morning animal market, a handicraft market, a fruit and vegetable market, and a market for clothes and costumes in the local style. Back in Quito, you stay the night in the 'La Mariscal' area.

Day 11 B Transfer to the airport for your flight to the Galapagos or back to the UK.

Trek to Quilotoa

A classic 4 day trek on the best part of the Quilotoa 'loop'. A broad range of Andean landscapes leading to the beautiful Lake Quilotoa at 4000m.

The trail takes you through broad valleys, past colourful hillsides, remote homesteads and small patchworks of cultivated fields. The high point is the stunning emerald green Quilotoa crater lake, set in a 3km wide caldera.

All along the way you will be meeting local Quichua-speaking people who maintain their rich traditional way of life living in local Andean 'tapial' and 'adobe' constructions. They live self-sufficiently, growing quinoa, lupins, maize, broad beans and potatoes, and spinning wool from their llamas. You are more than likely to experience one of the villages' colourful markets too.

Quito to Isinlivi

Day 1 LD Your English speaking local trekking guide will collect you from your hotel in Quito.

Together you drive down the first section of the Avenue of the Volcanoes, passing Cotopaxi before turning off towards the sleepy Spanish-speaking village of Isinlivi.

From the village you make a gentle warm-up hike to enjoy the beautiful and dramatic Andean scenery.

You stay the night in Isinlivi at the little Lullu Llama hostel (shared bathroom).

Hiking time: 2½hrs

Trek Isinlivi to Chugchilan

Day 2 BLD With a mule to carry your main pack today you set out following a steep trail to the bottom of the immense Toachi canyon. Once you have reached the Toachi River you'll follow a sandy trail south along its bank for a couple of miles.

Walking at the bottom of the canyon you're in different surroundings.

Now and then you'll see a few local people's houses. Further north we will leave the bottom of the canyon again to hike up on the other side, towards the village of Chugchilan.

Here and there the trail is steep, but the views back down upon the canyon are amazing.

Once out of the canyon the last stretch follows an easy dirt track that brings you to the pleasant small village of Chugchilan (approx 3,300m).

Mama Hilda the friendly owner of a local hostel will welcome you with a fresh drink and a well-deserved meal.

Hiking time: 4-5 hours

Trek Chugchilán - Quilotoa

Day 3 BLD Today you'll hike the beautiful trail up to Lake Quilotoa. It's a scenic day starting with a descent into Siguí canyon (3000 m).

After crossing the river of the same name you do have to hike out of the canyon again on the other side. This canyon stretch offers spectacular views and nice hiking along some narrow and steep paths with high volcanic walls on both sides. Once out of the

canyon there are impressive views of the canyon below.

You pass the small indigenous community of Huayama, before another ascent up the sandy slopes of the Quilotoa crater. Once on top of the crater you will be amazed both by the colours of the bright green Quilotoa lake several hundred meters below and by panoramic views on a clear day of some of Ecuador's highest volcanoes all around.

You end the day by following the crater rim, walking through paramo vegetation and some sandy and rocky parts, with rock formations weirdly eroded by the wind.

You'll then bid your trusty pack mule and muleteer farewell as you are picked up by vehicle and taken to a nice hacienda near the village of Figua, a 45 minute drive, for the night.

Hiking time: 6 hours.

Day 4 B Today we could make a short morning hike in the surroundings or just relax at the hacienda and observe the daily life of the farm.

They have cattle and sheep and a couple of llamas. In the nearby village you can take a look at the brightly coloured naive paintings made by the local artisans on sheep skin.

Depending on the day of the week you could perhaps visit a local market. On Saturdays it's at Zumbahua, Sundays at Guangage (but tiny) and Pujilli, on Wednesdays at Pujilli, Thursdays at Guamote and Sasquisilí.

In the afternoon you return by private transport to Quito

Trekking notes

We can arrange to pick you up at the start and/or drop you off at the end anywhere in the region.

The dry season in this trekking area is between June and December. In normal conditions it hardly rains during these months. From July to October it can get rather dusty, so if you wear contact lenses you should also bring a pair of normal glasses or sun glasses.

In the rainy season, between February and May, it normally rains at least 3 days a week. Some stretches of this trek may turn a bit muddy at this time of the year. At night, temperatures can drop to low single figures.



PRIVATE GUIDED WALKING • MID-RANGE HOTELS (EXCEPT FOR 1 NIGHT AT A RUSTIC GUESTHOUSE) • DESIGNED TO START ON A SATURDAY

Day walks in the Andes

Escape to another world on very 'do-able' day walks that take you into the heart of the Andes and an intriguing mixture of scenery and habitats and ways of life. Walk the rim of crater lake, stretch your legs in a mountain pass where condors fly, explore subtropical forest, take a country walk between remote farming villages, and hike with the last of the 'hieleros'—the 'icemen' who work the glaciers of mighty Chimborazo.

Each night is spent at pleasant mid-range hotels or lodges (and one rural guesthouse) with private facilities. You decide how far you walk each day.

Quito

Day 1 You will be met on arrival at Quito airport and transferred to your mid-range hotel for 2 nights.

Day 2 **BL** Morning tour of the Old City, including lunch, and a visit to the Equator in the afternoon.

Antisana Ecological Reserve

Day 3 **BLD** Your guide collects you from your hotel in Quito for a full day out of the city, walking in the beautiful Antisana Reserve. Here it is possible to see Condors and to walk high on the moors between the snow capped Antisana and Cotopaxi volcanos. Lunch in a characterful old hacienda in the National Park. Return to Quito.

Papallacta Hot Springs

Day 4 **BD** This morning you are driven to Papallacta (1½hr) on the Andean páramo at 3,300m. In the afternoon walk straight out from the hotel: there is a choice of trails of different durations. When you get back there are hot pools waiting for you, and optional treatments at the hotel's spa. These include five open air thermoludic pools kept at different temperatures some with pressured water or hydrojets, plus massages, treatments and body wraps. Your room has a thermal pool right next to it—perfect for a nighttime dip beneath a starry sky.

San Isidro

Days 5-6 **BLD** Today you are driven down to Cabañas San Isidro lodge in a picturesque valley at 2,000m, your base for the next 2 nights. The lodge is set in large tracts of subtropical forest with clearly marked, self-guided trails from 1 to 6 km. Some lead through a forest of large hardwood trees draped with lush mosses that support great numbers of different orchid and bromeliad species. Others pass through vast bamboo stands and river edge forests. Each habitat supports its own complement of flora and fauna: one trail leads to an Andean Cock of the Rock lek. Rarities such as Spectacled Bear, Mountain Tapir, Oncilla and Puma are reported from time to time.

Otavallo

Day 7 **BLD** Towards late morning you will be collected and driven to Otavallo, to stay at Hacienda Las Palmeras—your base for the next 3 nights. This 150 year old hacienda is set among towering palm trees and features garden cottages with log fires. The 'perpetual spring' climate ensures a continual flowering of hibiscus, bougainvillea, other flowering plants and fruit trees, attracting hummingbirds, vermilion fly-catchers and a profusion of other native birds to the grounds.

Day 8 **BLD** A short downhill stroll in the early morning to Otavallo's animal market. Return for breakfast. You will then be driven into town for the main market, now in full swing selling crafts, fruit and vegetables, and traditional clothing for local Quichuas.

Cuicocha circuit

Day 9 **BLD** Cuicocha ('Guinea Pig Lake') is a deep blue-green crater lake in the caldera of a dormant volcano. Make an early start for the best views on an exhilarating 5hr circuit around the crater's rim. As well as great views of the lake's two islands there are panoramas of nearby Cotacachi and Imbabura volcanoes. The circular walk is 12km (7½ miles) at an altitude of 3,070-3,400m. There are steps on steeper parts of the trail and handrails on the more precarious sections.

Look out for hummingbirds amid the lupins, puyo with bright green flowers, wild orchids and even condors. Avoid the tempting, but poisonous, blueberries.

For this trip it may be possible for your guide to hire a llama from a local farmer to carry your lunch!

Cotopaxi

Day 10 **BLD** This morning you will be driven south to Hacienda La Ciénega for 2 nights (p13). This route takes you on the first section of the Avenue of the Volcanoes. Rest of the day free to relax at the hacienda or in its gardens, or go horse riding (optional).

Day 11 **BLD** A full day exploring Cotopaxi National Park. Visit Limpiopungo Lagoon at 3,800m and enjoy the high páramos vegetation with miniature asters and crocus-like flowers nestling amid lichens and mosses. If you are responding well to the thinness of the air there is the option of walking up to touch the ice of the volcano's glacier. You could ride back down on a mountain bike (let us know in advance and check your travel insurance cover).

Lake Quilotoa to Chugchilán

Day 12 **BLD** With an early start you are driven to Lake Quilotoa, a second crater lake which is the starting point of today's walk. The trail down the outside of the volcano leads through a remote rural area of subsistence farming, canyons, and rivers to reach the Quichua-speaking village of Chugchilán. Goats, sheep and llamas graze, and crops include potatoes, corn, broad beans, lupins, squash, and quinoa. Local crafts include primitivist paintings on leather, and wooden masks.

The trail is 12km (7½ miles), starting at 3,900m and ending at 3,200m. The final section makes an abrupt 250m descent into the Río Sigüí Canyon and back up the other side before arriving in Chugchilán village. This can be avoided by curtailing the walk in Guayama, about 6 miles from the start.

Stay overnight in Chugchilán at a simple guest house with private bathroom.

Saquisilí Market and Riobamba

Day 13 **BLD** A visit to Saquisilí Market this morning. One of the largest in the highlands, it fills seven plazas, each specialising in different merchandise.

You will then be driven south via Salasaca (where you can stop to see back strap loom weavers at work) to Riobamba where you stay for 2 nights at a mid-range tourist lodge.

Riobamba is close to Chimborazo, an extinct volcano which rises 6,310m above sea level. It is the highest mountain in the world if measured from the centre of the earth. (The bulge in the planet at the equator gives Chimborazo an advantage over Everest.)

Los Hieleros (The Icemen)

Day 14 **BLD** An early start to join Baltazar, the last of 'Los Hieleros' brothers, who still maintains his family's tradition of walking up to the glacier on Chimborazo to cut blocks of ice to sell in Riobamba. This is a wonderful hike offering great views of this impressive mountain and across a wide expanse of the central highlands. Baltazar earn very little from the ice they collect, so your walking with him helps to keep alive this extraordinary way of life.

At first you drive up through fields of maize, potatoes, carrots and lima beans. At the end of the track the walk takes you on hillsides covered with mixed clumps of cushion plants and tussock grasses—enough to supply a thousand years of garden make-over programmes. This area is home to vicuñas, llamas and alpacas.

Around 3,380m Baltazar uses scythes to cut some of the longer grasses which he deftly twists together to make 6ft lengths of rope. Armfuls of grass to insulate the ice are then cut and tied to their mules using the rope. The trail continues to ascend. Vegetation gives way to volcanic scree before you eventually arrive at the snow line. It takes around 4hrs to reach the glacier, at around 4,500m. You should find that your time in the highlands has acclimatised you sufficiently to cope with this altitude if you walk fairly slowly.

At the face of the glacier, Baltazar uses axes and spades to hack out large blocks of ice, as he has done from this spot for the last 50 years. He wraps the ice in the grass and ties it to the mules with the handmade ropes.

The descent starts around midday and lasts 2 hours. You rejoin your vehicle while Baltazar continues to his home in the village, where the ice is stowed in underground pits to preserve it for Saturday's market in Riobamba.

Riobamba Market

Day 15 **B** Make a short visit to Riobamba's San Alfonso market this morning, where you can try Baltazar's ice mixed with fruit in snow cones called 'raspados'. Then you are driven back to Quito (4hr) for your chosen overnight flight home.



MID-RANGE HOTELS AND HACIENDAS (NO CAMPING)

Cotopaxi Ascent

This trip brings together 5 first rate day walks that are well worth doing in their own right. If all goes well, you will then be acclimatised and ready for an assault on the magnificent Cotopaxi—the highest active volcano in the world. From the summit there are fabulous views of all Ecuador’s principal volcanoes parading into the distance, and into the volcano’s steaming crater—half a mile wide.

Cotopaxi’s altitude of 5,897m (19,348ft), near perfect cone-shape, and relatively predictable conditions attract hikers from all over the world. The ascent involves a steep, high altitude hike over ice, which amongst climbers is not considered technical but does require ropes, crampons and ice axes (training for which is given at the start of the

climb). It also requires a high degree of stamina, physical fitness and careful acclimatisation—the demands are such that in reasonable conditions only half those who start the ascent successfully reach the summit. The thorough acclimatisation provided in this tour should increase your chance of success to about 75%.

The Cotopaxi area is blessed with the highest proportion of clear days in the Ecuadorian Andes, and the summit may be attempted at any time of year. June and July are the driest months, but can be very windy. December and January are almost as dry but much less windy. April is the wettest month. The mountain sometimes suffers from days of strong winds that prevent any ascent.

Quito

Day 1 You will be met on arrival at Quito airport and transferred to a mid-range hotel.

Cuicocha Lagoon

Day 2 You meet your experienced, English speaking, local mountaineering guide who over the next seven days will personally supervise your acclimatisation and your attempt at the summit. A short drive north brings you to Cuicocha lagoon for a straightforward 5 hour walk around the rim of this beautiful crater lake at 3,400m. Overnight at Hacienda Pinsaqui near Otavalo.

Fuya Fuya

Day 3 Today you start to stretch your sinews in greater earnest with a hike to the top of Fuya Fuya (4,283m) which gives great views over the three pristine Mojanda lakes and wide expanses of páramo grassland. Overnight in Quito.

Guagua Pichincha

Day 4 Your acclimatisation continues today with a hike to the summit of Guagua Pichincha, at 4,794m.

The two Pichinchas overlook Quito from the east. The smaller, Rucu Pichincha, is dormant, but Guagua Pichincha is active and over the centuries has several times spewed ash and more over the citizens below.

During the ascent there are spectacular views of Quito and far beyond. At the summit you can look into the crater to fumaroles smouldering at the crater bottom.

You can choose to drive to the start point or take the brand new cable car from Quito and walk from there. On your descent you will be transferred to Hacienda La Ciénega at Lasso for one night. Hiking time today is 4-6 hours.

Volcán Iliniza

Day 5 Today you hike to Nuevos Horizontes Refuge which is just below a saddle between the two peaks of Iliniza volcano. We sleep here in a mountain lodge dormitory at 4,650m in readiness for Iliniza Norte. Hiking time: 3-4 hours.

Day 6 Dawn ascent of Ilinizas Norte, 5,120m. With normal conditions technical equipment will not be necessary as we walk on a ridge of solid rock, then traverse sandy ledges to reach the iron cross at the summit. On a clear day there are great views of Ecuador’s high snow-capped volcanoes and there is a chance of seeing condor in flight. Then descend and transfer to Hacienda El Porvenir, a characterful and comfortable hacienda built in traditional adobe and thatch style where we stay for one night. Hiking time: 3 hours ascending, 2 hours descending

Hacienda El Porvenir

Day 7 You spend the morning resting at Hacienda El Porvenir before being driven to the shoulder of Cotopaxi at 4,600m. From here you walk up a slope of pumice and ash to the refuge at 4,800m. Your guide leads you onto the glacier’s snout for training in safety techniques, and the use of crampons and ice axe. Then it’s off to bed at 6pm to try to get some sleep.

Cotopaxi

Day 8 At 11pm you will be woken for a high carb meal before you set off on your push for the summit. The ascent is made at night while the snow is most solid.

The first section is over pumice, ash and ice lightly dusted with snow. Within an hour we reach the permanent snow line at 5,050m where ropes and harnesses come into play and we start using our crampons and ice axe.

In normal conditions the going is pretty straightforward, with some crevasses that have to be crossed.

After Yanasacha, an immense black rock face just below the summit at 5,700m, you will be very tired, but your guide is there to encourage, cajole and curse you into the final push up the steepest section and, at last, on to the summit.

The total time for the ascent is usually between 6 and 9 hours.

Sunrise at the summit of Cotopaxi is an amazing experience. From here you can see all the snow-capped volcanoes of Ecuador, northwards well beyond the Colombian border, and the continental divide between the Amazon to the east and the Pacific

lowlands to the west.

You will also be able to peer into Cotopaxi’s huge, active, sulphurous crater (800m by 600m).

We’ll start descending soon, to avoid risks of soft afternoon snow. The descent takes less than half as long, but we’ll take it slowly as the majority of accidents occur on the way down.

Our support vehicle will be waiting just below the refuge to transfer us back to Quito where the rest of the day is free for some well deserved relaxation, a hot shower, a hearty meal and maybe even a beer...

Quito

Day 9 Today you are driven back to Quito, either to the airport for your flight home, or for onward travel.





Sword-billed Hummingbird
photographed by Craig Brooks on a tailor-made Geodyssey
birdwatching holiday to Mindo, San Isidro, Wild Sumaco,
Guango Lodge and the Galapagos.



Birdwatching in Ecuador

Ecuador is one of the world's top birding destinations - not only for the sheer variety of its birds, but also for the wonderful places where they can be seen. If you enjoy your birds and you have not yet been to Ecuador, it's high time you gave us a call!



Planning your trip

Tailor-made birdwatching

Ecador has the highest biodiversity of any country on Earth, with 15% of the world's bird species in less than 0.2% of the planet's surface. About 1,600 species have been recorded for the mainland and a further 38 are added by the Galapagos Islands. A high proportion (84%) are permanent residents rather than migratory.

Ecuador has come of age as a birdwatching destination. An authoritative field guide is available. There are first rate birding guides based permanently in the country. There is a good selection of birder-oriented hotels and guest houses. Travelling around has become much easier.

Our travel specialists at Geodysey have arranged tailor-made birdwatching holidays to Ecuador for many years. The range of birdwatching trips we can offer is very extensive, covering not just all the key sites on the mainland but also those of interest to the specialist.

All the suggested itineraries presented here can be adapted. We design and support tailor-made birdwatching trips to suit a wide range of interests, styles, budgets and timeframes.

There are three principal options to consider when planning your trip on the mainland:

- you can be accompanied by a **specialist birdwatching guide** who is also your driver. This is by far the easiest option and generally produces the most birds.
- you can be accompanied by an English-speaking **local driver** who is familiar with the key sites, so that you use lodge guides where available or identify your own birds. This is more challenging, but also very rewarding if your preparation has been thorough.
- for the intrepid, **self-drive** is a possibility, but not very economical and locating the sites can be tricky.



Amazon birdwatching

The best access to the wildlife and birds of Ecuador's western Amazon is provided by 3 jungle lodges located within an hour of each other along the Napo river (see p17). Each is beautifully situated and offers similar experiences of the rainforest.

From a birding perspective, each lodge is spectacularly good with very long lists of around 550 species.

Such high biodiversity is at the expense of low numbers of individuals of each species, so while you are virtually guaranteed an impressive list there is no predicting what will be on it.

Most birders choose a 4 night stay, but to find particular species you should consider more time (which should also mean a nearly proportionately longer list). All 3 lodges provide excursions to the same parrot/parakeet licks on the south bank of the Napo river.

They each have their own resident naturalist guides, who are often very accomplished. Specialist birdwatching guides can be drafted in by arrangement.

Napo Wildlife Centre

Napo Wildlife Centre is on the south side of the river within its own 82 sq mile reserve in the Yasuni NP—a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve with the world's highest documented tree diversity. The south side of the Napo is said to support 30% more species than the north, and the Napo Wildlife Centre's current bird list records 565 species. Another important consideration for birdwatchers is that the terrain around the lodge (terra firma and varzea forest) is accompanied by small hills which provide a greater variation of forest habitat. The lodge offers a network of trails and a selection of river excursions.

Sacha Lodge

Well promoted and efficiently run, Sacha Lodge receives a large number of visitors and offers substantial and well maintained accommodation. Facilities include a canopy platform in a kapok tree, and three metal observation towers extending well above the canopy connected by a 275m long metal walkway at a height of 30m—unique to the area and a birding plus point. The lodge's birdlist claims 586 species.

Other wildlife includes an impressive list of monkeys, many of which are readily seen, plus sloths, ant-eaters, armadillos, racoons, small cats, tapir and reports of puma.

La Selva

Because of its longevity, La Selva is the lodge that is best known by foreign birders. It is in another wonderful location and it has an extremely impressive bird list of 530 species (which was reckoned to be the second largest of any location in the world, until the other two lodges prepared their lists!) A wide variety of other wildlife can be seen. Trail and canoe excursions access terra firma and varzea forest, palm swamp and two oxbow lakes. A tree platform provides views over and into the canopy.



Galapagos birdwatching

There are just 120 birds on the Galapagos list, but of these 23 are endemic and 4 are near-endemic.

Birds here are amazingly fearless. For sheer spectacle, walking by colonies of nesting sea birds on Espanola or Genovesa is hard to beat.

There are 29 land bird species, mostly on the larger islands, of which 22 are endemic. Most famous are the 13 species of Darwin's finch and the 4 Nesomimus mockingbirds, the others being Galapagos Hawk, Galapagos Dove, Galapagos Martin, Galapagos Rail and Galapagos Flycatcher.

A cruise is by far the best way to experience the islands, but if land birds are a particular interest then after your cruise you might stay for a few days at a hotel on Santa Cruz, such as Finch Bay Hotel.

If you base yourself there fully you would miss the 4 single-island endemics: Medium Tree-Finch and Charles Mockingbird (both on Floreana), Chatham Island Mockingbird (San Cristobal) and Hood Mockingbird (Espanola) but could get all the rest.

Some key sea bird species have limited distribution, such as Red-footed Boobies (largest colony: Genovesa), Flightless Cormorant (Isabela and Fernandina), Galapagos Penguin (largest colonies: Isabela and Fernandina) and Waved Albatross (Espanola: present from April to December). Choosing the right boat for the birds you want to see can be quite confusing: we keep track of changing itineraries and can advise you on the best choices.



SPECIALIST BIRDWATCHING • MID-RANGE HOTELS AND LODGES • BIRDWATCHING GUIDE/DRIVER, OR DRIVER ONLY, OR SELF-DRIVE

Birds of Ecuador

The best two weeks of birdwatching you may ever have. A huge variety of birds in an astounding array of habitats from high *paramo* to deep rainforest, with reasonable travelling and comfortable accommodation.

Quito

Day 1 You will be met on arrival off your chosen international flight and transferred to a 3* hotel in Quito.

Yanacocha Forest and the Nono-Mindo Road

Day 2 BLD Starting your trip with a bang, you depart from Quito before dawn to bird the Yanacocha forest at around 3300m on the northwest slope of Mt Pichincha - a high temperate zone with hummingbirds a major feature.

Look for Shining Sunbeam, Mountain Velvet breast, Great Sapphirewing, Buff-winged Starfrontlet, Purple-backed Thornbill, plus the rare endemic Black-breasted Puffleg among 3 puffleg species here. There are good chances of foraging tanager flocks, flower piercers, and furnariids. Listen for antpittas and tapaculos.

Continue birding down the Nono-Mindo road in lower temperate and subtropical forest to Tandayapa, your base for 2 nights.

Tandayapa and Bellavista

Day 3 BLD A full day's birdwatching along forest trails and small roads around Tandayapa and Bellavista, with a visit to Tony Nunnery's fabled garden. Nearly 300 species are listed in this area, including 35 species of tanager, Black-and-chestnut Eagle, Golden-headed and Crested Quetzals, Toucan Barbet, Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan, Powerful Woodpecker and Andean Cock-of-the-Rock. You'll be mesmerized as up to 20 species of hummingbird whizz around the feeders.

Tandayapa and Mindo Loma

Day 4 BLD A memorable day's birding at Tandayapa and at the Herrera family's Mindo Loma Reserve, whose hummingbird and fruit feeders attract specials such as Velvet-purple Coronet, Buff-tailed Coronet, Fawn-breasted and Empress Brilliant, Violet-tailed Sylph, White-Bellied Woodstar and Hoary Puffleg (which has a lek here). There are also records of Pacific Tuftedcheek, Long-wattled Umbrellabird, Orange-breasted Fruiteater and Purplish-mantled Tanager.

Descend to Mindo for 2 nights at Septimo Paraiso cloud forest reserve at 1600m.

Refugio Paz de las Aves (the 'Antpitta farm')

Day 5 BLD A while ago, local farmer Angel Paz started putting out worms for antpittas. Now his Refugio Paz de las Aves has trails and viewing shelters for you to sit and watch the rare and normally elusive Giant, Moustached and Yellow-breasted Antpittas. Dark-backed Wood-Quails come on to the path to feed. Also found here are Sickle-winged Guan, Crimson-rumped Toucanet, Toucan Barbet, Olivaceous Piha, Blue-winged Mountain-Tanager and the Black-chinned Mountain-Tanager. An Andean Cock-of-the-Rock lek, most active at dawn, is reached down a steep muddy trail.

Pululahua

Day 6 BLD A morning birding the productive trails from Septimo Paraiso, then move down to the temperate forest of the Pululahua Geobotanical Reserve: a vast volcanic crater close to the equatorial line. Rusty-Breasted, Undulated, Chestnut-Crowned, Chestnut-Naped, and Rufous Antpittas, White-Browed Spinetail, Ocellated, Ash-Colored and Unicolored Tapaculos, Plain-Tailed Wren and Stripe-Headed Brush-Finch are all possible here.

Antisana Ecological Reserve

Day 7 BLD Drive to Los Chillos valley for high páramo birding in and around the Antisana Reserve, including Laguna Micacocha—a landscape created by a colossal volcano that erupted just 400 years ago. Stay 2 nights at Papallacta, where hot springs are a well earned treat.

Papallacta

Day 8 BLD Depart early for Papallacta Pass, the highest road in Ecuador. Your birding is at high páramo and marsh areas, and Papallacta and Sucus lakes. Among species seen are Andean Snipe, Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe, Ecuadorian Hillstar, Stout-billed Cinclodes, Bar-winged Cinclodes, Tawny Antpitta, Streak-throated Bush-Tyrant, Red-crested Cotinga, Scarlet-bellied Mountain-Tanagers, Buff-breasted Mountain-Tanagers, and Black-backed Bush-Tanagers.

San Isidro

Day 9 BLD Early this morning head to lower elevations on the eastern flanks of the Andes around San Isidro for 2 days of superb birding in an area of subtropical and temperate montane forest.

Among the highlights here are Dusky Piha, White-capped Tanager, Red-hooded Tanager, Inca Jay, Sickle-winged Guan, Masked Trogon, Tyrannine Woodcreeper, Greater Scythebill, Highland Tinamou, Bicoloured Hawk, Broad-winged Hawk, Black-chested Fruiteater, Green-and-Black Fruiteater and Andean Cock-of-the-Rock (eastern subspecies). Stay 2 nights at Cabañas San Isidro.

Day 10 BLD A full day birding at Cordillera de los Huacamayos and Loreto Road. The area is dominated by montane and lower montane cloud forest from 2,300m to just 200m, a forest bridge to lowland rainforest with several eco-tones. The area provides chances for a good number of rare and localised species restricted to eastern Andean foothills. Tanagers are well represented in the entire area, especially at lower elevations where some good mixed flocks are seen. They may include Orange-eared, Golden-eared, Paradise and Saffron-crowned Tanagers.

Near the summit of the Guacamayos Cordillera, find Black-billed Mountain Toucan and White-rimmed Brush Finch. Other interesting possibilities are Orange-breasted Falcon, Black-mandible Toucan, Golden-collared Honeycreeper, Fasciated Tiger Heron, Plum-

throated Cotinga, Military Macaw and Subtropical Caciue, among many others. Nocturnal highlights include Rufous-bellied Nighthawk and Lyre-tailed Nightjar.

Day 11 BL A morning's birding at San Isidro, then return up the eastern slopes, stopping for species missed on the way down. Stay at your 3* hotel in Quito; dinner is not included so you can explore the city. Alternatively you might choose to be driven down from San Isidro to Coca for a positioning night before the Amazon.

Amazon

Day 12-14 BLD A morning flight to Coca to be transferred by fast riverboat to your chosen rainforest lodge: Napo Wildlife Centre, La Selva or Sacha Lodge—your base for the next 3 nights, full board, with wildlife excursions led by the lodge's resident guides (see p14).

Day 15 B Return by river to Coca and then by plane to Quito around lunchtime; met and transferred to stay at the same hotel as Day 1. Rest of the day free.

Day 16 B You are transferred to Quito airport for your return flight home, or onwards to the Galápagos.

Choose your style

- specialist birdwatching guide
- driver only
- selfdrive





SPECIALIST BIRDWATCHING • MID-RANGE HOTELS AND LODGES • BIRDWATCHING GUIDE/DRIVER

Birds of Southern Ecuador

An extraordinarily productive circuit of southern Ecuador's prime sites, including the world's most birdy cloud forest, with gorgeous birding experiences and a thrilling selection of endemics, rarities and new species.

Guayaquil

Day 1 Met on arrival and driven to a 4* hotel in Guayaquil.

Manglares-Churute Reserve

Day 2 BLD A morning's birdwatching at Manglares-Churute, an important reserve of extensive mangrove and freshwater marsh.

Drive on to Buenaventura in the afternoon for 2 nights at Jocotoco Foundation's Umbrellabird Lodge.

Buenaventura

Day 3 BLD A full day at Buenaventura: a superb area of accessible forested slopes where Chocó and Tumbesian bioregions merge.

Its impressive list includes El Oro Parakeet (discovered here in 1980), 12 threatened or near-threatened species, a wide range of wet-forest birds, impressive tanager flocks and raptors such as Black and Ornate Hawk Eagles and Crested-eagle (rare). Long-Wattled Umbrella Bird is possible.

Day 4 BLD More birdwatching at Buenaventura this morning then drive to the small town of Loja, with plentiful birding en route. Overnight at La Casa Lojana.

Cajanuma cloud forest of Podocarpus NP

Day 5 BLD A full day of birding in the Cajanuma cloudforest in Podocarpus NP at 2500m-3200m, an area that claims the highest number of bird species of any cloud forest in the world. Its entrance is cited as the world's best location for Andean birds.

The very full list includes 5 threatened, 9 near-threatened and 9 restricted-range species including Bearded Guan, Red-faced Parrot, Golden-plumed Parakeet, Rainbow Starfrontlet, Purple-throated Sunangel, Orange-banded Flycatcher, Masked Mountain-Tanager and Chestnut-bellied Cotinga which was first seen here.

Overnight in Vilcabamba.

Vilcabamba and Tapichalaca

Day 6 BLD A morning birding around Vilcabamba for Tumbesian specialties: Plumbeous Rail, Amazilia Hummingbird, Pacific Hornero, Tawny-crowned Pygmy-Tyrant, Tumbes and Southern-beardless Tyrannulets, Fasciated Wren, Silver-backed Tanager (with luck), and many more.

Work the road through arid habitats into humid temperate forest to Tapichalaca for 2 nights at Jocotoco Foundation's lodge, where after an already busy day you will be thrilled by the action at the hummingbird feeders.

Tapichalaca Reserve

Day 7 BLD A full day in the Tapichalaca Reserve, home to Chestnut-crested Cotinga, Chestnut-naped Antpitta, Dusky Piha, Red-hooded and White-capped Tanagers, White-breasted Parakeet, Scaly-naped Amazon and Red-billed Parrot.

The upper part of the Quebrada Honda trail is good for mixed species flocks: look for Tyrannine Woodcreeper, Orange-banded Flycatcher and Masked Saltator.

Day 8 BLD Morning at Tapichalaca, excellent for mixed foraging flocks, under-storey skulkers, and much more. A full day with productive forest trails, good roadside birding and easy birding at and near the lodge (including the Jocotoco Antpitta). You could also drive south for Marañón valley endemics spreading north.

Your list for today could be very long, with Tawny-breasted Tinamou, Plain-breasted Hawk, Bearded Guan, Golden-plumed Parakeet, Scaly-naped Amazon, Rufous-banded Owl, Collared Inca, Chestnut-breasted Coronet, Amethyst-throated and Flame-throated Sunangels, Glowing Puffleg, Grey-breasted Mountain-Toucan, Marañón Thrush, and many more.

Bird the Loja road to stay at La Casa Lojana.

Loja-Zamora road

Day 9 BLD An early start for Zamora, a village on another fascinatingly diverse transect through temperate, subtropical and foothill zones.

Specialities include Maroon-tailed and White-breasted Parakeets, Green Hermit, Blue-fronted Lancebill, Rufous-capped Thornbill, Amethyst Woodstar, Emerald Toucanet, Spectacled Prickletail, Amazonian Umbrellabird, Orange-eared, Golden-eared, Saffron-crowned, and Flame-faced Tanagers. Stay 2 nights at Copalinga Lodge.

Bombuscaro foothills of Podocarpus NP

Day 10 BLD Podocarpus's rich Bombuscaro sector offers many rare and very local species in its foothill forests.

Park trails yield Coppery-chested Jacamar, Highland Motmot, Black-streaked Puffbird, Chestnut-tipped Toucanet, Blue-rumped Manakin and a spectacular number of Tangara tanagers.

Zamora-Loja-Cuenca

Day 11 BL A good birding drive from Zamora to Loja, then straight on for 2 nights at a 3* hotel in the town of Cuenca.

Cajas NP

Day 12 BL In Cajas NP to focus on its higher altitude habitats.

Look for the rare endemic Violet-throated Metaltail as you bird your way to the paramo at the top of the pass.

Good possibilities of Ecuadorian Hillstar, Blue-mantled Thornbill, Andean Condor, Gull, Teal and Ruddy Duck, Bar-winged and Stout-billed Cinclodes. Today's targets also include Carunculated Caracara, Black-chested Buzzard-Eagle, Yellow-billed Pintail, and many other paramo species.

Day 13 BLD A leisurely and rewarding day today in the lower

Llaviuco section of Cajas NP, mostly around shrubbery and woodland by a small lake. Mixed feeding flocks, hummers, and an array of mountain birds will keep you busy. Drive down to Gualaqueto to overnight at Uzhupud.

Gualaqueto-Limon road

Day 14 BL A pre-dawn start to bird the very rich transect afforded by the Gualaqueto-Limon road.

The birding begins as the sun comes over the pass in one of the few places in the world to easily bird very high temperate elfin forest - an evocative and beautiful habitat foraged by mixed flocks, with several spine-tingling specialties such as Mouse-coloured Thistletail, Glossy Flowerpiercer, the rare Masked Mountain-Tanager, Black-backed Bush-Tanager and Pale-naped Brush-Finch and special hummingbirds such as Great Sapphirewing, Glowing Puffleg and Rainbow-bearded Thornbills.

Lower down, look for White-throated and White-rumped Hawk, Viridian Metaltail, Amethyst-throated Sunangel, Blue-backed Conebill, the spectacular White-capped Tanager, Lacrimose, Blue-winged, and Black-chested Mountain Tanagers and the rare White-rimmed Brush-Finch. Overnight Cuenca.

Guayaquil via Mantareal and Shagal

Day 15 BL The road descending to Guayaquil allows stops at several good birding sites in highlands, subtropics, and the lowlands of Manglares-Churute. Overnight in Guayaquil

Cerro Blanco or Santa Elena Peninsula

Day 16 BL Early start for a final morning's birding in Cerro Blanco in the Chongon Hills (closed Mon & Tue, when the Sta Elena peninsula is a good alternative), well-known for its impressive dry forest endemics, and its great raptor list.

Most notable of all is its population of endangered Great-green Macaw. Possibles include the rare Rufous-headed Chachalaca, Grey-backed Hawk and Pale-browed Tinamou, and endemic parrots Grey-cheeked Parakeet, Red-masked Parakeet and Red-lore Amazon. The Tumbesian endemics are abundant, with good chances of Short-tailed Woodstar, Elegant crescent Chest, Collared Antshrike, Black-capped Sparrow, and others.

Return to Guayaquil in the afternoon for overnight flights to Europe, evening flights to Quito for Amazon lodges next day, or stay overnight for morning flights to the Galapagos.

Choose your style

■ specialist birdwatching guide

At these relatively off-track locations a birdwatching trip only really works with a specialist birdwatching guide/driver.

Specialist Birdwatching Modules

These more demanding slightly longer itineraries wring the most out of precious time in very productive areas. Put them together to make your perfect trip.

Birds of the North West Andes

Notable extras added to the key birdwatching sites on the western slopes of the Andes.

Yanacocha Forest and the Nono-Mindo Road

Day 1 BLD Starting your trip with a bang, you depart from Quito before dawn to bird the Yanacocha forest at around 3300m on the northwest slope of Mt Pichincha - a high temperate zone with hummingbirds a major feature.

Look for Shining Sunbeam, Mountain Velvet breast, Great Sapphirewing, Buff-winged Starfrontlet, Purple-backed Thornbill, plus the rare endemic Black-breasted Puffleg among 3 puffleg species here. There are good chances of foraging tanager flocks, flower piercers, and furnariids. Listen for antpittas and tapaculos. Continue birding down the 'Eco-Ruta' Nono-Mindo road in lower temperate and subtropical forests to Tandyapa, your base for 2 nights.

Tandyapa and Bellavista

Day 2 BLD A full day's birdwatching along forest trails and small roads around Tandyapa and Bellavista, with a visit to Tony Nunnery's fabled garden. Nearly 300 species are listed in this area, including 35 species of tanager, Black-and-chestnut Eagle, Golden-headed and Crested Quetzals, Toucan Barbet, Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan, Powerful Woodpecker and Andean Cock-of-the-Rock. You'll be mesmerized as up to 20 species of hummingbird whizz around the feeders.

Tandyapa and Mindo Loma

Day 3 BLD A memorable day's birding at Tandyapa and at the Herrera family's Mindo Loma Reserve, whose hummingbird and fruit feeders attract specials such as Velvet-purple Coronet, Buff-tailed Coronet, Fawn-breasted and Empress Brilliant, Violet-tailed Sylph, White-Bellied Woodstar and Hoary Puffleg (which has a lek here). There are also records of Pacific Tuftedcheek, Long-wattled Umbrellabird, Orange-breasted Fruiteater and Purplish-mantled Tanager. Descend to Mindo for 2 nights at Septimo Paraiso cloud forest reserve at 1600m.

Refugio Paz de las Aves (the 'Antpitta farm')

Day 4 BLD A while ago, local farmer Angel Paz started putting out worms for antpittas. Now his Refugio Paz de las Aves has trails and viewing shelters for you to sit and watch the rare and normally elusive Giant, Moustached and Yellow-breasted Antpittas. Dark-backed Wood-Quails come on to the path to feed.

Also found here are Sickle-winged Guan, Crimson-rumped Toucanet, Tucan Barbet, Olivaceous Piha, Blue-winged Mountain-Tanager and the Black-chinned Mountain-Tanager. An Andean Cock-of-the-Rock lek, most active at dawn, is reached down a steep muddy trail.

Mindo down to Milpe

Day 5 BLD Now well into your stride, there's a morning birding in Septimo Paraiso's productive reserve and other Mindo sites before birding down the western slopes to Milpe (1100m), where you stay the night. This is home to Chocó Trogon, Pale-mandibled Aracari, Yellow-collared Chlorophonia, Broad-billed Motmot, Moss-backed Tanager, Chocó Toucan and Club-winged Manakin.

Rio Palenque Biological Centre

Day 6 BLD Early morning birding at Milpe then travel down to the Rio Palenque Biological Centre. This small patch of lowland tropical forest at about 100m offers great birding.

On its many trails you will find yet another new set of species. Highlights include Pacific Parrotlet, Pallid Dove, Bronzy, Baron's and Stripe-throated Hermits, Ecuadorian and Northern White-tailed Trogons, Chocó Toucan, Slaty-winged Foliage-gleaner, Red-billed Scythebill, several ant birds, Black-headed Antthrush, dozens of flycatchers, Purple-throated Fruitcrow, White-bearded Manakin, Whiskered and Song Wren, Black-lored Yellowthroat, Grey-and-

Gold Warbler, Golden-hooded and Tawny-crested Tanagers and Scarlet-rumped Cacique. Overnight at Rio Palenque lodge at 2200m.

Palenque and Pedro Vicente Maldonado

Day 7 BLD Bird the humid lowland rainforest for Chocó endemics such as Indigo-crowned Quail-Dove, Double-banded Graytail, Fulvous-vented Euphonia, Emerald and Scarlet-and-white Tanagers and the near-threatened Blue-whiskered Tanager. Overnight at a comfortable lodge outside Pedro Vicente Maldonado.

Rio Silanche road

Day 8 BL Morning birding at Rio Silanche Bird Sanctuary: 80ha of Chocó lowland habitat at 350m that is home to Purple-chested Hummingbird, Chocó Trogon, Double-banded Graytail, Griscom's Antwren, Stub-tailed Antbird, Black-tipped Cotinga, Slate-throated Gnatcatcher, Scarlet-breasted Dacnis, Scarlet-and-white Tanager, Blue-whiskered Tanager.

Your afternoon transfer back to Quito takes about 3 hours, but time permitting you could stop to bird the temperate forest of the Pululahua Geobotanical Reserve: a vast volcanic crater close to the equatorial line. Rusty-Breasted, Undulated, Chestnut-Crowned, Chestnut-Naped, and Rufous Antpittas, White-Browed Spinetail, Ocellated, Ash-Coloured and Unicoloured Tapaculos, Plain-Tailed Wren and Stripe-Headed Brush-Finch are all possible here. For more time to bird the reserve you could add a night at Pululahua.

Birds of the North East Andes

7 days in the north east allows time for the stunning birding around Wildsumaco lodge.

Antisana / La Mica Lagoon to Papallacta

Day 1 LD You are driven from Quito for very productive and scenic birding in and around the Antisana Reserve, below Antisana's snow-capped peak. At Laguna Micacocha look for Silvery Grebe, Yellow-billed Pintail, Andean Coot, Gull, and Lapwing, and Lesser Yellowlegs, as well as Carunculated Caracara and Black-faced Ibis. Today and tomorrow there are good chances to see Andean Condor patrolling the skies. Stay 2 nights at 'Termas de Papallacta' (p13) at 3300m. Trails behind the hotel are good for hummingbirds.

Papallacta Pass and Sucus Lake

Day 2 BLD Bird the Papallacta pass and Sucus Lake in an area of polylepis woodlands, paramo grasslands and marsh. In polylepis groves there's a good chance of Giant Conebill. Among others for today are Andean Snipe, Rufous-bellied Seedeater, Ecuadorian Hillstar, Stout-billed and Bar-winged Cinclodes, Tawny Antpitta, Streak-throated Bush-Tyrant, Red-crested Cotinga, Scarlet-bellied Mountain-Tanager, Buff-breasted Mountain-Tanager, and Black-backed Bush-Tanager.

Guango and San Isidro

Day 3 BLD Onwards over the Papallacta pass to Guango Lodge at 2700m on the eastern slopes of the Andes in humid temperate forest. Later continue down to the Quijos Valley, one of the westernmost sources of the Amazon, to stay for 2 nights at San Isidro Lodge at 2050m. The lodge's trails explore habitats from temperate zones around 2400m down into the subtropical zone at 1850m. Amongst many great birds, you have good chances of finding Sword-billed Hummingbird and Powerful Woodpecker. On the way you may see Torrent Duck in a rushing stream by the road, Torrent Tyrannulet, Black Phoebe and White-capped Dipper.

Guacamayos, Wildsumaco, Loreto Road

Day 4 BLD After birding the Cordillera de Guacamayos (see above), continue down to Wildsumaco, a specialist birding lodge set on a ridge in the foothills with panoramic views across the Rio Pucuno Valley. Trails are from 1200 to 1500m and yield a tremendous mix of cloudforest species, foothill specialities and Amazonian birds.

Day 5 BLD Full day birding around Wildsumaco where an amazing 456 species have been recorded, including several very difficult to see rare and local birds. Targets include Blue-rumped Manakin,

Musician Wren, Golden-eyed Flowerpiercer, Yellow-throated Spadebill, Ecuadorian Piedtail, Golden-tailed Sapphire, Napo Sabrewing, Black-throated Brilliant, Gray-tailed Piha, Chestnut-crowned Gnateater, Paradise Tanager and Red-billed Tyrannulet.

Day 6 BLD Second full day for birding locally at Wildsumaco where regional specialities include, Striolated Puffbird, Chestnut-tipped Toucanet, Equatorial Graytail, Black-billed Treehunter, Lined Antshrike, Blackish Antbird, Short-tailed Antthrush, Scarlet-breasted and Fiery-throated Fruiteater, Amazonian Umbrellabird.

Quito

Day 7 B Early morning birding at Wildsumaco before travelling back to Quito where this module ends. Either fly back to Europe or overnight in Quito ready for onward travel elsewhere within Ecuador or the Galapagos.

Birds of the Pacific coast

A great way to round off a birdwatching trip to Andes or Amazon.

Cerro Blanco and Salinas

Day 1 LD Depart early from Guayaquil to bird Cerro Blanco (see Birds of Southern Ecuador, Day 16), then west to the Ecuausal salt pools a magnet for rarities and a wide variety of water and coastal birds. Chilean Flamingo are often here. Drive north to Hosteria Atamari, on a promontory with superb views over the ocean, with good birding in the grounds.

Ayampe River

Day 2 BLD A full day birdwatching around Rio Ayampe, a narrow, shallow river that doubles as a road. Bird extensive areas of remnant deciduous and semi-humid forest, and hills that are the only known breeding area for the endangered Esmeraldas Woodstar. Later, drive a short way north to Puerto López for 4 nights at Mantaraya Lodge, outside the town.

Isla de la Plata

Day 3 BLD An early departure for a boat ride to the highlight of Ecuador's mainland coast: the Isla de la Plata - just a few kms offshore. Pelicans can be quite a highlight of the boat trip to the island, including White-vented Storm Petrel, Wedge-rumped Storm Petrel and Parkinson's Storm Petrel, plus the large Waved Albatross.

Very enjoyable trails produce numerous Blue-footed, Nazca (Masked), and some Red-footed Boobies, Red-billed Tropicbirds, Magnificent Frigatebirds, Waved Albatross, and many other sea birds. Look for Short-tailed Woodstar, and the island's endemic subspecies of Long-tailed Mockingbird. Between June and September cetaceans are often seen on the boat trip.

Machalilla NP: humid forest and dry forest

Day 4-5 BLD Two full days' birding at Machalilla NP and Cerro San Sebastián. Machalilla supports large populations of many Tumbesian endemics, and a host of other interesting birds, including Pacific Royal Flycatcher, Collared Antshrike, Ecuadorian Thrush, Guayaquil Woodpecker, and more. Cerro San Sebastián is an 800m peak, grading from arid shrub and deciduous forest, to semi-humid and cloud forest around the top.

The area is rich in endemics, some threatened, with notably large numbers of Ochre-bellied Dove, and Henna-hooded Foliage-gleaner. Very few foreign birders have discovered this area, making your visit quite special.

Shore highway-Guayaquil

Day 6 BL Early departure for coastal birding along the shore highway. Parts of the road detour inland, so as well as sea and shore birds, look for Croaking-ground Dove, Pacific Parrotlet, Harris Hawk, Plumbeous Kite, Great Black Hawk, King Vulture, Laughing Falcon, Yellow-tailed Oriole, Scrub Blackbird and more.

You arrive in Guayaquil by early afternoon in time for evening flights home, or you could stay the night in Guayaquil and fly to the Galapagos next day.





Galapagos

'The closest thing to Eden on Earth', a visit to the Galapagos Islands is a very special lifetime experience.

The Galápagos islands offer a profound and unique experience of being on equal terms with nature in an arcadian paradise. Their physical beauty, world-class wildlife, and the quality of the best yachts that cruise the archipelago, combine to make a well planned trip to the Galápagos a truly memorable experience that ranks near the top of many travellers' lifetime 'must go there' lists.

Beautiful and remote, the Galápagos was visited so little in history and settled so recently that its animals have not developed a fear of man.

Walking on the islands will bring you right up close to courting or nesting sea birds, sun bathing iguanas, relaxing sea lions or perhaps even a rare giant tortoise ambling to its lunch. More often than not it will be you, not the wildlife, that decides how close you approach. Snorkelling is wonderful, with the thrill of swimming with penguins, turtles and curious young sea lions who seem to like nothing better than to show off their underwater acrobatics around you.

The thirteen major islands of the Galápagos straddle the equator 600 miles west of mainland Ecuador. The best way to see them is on one of the motor and sailing yachts, large and small, that are based in the islands.

Cruising these 'enchanted islands' adds considerably to the overall experience and gives access to the important sites. Hotels are available for the non-nautical.

The archipelago is a national park financed by visitor income. Preservation of its sensitive ecosystems depends on the right balance between wildlife and humans. Key issues include the impact of visitors and their boats, immigration of settlers from the mainland, and introduced species such as feral goats. Tourism, which is tightly controlled to reduce its negative impacts, provides the considerable income needed to fund conservation programmes to safeguard island ecology, notably by the progressive eradication of introduced species that are the greatest threat.

There are limits on the number of visitors overall, and to each particular landing site around the islands. When ashore you must keep to the well thought out system of paths. Boats are tightly regulated in such matters as anchoring and effluent, and long-term allocation to fixed itineraries encourages responsibility for their proper conservation. The end result is a very workable system that achieves its goals while scarcely diminishing the experience of visiting these fabulous islands.



What makes the Galapagos so special?

A little light science may help to underscore why the Galápagos is so special.

GEOLOGY

The islands were formed at different times and are still being created now. They are situated over a 'hot spot' in the earth's crust where from time to time over the last 4 million years eruptions have created submarine volcanoes whose tips are the islands we see. Convection currents in the earth's crust are gradually pushing southeast, so the islands are forming sequentially: as each new island is created it is gradually moved off the hot spot as if on a conveyor belt. Volcanic activity then ceases and the landscape is softened by erosion and events such as caldera collapses. The newest islands, in the north west, which were formed barely a million years ago, therefore have the most dramatic topography.

ECOLOGY

The islands are very isolated. As the Galápagos islands were formed volcanically from the ocean bed they have never been connected to the mainland. Consequently, all the land species found here have colonised from some far-away source, travelling by wind, or water, or attached to something else—either as spores or seeds, or as entire plants or animals. This process has been sporadic and random, so

niches have been filled by species that would not have been able to do so on the mainland. For example, no large mammals reached the Galápagos, so the largest natural herbivores on the islands are reptiles.

OCEANOGRAPHY

The Galápagos is at the junction of two circulating ocean currents: a warm current from the Gulf of Panama in the north, and the cold Humboldt current from the south. These two currents create conditions that can suit both tropical and temperate species, which explains why you will find sea lions and tropical fish, penguins and flamingos at the same time.

Further complexities in ocean currents at a more local level lead to very different environments in the eastern islands compared to those islands in the west of the archipelago, so different species of plant and animal are found on different islands.

EVOLUTION

Most of the resident species are found only on the Galapagos. Sporadic colonisation and unusual ecologies have created a very high proportion of unique species 'endemic' to the Galápagos (that is, found only there). All but 2 of the 21 species of iguanas, lava lizards, geckos, snakes and the giant tortoises are endemic to the archipelago. Some species are



restricted to a single island only.

29 species of land birds are found on the islands, of which 22 are endemic, including most famously Darwin's 13 species of finch. On his visit to the islands in 1835 Darwin observed their differently sized and shaped beaks and concluded that they had been adapted to exploit different niche food sources. The Cactus Finch has an edge crushing, probing bill to feed on cactus seeds. The Woodpecker Finch has a biting tipped beak and uses a tool, such as a cactus spine, to probe holes in trees for wood-boring grubs. In Darwin's words from *The Voyage of the Beagle* :

"Seeing this gradation and diversity of structure in one small, intimately related group of birds, one might really fancy that from an original paucity of birds in this archipelago, one species had been taken and modified for different ends."

Darwin eventually proposed in *The Origin of Species* that evolution through variability of inherited qualities and natural selection of individuals was the likely process by which this had occurred.

The extraordinary ecology of the Galápagos creates a laboratory of evolution. Through Darwin, its animals and plants have led us to understand a great deal more about the natural world, our position within it, and how we came to be here.

HUMANS AND CONSERVATION

The Galapagos are the closest thing to Eden on Earth. The islands saw almost no humans, except passing sailors, until quite recently. As soon as humans began to arrive in small numbers, their impact has been, for the most part, tightly and successfully controlled.

In 1959 the 97% of the archipelago which is without human population was declared a national park and the Charles Darwin Foundation for the Galápagos Islands (CDF) was created. In 1979 UNESCO declared the Galápagos Islands a World Heritage Site.

The National Park Service concentrates on conservation issues and controls the impact of tourism in the islands. It supervises the boats especially comprehensively and tightly. The resultant park fees fund important conservation programmes such as the eradication of feral goats, which numbered 100,000 on Santiago island alone.

The CDF's research station on Santa Cruz island runs a captive breeding programme for endangered tortoises and land iguanas. Its main roles are scientific research and education, and it keeps watch on conservation.

It seems to work. Apart from the very small areas where mainlanders settle or come for week-ends, the natural environment of the Galapagos is, according to the CDF, in better shape than when Darwin visited.

Planning your trip

Galapagos seasons

W eather-wise, no time of year on the Galapagos has perfect weather in every respect, so deciding when to visit the Galapagos based on the weather is very much a personal decision.

December to May

The warm Panama current usually dominates between December and May, bringing sunny weather with occasional tropical showers that turn the islands green. Seas are generally calm, the average water temperature is 26C and underwater visibility is good at 20-25m. The daytime air temperature is generally 26-30C, but rather humid.

June to November

Between June and November the weather is cooler and drier under the influence of the Humboldt current. Temperatures are typically 23-26C, reduced by wind-chill that can make it a bit nippy to be on deck without a fleece. Skies are often cloudless and rain is scarce, but a fine mist called *garua* can cloak the islands at a height of 300-600m. Snorkellers in the water for any length of time should use a wet suit as water temperatures decline to 19-23C. Nutrient levels rise, so underwater visibility may decrease to 10-15m.

El Nino

The *El Nino* phenomenon occurs every 4-7 years. The Humboldt current weakens and trade winds die down. Sea temperatures rise and there is an increase in rain primarily affecting the December to May season.



The islands

All the islands in the Galápagos are volcanic, some actively so, and their scenery is correspondingly varied and often dramatic. Each has its own ecologies supporting different species: a Galápagos guidebook is essential to cover the details of so much diversity.

Flights from the mainland arrive at airstrips at either Baltra or San Cristóbal. All cruises start at these entry points or at Puerto Ayora, reached by road from Baltra.

SANTA CRUZ

Santa Cruz is the hub of the Galápagos, with the largest town, Puerto Ayora, on its south coast.

Travelling from the airstrip at Baltra Island to join a yacht moored at Puerto Ayora you travel across the scrubby interior, passing between The Twins—two large sink holes.

The Charles Darwin Research Station and its tortoise conservation and breeding centre are just outside Puerto Ayora.

At Black Turtle Cove, small boats are paddled in a peaceful lagoon fringed with mangroves where pacific green turtles breed between December and April and schools of golden rays and spotted eagle rays fly in formation through the water. In contrast, Turtle Beach is a white sand beach: brown pelicans nest here and flamingos are sometimes seen.

North Seymour island, just to the north of Baltra, has colonies of blue-footed boobies, swallow-tailed gulls and magnificent frigate birds.

South Plaza is another island just off Santa Cruz with a shoreline packed with life: sea

lions, land iguanas, swallow-tailed gulls, opuntia cactus and vegetation that changes colour with the season.

SAN CRISTÓBAL

San Cristóbal, supports another small town—Puerto Moreno. Cerro Brujo offers a long white sand beach, excellent for swimming and snorkelling, plus sea lions, pelicans and boobies. All three species of booby can usually be found at Punta Pitt.

Just off the north shore, the rocks of León Dormida resemble a sleeping lion, and are frequented by tropicbirds, frigatebirds and boobies.

ESPAÑOLA

The southernmost island boasts large nesting colonies of blue-footed and Nazca boobies, a colony of endemic marine iguanas, the fabulously chunky waved albatross (one of the heaviest sea birds weighing in at an average 9lbs with a wingspan of 16ft) here from April to December, and spectacular cliffs, all reached from Punta Suarez. There are sea lions, Galápagos doves and Darwin's finches.

The white sands of Gardner Bay are favoured by sunbathing sea lions, by turtles as a nesting beach, and are home to an endemic mockingbird.

FLOREANA

Sands made green by crystals of olivine, a semiprecious stone, greet you as you land at Punta Cormorant. A short walk leads to a view over a large lagoon which is home to the archipelago's largest population of flamingos, plus other waders.

Between December and May turtles nest on

a white sand beach a short walk away.

Nearby is Devil's Crown rock, a sunken cone with fabulous snorkelling.

In Post Office Bay, a letter left in a barrel originally placed here in 1793 would be picked out and delivered to its address by sailors going that way: a tradition maintained to this day by passing travellers.

ISABELA

The largest island, with five of the biggest volcanoes. Mostly barren, but there are some excellent sites to visit around its coast. Darwin's Lake, a fine crater lake, and a volcano of the same name are accessible from the impressive natural harbour of Tagus Cove where passing mariners have carved their names since Victorian times.

Trails from nearby Urvina Bay offer good prospects of seeing giant tortoises in the wild, plus large colourful land iguanas and flightless cormorants.

At Elizabeth Bay, accessible only by panga, a lagoon sheltered by mangroves is home to turtles, rays, sea lions and penguins. Punta Moreno has spectacular views of volcanoes and impressive lava flows. Its pristine landscape provides a textbook lesson in early colonisation by pioneer species. Brackish lagoons are filled with life, including dragonflies, gallinules, ducks and very tame flamingos. Many sea birds also visit.

The small settlement at Puerto Villamil has a tortoise captive breeding centre, and flamingos in the nearby lagoon; an excursion from here leads to Sierra Negra—the second largest crater in the world after Ngorongoro.

Planning your trip

The Natural Year

The natural year on the Galapagos is always changing and there is plenty to see at any time, so there is no 'wrong' time to visit.

Here is a summary of what you can expect to find month-by-month.

December The islands green over as the rainier season starts. Still great weather: mostly sunny days, hardly any wind, waters warmer. Giant tortoise eggs hatch from now until April. Pacific green turtles breed on Santa Cruz. Waved albatrosses fledge. First red pouches of great frigatebirds at Genovesa. Northern migrant birds and some whales and dolphins rest and feed on their journey south.

January Land birds nest. Marine iguanas turn green, red and black on Espanola. Green sea turtles arrive to lay eggs until March. Land iguanas breed on Isabela. Nazca boobies nest on Espanola. Air and seas are warm until June. Ideal for snorkelling.

February Greater flamingo start nesting on Floreana. Bahama pintail ducks start breeding. Marine iguanas nest on Santa Cruz. Galapagos doves' peak nesting season. Highest sea temperatures, 25C.

March Marine iguanas nest on Fernandina. Waved albatross start to arrive on Espanola on about 21 March. Snorkel with penguins and tropical fish off Isabela. Wettest month in rainy El Niño years. Hot and humid. Air temperatures up to 30C. Swells on north shores.

April Rains end, yet islands remain green. Waved albatross mass arrival and courtship, Espanola. Green sea turtle eggs begin to hatch. Land iguana eggs hatch on Isabela. Giant tortoise hatching season ends. Good visibility for snorkellers. Together with May one of the best months to visit.

May Blue-footed boobies begin courtship on North Seymour. Galapagos penguins very active on Bartolome. Last of the sea turtle and land iguana eggs hatch. Palo santo trees begin to shed their foliage. Waved albatross start to lay eggs on Espanola. Band-rumped storm petrels start nesting. Sea temperature starts to drop towards the end of the month.

June Start of the drier season. Southeast trade winds return, currents become stronger, seas pick up. Giant tortoises on Santa Cruz migrate from highlands to lowlands in search of nesting places. Magnificent frigatebird males on North Seymour develop their red pouches. Southern migrant birds rest on their way north. Humpback whales near the shore turns red until December.

July Sea birds actively breeding. Flightless cormorant courting, Fernandina. American oyster-catchers nest, Santiago. Lava lizards start mating rituals until November. Whales and dolphins most likely to be seen off Isabela. Seas cool, 21C.

August Galapagos hawks court on Espanola and Santiago. Nazca boobies and swallow-tailed gulls nest on Genovesa. Migrant shore birds start to arrive and stay until March. Giant tortoises return to the highlands of Santa Cruz. Sea lion pupping starts in west and central islands. Seas at their coolest 18C and a bit choppy.

September Peak of the garua season. Air temperatures at their coolest: 19C. Galapagos penguins very active on Bartolome. Sea lions very active on west and central islands' harem-gathering males barking and fighting. Sea birds remain active at their nesting sites.

October Garua mist in most locations, but less prolonged in the western islands. Lava herons nesting until March. Galapagos fur seals start their mating period. Blue-footed boobies raise chicks (Espanola and Isabela). Sea lion pupping continues.

November Nice transitional weather. Sea lions harem-gathering on the eastern islands. Brown noddies breeding. Sea lion pups display aquagymnastics to snorkellers. Trade winds have dropped, seas calm and sea temperature slowly rising.



FERNANDINA

The westernmost island, Fernandina is therefore also youngest and most volcanically active: a 1,500m high dome rises above empty lava fields.

Punta Espinosa is a very beautiful promontory with a backdrop of six volcanoes on Isabela. The water is rich in fish with corresponding intense activity from sea birds, dolphins and even whales. Flightless cormorants, marine iguanas in large numbers and penguins can be seen from trails.

SANTIAGO

Santiago offers several good sites and is on many boats' itineraries.

Bartolomé Island provides a view looking back to Pinnacle Rock with Santiago behind it that is one of the most photographed on the archipelago. Lava flows and spatter cones add to the experience. Sea lions patrol the landing site and penguins fly through the water among snorkellers in the bay below.

Sullivan Bay has some fantastic lava formations and is good for snorkelling.

There's a good shoreline walk on the black sands of James Bay and to lava formations where there is a fur seal colony.

GENOVESA

Boats enter the spectacular sunken crater of Genovesa, a long sail north of the other islands. There are landings on the white sand beach at Darwin Bay, where rocks and small lagoons make an attractive scene. Birders find Galápagos doves, lava gulls, swallow-tailed gulls, great frigatebirds and three species of finch.

Prince Philip's Steps, incongruously named

after the Duke of Edinburgh, provides one of the few places where fur seals are found; ascending this rockfall leads to a good colony of red footed boobies; masked boobies, short-eared owls and storm petrels are also at home here.

OTHER ISLANDS

- The small island of **Rabida** has a red beach fronting a saltwater lagoon bordered by mangroves, popular with sea lions. Pelicans nest in bushes by the beach. Around the island are some beautiful snorkelling spots that are great for beginners. 9 species of finch are found inland.
- **Sombrero Chino** (Chinese Hat) just off Santiago is only accessible by the smallest yachts through a small channel leading to a picturesque anchorage.
- **Daphne** is a highly restricted but lovely small island where a trail leads from a difficult landing site through colonies of masked boobies to a summit above two craters that are packed in season with nesting blue-footed boobies. Red-billed tropicbirds patrol the skies.
- **Santa Fé** has its own endemic species of land iguana, lava lizards and sea lion colonies. There are good swimming and snorkelling opportunities.

Many islands have alternative English names, mostly after passing warships and admirals: Santa Cruz is also called 'Indefatigable', San Cristóbal is 'Chatham', Española is 'Hood', Floreana is 'Charles', Isabela is 'Albemarle', Fernandina is 'Narborough', Santiago is 'James', Genovesa is 'Tower', and Santa Fé is 'Barrington'.

Planning your trip

Choosing a Galapagos cruise

Because most visitor sites can only be reached from the sea, the most appropriate, and almost the only, way to see the Galapagos is by boat. At its best, the combination of marvellous wildlife, a fine quality boat, and first-rate naturalist guides makes for a truly memorable and enriching trip.

Cruising on well-crewed well-equipped boats built and maintained to modern standards is never cheap. The extra costs of being hundreds of miles into the Pacific means that a Galapagos cruise is going to absorb a sizeable chunk of your holiday budget.

It is all the more important to make sure you get value for money. This is where personal tastes and preferences come in. You can choose between different sizes and styles of boat, different routes around the islands, and how many days you would like your cruise to last.

Although price and quality are not always in lock-step, for the most part the higher the price the more comfortable the boat will be and the better you will be looked after.

Book well in advance for the widest choice.

Style and size of boat

Several dozen boats ply the islands. There are purpose-built 'expedition vessels', elegant schooner-rigged yachts with well appointed cabins, spacious catamarans, sturdy practical motor yachts converted for the Galapagos, and conventional sailing yachts.

The largest based in the islands accommodates 100 passengers: none come close to the scale of a typical cruise ship elsewhere.

We have chosen good examples in each style. As conventional sailing yachts are usually cramped and tend to become the worse for wear rather quickly there are relatively few of them that, in our opinion, make the grade.

The larger boats tend to be faster and can include interesting outlying islands such as Fernandina and Genovesa. Most smaller boats drop one of these two sites. Larger boats give a better ride. You might enjoy the thrill of being tossed around a little (sometimes a lot) in a smaller boat, but if your sea legs can be a bit wobbly then you might play it safe and go for one of the bigger boats. Bunk berths are usual on smaller boats.

You are ferried from your mother vessel to each site in a tender, usually a sturdy motorised Zodiac or RIB called a panga. Larger boats form their passengers into small groups of up to sixteen for the landings, with each group usually going to a different landing site in the area, so neither you nor the wildlife should feel there is a crowd.

The camaraderie, personal attention and 'away from it all' experience of a smaller boat weighs in their favour for many people.

Number of days

Each boat offers its own combination of routes on a 14 night rotation. Some offer two different 7 night itineraries, eg 'Eastern islands' one week, and 'Western islands' the next. Others run a 5 night itinerary, followed by a different 5 night itinerary, then a 4 night itinerary. And so on.

If your budget will stretch to it and you are keen

to see the islands well, you should definitely go for a 7 night cruise. This allows enough time to see most of the interesting sites in the archipelago.

If you have the time, a 14 night cruise will be a very comprehensive and memorable trip.

Combining shorter options to make a longer cruise overall works reasonably well, with the slight disadvantage that if you are staying for a longer cruise you may find guides having to repeat themselves in the field for the benefit of people who have just joined. Excursions on the change-over day may be a bit thin.

Whatever length of cruise you choose bear in mind the cost of the flight from mainland Ecuador and the national park fee, which are the same no matter how long your trip. Consider also that much of the first day of your 'cruise' will be taken up by the flight, travel from the landing strip to the boat, and safety drills and administration on board the vessel. A 3 night cruise is therefore really too short unless you are pressed for time or keen not to spend long at sea.

You should also consider the Finch Bay Hotel near Puerto Ayora, from which there are day trips to nearby sites. A stay here can make a short cruise more worthwhile and round off time at sea with relaxation at the hotel pool or local beach.

So-called 'island-hopping' is not as attractive as it might sound. Crossings between islands can be very bumpy (much worse than on a proper cruiser) and waste precious daylight hours, places to stay are very limited, and your experience of nature is much poorer - and that's the main reason for going. Hotels' impact on the islands' environment and uninhabited history is also a consideration. The Galapagos is not Greece.

Itineraries

Itineraries are agreed with the authorities to control visitor numbers at each site each day.

Occasionally there will be a temporary or permanent change in an itinerary, usually for conservation or safety reasons.

If you have a particular interest in visiting certain islands, then you should study the itineraries carefully to meet your needs (our website has the details) and perhaps think about any species you are most keen to see. We can then help to match your requirements to an appropriate itinerary. Even so, there is always a possibility that the itinerary you chose will be changed.

Boats typically move between sites before dawn and during lunch, making best use of the morning and afternoon for visits ashore.

Connections

Flights to the islands leave Quito and Guayaquil in the morning, and return to the mainland early in the afternoon, in time for flights to Europe from Guayaquil.

Most people combine the Galapagos with one of our tours of mainland Ecuador. When cruises are in short supply it is usually possible to split a visit to the mainland to fit available cruise dates: we are adept at ingenious solutions to this problem.

It is possible, if time is short, to arrive in Quito, overnight and catch a flight to the islands next day, but it is better to pause a while on the mainland first.

Galapagos boats

The vessels shown here all have air-conditioned or climate controlled cabins, with private WC and freshwater shower (unless otherwise stated) and experienced English-speaking naturalist guides.

Cruises generally provide two land visits a day of about 2-3 hours long, plus swimming and snorkelling opportunities.

Sailing yachts only put up their sails occasionally when conditions are appropriate - more for romance than conveyance.

We offer several others and constantly review our selection of boats: for updates please see the Booking Information leaflet that comes with this brochure, or our website, where you will also find detailed itineraries and prices.



Eclipse

P48 G4 L210 K14 C29

TOP

Extremely spacious, stable ship with attractive elegant décor in public areas. 24 twin/double cabins and 2 single cabins. Library, shop, Jacuzzi, doctor. Breakfast and lunch are usually eaten *al fresco* under an awning. Dinner is inside. Snorkelling equipment is provided and shorty wet suits are provided at no extra charge.



Origin

P20 G2 L142 K12 C1bc

TOP

Launching in January 2016, Origin is a top range motor cruiser with 10 cabins all with panoramic picture windows. The yacht has stylish social areas including a sun deck with jacuzzi and hammocks, indoor and al fresco dining areas and bars, a cosy library and a fitness centre. The crew includes two naturalist guides and a concierge.



Galapagos Odyssey

P16 G1 L135 K12 C10

FIRST CLASS - SMALL

A new, spacious motor-yacht with 10 large air-conditioned cabins (6 with twin beds and 2 with double beds spread between the upper and main deck and two smaller cabins on the lower deck) each with private bathroom, desk, closet and most with panoramic windows. On board facilities include a lounge and dining area, library, shaded deck for al fresco dining, outdoor bar, jacuzzi, sunbathing area with sun-loungers



Athala II

P16 G1 L98 K12 C10

Stylish motor-catamaran with 8 air-conditioned stateroom cabins with picture windows and queen or twin beds - 4 cabins have private balconies and are located on the main deck and 4 are located on the upper deck. The upper deck features a bar and open area for relaxation and al fresco dining. The sundeck has sun-loungers and a jacuzzi. The dining area and lounge are located on the main deck. Wetsuits included.

TOP



Isabella II

P40 G3 L166 K10 C24

Luxurious, thoughtfully-designed, fast, stable and well run. Plenty of space, comfort and facilities for just 40 lucky guests. Star-gazing, glass-bottomed boat. Snorkelling equipment provided.

TOP



La Pinta

P48 G4 L207 K12 C24

A generously-equipped luxury-class motor yacht with 24 cabins, all on the same deck and with floor-to-ceiling windows, main dining room indoors, spacious outside sundeck with bar area where some meals served, Jacuzzi, conference room for briefings, exercise room, doctor's office, friendly atmosphere generated by attentive, pleasant crew.

TOP



Galapagos Legend

P100 G6 L300 K15 C60

All the amenities of a cruise liner. 54 cabins in a range of styles, all with twin beds that can be put together. 60 crew including a doctor and 6 naturalist guides. Piano lounge, pool, kids corner and computer games for teenagers. Museum, library, hammock terrace, auditorium, lounge and dining room. Glass-bottomed boat. Laundry service.

FIRST CLASS - LARGE



Santa Cruz

P90 G6 L240 K13 C52

46 cabins, in a range of styles mostly with twin beds, 2 triple, 4 quadruple, 4 suites. Jacuzzi, library, shop, infirmary with doctor, stargazing, glass bottomed boat and snorkelling equipment provided. Extremely well-run operation with high maintenance and safety a priority. Special early dinner sitting for children.

FIRST CLASS - LARGE



Coral I and II

Coral I P26 G2 L118 K10 C10 Coral II P20 G2 L108 K10 C10

Two very similar but not identical sister motor cruisers which cruise together. Cabins with twin beds that can be put together. Coral I has a Jacuzzi. High quality furnishings in attractive salon area. Snorkelling equipment on board.

FIRST CLASS - MEDIUM



Eric, Flamingo and Letty

P20 G2 L83 K10 C8

Three identical motor cruisers which travel in convoy. 7 twin and 3 double cabins. Unusually high ratio of guides to clients and a very good itinerary. Clear bottomed sea kayaks and wet suits are available for use at no extra charge on a first come first served basis. Snorkelling equipment is provided. Diving can be pre-arranged for days 2 and 5 of the cruise at extra cost. Some special family friendly departures.

FIRST CLASS - MEDIUM



Beagle

P12 G1 L105 K8 C6

A teak decked, schooner rigged, motor yacht. 6 cabins each with a double lower berth and single upper bunk plus 1 single cabin. Meals served inside or on deck. 2 kayaks.

FIRST CLASS - SMALL



Beluga

P16 G1 L110 K12 C8

The Beluga is a deluxe, 110 foot, steel-hulled motor vessel. It is fully air-conditioned and accommodates 16 passengers in double staterooms (one is a triple cabin with an additional berth), each with private bathroom and shower. The well-trained and experienced crew of 7 takes very good care of their guests at all times aboard and ashore. The Beluga is a spacious and comfortable yacht with lots of deck space.

FIRST CLASS - SMALL



Cormorant

P16 G1 L108 K14 C12

This modern and stylish motor-catamaran has 6 air-conditioned stateroom cabins all with private balconies located on the Main and Upper decks. There are also 2 larger suites on the Main deck, these also have private balconies. The upper deck feature a bar and an area for al fresco dining, and on the sun deck is a jacuzzi and sun loungers. The dining area and lounge are located on the main deck.

FIRST CLASS - SMALL



Samba

P12 G1 L78 K9 C5

Samba is a 78 foot steel-hulled motor-yacht (with stabilizing sail) originally built in Holland. She is comfortable and well laid-out and offers good cabin accommodation (6 double cabins and 1 exterior double bed cabin all with private bathrooms and hot water) and public areas, including an inside salon and an outside stern area often used for dining. There is also a mini-library and a small bar.

SUPERIOR TOURIST CLASS - SMALL

Worth a mention

Cachalote P16 G1 L96 K9 C6

SUPR TOURIST-SMALL

Steel-hulled, ketch-rigged motor sailer. Cabins have private bathroom with shower. Deck space is ample and there is a good-sized saloon.

Grand Odyssey P16 G1 L137 K12 C10

TOP

Luxury motor yacht recently launched. 8 spacious twin or queen-bed a/c cabins. Large solarium deck, 2 jacuzzis, mini-spa, dining room & lounge.

Ocean Spray P16 G1 L113 K15 C10

TOP

Stylish, spacious catamaran. Its 8 cabins have private balconies. Large sundeck with jacuzzi. Lounge, dining room, bar, outdoor bar/dining area.

Mary Anne P16 G1 L172 K8 C8

FIRST CLASS MEDIUM

Elegant 3 masted tall sailing ship. 12 cabins, with double lower berth and a single upper berth. Wood-panelled lounge, bar, ample deck space.

Key to boat data

P max number of passengers **G** number of naturalist guides
L length overall in feet **K** cruising speed in knots
C number of crew



SMART VOYAGER CERTIFIED



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 **GEODYSSEY**
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Tel: 020 7281 7788

Fax: 020 7281 7878

www.geodyssey.co.uk

enquiries@geodyssey.co.uk

116 Tollington Park, London N4 3RB, England

