



Andean Explorer

If you want to see spectacular mountains, stunning valleys, a slice of Ecuador's indigneous culture and perhaps spend a day being pampered in a luxurious Andean spa... then this could be the Ecuador holiday for you!

This two-week trip will take you to see some of the most amazing sights South America has to offer, from the colonial grandeur of Quito and Cuenca, to the peace and tranquility of the Cotopaxi National Park, to the bustle and bargains of the Otavalo market - a perfect way to get to know the Real Ecuador!



Day One - Arrival in Quito

As your holiday in Ecuador begins, we'll be there to pick you up and take you to your hotel, which is in the heart of Quito. You will probably be wanting some time to rest and get used to the altitude so we have left the rest of today free for you to relax. Your hotel is close to dozens of restaurants and cafes, as well as all the other facilities you'd expect from a capital city, so if you're feeling up to it then why not head on out and explore?



Day Two - City tour of Quito

After a free morning to relax and settle into things, we will pick you up after lunch and take you for a tour of Quito's Old Town, including the plazas, Cathedral and other sites of interest before heading out of town to the "Mitad del Mundo" (Middle of the World) centre, located right on the Equator, so you can stand astride the world!



Day Three - Otavalo market

An early start today, as we head out of Quito into the mountains to the north for a slice of the Real Ecuador! We'll be heading to the bustling local market at Otavalo - a typical mountain town that just happens to be home to the largest market in Ecuador! You can check out the beautiful local textiles, haggle over some excellent leather goods, or just sit back with an Ecuadorean coffee and take it all in! After a full day here, we will return to Quito in the evening.



Day Four - Into the cloud forest

We will be seeing a different aspect of the Andes today, as we pick you up after breakfast this morning for the drive down the western slopes of the Andes, towards the town of Mindo. This area is known throughout Ecuador as "Mindo Lindo" (Beautiful Mindo) for the stunning scenery you will see along the way. We will arrive at the El Monte cloud forest lodge in the later afternoon and we will take you to your cabin and show you around the lodge and the beautiful private gardens before one of El Monte's superb lunches! In the afternoon, we will walk out into the forest along the banks of the Rio Mindo to appreciate the huge variety of bird and plant-life we can find here. We will then return to the lodge to relax before dinner and a short briefing on tomorrow's activities.



Day Five - Amazing wildlife in the cloud forest

This morning we will rise early to head out and see some more of Mindo's amazing wildlife – toucans, parrots, quetzals, flying squirrels and agoutis can all be seen in the area and we'll hope to see as many as possible. We will then head back to the lodge for breakfast, before going for a longer walk up into the Nambillo valley in the hills behind the lodge. As well as the chance to see more fantastic wildlife, we will end our trail at a beautiful waterfall with a crystal-clear pool underneath, where we can cool down and swim. We will then head back to the lodge for lunch before driving back to Quito.



Day Six - Cotopaxi National park

The snow-capped mountain of Cotopaxi is one of the enduring symbols of Ecuador, and no holiday in Ecuador is complete without a trip to see it. Today we will take you on a full-day tour through the Cotopaxi National Park, giving you the chance for some breathtaking photos along the way.



Day Seven - Lake Quilotoa

Today we will head away from Cotopaxi to the volcanic Quilotoa lake. We guarantee you've never seen anything like it - climbing up to the lip of the (extinct!) volcano, you look down into a bluey-green lake that seems utterly surreal. You can then head down to the lake and take out a rowing-boat or canoe, before coming back up by horse to your waiting driver. In the evening, we'll head further south through Ecuador, to the town of Riobamba, where we will spend the night in a traditional Hosteria.



Day Eight - The Devil's Nose

An early start again today, as we pick you up and take you to the train station in Riobamba, for a ride down the Devil's Nose! This infamous switchback took decades of work to complete but is now used mainly by tourists. You have some spectacular views as you travel down the line - especially for the adventurous ones who decide to ride on the roof... At the end of the line we will pick you up and take you on to the beautiful colonial city of Cuenca, where you will stay tonight.



Day Nine - Tour of Cuenca

Today we will take you on a tour of this lovely city - probably the prettiest in Ecuador. We will visit the two cathedrals, two of Ecuador's best museums, and a factory where they make traditional 'Panama' hats. We will finish off by heading to a hill just outside Cuenca, from where you have some gorgeous views over the city and the countryside beyond.



Day Ten - Free day in Cuenca

We've left today free for you to wander around Cuenca. With its pleasant, tree-lined streets and squares, gorgeous domed churches, and some of the best food and drink in the country, we're sure you'll find lovely plenty of places to sit and write those postcards - we can even recommend a few!



Day Eleven - Back to Quito

After breakfast this morning, we will pick you up and take you back to Quito, where you can get ready to head out for a final full day here in Ecuador. Postcards sent? Souvenirs bought? Then you're all set to enjoy a traditional meal before it's salsa time...



Day Twelve - Onward bound

Most flights back to the UK and to the Galapagos leave in the morning, so you'll just have time for breakfast today before it's time to say goodbye to Ecuador as we pick you up and take you to catch your flight either home, or on to your Galapagos cruise...

Easy upgrades

As we've said, we can tailormake your itinerary to your exact specifications, and you can have a look at our Ecuador Guide or some of our other Ecuador Holidays for ideas about how to add to this holiday, but we can also offer you some easy optional extras which fit into this exact itinerary:



Upgrade accommodation - from £50pp

This price is based on our standard 3-star hotels, which all have ensuite bathrooms, cable television, full buffet breakfasts, etc. However, if you'd like to upgrade your hotels to something with a little more luxury then please just ask and we'll make some recommendations!



Trekking in the Andes - from £200pp

If you like a bit of adventure, why not have a look at some of our treks in the Andes... We have treks from 2-10 days in some of South America's most beautiful National Parks.



Relaxing on the Pacific Coast - from £400pp

If you want a bit more relaxation time after your jungle adventure, then why not head to the warm Pacific Coast and soak up some sun? We have a range of excellent beach hotels so you can enjoy some comfort and relaxation after all that culture and wildlife...

Tailormade for you

Of course, what we want you to remember is that we're here to offer you any guidance and advice you need. We're not about trying to sell you more than you want - we want you to have the holiday that's right for you, so give us a call or send us an email and we can start to find out what sort of Ecuador holiday is right for you!