



ANDANDO^o
TOURS
Mainland Ecuador &
Galápagos Islands

Central Highlights of Ecuador

From Quito to Guayaquil in 7 days





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Day 1

Transfer in from the airport to Hotel Cultura Manor. Once at the hotel we will enjoy dinner and spend the night in this historic property.



Day 2

After breakfast, we will step back in time into the picturesque neighborhood of San Juan as we make our way toward the Historic Center. We will walk down quaint cobbled streets lined with brightly colored colonial houses roofed in antique tiles, with flower-dressed balconies dressed, watched over by the Quito's winged Virgin Mary of standing on the 'Panecillo'. The 'Panecillo', so named for its bread like shape, is actually a parasitic crater formed by magma from Pichincha Volcano. From here we continue along Benalcázar Street, past the house of conquistador Sebastian de Benalcázar and onto García Moreno Street.

This street, also known as the Calle de las Siete Cruces (Street of the Seven Crosses) was originally an Incan route to the Panecillo, a hill thought to have been a center of worship to the sun and moon gods. This Incan avenue was transformed into the most Catholic-influenced street in Quito when the Spanish arrived. They erected seven crosses along the avenue in an effort to make the indigenous people believe in their God. We will walk along this street to the Plaza de la Independencia. On the south side of the square lie one of the oldest cathedrals in South America and the sacred heart of the city: La Catedral de Quito, an impressive white walled building with green glazed ceramic domes. Look out for the plaque marking the spot on which President Gabriel Garcia Moreno was killed. The symmetrical Palacio de Carondelet, the presidential palace, runs along the western side of the square, its overhanging balconies a gift from the French Government and originally from the Tuileries Palace in Paris. A few buildings up, is the incomparable Iglesia de la Compañía, a Jesuit church overflowing in Baroque art, it's tragic history covered in gold concealing the devastating fire and earthquake that shook it. The great Plaza de San Francisco and its church have been a center of activity since pre-Incan times when the square was the tianguéz (main market place). We will search for the mythical stone from the legend of Cantuña in the church's vestibule and visit the museum which houses four thousand pieces including sculptures and oil paintings from the Escuela Quiteña (Quito School), an artistic tradition that emerged during Ecuador's colonial period. The works of art on display by artists such as Miguel de Santiago, Miguel Chili,- better known as 'Caspicara' – and Bernardo de Legarda show the mix of indigenous and European styles: angels with Andean features and virgins dressed in wide skirts shaped like volcanoes.



*Note: The church Iglesia de la Compañía is closed for service on Sundays.



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Following this excursion, we depart from Quito for the Mitad del Mundo (Middle of the World) complex, with a stop for lunch at a lovely restaurant specializing in typical Ecuadorian cuisine. In the middle of the world, a 30-meter-high monument is located at latitude $0^{\circ} 0' 0''$, and gives you the unusual opportunity of standing in both the northern and southern hemispheres at the same time while straddling the equator. To one side of the monument a replica Spanish Colonial village offers a leisure area, gift shops and restaurants. This site was highly significant for the ancient Andean people whose cosmovision worshipped the unity of cosmos, nature, and family many thousands of years ago. We will also visit the Intiñan museum, dedicated to the promotion and study of the nations that inhabited the equatorial area of South America. The museum also has several attractions, such as a totem forest, sundials, an example of a Shuar home, and much more. After this, we return to the hotel for a hearty dinner and to spend the night.



Day 3

After breakfast we will make our way out of Quito, where the true length of the city reveals itself as it stretches down the valley below Pichincha volcano. Clouds fill the valleys like steaming cauldrons and the Avenue of Volcanoes opens the way towards Cotopaxi, the neck of the moon (in an ancient indigenous language).



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Cotopaxi, at 5,898 m.above sea level, is one of the highest volcanoes in the world and easily the most visited summit in Ecuador due to its easy access for amateur climbers and experts alike. Our drive through this National Park brings us out onto the plains of Laguna de Limpiopungo, a lake fed by water from the Rumiñahui volcano, which towers over it. It is thought that the Incan Rumiñahui hid his gold on the mountain and many search parties have set out to find it, some never to be seen again. The park's wildlife gathers at the water's edge, where you can easily see ducks, swallows, frogs, and toads, and you may spot an eagle or maybe a great Andean Condor. If the sky is clear we can catch beautiful views of Cotopaxi and the surrounding volcanoes: Rumiñahui, Sincholagua, Pasachoa, and - with luck - the elusive Antisana.

After this visit, we will head for Hacienda La Alegría to enjoy lunch and prepare for the afternoon activity: a "Chagra style" horseback ride in the beautiful and unique surrounding landscape. Hacienda La Alegría specializes in this activity, ensuring a pleasant adventure. After our ride, we will return to the Hacienda for dinner and rest for the night.





Day 4

After breakfast, we will head further south along a stretch of the Avenue of the Volcanoes dominated by the magnificent peak of Cotopaxi and neighboring Rumiñahui, Sinchologua, and the Ilinizas.

Throughout the countryside, sheep and llamas graze in the surrounding fields and farms as we come to the highland towns of Pujilí and La Victoria, renowned for their beautiful ceramics. In Tigua we call in at the workshop of local artist, Julio Toaquiza, who paints colorful scenes of highland festivals and folkloric characters, typical of this region on sheep skin in the naïf style.

In Quilotoa crater, a beautiful, easy walk takes us down, some 200m, to the shore of the dazzling emerald-green Quilotoa Lake. The lake formed when, after several violent eruptions, the crater filled with water creating a stunning natural wonder. After some time on the shore, we climb back up on foot or on horseback to reach a charming restaurant run by the local community and with privileged views of the crater lake. After our late lunch, we will continue to Hacienda Abraspungo in the nearby city of Riobamba, where we will enjoy dinner and spend the night.





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Day 5

After a delicious highland breakfast, we will travel to Alausí where our train adventure on the La Nariz del Diablo' (The Devil's Nose) 'begins. The 'Devils Nose' as it is known, is an unforgettable train ride down an incredibly steep mountain pass; the train makes hairpin turns all the way down the mountain and then back up again. After this activity, we will have lunch at a local restaurant and then continue our journey to the city of Cuenca, stopping at Ingapirca, Ecuador's most important archeological complex. The Ingapirca ruins are constructions of perfectly carved stones that fit together seamlessly. The main site is the elliptic structure of the Temple of the Sun, used for the ceremonies and rituals of the Cañari and Inca cultures. Additionally, among the remaining buildings, we find a cemetery, a solar observatory, paths, priests' chambers, and a large plaza. As the afternoon ends, we will continue to Cuenca and its UNESCO World Heritage Site historical center, where the charming Hotel Victoria is located. After checking in at the Hotel, we will enjoy dinner and rest for the night.





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Day 6

After breakfast, we will spend the day in Cuenca's historical center. Cuenca's beauty and colonial ambiance are best experienced on foot. Our tour weaves its way through the old-town center and includes visits to Old and New Cathedrals, the famed local flower market, and a stop at a famous Panama hat workshop. We will also visit the Turi viewpoint, to enjoy the Andean landscape that surrounds this historical city. We will have lunch at a local restaurant and then visit the Central Bank Museum, to learn about the city's past, which was the second capital of the Incan Empire, under the name of Tomebama. The museum includes some ruins of the city's indigenous era. On this day, dinner is not included as there are many exquisite restaurants in the colonial center for you to explore.



Day 7

After a good breakfast and a late start, we will head to Cajas National Park, one of the biggest wetland reserves in Ecuador. It has an extension of 30,000 hectares of forest and moorland with more than 230 lakes spread across the protected area.

Because of the different altitudes and humidity on this irregular terrain, this reserve has many different microclimates and ecosystems, making for an ideal home for many animals, especially birds and amphibians. The rugged landscapes of Cajas are interspersed with many interesting geological formations, which give way to small forests of polylepis (an intriguing tree found only in the Andes) which are also home to many orchids and mosses that hide in the twisted trunks and branches of the trees. After exploring this natural treasure, we will continue to Guayaquil, giving us a chance to take in the impressive change in landscape and vegetation as the Andes descend to Ecuador's coastal region.

Once in Guayaquil, we will check in at the luxurious Hotel del Parque, located in the city's historical park. On this day, dinner is not included as Guayaquil is a city known for its culinary delicacies. Therefore, the evening is free for you to discover the many superb restaurants this city has to offer.





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Day 8

After breakfast, we will drive to the airport or on to your next adventure in Ecuador.

