



A CHIVA is a typical, old-fashioned Latin American bus, with plenty of room on the roof for bags of grain, bananas and the odd chicken. In Quito, these buses have taken on a new lease of life as party vehicles. Typically, some hire a chiva for a celebration, invite all their friends & the bus drives around the streets of Quito, an oompa-oompa brass band banging out favourite tunes, while Andean canelazo drink is liberally poured.

The CHIVA EXPRESS journey is a unique and exclusive product adapted by our ground agents. It is a great way to experience the best of mainland Ecuador, from the Andean patchwork countryside to the lush tropical coastal lowlands. The Chiva Express is a must-do trip through the unbeaten paths and ever-changing scenery of this beautiful country, designed to offer a relaxed, fun and truly authentic experience for visitors.

One of our recommended tours:

### **The 4 day 3 night Chiva Express Programme:**

The first half of this four-day voyage is along the Avenue of the Volcanoes from Quito to beautiful Cuenca in the south; among spectacular scenery aboard the CHIVA EXPRESS or by motorcoach, with many stops along the way for a close contact with the indigenous cultures, haciendas, plantations and a taste of the products of the land. The second half is dedicated to the cultural and natural experience of exploring the charms of Cuenca and the Valley of Gualaceo.

#### **DAY 1**

The adventure starts at the Station of Chimbacalle in southern Quito, which is being restored to its old glory, to commemorate the centenary of the arrival of the first steam train of the Guayaquil & Quito Railway Co. to Quito in 1908, an event that joined Ecuador's main cities (Guayaquil and Quito) and became the backbone that would forever change the politics, economy and the lives of the

Ecuadorians. Here awaits the unique "Chiva Express", a colourful one coach train, like a bus on tracks, ready to take guests on a trip along the stunning Andean region of Ecuador. The first leg of the Chiva Express ride goes from Quito to the Machachi Station. A stop is made along the way at dairy Hacienda La Alegría, where guests are welcomed by the owner, served a snack and can see the milking process of the cows, plus horses and llamas. At **Machachi Station**, guests are transferred to a bus to continue along the Pan American Highway, up and down the slopes of **Cotopaxi Volcano**, and into the fertile Valley of Latacunga for a visit to a **rose plantation** to observe the beautiful variety of Ecuadorian roses, ready for exportation, and a taste of the products of the land, specially broccoli and potatoes- harvested that same morning- with lima beans and fresh cheese. Continue by bus to Urbina Train Station, up high, at the foot of imposing **Chimborazo Volcano**, visit a Tagua workshop and warm up with a canelazo and cholas by the fireplace and, if the Chimborazo is clear, an amazing sunset. Then continue by bus to Riobamba for dinner and overnight.

## DAY 2

After an early breakfast, transfer to the train station to board the "Chiva Express". You will leisurely enjoy the ever-changing scenery as the "Chiva Express" advances along the ancient tracks in an astonishing ride, twisting and turning over the Andes, along bridging ravines and river gorges. Stop at **Guamote**, an Indian town, for a short visit to an Educational Center for Adults' Development and Sustainability. Continue aboard the Chiva to **Alausí**, and prepare to go down the **Devil's Nose switch backs**, one of the most impressive feats of rail engineering in the world, and back to Alausí, where a snack is served. Continue south along the Andes by motorcar to **Cuenca**, visiting the Inca Ruins of **Ingapirca** to arrive at dusk, with a stop for lunch. Accommodations and all meals at the hotel in Cuenca

## DAY 3

Today guests will enjoy a full day to discover, at a leisurely pace, the beauty and charm for which **Cuenca** has been recognized as a World Cultural Heritage Site. Its red tiled roofs, cobblestone streets, flowery plazas and museums make it very special. Lunch is served at a cosy restaurant.

**Cuenca** is Ecuador's third largest city; yet it still retains its pleasant provincial air & is the prettiest city. It has also been designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Its red tiled roofs, cobblestone streets, flowery plazas and museums make it very special.

This comprehensive tour includes the Plaza of San Sebastian, a colourful artisans market, where handicrafts are sold. Then, visit the Museum of Modern Art, featuring an excellent collection of contemporary fine art. The original building was the "House of Temperance" where alcoholics were once shut inside its thick walls in an effort to cure them. A stop is made at Plaza San Francisco, where the exquisitely embroidered skirts of the Cholas are for sale. Next is a visit to the flower market at the small plaza in front of the carved stone entrance to the church of El Carmen de la Asunción. From here, a stroll to the main square, surrounded by the imposing blue-domed Cathedral, the Court of Justice, the Municipal Palace, the Governor's Palace and the Church of El Sagrario. Then, a drive along the Tomebamba river to admire the city's overhanging houses and the laundry spread out to dry on its river banks and a great view of the city from the Hill of Turi.

Cuenca is also the biggest production centre of the mis-named "panama" hats. Shopping here is wonderful for traditional wears. A visit to the famous ceramic artist Eduardo Vega's work shop & gallery will also give you the opportunity of seeing stunning views of the city. This is the ideal city to stay a few days, relaxing, exploring a beautiful city, which is in many ways similar to Cusco in Peru.

#### **DAY 04**

The day starts with a ride along the **Santa Ana valley** and then high in the mountains, through very scenic landscapes, which change at every curb. Stops are made at the small towns that produce a variety of handicrafts, such as artistic handmade guitars at San Bartolo and alongside orchards and sugar cane plantations, on to Chordeleg, famous for gold and silver jewellery. Then past the village of Gualaceo, follow the road along the banks of the Santa Barbara River, lined with weeping willows, to Bulcay where shawl and scarves are woven with the ancient technique of Ikat (tie dyed warp to form specific designs, on ancient shuttle looms. Visit lovely orchid gardens with over 2500 species and then lunch at an attractive hostel, surrounded by flowery gardens, close to the Paute River. After lunch, return to Cuenca in time to catch the flight to Quito, Guayaquil or have an extra 1 or 2 nights in Cuenca to continue exploring the city on your own.

#### **NOTE:**

Accommodation in Cuenca at hotels Oro Verde, Santa Lucía, Carvallo or for a supplements @ the Mansión Alcázar.

### **Included**

Shared guide.

Accommodation in Riobamba and Cuenca

All meals are included

### **Not included**

Air ticket Cuenca/Quito or Cuenca/Guayaquil

### **Travel facts**

Dress in layers (T-shirt, blouse, sweater, coat)

Take a warm coat for evening and rain protection

Sun protection (SPF 40) even if the day is cloudy

Hat or cap

Good walking shoes

Altitude: 2,550 meters (7,750 feet) to 3,000 meters (10,000 feet)

Average Temperature: Day 10° to 25° C / 50° to 77° F. Night 6° to 10° C / 43° to 50° F.