

## MAINLAND ECUADOR DELUXE ITINERARY IDEA

This is an idea of areas clients may like to visit. Clients may also like to include a visit to the Amazon, which of course can be added.

- Δ 3 nights Quito
- Δ 1 night Mindo
- Δ 2 nights Otavalo
- Δ 1 night Papallacta
- Δ 2 nights Cotopaxi
- Δ 1 night Riobamba
- Δ 2 nights Cuenca
- Δ 1 night Guayaquil
- Δ 3, 4 or 7 nights Galapagos Islands

### Day 1

On arrival into **Quito's** International Airport you will be met by our ground agents and have a transfer to your preferred hotel for a 3 night stay BB. Quito is approx. 25 km from the equator and due to its high altitude of over 9,000 feet, we recommend 24 hours to acclimatise yourselves whilst enjoying this beautiful city. Old Quito was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1978 and abounds with cobblestone streets, parks, plazas, churches (The Church of San Francisco being the oldest in all of South America) and all its wonderful old colonial architecture. The historic area of this fabulous city is easily explored on foot - safe day and night, with no traffic allowed on Sundays. You will also find a theatre, which holds operas, the church hold concerts in the evenings and various cultural events can be found the plazas.

Few cities have a setting to match that of Quito, the 2nd highest capital in Latin America (after La Paz, Bolivia). The city is set in a hollow some 19 miles long and only 2 miles wide, at the foot of Pichincha Volcano.

We generally recommend for clients to stay in a hotel in the historical area rather than the modern part of town as in the historical cobbled road area it is safe to walk around at night & this area has a great atmosphere. One of our favourites is the Patio Andlouz. Other hotels include Villa Colonna, Relicario del Carmen & the Plaza Grande in the historical part of the city. In the modern area there are several international hotels as well as Café Cultura, Vieja Cuba etc.

◇ **Patio Andaluz**

This is the best hotel in the historic area, 5 minutes walk from the Presidential Palace and therefore ideally situated for exploring all the city has to offer. Colonial style hotel on 2 floors with a tapas bar in the cellar. Just 31 rooms all comfortably furnished with doubles, twin and duplex rooms perfect for families.

## Day 2

Today you can have a **half-day private or non-private tour of Quito & also the Centre of the World**. First stop is at the Parliament Building, whose stone mural records Ecuador's history. Then a stroll downtown and visit the colonial temples and monasteries of this urban jewel, designated by UNESCO a World Heritage Site, starting at the Independence Plaza, flanked by the Cathedral, the Presidential Palace, the Municipal Building and the Archbishop's Palace. Visit the Church of La Compañía de Jesús. Continue to the Church of San Francisco, one of the great religious buildings of the New World; its impressive façade and atrium lead to its gilt interior a Baroque influenced by Moorish style, with the winged Virgin of Quito at its main altar.

Then continue to the Equatorial Monument, 25 Kms. (16 miles) North of Quito, which marks the exact Middle of the World, latitude 0°, where you can stand with a foot on each hemisphere. Visit the Ethnographic Museum inside the monument, which shows the different Native American groups living in Ecuador. Beside the monument there is a colonial-style town, complete with main square, church, post office, bullring, cafeterias, restaurants and many gift shops with postcards and souvenirs. You will get a certificate for having crossed the Equator. Dress in layers (T-shirt, blouse, sweater, coat). Take a sweater even if the day is warm and sunny. Rain protection advised in the afternoon. This tour includes walking at an altitude of 2800 meters (9200 feet) and climbing stairs. Sun protection (SPF 40). Good walking shoes.

## Day 3

Day @ leisure when perhaps you could take a taxi to Bread Loaf Mountain to see the lady of Quito and have a stunning view of the city, & / or go on the teleferico.

## Day 4

Depart Quito to travel to the **Mindo Cloud Forest**, where you will have 1 night in your selected Lodge. This can also be done as a 1 day excursion from Quito. The tour to the renowned Mindo-Nambillo Protected Forest has been specially designed for bird watchers and nature lovers. The Valley of Mindo is within the protected Mindo-Nambillo forest, located a short two-hour drive to the northwest of Quito. The 48,000-acre (19,200 hectares) Forest stretches over the slopes of Pichincha Volcano and covers diverse ecosystems ranging from the cloud-high, treeless plateau or "paramo" through subtropical forest to tropical jungle. While Mindo is a haven for bird watchers, it also appeals to photographers and explorers for its outstanding panoramic views. A first short stop is

made at the rim of the crater of the extinct Pululahua Volcano, before descending into the Valley of Mindo.

Visit the El Pahuma Orquid Reserve and its Orchid Botanical Garden with flowering orchids mounted on the trees and placed in the vegetation along the trail, consistent with each species' habitat. Bird watchers may find here some of Ecuador's most rare species. BirdLife International has designated Mindo as an IBA (Important Bird Area), the first such site in South America. Also worth a visit is the Butterfly Vivarium, housing 25 varieties of butterflies. Flight areas simulate the outside forest with water streams, mineral deposits, and a wide range of wild flowers. Hundreds of caterpillars feed on their host plants in their natural environment to assure the best development of pupae and butterflies. You can actually watch the butterflies hatching out of their cocoons. Dress in layers (T-shirt, blouse, sweater, coat). Take rain protection. This tour includes walking at altitudes between 4,700 to 1,400 meters, (15,700 to 4,600 feet). Sun protection (SPF 40). Hat or cap. Good walking shoes and an extra pair of socks. Binoculars are essential.

2 of the Lodges you can stay with are:

◇ **Sachatamia Lodge**

Within the main building there are 5 rooms on 3 floors and then 4 cabins slightly away. They have an indoor pool, nature trails and numerous hummingbird feeders. This lodge is the perfect location to just watch the many varieties of hummingbirds - Ecuador has 150 species and 137 have been logged at this lodge.

◇ **Bella Vista Lodge**

This is owned by an English guy who has done a fabulous job of building the lodge within an ideal setting for nature lovers. It is most certainly worth the journey on the 14km of unmade road. They have their own guides & nature trails which are graded from easy to suicidal!!

## Day 5

You will leave Mindo to travel north of Quito to the **Otavalo region** for 2 nights at your selected hacienda or Hotel. This trip is a treat of brilliant scenery and artisan villages, like Calderón, a small town where bread dough figurines are made in many shapes and sizes. Continue along the valleys of Guayllabamba and Cayambe, with their dairy farms and rose plantations. Arrive at lunchtime to one of the charming country inns or colonial haciendas where you will spend the night (see description below). Visit the town of San Antonio de Ibarra, famous for the woodcarvings, the town of Cotacachi, an entire town dedicated to selling fine leather products, and the town of Peguche where textiles are woven in old-fashioned shuttle looms. Accommodations and all meals are included.

Some the best places to say include:

◇ **Hacienda Cusin**

Is owned by the eccentric Englishman, Nicholas Millhouse, and beautifully restored to provide a sumptuous hacienda, open to guests. The property dates back to 1602 and has a rich history, beautiful authentic yet comfortable rooms, with most having a fire which are lit whilst you enjoy a wonderfully prepared meal. The property has beautiful gardens, their own stables and an abundance of bird life.

◇ **La Mirage**

Is owned by the world renowned Relais & Chateaux group and offers exceptional accommodation. Rooms are named, rather than numbered & Queen Sofia stayed here in the Daisy room. A visit here can include enjoying the hotels wonderful spa with its 14 treatment rooms, indoor pool and, if inclined, the English cream teas served @ 5pm each day.

◇ **Pinsaqui**

was originally built in 1790 and now has been fully restored and has 23 rooms. This amazing colonial ranch house was originally a textile workshop, where up to 1,000 local Indians eventually worked. The Treaty of Pisanqui, which ended a territorial dispute with Colombia, was signed at this hacienda, which has also hosted guests as eminent as Simon Bolivar. Whilst at dinner the fire in your room will be lit.

## Day 6

Today, after a hearty country breakfast, visit the market of **Otavalo**, piled high with ponchos, woolen goods, tapestries, the original "Panama" hat, sweaters, Indian jewellery and many handicrafts. You will also have some time to relax @ your Hacienda /hotel if you choose. It is also possible to have pre-booked a visit to one of the local rose farms.

## Day 7

Depart Otavalo to travel to the Antisana Volcano area for 1 night @ **Papallacta Thermal Resort & Hotel**. This is a spectacular excursion to the high Andes of Ecuador, into the paramo and the montane forest, rich in unusual flora and fauna. The voyage starts with a drive to the Antisana volcano, the fourth in altitude in Ecuador, covered with glaciers and snow, and the surrounding Ecological Reserve. The climb and spectacular scenery on Antisana begins with close-up views of a massive glacial moraine, dating back to 11,000 year ago, jagged rocky peaks and a vast sweep of paramo vegetation above the tree line.

Up in the paramo (at about 12,000 ft. elevation) several stops are made to walk about on level terrain and observe the small but beautiful paramo flowers hugging the ground among the lichens and paramo straw: yellow composites, gentians, red Indian paintbrush, orchids and chuquiraguas. Andean birds abound, in both a diversity of species and individual abundance of most of them, such as the highly endangered Black-faced Ibis, Cinereous Conebills, Brown Speckled Teal, Andean Lapwings, many Carunculated Caracaras, Black Wing Doves, and the rare Siskin. After all this natural history excitement, drive over to the hacienda Antisana for lunch. A three-course hot meal is served at the hacienda's dinning room, warmed by glowing fireplaces. In the afternoon, drive on to Papallacta and its hot springs, amid a breathtaking setting. Papallacta Thermal Springs Resort is nestled high in the Andean Cordillera at the entrance of the Amazonian jungle and features several hot thermal spring pools of different sizes and temperatures. Facilities include a first-class hotel, a spa and a restaurant offering local and international cuisine with its main specialty: fresh trout.

## Day 8

Today you will then leave to travel South to the **Cotopaxi Volcano** area for 2 nights @ your chosen Hacienda / Hotel.

Located in the Andes mountains in central Ecuador, Cotopaxi is one of the highest active volcanoes in the world. Cotopaxi which means "neck of the moon", rises from a valley about 2,750 meters (9,000 feet) above sea level to a height of 5,897 meters (19,347 feet) above sea level. The width of its crater from west to east has been estimated at more than 500 meters (1,650 feet) and the width from north to south at about 700 meters (2,300 feet). Surrounding Cotopaxi Volcano is the Cotopaxi National Park, an ecological sanctuary of 36,000 hectares (88,920 acres), especially attractive for nature lovers, with the treeless vegetation of the Andean moorlands or paramo. You may see some of the fauna and bird life of the highlands, which includes the Andean gull, ducks, several species of hummingbirds and with some luck, the condor. Hacienda / Hotel choices include:

◇ **San Augustin del Callo**

This to our mind is one of the best haciendas in all of Ecuador. It's stunning location, Inca walls, stunning murals on the walls, all make this a wonderful small distinctive place to stay. The views of Cotopaxi volcano are outstanding.

◇ **La Cienega**

This is the most famous Hacienda in Ecuador because of it's old church & its huge, much photographed decorative wooden doors. There are 35 simple rooms, many have their own fires. Local food is served and local musicians are often on hand for after dinner folk music.

## Day 9

Today is free to visit a local produce Indian market of the area (depending on the day of the week), the handicraft centre of the potteries of La Victoria and time to explore the countryside and small towns.

## Day 10

Travel down the Avenue of Volcanoes to the town of **Riobamba** for 1 night @ Abraspungo Hotel. Riobamba is a pleasant town is the capital of the Chimborazo province. Most importantly from Riobamba you can depart for all or part of the thrilling train ride to Guayaquil. The most exciting & scenic section is between Alausi & Bucay, known as the Devil's Nose because of its steep gradient.

◇ **Abraspungo Hotel**

A ranch style property, with some rooms in the main building and others in a 2 storey outside courtyard. As the clouds clear you have an amazingly close view of Chimborazo volcano. The restaurant serves a good choice of food whilst enjoying the live traditional music. You have an early start for here to join the Chiva Express the next day.

## Day 11

The **Chiva Express** departs from Riobamba on Wednesdays, Fridays & Sundays.

After an early breakfast, transfer to the train station to board the Chiva Express for a scenic ride to Alausí. Twist and turn over the Andes, tunnelling through rocky impasses, bridging ravines and river gorges. Arrive 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. Disembark in Alausí, and your driver will be waiting to continue the trip by road along the Andes towards Cuenca, where you will stay 2 nights. En Route you stop @ **Ingapirca** for a visit to the Inca Ruins of Ingapirca. Upon arrival at Ingapirca stop at the on-site museum, and admire the stone fortress with several trapezoidal doorways and stone walls perfectly fit together, without mortar, of the Inca construction. There is an elliptical platform, known as the Temple of the Sun used for religious and ceremonial purposes, the barracks, the stone "Inca Face" and the zoomorphic carvings. Box lunch en-route. Continue on to **Cuenca** to arrive at dusk. Accommodations and all meals at the hotel in Cuenca.

Hotel choices include:

◇ **Mansion Alcazar**

This is the most stunning hotel & is located in the historic area. Once owned by a past president, its ornate furnishings & décor you could think that you are staying in a museum. The rooms are beautiful and this property has the advantage of having a small out side courtyard garden, where you can enjoy breakfast.

◇ **Santa Lucia Hotel**

Located in the heart of the old historical town, is this lovely stylish converted mansion house. The central area houses the evening restaurant and is over looked by the gallery corridors leading to the rooms. Food here is excellent, especially the French onion soup & desserts.

## Day 12

**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 cholos 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 13

Today you can either fly to **Guayaquil** or go by road, visit Cajas National park en route. Starting at 3,000 meters (10,000 feet) above sea level, this Lake District is the aftermath of intense volcanic activity and glaciations. The highest point is reached on the road at Three Crosses, where waters divide with a part running to the Pacific and another part down to the Atlantic. Scenery is splendid and walking and hiking amongst the clouds is a rewarding experience.

You will then have 1 night in **Guayaquil**. Guayaquil is the country's largest city and the most important seaport. It is also the focus of the Ecuadorian economy, contributing the lions share to the economy, where the hotels, nightlife, shopping and business opportunities are second to none. Guayaquil is generally the stopping point en route to the coastal areas, Galapagos and the night before your flight home. On first arrival you may be a bit let down after all you have already experienced. It is a large, fairly industrial city but on closer inspection it is actually another interesting facet of this diverse country. The 2000 Malecon is a amazing feat of local community spirit & progression. Whilst here you should walk along the Malecon, visit the Iguana park outside the church and see first hand how this city is rejuvenating itself by helping the people improve housing with beautiful architecture. Some of the traditionally worst areas are now tourist attractions.

Hotel recommendations include:

◇ **Oro Verde**

Is perhaps our favourite hotel in this city. It is only a short walk down to the Malecon and is a stylish hotel with 212 rooms over 7 floors & wonderful facilities; which include; an outdoor pool, gym, steam room, Jacuzzi, hairdresser, 3 restaurants including a wonderful Swiss Fondue restaurant.

◇ **Hampton Inn**

Just a short walk to the Malecon 2000 and within the fabulous shopping area, this is a comfortable modern hotel.

## Day 14

For clients wishing to visit the Galapagos Islands you will depart from Guayaquil