

# Ecuador Explorer

## 7 Days | Starts/Ends: Quito



Explore volcanoes, a cloud forest and beautiful colonial towns as you wind your way through northern Ecuador. Starting in the quaint city of Quito, you'll discover the bird watchers paradise of Mindo cloud forest, go shopping at one of the world's most colourful markets in Otavalo and hike the edge of the Cuicocha Crater Lake. You'll also visit the incredible Cotopaxi Volcano, one of the most picturesque parts of the country.

### HIGHLIGHTS AND INCLUSIONS

#### Trip Highlights

- Inti Nan Equator Museum - Explore the area that is often referred to as the 'middle of the world' as you cross from the Northern to Southern hemisphere stepping across the equator line
- Mindo Cloud Forest Reserve - Discover the incredible flora and fauna of this beautiful natural paradise
- Cuicocha Crater Lake - Take in the breathtaking scenery of this crystal clear lake perched on an active volcano
- Otavalo Indigenous Market - Experience a burst of colour as you dive into this

vibrant local market looking for exciting souvenirs

- Papallacta Hot Springs - Relax in the warm waters as you gaze out upon stunning Andean mountain scenery
- Cotopaxi Volcano - We'll explore the area around the world's tallest active volcano, with stunning views of the snow-capped peak

#### What's Included

- 6 breakfasts & 1 lunch
- 6 nights 3-5 star accommodation
- Arrival transfer on day 1. One arrival transfer included per booking.
- Visit to the Equator at the Intinan Solar Museum
- Hike to the waterfalls in Mindo Cloud forest
- Escorted by an English-speaking local tour leader
- Transfers & transportation in private air-conditioned vehicles
- Cooking class with local indigenous Ecuadorians

#### What's Not Included

- International & Domestic flights and visas
- Laundry, drinks and items of a personal nature
- Tipping – an entirely personal gesture

### DETAILED ITINERARY

#### Day 1 : Welcome to Ecuador!



Welcome to Quito! The largest, best preserved colonial city of America - declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1978. The city is considered the Cultural Capital of South America and is located on the equator in a valley at the foothills of the Pichincha volcano.

Depending on arrival time, you can spend your day exploring the old town of Quito and the surrounding area. In the evening, one of our trip leaders will meet you at the hotel's lobby for a welcome briefing at 18:00 hours. At this time, we will discuss the details and questions you may have regarding the adventure. Our first day is an acclimation and information day.

#### Overnight - Quito

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updated on 10-07-2020 11:14:04

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## Day 2 : Cross the Equator



On the first day of our adventure, we will drive north of Quito to witness the equator monument complex. Visiting the middle of the world is a mandatory stop once you are in Ecuador, you'll have the opportunity to be able to stand on both sides of the hemispheres, north and south, at the same time and feel the neutral forces of the equator.

On our way, we will also stop for a view of the Pululahua crater, the third largest inhabited volcano crater in the world, hosting more than 400 people.

After, we will reach the little town of Mindo, nestled into the cloud forest. This area is filled with a wide variety of plants and animal life – perfect for a nice introduction to the diversity of Ecuador. Mindo and its surrounding cloud forest are a birdwatcher's paradise, especially for hummingbirds!

In the afternoon we will visit a chocolate distributor, where you can take a tour of the process of the cocoa, from harvesting the seed to the final product, like as a delicious brownie or a cup of real hot cocoa.

**Overnight - Mindo (B)**

## Day 3 : Cloud Forest



We will explore the pristine cloud rain forest of Mindo, crossing cable cars and hiking along waterfalls, surrounded by a lush green forest filled with toucans, hummingbirds and colorful

birds. In the afternoon, you will have some free time to enjoy the several optional outdoor activities offered in this area.

You can go whitewater rafting or "tubing" (several large inner-tubes tied together) as our steely-nerved guides steer you through thrilling rapids. Or try a canopy zip-line (sailing along one of 13 zip-lines over the beautiful canopy of the cloud forest.)

One of the highlights of today is the visit to the butterfly nursery, where we watch gargantuan butterflies dry their wings after emerging from their jewel-like cocoons. You can dip your fingers into a banana concoction and then be thrilled as butterflies the size of birds land on your hands for a snack.

**Overnight - Mindo (B)**

## Day 4 : Otavalo Market



Drive back up into the highlands and reach the Pan-American Highway heading north on the way to the famous indigenous town of Otavalo. Here, admire the endless number of handicrafts from the local people. Take time to stroll along the narrow cobblestone streets, which are filled with Otavalo indigenous people wearing the traditional blue ponchos. Visit their handicraft market, with its wonderful textiles, native paintings, ceramics, jewelry, tapestries and more at bargain prices. In Otavalo, there will be enough time for shopping and cultural interaction.

In the afternoon, we will drive to Cotacachi to witness the impressive leather goods of the town and enjoy the beauty of this small village. There will be some free time for you to explore the shops or simply relax while sipping on one of the best coffees in Ecuador in the main plaza.

Later we will arrive at the beautiful, historical hacienda of Pinsaqui where we will stay overnight. Enjoy a typical Andean cocktail as welcome, and learn about the history of this place.

**Overnight - Otavalo (B)**

## Day 5 : Cuicocha Crater Lake



Today we will first visit Cotacachi Cayapas ecological reserve to see the breath taking scenery of the crystalline-clear waters of this active volcano and the amazing surrounding landscapes. At the end of an hour long hike along the rim of the Cuicocha Crater Lake, we will take a boat ride to the center of the crater to observe the activity of this volcano, watching bubbles coming up from the center of the caldera.

Later, we will head to Peguche, a small village located in the heart of the Andes, where you will live an unforgettable cultural experience, immersing yourself in the true spirit of the South-American highlands. You will help the local people prepare a delicious lunch using the fresh products harvested the same day from the surrounding organic fields and share precious moments of conviviality with them.

In the late afternoon, we will reach the luxury volcanic hot-springs resort of Papallacta, where you will have the chance to relax at the spa resort surrounded by the view of the majestic Andean mountains.

**Overnight - Papallacta (B, L)**

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## Day 6 : Cotopaxi Volcano



After breakfast, following a last dip in the open-air hot springs, we will drive south on the Pan-American Highway to the highest active volcano in the world, Cotopaxi. The snow-capped volcano is surrounded by the national park, home to abundant plant life, a rich fauna and Inca ruins. We will begin our visit at the interpretation center at the entrance of the park, before continuing our drive across the paramo to the Limpiopungo Lake. During a short walk around the lake we can observe a variety of birds and enjoy the stunning views of the almost symmetrical cone of the Cotopaxi volcano.

We arrive back into Quito this evening.

**Overnight - Quito (B)**

## Day 7 : Quito

Today our trip will end with your International departure. Take your memories and photos and leave a piece of your heart, as you will want to return to Ecuador soon to experience more of this spectacular paradise. We wish you ¡Buen viaje!(B)

## Tour leaders

Our Ecuador tours are escorted by a tour leader who will be responsible for the day-to-day running of the tour, so you are free to sit back, relax and enjoy the journey. Your tour leader will be Ecuadorian and passionate about sharing their country with you.

Please note that our tour leaders are not "Tour Guides" in the normal sense. They are not experts in all aspects of the culture and history of each area. They are employed to ensure the smooth running of your trip.

## Tipping

Although tipping is not a natural part of many Western cultures it is expected in Ecuador.

The local people work very hard to provide a good service and this is due in part to the tips they have received from foreigners in the past. However all tips are at your own discretion and you should not feel obliged or pressured to tip at any time – particularly if you feel that the level of service was not up to standard.

As a general guideline a gratuity of 10% of the total bill for your waiter is recommended in restaurants. You should be aware that prices on the menu often exclude service charges but they are added to the bill (10%) and local taxes (anywhere between 2% and 20%). If it is included then you are not expected to pay an additional tip, although this is still appreciated. Some restaurants have a 'cubiertos' (cover charge) which is normally added onto the food section of the bill, not the total, so watch out for this when dividing the bill with other group members.

It is also customary to tip local guides for included sightseeing and tips are appreciated by your drivers and tour leaders. As a guideline, we recommend:

- Local guides for a full day excursion: approx US\$3-5 per person
- Tour leader: approx US\$4-6 per person per day
- Drivers: approx US\$2 per person per day

This information is given as a guide as many travellers are unsure and uncomfortable about how much to tip. Tipping is an entirely personal gesture and only if you feel that their service was up to standard. It is completely at your own discretion.

## Domestic Flights

If your tour includes a domestic flight or you have independently booked domestic flights separate to that of your international flights, please be mindful that that free baggage allowance for Economy class travel on all flights within Peru is 22kg with 8kg of hand luggage. Additional weight will be subject to a fee.

## Electricity in Ecuador

Ecuador uses 110 volt, 60 cycle electricity, same as the US. Plugs are typically the 2

pronged flat type so US travelers will not typically need a converter or adapter.

## The Amazon

### What to Bring

Due to the weight and space limitations of the Amazon lodge's transport canoes, your luggage should weigh no more than 10kgs – packing it in a carry-on bag is ideal. The lodge has storage available near the airport in Puerto Maldonado for travelers carrying luggage that exceeds these weight restrictions.

### Suggested packing list for the jungle

- Clothing suitable for layering
- Hiking boots or sturdy shoes
- Raincoat or jacket
- Sunglasses, hat or visor, and sunscreen
- Backpack or tote for day tours
- Prescription and over-the-counter medications
- Antibacterial wipes or gel
- Binoculars (they can also be rented at the lodge for a small fee)
- Zip-close bags to keep articles dry and a plastic bag to keep wet or muddy clothing separate

### What to Expect

The lodge does not offer Wi-fi, though there is intermittent cell service. Apart from a small boutique, there are no places to buy supplies once you have left Puerto Maldonado. You should take care to pack all clothing, toiletries and medications that might be needed during your stay because any items you forget to pack will not be easy to acquire at the lodge. The nearest medical facilities are in Puerto Maldonado.

### Weather and Seasons

The Amazon rain forest has a tropical climate. Conditions are hot and humid throughout the year, and daytime temperatures average around 30 degrees celcius. During Peru's winter months of June through September, the area can experience the occasional cold front, with temperatures sometimes dropping as low as 10 degrees celcius overnight. The dry season runs from May through October and is ideal for land exploration, as less frequent rains make trails easier to navigate. November through April are the region's

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hottest months and also correspond with the jungle's rainy season. During this period, heavy downpours can cause the rivers to swell, making it an ideal time to explore the forest by boat.

## Essential packing

- A small daypack for your day-to-day needs
- A photocopy of your passport data pages
- A universal power adaptor
- Insect repellent to guard against mosquitoes
- Spare camera batteries/memory card
- Bring some US dollars with you
- Keep a supply of small notes for local transactions

## Health

You should seek medical advice from your local health practitioner before travelling to Ecuador and ensure that you receive all of the appropriate vaccinations. As a guide tetanus, diphtheria, polio, typhoid, hepatitis A are recommended. Malaria risk is low throughout the year in areas below 1500m including coastal provinces. There is no risk in Guayaquil, Quito, other cities in the inter-Andean region and the Galapagos islands.

A yellow fever vaccination is recommended for travellers to the Ecuadorian Amazon. This vaccination must be administered at least 10 days before your arrival in Ecuador. Travelers must bring along their International Certificate of Vaccination or Prophylaxis (ICVP) as proof of vaccination.

Altitude can affect anyone at moderate to high altitude (generally anything over 3,000 metres). Altitude sickness is caused by the lack of oxygen which can be up to a third less than at sea level. No one understands why some people are affected and others not, and age, level of fitness and strength is no indication of how well you will fare. With altitudes of up to 5,000 metres during parts of the trip it is imperative that you speak with your doctor prior to departure as drugs are available to combat the effects of altitude sickness and may be recommended.

## Not like home

Travelling to far-flung corners of the earth often involves encountering lifestyles and conditions that are very different from

what you are used to back home. As such it is important to come prepared for unusual situations, local inadequacies and unpredictable events as and when they occur. Foreign travel is definitely not suitable for people who expect or demand everything to go exactly as planned, as things can and do change in foreign countries. Ecuador is a destination where you'll be afforded plenty of unique encounters, and if you can travel with an open mind you will have a wonderful time here. In return, please remember to demonstrate sensitivity and respect for local customs.

## Personal safety

It is not advisable to wear chains or expensive looking watches or jewellery while in Ecuador. You should also keep your camera concealed when not in use and carry daypacks on your front for extra safety. Crime in Latin America is not as bad as its reputation but you must be sensible and alert.

### KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

#### Ecuador Country Guide

## Ecuador - Fact File

- Official Name: Republic of Ecuador
- Capital: Quito (population 1.4 million)
- Government: Multiparty Republic
- Population: 13.4 million
- Total Area: 283,560 kilometres squared, including the Galapagos Islands (slightly smaller than Nevada, USA)
- Official Languages: Spanish. Others: Amerindian languages (especially Quechua)
- Religions: Roman Catholic 95%
- Voltage: 110 volts. Sockets are a mixture of the European, two-pronged round variety and US flat-pin.
- Time Difference: For time differences please visit [www.timeanddate.com](http://www.timeanddate.com)
- International airport departure tax: US \$25. This is sometimes included in your airfare - please check with your airline before departure.

## Ecuador - Visas

Most nationals, including citizens of the EU, North American and Australasia do not need a visa to enter Ecuador. Entry is granted on

production of a passport valid for more than six months, a return air/bus ticket and proof of funds to support yourself for the duration of the stay. You'll be issued with a T-3 tourist card on arrival, which you should keep safely with your passport as it will be collected when you leave the country. The tourist card can allow up to 90 days stay, although it's up to the immigration official to decide whether you're allocated 30, 60 or 90 days on arrival. Visa requirements do change periodically so you should check for the latest information on your specific visa requirements with your local Ecuadorian embassy or consulate well in advance of your planned date of travel.

## Ecuador - Climate

Ecuador is divided into the coastal plain (costa), inter-Andean central highlands (sierra), and flat to rolling eastern jungle (oriente). There's no real summer and winter in Ecuador, with weather patterns varying according to geography, and temperatures determined more by altitude than by season or latitude. As a general rule, the warmest and driest months in the sierra are June to September, though this is complicated by various microclimates found in some areas. Outside these months, typical sierra weather is characterised by sunny, clear mornings and cloudy, often wet, afternoons. In the oriente, you can expect it to be warm, humid and rainy throughout the year, though there are often breaks in the rain between August and September and December to February.

In the lowland areas it can get particularly hot on clear days, with temperatures easily topping 30°C. The coast has the most clearly defined wet and dry seasons, with the best time to visit being from December to April, when you'll get frequent showers but also clear blue skies and warm weather. From May to November, the southern coast, in particular, is often overcast and relatively cool, with less chance of rainfall.

Check the weather chart on our website or visit [www.worldclimate.com](http://www.worldclimate.com) to get an idea of what the weather will be like on your trip.

## Ecuador - Money

### Important

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In Latin America you will have problems changing the US\$100 CB B2 2001 series notes and it is important you do not to bring them. In some countries banks won't even take them. The serial number is located in the top left hand corner and bottom right hand corner on the side with the President's face. This serial number starts with CB and then a few more numbers and then directly under that B2. At the bottom of the note near the signature of the Treasurer it says which series of notes it is and it is there that it says 2001 series.

## Local Currency

In April 2000, the government in Ecuador decided to 'dollarise' the economy due to the instability of their own currency, the sucre. The country now uses the US dollar as its own currency, which means that you do not need to change money on arrival (if you bring sufficient US dollars with you). If you do need to change money into dollars, you can do it at the bank after exiting the luggage hall or use one of the ATMs outside the terminal. Remember that if you are travelling through to other countries in South America, Ecuador is the best place to load up on US dollars cash without paying high charges. Having said that we do recommend that you bring as much US dollars cash as you feel comfortable carrying as it is not always easy to get money out on credit and debit cards. You should carry your US dollars in small denominations (US\$1, US \$5, US\$10 and US\$20 are best) as there is always a shortage of change.

Although bank cards are often the easiest way to go, there are times where they will not work for you even if your bank at home tells you it will! Do not rely on your card as your only source of money. Always have a few back-ups with you.

## Ecuador - Local Transport

Most of Quito is easy to visit on foot, although there is a cheap trolley bus system which travels from north to south of the city. There are also normal buses which are cheap but can get very crowded. We recommend that you use taxis at night as they are fairly cheap but also have meters so you do not need to worry about bartering to get a good price –

just make sure the driver puts the meter on when you get in.

In other Ecuadorian towns and cities walking is basically the best and cheapest way to see the sights.

## Ecuador - Food & Drink

As a guideline a simple snack (e.g. a sandwich) can cost as little as US\$2, a light meal will cost around US\$4-5, and even a meal in one of the best restaurants in Quito or Cuenca costs very little in comparison to what you would expect to pay at home (usually around US\$30-40). Obviously this depends on what you order and if you have wine or other drinks which will certainly increase the bill.

All drinks such as water, soft or alcoholic drinks are at your own expense at all times. The following is a guideline for drinks bought in a shop in the street. Prices in restaurants and hotels can sometimes be more than double the prices specified below;

- 1 litre of water - US\$1
- 30cl bottle of soft drink - US\$0.70
- 30cl bottle of beer - US\$1.20
- 50cl bottle of beer - US\$1.70

## Food

In Ecuador the basic diet focuses around chicken, beef or seafood, mostly with french fries or rice (or both) and possibly a little salad. Ceviche is fish marinated in lemon juice, onion and hot peppers traditionally served with corn on the cob and tostado (roasted maize). Other popular dishes include fritada (roast pork), lomo ala pimienta (pepper steak), humitas (ground corn steamed in a maize leaf) and quimbolitas (similar to humitas but with corn-flour and cooked in banana leaves). For a simple fish, you should ask for pescado which can be grilled, pan fried with breadcrumbs (apanado) or served with a sauce. An interesting local speciality is cuy (pronounced: cooee). This is roasted guinea pig which some people say tastes like chicken, others, like cooked cardboard!

Maize and potatoes feature in many dishes, particularly soups. Locro de papas is cheese and potato soup, sancocho de yucca is vegetable soup with cassava or manioc

root and sopa de bola verde is vegetable banana dumpling soup. Typical snacks are empanadas (little fried pasties usually filled with meat, chicken, cheese or even prawns) and patacones (fried vegetable banana chips, served as a side dish).

Much of Ecuador's food is not too hot and spicy but you will find a bowl of aji (which is a chilli or hot pepper sauce) on most tables which can be added to spice things up.

## Vegetarians

If you are a strict vegetarian you may experience a distinct lack of variety in the food available, especially in small towns. You might find that you are eating a lot of omelettes and other egg dishes. Our tour leaders will do their best to organise interesting vegetarian alternatives for included meals, but your patience and understanding is requested.

## Drinks

You should be wary of drinking the local tap water. Bottled water, carbonated soft drinks and fruit juices are widely available and are generally safe to drink. Please note however that fruit juices are sometimes made with unboiled tap water and could upset your stomach. An easy way around this is to order juice 'con leche' (with milk) instead. The choice of different juices is incredible e.g. mora (blackberry), piña (pineapple), naranjilla (mixture between mandarin and orange), maracuya (passion fruit), tomato de argol (like a tomato but with a harder texture), guanabana (custard apple) and curia (which has a great taste – just try it!).

In Ecuador some of the hotels we use have bars or serve alcoholic drinks. If there is not a bar in the hotel then there is sure to be a bar within walking distance. In more up-market hotels, imported beers and spirits are available but usually at a high price. If you are happy to drink the local spirits then there is an array of rums, aguardiente (a kind of ouzo) and imported Chilean and Argentine wine can sometimes be found cheaply. There are various brands of beers including Pilsener, Club and Biela.

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