

Ecuador and Galapagos Highlights



Divided into four key natural regions, Ecuador offers a wide variety of landscapes: from beautiful beaches on the Pacific to magical rainforests in the Amazon; snow-capped mountains and volcanoes to quaint Colonial cities and the unique Galápagos Islands.

The highlands and lowlands of Ecuador enjoy an amazing biodiversity with 1,800 species of birds, 1,000 species of fish, 680 reptiles and amphibians, 230 mammals and more than 20,000 species of plants.

Beyond fauna and flora, the people of this country have developed, through centuries of civilization, a culture of rich heritage, which is evident in its traditions, archaeology, art, architecture and music. Ecuadorians are gentle and friendly people and you can expect a warm welcome.

Local cuisine is highly appealing and varied, including the best Pacific shrimp and assorted tropical fruits. The weather is another plus, springtime year round!

For shoppers, Ecuador has some of the most beautiful handicrafts in South America. You will find them in local Indian markets and at shops and galleries in the main cities. Best buys include: ponchos, hand-knit wool sweaters, hand-woven rugs, wall hangings, shawls, the famous Panama hat, jewellery, paintings, leather, and assorted woodcarvings.

Your Financial Protection

All monies paid by you for the air holiday package shown [or flights if appropriate] are ATOL protected by the Civil Aviation Authority. Our ATOL number is ATOL 3145.
For more information see our booking terms and conditions.

Day 1 Quito

Welcome to Quito, and to Ecuador! At the airport you will be met and transferred to your hotel with a short briefing about Quito and the country in general en-route. Four nights at the Holiday Inn Express or similar (B).

The remainder of the day is at leisure. Enjoy scenic, Colonial and artistic Quito. Visit museums, monasteries and the golden altars of its many churches. The capital of Ecuador has a setting that few cities can match. During the 13th century it was the prosperous centre of the Kingdom of Quitus. It later became the northern capital of the Inca Empire. In the 16th and 17th centuries, Colonial architects built formidable temples, monasteries and mansions, creating an urban jewel designated by UNESCO as a World Cultural Heritage Site.



Day 2 Quito

This morning you will enjoy a private tour of Quito with a guide and driver.



Visit downtown Quito with its treasures of art and architecture. Quito's colonial quarter, the largest and best preserved of South America, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Stroll along Independence Plaza, flanked by the Cathedral, the Presidential Palace, the Municipal Building and the Archbishop's Palace. Visit the temple of La Compañía de Jesús and its awesome gilded interior. Continue to the Monastery of San Francisco, one the of great religious buildings of the New World; its impressive façade and atrium that lead to its Baroque interior influenced by the Moorish style.

Continue to the Equatorial Monument, 16 miles North of Quito, which marks the exact Middle of the World at latitude 0°. You will receive a certificate for having crossed the Equator!

Day 3 Quito / Mindo/ Quito

A full day tour to Mindo Cloud Forest with private guide and driver.

The Valley of Mindo is within the protected Mindo-Nambillo forest, located a short two-hour drive 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 through subtropical forest to tropical jungle. Specially trained guides introduce visitors to the



mysteries of the Cloud Forest, pointing out the unique flora and fauna. Visit the Orchid Botanical Garden then hike on a trail through the lush cloud forest to the Pacaya waterfall. Over 170 species of orchids have been identified within the reserve as well as bromeliads, heliconias, ferns, vines, mosses and lichens.

Continue to the quaint little village of Mindo, at an altitude of 1,300 meters, observing the bird life along the way. Visit the Butterfly Vivarium, housing 25 varieties of butterflies.

Lunch is served at a restaurant in the area and there will be time for a short stroll before returning to Quito.

Day 4 Quito/Antisana Ecological Reserve

A full day tour to the Antisana Ecological Reserve with a private guide and driver.



This is a spectacular trip to the volcano Antisana, the fourth highest in Ecuador, and the surrounding Ecological Reserve. After about an hour's drive, the climb and spectacular scenery on Antisana begins with close-up views of a massive glacial moraine, jagged rocky peaks and a vast sweep of paramo vegetation above the tree line.

Stop at a narrow canyon, where condors can be seen fairly regularly. Up in the paramo you can walk on level ground and observe the beautiful but small paramo flowers hugging the ground among the lichens: yellow composites, gentians, red Indian paintbrush, orchids and chuquiraguas. Birdlife in the area includes the highly endangered Black-faced Ibis,

Cinereous Conebills, Andean Teal, Andean Lapwings, Carunculated Caracaras, Black Wing Doves, and the Siskin.

After lunch, drive back to Quito amid breath-taking scenery.

Days 5-8 Quito/Galapagos

Transfer from your hotel and the airport for your flight to the Galapagos.



The Galápagos Islands have been so-named as they are home to the giant Galápagos tortoise. The archipelago, 600 miles off Ecuador's Pacific Coast, originated from undersea volcanic activity. The archipelago's 13 major islands, 6 smaller isles, and scores of islets are all part of Ecuador's National Park system.

In 1835, the English naturalist Charles Darwin visited the islands and discovered this living laboratory which inspired his writings on the Theory of Evolution. Many

of the animals on the Galápagos Islands have developed into different species from their continental relatives, and because they have never experienced man as a predator, they show little fear of humans.

Guests are taken to shore in small groups by a multilingual naturalist guide, who will explain the fascinating geology and history of this eco-world. There is ample opportunity to walk, swim, snorkel, photograph, and observe the abundant variety of wildlife on each island. You can swim with sea lions, walk among black marine iguanas basking in the sun and observe the elaborate mating rituals of boobies, albatrosses, or male frigate birds displaying their red pouches.

This itinerary has been based on the M/V Santa Cruise vessel for a 4 night/5 day cruise in a twin standard cabin on the main deck (FB). There are many other ships to choose from, however. Your ship will provide private, tasteful accommodation; fresh, healthy, contemporary international and local cuisine and attentive staff. Please speak to us to discuss the most suitable ship for you.

Day 9 Galapagos-Guayaquil

Take the flight to Guayaquil, where you will be met and transferred to your hotel.

Guayaquil is Ecuador's natural port, and its largest city with a population of three million. This tropical city is the financial and commercial centre of the country and lies on the banks of the Guayas River, thirty miles inland from the Gulf of Guayaquil.

Overnight in Guayaquil at Hampton Inn or similar (B).

Day 10 Homeward

Transfer to the airport for your return flight.

The cost of this itinerary is £2775 per person, based on twin share and subject to availability at the time of booking.

Includes:

Private or shared services with local English speaking guides
All entrance fee to the sites mentioned in the itinerary
Accommodation and meals as indicated in the itinerary
Taxes and transfers in the islands.
Permanent assistance during the trip

Excludes:

International or domestic air fares
Domestic airport taxes
Meals or any other item not described in the itinerary
Galapagos National Park tax US\$100.00 per person (as of 2015).
Transit Control Card US\$10.00 per person (as of 2015).
Early check-in, late check-out
Personal expenses
Drinks during meals, hotel extras and personal spending
Tips