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TOURING

ECUADOR



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CLASSIC ECUADOR TOURS

ABOUT ECUADOR

As its name alludes to, Ecuador is one of 13 countries - and only three in the Americas - that straddles the equator. Its official name is "Republica del Ecuador" - the Republic of the Equator.

This provides the country with a wonderfully consistent climate, averaging 70°F (21°C) year-round. The compromise of this is that it is also particularly inclement, and even the drier months receive 100mm of rain.

Though the Amazonian and Cayapas people are the true ancestors of Ecuador, the Inca ruled over the country for almost a century and their influence remains to this day. Wonderfully diverse, it ranges from coastal regions to the dense Amazon rainforest and the lofty Andes.

Though often a gateway to the remarkable Galápagos, there is plenty of reason to make more of this fascinating and richly cultural nation. Its capital of Quito was one of the first to gain UNESCO World Heritage status, with the best preserved historic center of all North and South American cities.

QUICK FACTS:

- At 9,350 feet (2,850m) above sea level, Quito is the second-highest capital in the world, second only to Bolivia's La Paz
- Though some indigenous dialects remain, the prevalent national language is Spanish, and the official currency is the US dollar
- Ecuador has the densest biodiversity of any country on earth, with 15% of all bird species and almost 300 endemic creatures
- At 20,560 feet (6,300m) high, Chimborazo is Ecuador's tallest mountain and, though a long way behind Everest, is geographically the furthest point from the earth's core
- A short distance from Quito, Cotopaxi is a wonderfully picturesque - and alarmingly active - volcano, averaging one eruption annually over the last 50 years

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CLASSIC QUITO TOURS

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QUITO CITY TOUR

Quito is one of the most picturesque capital cities in the world. Rich in history though also conveniently contemporary, its story dates back 10,000 years. The main city began in 890 AD, while the Inca rule in the 15th century saw it flourish before the Spaniards established much of what is seen today. This patchwork heritage has resulted in spectacular architecture, fascinating archeology and a melting pot of influences. Independence Square is the hub of both government and religion, and the Presidential Palace, Archbishop's Palace and the Cathedral of Quito all lie here. At the heart of the city lies Panecillo Hill and, after a morning's explorations, it is worth venturing to its summit to gain one's bearings and see the city in 360 degrees. Quito boasts a wide range of eateries and restaurants, and you can sample local fare, take lunch at informal cafés and dine at superb fine-dining establishments. A short distance from Quito, it is also worth taking the opportunity to visit 'the middle of the world' - latitude point 0°0'0", from which the equator was first measured in the late 18th century.

PAPALLACTA

At an altitude of 10,800 feet (3,300m) in the Andes mountains, approximately 40 miles (64km) east of Quito, lies the town of Papallacta, renowned for its geothermal hot springs. Guests can wander the extensive paths of the sprawling property in a valley high in the Andes, before relaxing in the therapeutic hot springs. The journey is well worth taking, not least for the gorgeous landscapes of the eastern Andean cordillera towards the Cayambe-Coca National Park.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Discover the prehistoric, Incan and Conquistadorial stories of Quito
 - Take in a spectacular array of architecture, with its strong Spanish influence
 - Scale Panecillo Hill for a grand overview of the city
 - Visit Casa del Alabado Museum to learn of the city's diverse history
 - Marvel at the Baroque architecture, including Quito's crown jewel, La Compañía Church
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- Take a picturesque drive from the city high into the Andes, before relaxing in the indulgent geothermal hot springs of Papallacta.

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CLASSIC NORTH ECUADOR — TOUR —

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OTAVALO

Located in the Northern province of Imbabura, Otavalo is renowned for its wonderful culture, abundantly on display at its central market, the largest indigenous market in South America. Here, you will find locals in traditional dress casually mingling with tourists, stalls filled with vibrant textiles, jewellery and crafts and regional cuisine.

Though not on the same level as Quito, Otavalo still has plenty of culture to offer, and wandering the streets, seeing centuries-old churches and enjoying the parks, shops and squares is a wonderful afternoon's activity.

Surrounding the city, towering snow-capped mountains part into deep valleys with crystalline lakes, creating absolutely breathtaking scenery and plenty of walking and hiking opportunities.

Less than an hour's stroll from the city centre lies Cascada de Peguche - Peguche waterfall. Its several trails give stunning views of the falls and access to a secret cave with its own smaller waterfall inside.

The Andean condor is the world's largest flying bird though its numbers are threatened, primarily due to over-hunting. Parque Condor, a short drive from the city, rehabilitates condors that have been rescued from illegal trafficking or that are injured and, though not a tourist attraction as such, for a small entry fee visitors can observe these magnificent birds being cared for.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Hike into the mountains and visit glacial lakes
- Visit Plaza de Ponchos and wander the 500-year-old cultural market
- Wander the old city, enjoying its lanes, cafés and shops
- Escape to secluded waterfalls and hidden caves
- See one of the world's largest birds - the Andean condor - up close
- Shop for traditional textiles, crafts and jewellery
- Enjoy sunset drinks with a traditional Ecuadorian music performance.

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CLASSIC NORTHWEST ECUADOR — TOURS —

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MINDO-NAMBILLO CLOUD FOREST

A day's excursion from Quito, Mindo-Nambillo Cloud Forest allows visitors to glimpse just a sample of Ecuador's extraordinary biodiversity.

The 48,000-acre (19,200-hectare) forest stretches over the slopes of Pichincha Volcano and covers diverse ecosystems ranging from subtropical forest to tropical jungle and high plateaus amongst the clouds. Specially-trained guides introduce visitors to the mysteries of the Cloud Forest, pointing out the unique flora and fauna.

The El Pahuma Orquid Reserve protects over 1,500 acres from logging and other harmful practices and is stunningly beautiful, its botanical garden containing many of the region's 170 fragile and rare orchid species. From here, one is able to hike through lush, epiphyte-laden cloud forest, alongside a sparkling creek to the 165-foot (50-metre) Pacaya waterfall.

The quaint little village of Mindo offers a little respite from the trail and refreshments to revitalize weary legs. Mindo-Nambillo Cloud Forest is an area of particular natural significance, with a vast diversity of bird life, much of which is endemic. The air is also filled with the bright, flapping wings of butterflies, and the nearby butterfly vivarium is a wonderful way to see many of them at close quarters.

If lucky, visitors may also spot squirrels, bats, numerous frog species and the elusive spectacled bear.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Walk through verdant forests, spotting hummingbirds and toucans
- Visit a chocolaterie to learn the fine art of chocolate making
- See a spectrum of butterflies and see the breeding programs in place
- Search for Mindo's mammals, including bats, squirrels, kinkajous, spectacled bears and rare pumas
- Stop at the rural town of Mindo and sample local cuisine

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CLASSIC SOUTH ECUADOR — TOURS —

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COTOPAXI

Cotopaxi National Park and its eponymous volcano are simply breathtaking. Towering 19,350 feet (5,900m) above sea level, the volcano is still startlingly active, averaging one eruption per year. Seismology, however, allows researchers to keep track of the volcano's pulse, ensuring visitors' safety. Though captivating, the volcano isn't the only attraction, and this large national park is also home to red brocket deer, Andean fox, Andean puma, white-tailed deer and the rare Andean spectacled bear. There are also huge herds of guanacos grazing across the plains.

ANTISANA

Like Cotopaxi, Antisana National Park is home to a volcano of the same name. With an altitude ranging from 3,937 to 18,891 feet (1,200-5,757m) above sea level, the park is considered one of the world's 10 most biodiverse hotspots. Vast moors and Andean forests, give way to the impressive Antisana glacier in the distance, and the icy water of Mica Lake. The park is also one of the last refuges of the Andean Condor in Ecuador, possessing the largest-known population of the world's largest flying bird.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- View the incredible vista of Ecuador's most active volcano
- Stroll across the surrounding plains, with large herds of llama-like guanacos
- Search the national park for deer, foxes, puma and the rare spectacled bear
- Explore biodiverse plains and forests
- Photograph this dramatic landscape with its towering peaks and crystalline glacial lakes
- Keep an eye out for the endangered Andean condor, gliding high in the sky on thermal currents



CLASSIC SOUTH ECUADOR — TOURS —



BAÑOS

The town of Baños is fascinating in itself, its ancient architecture of national significance, including a spectacular basilica - Nuestra Señora del Agua Santa - dating back to the early 1900s. From the town, one can visit the dramatic Route of the Waterfalls, culminating in el Pailon del Diablo - the devil's cauldron. Here, the Pastaza River cascades over 260 feet (80m) in a plume of spray and mist.

QUILOTOA

The crater lake of Quilotoa is a majestic spectacle of nature. Its vibrant blue waters are almost eerily still. Some estimates suggest the mountainous caldera lake plunges to over 820 feet (250m) deep. Lying alongside the lake, the charming town of Quilotoa is a wonderful starting point for some superb mountain hiking around the lake's perimeter, or into nearby cloud forests. Also nearby, the vibrant markets of Saquisilí are well worth visiting for traditional food and wares.

CUENCA

Cuenca is one of Ecuador's most appealing and fascinating cities, with a rich history that echoes into the present day. Originally a Cañari settlement, the traditional people of the Azuay Province, it was overthrown by the Inca before the Spanish claimed it in 1557. The Sagrario Cathedral, built upon the Spanish conquest, is one of the most recognizable and beautiful buildings in Cuenca. Contrary to its name, the Panama hat actually originates from Ecuador, and here in Cuenca you can observe how this iconic headwear is crafted.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Wander the serene streets of Baños, discovering cafés, historical buildings & boutique shops
- Explore over 60 dramatic waterfalls in the Ecuadorian Amazon
- Marvel at the incredible crater lake of Quilotoa and explore its perimeter
- Take an afternoon to shop at the traditional market of Saquisilí
- Learn the long and varied history of one of Ecuador's most fascinating and picturesque cities
- Learn the true origins of the Panama hat and even try your hand at making one.



CLASSIC GUAYAQUIL TOURS

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GUAYAQUIL

Often referred to as the Pacific Pearl, Guayaquil is Ecuador's primary coastal town and main port city.

Dating back almost 500 years, it has become a cultural centre, reflecting the changing influences of the country at large. The city is filled with vibrant parks, cathedrals with spectacular stained-glass windows and colorful, floral cemeteries that bely their more morose purpose.

The neighborhood of Las Peñas is particularly popular, with its fascinating cobblestone alleyways lined with brightly-colored wooden houses. The waterfront district is equally as picturesque, and the boardwalks tracing the coastline pass by museums, plazas and delightful cafés.

HACIENDA LA DANESA

Where many destinations showcase the physical and architectural history of Ecuador, Hacienda la Danesa immortalizes the more rural traditions of the nation. A working farm, visitors can try their hands at beekeeping, milking cattle and horseriding. Honey and milk are just some of the produce handcrafted at Hacienda la Danesa, and the property is well known for its traditionally-made chocolate. Guests can learn how cacao is transformed from bitter bean to sweet, creamy bar and most certainly sample the results.

The venue also has a wonderful farm-to-table restaurant and accommodation for overnight and weekend stays.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Sample a traditional hot chocolate on the waterfront
- Enjoy a more temperate, sub-tropical climate on the shores of the Pacific
- Explore the 400-year-old Las Peñas district, with its traditional colorful timber houses
- Experience a traditional working farm and sample its fresh produce
- Learn about beekeeping and chocolate production
- Explore the property by bicycle, horseback, on foot or drifting down the river on a tube

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