

Ecuador Explorer

Day 1: Arrival in Quito

After you arrive in Quito, you will be taken to your hotel. The rest of the day is free at your disposal. Welcome to Ecuador!

Day 2: Quito - City Tour

In the morning we visit the beautifully restored old town of Quito (entrance tickets are not included). The largest well-preserved colonial city in America was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1978. Our tour takes us from the Plaza Grande past the cathedral and the Presidential Palace, the lavish El Sagrario Church and La Compania, while learning a lot about places including Santo Domingo, La Merced and San Francisco. Then we will see the Monastery of San Francisco, a jewel of colonial art in America. Finally, we will visit Quito's landmark, the statue of the Virgen de Quito, El Panecillo. In the afternoon you can choose between the following two trips:

- Mitad del Mundo: Equator Monument
- Taking the cable car up Pichincha (4,100 m)

Day 3: Quito - Cotopaxi National Park - Baños

After breakfast, we visit the Cotopaxi National Park (entrance fee not included). At the centre of the 34,000-hectare park, the picturesque volcano Cotopaxi is the highest active volcano in the world. After a short hike through lunar landscape to Limpiopungo lagoon you have the opportunity to ascend 300 vertical meters to the José Ribas refuge, which lies at 4.800meters. In the afternoon we reach the tourist town of Baños, which is well known for its pleasant climate, warm springs, extraordinarily beautiful scenery and delicious sweets.

Day 4: Baños – Pastaza Canyon – Waterfall: Pailon del Diablo – Baños

Today's destination is the Pastaza Canyon, which leads from Baños down to the Amazon rain forest. As we descend steep slopes past numerous cascading waterfalls, we can see how the vegetation changes. In the small town of Rio Verde we make a stop, and after a short walk we reach the roaring waterfall of Pailon de Diablo ("The devil's pan", entrance fee not included). In the afternoon we head back to Baños. The rest of the day is free. Note: to the Pastaza Canyon you can also go by mountain bike (about 10 USD).

Day 5: Baños – Market in Guamote – Naturreservat Chimborazo – Riobamba

After an early breakfast, we head off to the colorful market of Guamote which is the centre of trade for locals wearing colorful clothing from the surrounding mountain villages. The lively market is considered one of the most original in the country. We then drive up the highest mountain in the country, Chimborazo (6,310 m - entrance fee not included), which is the highest non-active volcano on earth. Later our route takes us through Arenal, a desert landscape full of wild vicuñas. These shy animals are one of the four South American camelids. Later, we can take a short hike to Edward Whympfer hut, which is situated at 5,000 meters. If you like mountain scenery, you will really enjoy the beautiful surroundings. In the evening we arrive at our hotel in Riobamba.

Day 6: Riobamba – train ride to the "Devil's nose" – Cuenca

After the breakfast we head to the station of Riobamba Alausí from where we start our Andean railway adventure – a great journey full of panoramic and stunning mountain scenery. The train ride starts and ends in Alausí, following the bends of the "Devil's Nose" route, which is the steepest in the world. On the way to Simbambe we pass through all of Ecuador's many climate zones of the country and enjoy a range of picturesque landscapes. Until some years ago it was common to spend the trip on the roof of the train, but this was prohibited in 2007. However, even inside the train this breathtaking ride is an unforgettable experience. After returning to Alausí we continue on to Ingapirca, the most important pre-Columbian archaeological site in Ecuador (entrance fee not included). The town of Kañari was later used by the Incas and expanded. Cuenca is our last stop of the day.

Important note:

The railway line "Nariz del Diablo" ("The Devil's Nose") originally started in Riobamba. Nowadays, because of landslides and ground repairs the route between Riobamba and Alausí is blocked indefinitely. So now the journey begins and ends in Alausí. However, the most spectacular section of the "Nariz del Diablo" fortunately has not

been affected by these restrictions.

Day 7: Cuenca – City-Tour

Today we get to know the colonial city of Cuenca, which is considered the most beautiful city in Ecuador and was recognized in 1999 by the UNESCO as a World Heritage site. The promenade along the Rio Tomebamba, the impressive cathedral, the daily market and the colorful flower market are among the highlights of the tour. We visit a Panama hat factory of the and learn about the production of these straw hats, considered the finest in the world. They were made famous by Ernest Hemingway and the name comes from the fact that the export route lead through the Panama Canal. The evening is free, with the opportunity to enjoy strolls through the beautiful streets of the town.

Day 8 : Cuenca – Cajas National Park – Guayaquil

After breakfast we drive towards Guayaquil through the beautiful Cajas National Park (entrance fee not included), which is famous for its wet and hilly uplands. In this nature reserve we can observe not only numerous small ponds and marshes, but also more than 230 lakes, which have a total size of at least 10 acres and are all connected by a small river system. Then we head to the highest point of Cajas National Park and walk along the "Laguna Toreadora" to the Polylepis forest. After a spectacular ride through a variety of climate and vegetation zones, we finally reach the tropical lowlands and visit a small country house. Here we can see how green bananas and cocoa are harvested. In the late afternoon we arrive at our hotel in the port city of Guayaquil.

Day 9: Guayaquil – City Tour

In the morning we do a city tour of Guayaquil. The highlights include the Parque Bolivar, with its many iguanas, the impressive City Hall in the Plaza de Administración, the Moorish Clock Tower, the three-kilometer long waterfront "Malecon 2000" on the broad Río Guayas and the historic district of Las Peñas. From the hills of Santa Ana with its colorful houses, we have the best panoramic view of the bustling port city. The afternoon is then free. Whether you prefer a little stroll through the streets, or to relax in the hotel complex, is up to you.

Day 10 Galapagos (Day 1)

From the Baltra airport we transfer to Puerto Ayora on Santa Cruz Island. Here we check in and have lunch. At 2pm we begin our tour of the bay. During our boat trip we observe the cliffs, sea lions and beautiful seabirds. At 2.30pm we walk to Las Grietas to see lava formations, iguanas, various species of birds and Las Salinas where salt is produced naturally. We also see the cliffs where you can go snorkeling (the equipment must be rented in advance in a dive shop). About 4pm we relax at Playa Estrada, where you can sunbathe, swim and go snorkeling. After that we return in a boat to the hotel, where at 7 pm we have dinner. In the evening the guide or the agency representative provides us with some helpful information.

Day 11 Galapagos (Day 2)

At 7.30am we eat breakfast and afterwards we visit the Marine Reserve Information Centre in Puerto Ayora. After that we walk about 45 minutes to Turtle Bay, observing land birds, reptiles, vegetation of the region, as well as seabirds, marine iguanas, the giant cactus forest and mangroves. About 10.30am we head for the beach, where you can relax in the sun, go swimming, practice snorkeling or rent kayaks. At midday we return to Puerto Ayora, where we have our lunch and visit the Darwin Station where you can see the Natural History Information Centre, a breeding centre for turtles and land iguanas, a cactus forest and some land birds. From here you we observe the famous turtle El Solitario George, which is the only survivor of its kind and has which scientists have tried to breed with females of similar species. After dinner we meet our guide or the representative of the agency again.

Day 12 Galapagos (Day 3)

After an early breakfast, we take a boat trip to Isla Floreana (there is a chance to see dolphins and whales). At about 9:00 we arrive in Puerto Velasco Ibarra and later visit the top of the Isla el Asilo de la Paz which is a historical site where pirates and the first inhabitants of the island settled. Later our visit leads to the corral of the turtles that live in a semi-natural environment. After lunch in a local restaurant, we take a walk to la Lobería where we can see sea lions, marine iguanas, crabs and other endemic species of animals and plants. Afterwards we can enjoy swimming at the Playa Prieta and snorkel to observe the underwater life. About 3.30pm we go back to Puerto Ayora on Santa Cruz Island.

Day 13 Galapagos (Day 4)

After a very early (6.15am) Breakfast we take a boat trip to the island Isabela, where we visit the Islote Tintoreras. There we can see several species of seabirds such as boobies, penguins, pelicans, etc., marine iguanas, sharks and you can do snorkeling here to observe the marine life. There is also time for the Playa de Puerto Villamil. After lunch we pay a visit to the Wetlands to observe flamingos and other birds of the lagoon. Later we visit the Turtle Breeding Center. In the afternoon we go back to Puerto Ayora on the Santa Cruz Island. After dinner, as every day, you meet your guide.

Day 14 Galapagos (Day 5)

After a 7am breakfast, at 8am we begin a visit to the Cráteres Gemelos (Twin Craters) which are volcanic depressions on the upper Santa Cruz Island, and admire the pajaro brujo, one of the most attractive birds of the islands. Here you can also see a forest of the endemic escalesia of the islands. At 9am we transfer to Baltra airport for the flight back to Quito, from where you continue your journey or flight back to your home country.

Galapagos Tour:

Included: guide, airport-hotel transfers, air, land and sea transport, accommodation, meals and visits

Not included: airfare, income taxes to the islands, extra consumption

After dinner you can choose to visit craft shops, boutiques, clubs, hotel activities, etc.

Included in the price:

- Transportation (including airport transfers)
- German / English speaking guide throughout the tour
- Accommodation in hotels in the program in a single, double or triple room
- Daily breakfast
- All activities described in the program
- Train ticket

Not included in the price:

- International Flights
- the flight to the Galapagos – the prices vary a lot throughout the year, depending on the month, of course we help you with the buy process
- The meals not mentioned in the programme
- Beverages
- Tips
- Other personal expenses
- Entrance fees (approx. \$60)
- Departure tax in Guayaquil (approx. \$29 USD) and Quito (approx. \$46 USD)

Notes to the hotels:

Standard: Our standard hotels, depending on the location and condition are medium-class hotels, very good hostels, nice jungle lodges and haciendas.