



STARR
TRAVEL

Custom Travel Itinerary

Ecuador

Visiting Quito "Queen City of the Andes," Cuenca, Otavalo indigenous market, and Riobamba. 8 days/ 7 nights.

Day 1 Sat: From USA to Quito

Arrive in Quito, Ecuador. You will be met at the airport and transfer to your hotel for the night.

Day 2 Sun: Quito (B)

Combined Quito City and Equatorial Monument Tour. Drive through this beautiful city and its colonial center. Possibly visit the Cathedral, Government Palace with a visit to La Compañía Church with its ornate golden altars. Then off for a quick jaunt to the Middle of the Earth at the Equatorial Monument. This is your chance to be in two places at once! Straddle the line and you are in both the Northern and Southern Hemispheres, or stand directly on the equator and you are nowhere... latitude 0.

Overnight at hotel selected.

Day 3 Mon: Quito- Cotopaxi National Park - Hacienda San Agustín de Callo - Patate

Early departure from Quito by motorcar on the Pan-American Highway to the south, to visit the Cotopaxi National Park, an ecological sanctuary of 88,920 acres, around the magnificent Cotopaxi Volcano, which rises 5897 meters (19,347 feet) above sea level. The evergreen landscape of the Ecuadorian highlands is one of the main attractions, along valleys and mountains covered by multicolored fields. After an hour and a half you will reach the entrance to the park. Then it's up a dirt road for approximately one hour. Upon arrival to the park, there is an introductory briefing about the habitat of the Andean paramo or moorlands, its flora and fauna in the small Interpretation Center.

Travel along valleys and mountains, arrive to Cotopaxi National Park, which surrounds the magnificent Cotopaxi Volcano, for an up-close view of the Andean paramo habitat and its unique flora and fauna; a number of high-altitude birds can be observed around

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Limpiopungo Lagoon, and occasionally, wild horses. On clear days, the perfect snow-capped cone of the Cotopaxi Volcano is quite a sight! At the foot of the volcano is a charming hacienda, where lunch is served in a room with Inca walls, perfectly preserved through the centuries - a truly archaeological jewel. After lunch, mingle with the llamas of the hacienda and stroll along a rose plantation, many varieties, many colors, ready for exportation. From here, descend towards the town of Patate, to spend the night at a 300-year old hacienda, hidden among the mountains, a magical ambience, where as the afternoon mist descends, stories are told about those who left in search of the treasure of the Incas in the nearby Llanganatis - and never returned...

Day 4 Tue: Baños - Route of the Cascades - Ambato - El Arenal - Riobamba

After breakfast, take a spectacular route along the gorge of the Pastaza River to the town of Baños (Baths), right at the foot of the Tungurahua Volcano, from where the thermal waters that gave it its name emerge. Drive along the Route of the Cascades to El Pailón del Diablo (the Devil's Cauldron). The most adventurous will descend (medium difficulty) to observe the impressive cascade up close, surrounded by subtropical vegetation and orchids. The force and sound of the waters can also be appreciated from a lookout point without descending. Lunch is served at a hacienda / hostel in the surroundings, and in the afternoon a short stroll along Baños - a town with an international pulse, full of people from all over the world as well as many locals who pilgrimage to the Sanctuary of the Virgin of Holy Water. From here, the route to Riobamba is up the mountain, to where the clouds can be touched, alongside the massive Chimborazo, the highest mountain of Ecuador, on the high paramo where vicuñas graze and scamper in a protected Faunistic Preserve. On the hillsides, where the land is worked beneath the plow, one might think the farmer's true objective was to paint the hills in fascinating patterns, not just to till the dark, fertile soil. Great photo ops on this route! Arrive to Riobamba for dinner and lodging.

Day 5 Wed: Riobamba - Alausí - Devil's Nose - Alausi - Ingapirca - Cuenca

After an early breakfast, you will depart by road, skirting the flanks of the Andes. This is an astonishing ride, twisting and turning along bridging ravines and river gorges and through Indian villages and cultivated fields. Here is where most of the cereals in Ecuador are grown, among them, the quinoa, considered the perfect grain for its nutritional value.

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After about 2 hours, you will arrive at the small town of Alausí, the beating heart of the rehabilitation of the Ecuadorian Railway Company in the last years. Great effort has been made to restore the 100-year old train to its old glory and romance. Stations have been renewed, railways and sleepers replaced, engines and classic coaches renovated, and, most important, the project involves the local communities along the route in the rail operation. The highlight is the thrilling 800-meter (2630-foot) descent on the zigzag cuttings on the rock of the Devil's Nose. At the bottom, one finds the newly renovated Station of Sibambe. Here there is time to visit the local museum "Condor Puñuna" built and run by the Nizag community, see the display of local handcrafts, fruit and medicinal plants and try the local coffee. The train whistle calls guests back on board for the return to the Station of Alausí, where a light snack is served to regain strength. Continue exploring the Andean world by motorcoach to the south, visiting the Inca Fortress of Ingapirca en-route. You will have lunch in the area then continue to Cuenca for the night.

Day 6 Thu: Cuenca - Quito

Today you will take a morning sightseeing tour of the beautiful and charming city of Cuenca, which has been recognized as a World Cultural Heritage Site. Its red tiled roofs, cobblestone streets, flowery plazas and museums make it very special. Lunch is served at a cozy restaurant. In the late afternoon you will transfer to the airport to take the flight to Quito and transfer to your hotel.

Day 7 Fri: Quito - Otavalo - Quito (B, L)

This excursion goes north, to the land of the Otavalos and South America's most famous local market. Along the Panamerican Highway through dramatic mountain scenery to the textile market of Otavalo, where guests will enjoy visiting the many stalls full of ponchos, scarves, blankets, wall hangings, woven belts (fajas), hats, handbags and much more. Here Otavaleños barter in silence, in marked contrast to the raucous noise of other markets. Take your time to negotiate the best bargains. Then you will proceed to Peguche, an Indian village very near Otavalo that is home to the artisans who do the weaving in their homes, where guests can learn about their culture and everyday life. Next, you will take the cobblestone road to San Pablo, with a stop along the way at a weaving workshop specialized in fine backs trap loom woven textiles. Lunch is at one of the charming country inns or haciendas of the area. Return to your hotel in Quito.

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Day 8 Sat: Quito -

Day at leisure for exploring.

Day 9 Sun: Quito - Galapagos Island

Transfer to the airport to take a 3-hour local jet via Guayaquil to the Galapagos Islands. You will then take a cruise for 4 days and 3 nights that will arrive at the Galapagos Airport.

In the afternoon, visit the Charles Darwin Research Station in Santa Cruz. Observe the giant tortoises that are part of the reproduction program and the world's most famous tortoise, Lonesome George, the last surviving specimen of his species.

Day 10 Mon: Cormorant Point, Champion/Devil's Crown (Floreana) SN, DR

This island features endemic plants such as Scalesia villosa, Galapagos daisies, white sand black mangrove, and holy stick. Here you can spot sea turtles and Blue-footed Boobies plunging into the water, and small reef sharks floating along the shoreline in search of food.

In the afternoon, head to the post office in Floreana SN. Continue the tradition by placing unstamped postcards inside the barrel, which reach their destinations for free. Observe the mocking bird of Galapagos, some species of Darwin's finches, yellow warblers, and lava lizards.

Day 11 Tue: Gardner Bay, Gardner & Osborn Islets (Española) SN, KY, Suárez Point

In the morning, you will be at Gardner Bay and the Gardner & Osborn Islets, where you can spot Galapagos hawks, American oyster catchers, Galapagos doves, hood mockingbirds, 3 species of Darwin finches, yellow warblers, lava lizards, and marine iguanas.

In the afternoon, you will head to Suárez Point to explore volcanic formations and a riveting wildlife. Besides the sea lion colonies, this is a very important site for bird watching. A major highlight is their mating season, from May through December.



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Day 12 Wed: Galapagos - Guayaquil - USA

In the morning, visit the Interpretation Center & Tijeretas in San Cristóbal to learn about the history of the islands in the context of nature, humankind and conservation. In Tijeretas Hill, walk through beautiful landscapes ending with a magnificent view nearby a large frigatebird colony. Depart from Galapagos airport to the mainland via a local 1-hour jet to Guayaquil, arriving at around 3pm.

Connect with your international flight back to the USA.