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THE HEART OF THE ANDES

Quito, Cuenca, Avenue of the Volcanoes Ecuador Tour

8 DAYS / 7 NIGHTS

Travel along the Avenue of the Volcanoes, also known as the backbone of Ecuador. The Avenue of the Volcanoes is a long strip of volcanoes and Andes mountain peaks that run from the north to the south of Ecuador. These peaks, along with the indigenous villages, the fascinating colonial cities, thrilling train rides, and national parks make for an unforgettable trip through Ecuador.

FROM
**GET CUSTOM
PRICING**

per person

THIS TOUR INCLUDES:

- 7 night accommodation
- Entrance to National Parks, Churches and museums
- All transfers
- All breakfasts
- English-speaking guides

HIGHLIGHTS

- Quito
- Peguche village
- Cotacachi market
- Chaski Antawa train
- Otavalo indigenous market
- Avenue of Volcanoes
- Cotopaxi National Park
- Baños
- Riobamba
- Devil Nose train
- Inca Cañari Ingapirca ruins
- Cuenca

ITINERARY



Day 1

ARRIVAL IN QUITO

Arrive at the Quito airport and meet your tour guide. Your guide will take you to your hotel in Quito, where you can relax and unpack. Quito is at a relatively high altitude of 2,850 m (9,350 ft), so make sure to spend some time acclimatize.



Day 2

QUITO CITY TOUR & MIDDLE OF THE WORLD MONUMENT

Have breakfast in the hotel, and then meet your guide for a city tour of Quito. The capital of Ecuador, Quito was an important city during the Inca empire and during the Spanish colonial era. The historic district of Quito has several churches and colonial era buildings; in fact, the city is often considered to have the highest percentage of churches per square feet of any city in the world.

Also visit the Mitad del Mundo (Middle of the World) monument, which commemorates where the equatorial line crosses through Ecuador. The monument is located 11 miles (18 km) from Quito. Here you can stand on the equatorial line, and you can learn all about how the exact coordinates of the line were first calculated and plotted here.



Day 3

SAN PABLO LAGOON - PEGUCHE VILLAGE - COTACACHI MARKET

The San Pablo Lagoon is located 55 miles (89 km.) from Quito, at the foot of Mount Imbabura; small indigenous communities live all around and you can see them fishing early in the morning or washing their clothes during the day. You can boat ride around the lagoon and enjoy jet ski and other water sports.

About 57 miles (92 km.) north of Quito the indigenous Kichwa community of Peguche is famous for its textiles and Andean musical instruments. Enjoy a delicious lunch prepared in the traditional way, using only firewood for cooking to preserve the original taste. In this cozy environment you will also enjoy live Andean music played with traditional charango, drums and flutes. Passengers can also observe the weaving process for which this town is famous. Visit a workshop where many different Andean instruments are made, and learn about them all. One of them is called bocina, which is made of bullhorn and bamboo cane and its sound can be heard for 1 mile.

Cotacachi is located 68 miles (110 km.) from Quito; this town specializing in leatherwork offers a wide variety of leather goods including bags, jackets, hats, gloves and belts. At 11 miles (18 km.) west lies Cuicocha Lagoon, located at the foot of the Cotacachi volcano and featuring two picturesque islands covered with vegetation and an impressive landscape of deep blue waters surrounded by hills.

Overnight in Otavalo.



Day 4

IBARRA - CHASKI ANTAWA TRAIN - OTAVALO INDIGENOUS MARKET

70 miles (112 km.) north of Quito lies Ibarra, a picturesque place to relax known as the White City because of its whitewashed houses and cobblestone streets. Typical products include arropo de mora (blackberry syrup), nogadas (sweetmeat with walnuts), and helados de paila (handmade sherbert). At the train station you can catch the Chaski Antawa train to the valley of Salinas.

Experience the Chaski Antawa two hour train ride that takes you into the Afro-Ecuadorian valley of Salinas. Located at about 18 miles (30 km.) from Ibarra, this valley, surrounded by farms and sugar cane plantations, takes its name because of the soil's high salt content.

Enjoy a traditional lunch and visit the Salt Museum, where you'll learn the ancient processes for obtaining salt, as well as the lifestyle and customs of the Salinas community.

59 miles (94 km.) about 2 1/2 hours north of Quito lies Ecuador's most famous indigenous market, Otavalo indigenous market, a mosaic of colors and handicrafts, offering shoppers superb bargains for fine textiles, paintings, ceramic ware, Panama hats, and an incredibly fun market experience. The craft fair takes place every day on the main plaza, Plaza de Ponchos, although Saturday is its busiest day. The Otavaleños have received world recognition for their weaving and craftsmanship. Back to Quito and overnight.



Day 5

AVENUE OF VOLCANOES, COTOPAXI NATIONAL PARK, BAÑOS & RIOBAMBA

Explore Ecuador's central mountains, the Avenue of the Volcanoes. This sierra stretches 325 km north-south through the center of Ecuador, splitting the dry west from the Amazon basin to the east. Some of the volcanic peaks you'll see include Chimborazo, Antisana Cayambe, Tungurahua and Cotopaxi. You'll also see small indigenous villages, where time seems to have stopped. Locals wear bright ponchos, woven sweaters, and typical hats.

Stop to explore to Cotopaxi National Park, where the formidable Cotopaxi volcano rises above the surrounding Andes Mountains. Enjoy a guided light hike through sections of the park, or opt for more activities such as hiking, mountain biking, and horseback riding. Visit the crystalline Limpiopungo Lagoon, home to Andean Gulls, wild rabbits, llamas and horses.

Next stop is in Baños, a delightful town known for its natural hot springs. The area is also known for adventure activities such as hiking, horseback riding, rappelling, canyoning, mountain biking, swimming, river rafting, and more.

Continue on to Riobamba, located in the foothills of Chimborazo volcano. This city showcases many twentieth-century architectural gems. Spend the night in Riobamba.



Day 6

DEVIL NOSE TRAIN - INCA CAÑARI RUINS OF INGAPIRCA - CUENCA

Today is dedicated to traveling by train along the Devil's Nose, one of the most difficult railway tracks in the world. The railroad was originally built to connect the Andes with the coast, and is crosses steep slopes and deep river valleys as well as a wall of rock known as the Ñariz del Diablo, or Devil's nose. The train leaves from Alausí and reaches Cuenca.

The Inca Cañari Ingapirca ruins, located outside of Cuenca, is the most important archaeological site in Ecuador. The Inca Empire stretched far north from Peru into Ecuador, and the Ingapirca ruins are the most impressive Incan ruins remaining in Ecuador. Explore the ruins, and then return to Cuenca for the night.



Day 7

CUENCA - GUALACEO - CHORDELEG

Cuenca, another UNESCO World Heritage site. Let its cobblestone streets, graceful wrought-iron balconies, and flower-filled plazas captivate you. This city is home to the famous Panama hats and to very talented people who will proudly show you their best work.

The best archaeological exhibits are at the Museo del Banco Central, which also displays old photos and has changing art and other shows. The Museo de Las Conceptas is housed in the Convent of the Immaculate Conception and is Cuenca's most famous religious art museum.

About 22 miles (36 km.) from Cuenca, find Gualaceo, the Garden of Azuay. The valley of Gualaceo is crossed by the Santa Ana River which creates a beautiful riverfront scenery. It's one of the most important fruit growing centers in the area. Its Sunday market features three separated markets: fruits and vegetables, craft and clothing, and produce and household goods which all blend perfectly into one. 10 minutes from Gualaceo, the pre-Incan town of Chordeleg is full of archaeological treasures. It's famous for its jewelry in gold and silver. This town also produces embroidery, pottery, ceramics, textiles, and panama hats. Back to Cuenca and overnight.



Day 8

RETURN TO QUITO & DEPARTURE

After breakfast in Cuenca, transfer to the airport for the flight to Quito or Guayaquil. There you can take an international flight home or to your next destination in South America.