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THE ESSENTIAL

ECUADOR TRAVEL GUIDE



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A WORD FROM THE FOUNDERS

SouthAmerica.travel is proud of its energetic Team of travel experts. Our Travel Partners are based in 7 South American countries, have traveled extensively throughout South America and work "at the source" from their operations headquarters in Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia and the Guyanas.

We are passionate about South America Travel, and we're happy to share with you our favorite Buenos Aires restaurants, our insider's tips for Machu Picchu, or our secret colonial gems of Brazil, and anything else you're eager to know.

The idea to create SouthAmerica.travel first came to Co-Founders Juergen Keller and Bradley Nehring while traveling through Brazil's Amazon Rainforest. The two noticed few international travelers, and those they did meet had struggled to arrange the trip by themselves. Expertise in custom travel planning to Brazil was scarce to nonexistent. This inspired the duo to start their own travel business to fill this void and help travelers plan great trips to Brazil, and later all South America.

With local tour operator partners throughout South America, as well as local phone numbers in multiple countries worldwide, the SouthAmerica.travel Partners has helped hundreds of thousands of travelers fulfill their unique dream of discovering the marvelous and diverse continent of South America. Where will your dreams take you? Let's start planning now...



Juergen Keller
Co-Founder



Bradley Nehring
Co-Founder

"Our goal is to create memories that will last our clients a lifetime."

Juergen Keller



ECUADOR TRAVEL GUIDE

ESSENTIAL ECUADOR TRAVEL TIPS

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THE HIGHLIGHTS OF ECUADOR

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The Tren Crucero & Devil's Nose
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THE BEST ECUADOR TRAVEL PACKAGES

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Quito & Devil's Nose Train Tour
Ecuador Amazon Eco-Lodge Napo Wildlife Center
Quito, Cuenca, Avenue of the Volcanoes
Galapagos Cruise and Machu Picchu Tour



ESSENTIAL ECUADOR TRAVEL TIPS

Ecuador may be small,

But it has a dazzling array of marine and colonial wonders. The Galápagos Islands are a destination in and of itself, as researcher Charles Darwin called them “a living laboratory”. Cruise around the Galápagos Islands and discover the spectacular scenery, friendly locals, and the never-ending tropical weather. After visiting the Galápagos Islands, be sure to explore the Avenue of the Volcanoes, go shopping for unique handicrafts at the Otavalo Market, ride the Ecuador railway, spot wildlife in the Ecuadorian Amazon and stroll along the cobbled stoned streets of Quito or Cuenca. In Ecuador, there's a little bit of everything.

Best Times to Visit Ecuador

The Galápagos Islands are perfect for any travel duo! High season is December to May when the seas are calm, and exotic creatures are abundant. If you're headed to the coast, the best time to visit is January to April, also known as the dry season with more sunshine. In general, most tourists visit Ecuador from June to August or September to late December. If you're planning a trip during this time, make sure to book well in advance! However, if you avoid these months, you will likely experience lower prices and fewer crowds. The choice is yours. Overall, there is never a bad time to visit Ecuador with mild temperatures year-round.

Tourist Visas & Travel Insurance

Citizens of the United States, Canada, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and several other nations do not need to obtain a tourist card for entry to Ecuador. Most travelers will receive a tourist card upon arrival, valid for 90 days. Always check with the local consulate in your country for the most up-to-date travel requirements for Ecuador.

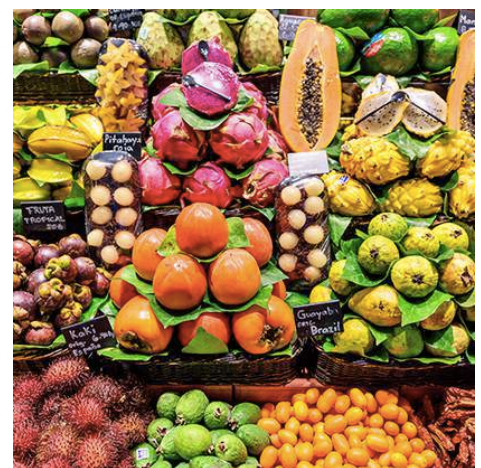


****NOTE** It is mandatory for all people entering Ecuador to purchase international travel insurance.**

Recommended Foods

Bring your appetite with you to Ecuador! Ecuadorian cuisine is diverse. In the highlands, pork and beef are common, but chicken and cuy (roasted guinea pig) are also popular. Along the coast expect seafood, but with an Ecuadorian twist with a touch of spice and coconut milk. Sample a plate of “encebollado”, a fish soup regarded as Ecuador's national dish.

Encebollado is prepared with fresh tomato, pepper, coriander, and leaves - a delicious mix of flavors you won't want to miss! At the lower elevations, fresh fruit is plentiful, try exotic fruits such as, granadilla, passion fruit, naranjilla, tree tomato and bananas at a local market.



Read More: [Ecuador Food & Drink](#)

MAP OF ECUADOR



Pacific Ocean

COLOMBIA

ECUADOR

Quito

Amazon



Galapagos Islands



Baños & Riobamba



Guayaquil

Cajas National Park

Cuenca



Train Travel



Volcanoes



Cruises

PERU

100 km



HIGHLIGHTS OF ECUADOR

Galápagos Islands

It is hard to find a destination that can compete with the Galápagos Islands. This archipelago is made up of 18 unique islands. Charles Darwin described the Galápagos Islands as “a little world within itself” because of the array of endemic species and contrasting landscapes. Named a UNESCO Site in 1957, the islands are heavily protected and monitored to ensure flora and fauna continue to thrive.

Wildlife in the Galápagos: Always keep your camera ready as the wildlife have little regard for tourists; to them it is as though we are simply the paparazzi. On a Galápagos adventure you are likely to see giant tortoises, swim with sea lions, marine iguanas, blue-footed boobies, Darwin finches, whales and even penguins!

Getting there: The islands are 906 km off the coast of Ecuador. From Quito, you can fly to Guayaquil and take a smaller plane to Santa Cruz or Isla San Cristóbal. Tame, Avianca & LAN offer daily flights to the islands.

Read More: [The Best Galápagos Islands to Visit](#)





Galápagos Cruises

Luxury cruises make it easy to visit multiple islands in a short amount of time. Don't mistake the islands here as identical tropical paradises; they each offer something different to visitors. All cruises have set itineraries so as not to exhaust the resources on a particular island.

There are a variety of Galápagos Cruises to choose from, ranging from small, large, luxury and simply designed vessels. For a more intimate experience consider the M/Y Coral Cruises or the Petrel Luxury Catamaran. For incomparable comfort, look into the Legend Cruises ship. No matter what you choose, you are sure to find the perfect cruise for your travel style. We recommend going on a 4-5 day cruise for a comfortable and more relaxed experience. Each cruise includes shore excursions with a local English speaking guide.

Island Highlights: For a splash of history, explore Española or South Plaza, the oldest islands, and ideal for spotting wildlife. If you're interested in learning the history of the pirates that were searching for booty, take a trip to Floreana. For landscapes and a volcanic experience, visit Santa Cruz, the second largest volcanic island in the heart of the Galápagos. Others include San Cristóbal, Isabela, Bartolomé, Fernandina & more.

View more: [Galapagos Cruises](#)



Quito - Ecuador's Capital City

Quito is the capital of Ecuador and was declared the first World Cultural Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1978. The city is among one of the best preserved historic centers in the Americas. Ecuador's capital city oozes history from every street corner with its cobblestone streets and colorful architecture, intricate cathedrals, and statues of Latin American liberation leaders. Highlights include the Basilica del Voto, the most remarkable neo-gothic building in Ecuador and La Compañía de Jesús Church, an 18th Century baroque-style church adorned with gold-plated walls and impressive artwork.

Insiders Tip

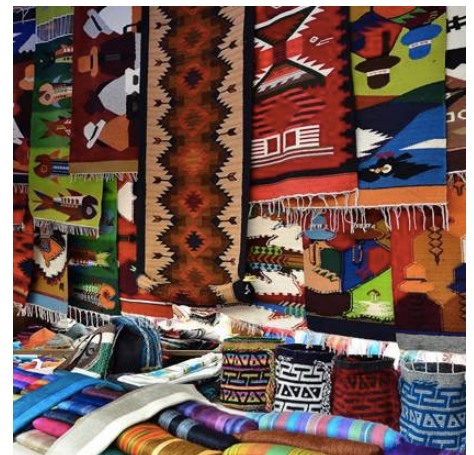
Take a cab or bus to the top of El Panecillo (the Little Bread Loaf). Known as one of the most romantic spots in Quito, you'll have incredible views of La Virgen de Quito (Virgin of Quito), the colonial city below, and surrounding volcanoes.



La Ronda Street in downtown Quito is full of lively culture and is the perfect place to spend the evening. Explore a variety of restaurants and bars offering up local favorites like locro, a warm potato, cheddar and avocado soup. Music fills the streets of the bustling neighborhood.

Otavalo Market: Just beyond the city are quaint Andean villages and market. The Otavalo market is amongst one of the most famous and is known for their colorful textiles, beautiful handmade blankets and other trinkets unique to Ecuador.

Read more: [What to do in Quito Ecuador](#)



Cuenca - The Hidden Gem of Ecuador

Cuenca is the laid-back, colonial treasure of Ecuador. The city's welcoming culture, picturesque streets and agreeable weather contribute to its being amongst one of the most beautiful colonial cities in Ecuador. Whether you enjoy history, culture, nature or railway tours, as the saying goes, all roads lead to Cuenca.

Cuenca's historic center dates back to the 16th century. The city was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site, for its well-preserved medieval historic area. Visit El Sagrario, also known as the "old cathedral" built in 1557, standing across the park from the new cathedral, Catedral de la Inmaculada Concepción. The beautiful skyline of perfectly sculpted steeples and rotundas captivate every tourist.

From cathedrals and museums to red terracotta roofs and cobblestone streets lined with artists and craftsman selling the famous Panama Hat, Cuenca has something for everyone. For foodies be sure to try cuy, roasted guinea pig, or visit any of the other high-caliber restaurants and pubs for authentic Ecuadorian dishes and treats. Seamlessly combine Cuenca and Guayaquil on a short, but entertaining 3.5-hour train ride.

Read More: [Best Things to Do in Cuenca Ecuador](#)



Cajas National Park & Ingapirca

Located just 30 km west of Cuenca lies the beautiful Cajas National Park, with its high altitude wildlife. Look for the Andean condors, llamas, giant hummingbirds and if you are lucky a puma! There are hundreds of lakes and plenty of hiking trails that take you through the páramo ecosystem past the strange polylepis "paper trees". Laguna Toreadora is the largest and most popular amongst travelers.

For the outdoors enthusiast traveler, Cajas National Park is the perfect playground. Hiking, fishing, and camping are of the top three activities to do here.



The Ingapirca Ruins are Ecuador's most impressive ruins built by the Incas. The purpose behind the primary Ingapirca structure is not for certain, although some believe that it was used for military strategies or as a place of worship. The Incas created their cities and temples without using a mortar and are now famous for their intricate stonework. The Temple of the Sun stood as a testament to the power of South America's most important ancient empire and was once used for ceremonial purposes.

View our favorite: [Ecuador Tours](#)





Guayaquil

Guayaquil is a port city in Ecuador and is most commonly known as the gateway to Pacific beaches and the Galapagos Islands. With its history nestled in the museums, parks and gardens, Guayaquil is becoming a popular place for tourists to visit, and not only because it's the entrance to the Galapagos Islands.

The city stretches along the Guayas River, where the waterfront home of Simon Bolivar rests. The waterfront is one of the most extensive urban-renewal projects in South America and makes for a wonderful place for the public to walk and dine. In the north sits Las Peñas, a neighborhood worth exploring due to its vibrantly painted homes. For dramatic views of the city, head up the lined stairs with cafes and art galleries to Santa Ana Hill.

Getting there: Combine Guayaquil and Quito with Ecuador's Tren Crucero. This steam locomotive passes through the Avenue of the Volcanoes following the famous Devil's Nose mountainside. If time does not permit, you can also fly from Guayaquil to Cuenca or Quito.

Read more: [Guayaquil to Quito Train Journey](#)



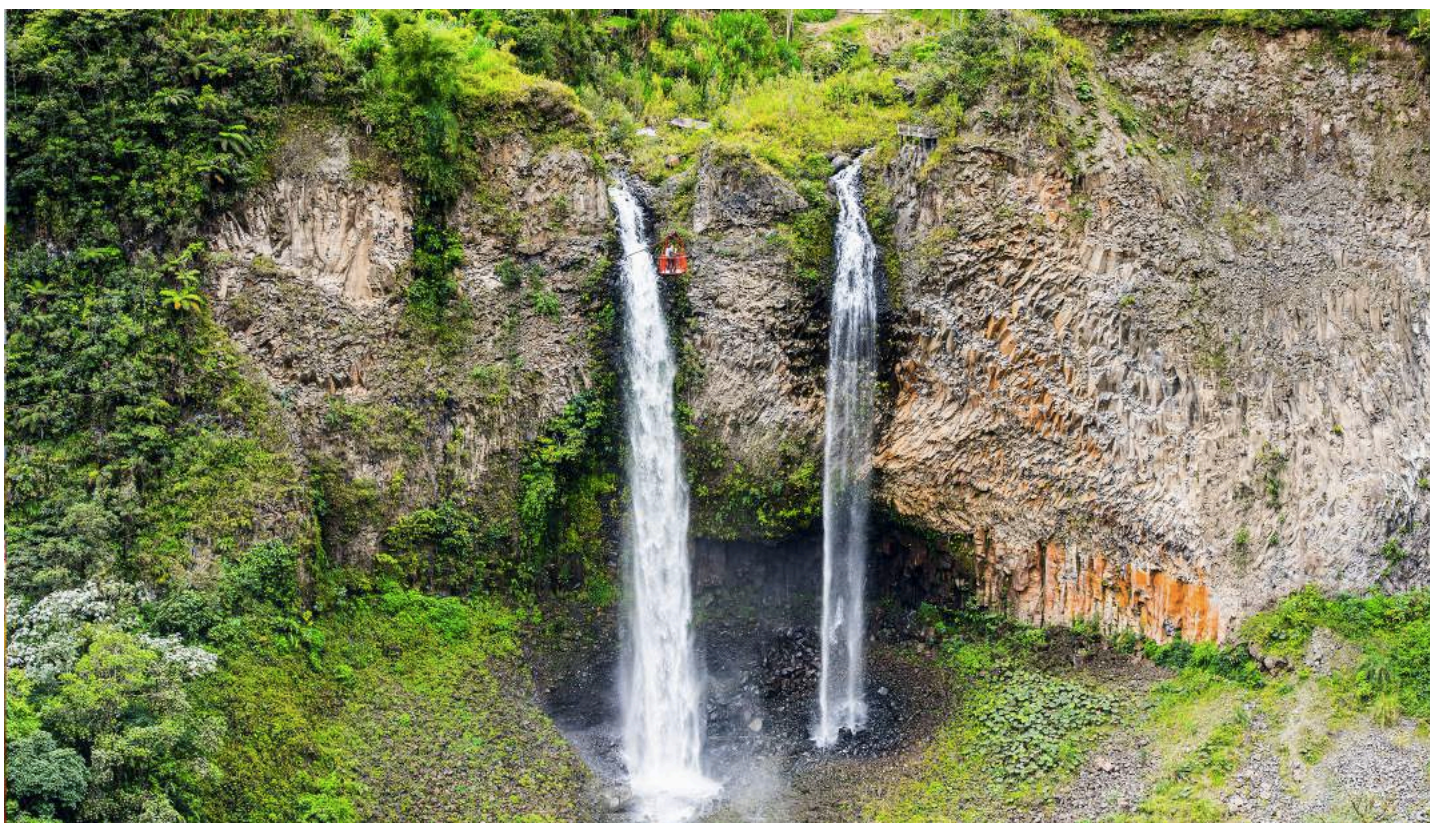
Fun Fact!

Guayaquil is the largest city and main point of Ecuador. The industrial port makes it a main focus of Ecuador's international trade, making Guayaquil the country's most important city!

Banos & Riobamba

Baños is another destination for nature and outdoor enthusiasts. Mountain biking, hiking, rafting and even zip lining are common in Baños. Just 176 km from Quito, it is well worth the trip if you prefer to venture off the beaten path.

From the town, you can see rushing waterfalls, head to nearby hiking trails through lush forests, rejuvenate at the thermal springs or even marvel at the aftermath of the eruption of the nearby Volcán Tungurahua. Baños is also near the Amazon Basin, making it the perfect starting point for the Amazon.



Riobamba is the combination of its native name in Spanish, “river” and “valley”. Coincidentally, people visiting Riobamba often take a trip to the region’s most beautiful lakes for an afternoon trip. Yet, while the calm lakes are an option that are common amongst most, the strong indigenous presence that makes up the history of Riobamba can be seen in its weekly Saturday Markets. Explore this colorful regional market, where villagers from all over the province pour into the city to sell their locally made produce and crafts.

View our favorite: [Ecuador Tours](#)



Ecuador Amazon Cruises

After spending time in the colonial cities of Ecuador, get ready for a change of scenery. Ecuador's portion of the Amazon Rainforest is much smaller than Brazil's, but its small slice of the jungle is just as diverse with its lagoons, rivers, dense forest and jungle canopy.

If you choose to add on the Amazon in Ecuador, consider embarking on a luxury cruise aboard the **Manatee Amazon Explorer** or the **Anakonda Amazon Cruise**. This deluxe cruise smoothly enters the Amazon Basin from Coca, Ecuador. Activities include, piranha fishing, swimming with pink river dolphins and visiting the Parrot Clay Lick. Amazon cruises are an excellent way to venture deeper into the Amazon to see more flora and fauna. With daily shore excursions, hikes, village visits and more, you will leave with an authentic Amazon experience.

Not only is Ecuador a great gateway to the Amazon Basin, but it's also a fabulous destination to explore **Yasuni National Park** and the **Biosphere Reserve**. Yasuni National Park, located between the Napo and Curaray rivers has come beautiful green forests and wildlife. The park holds the world record of amphibian species at 150.

View More: [Ecuador Amazon Cruises](#)



Insiders Tip

Seamlessly combine the Amazon and the Galapagos to see two of the best highlights in Ecuador. This is a great option for travelers with limited time that want to see as much wildlife as possible!





ECUADOR TRAIN TOURS

Tren Crucero

Travel from the Pacific Ocean to the Andes of Ecuador aboard the “leading luxury train in South America,” the Tren Crucero. Experience some of the most stunning landscapes that Ecuador has to offer, as you travel along the historically laid tracks. Guests can choose from four colonial themed passenger cars to explore while enjoying magnificent views of the ever changing scenery. The Tren Crucero is much more than just a train ride; this Ecuador train seamlessly integrates well-guided tours, walking adventures and local market excursion.



Devil's Nose

Adventurers hop aboard the Devil’s Nose Tren Ecuador! Commonly referred to as the, “Most Difficult Train in the World”; this journey is one of Ecuador’s most popular attractions. This engineering masterpiece climbs over 500 meters in 12 kilometers as it zigzags up the mountain, offering guests incredible views of Ecuadorian landscapes.

Read more: [Ecuador Railway Tours](#)



Avenue of the Volcanoes

The Avenue of the Volcanoes stretches 325 km north to south through the center of Ecuador. Along the avenue are the Chimborazo, Antisana, Cayambe, Tungurahua and Cotopaxi volcanoes. Seamlessly connect Quito, Cuenca, and Guayaquil on a railway journey following the Avenue of the Volcanoes. Climb aboard the **Tren Crucero** for a luxury excursion past scenic landscapes, visit authentic local markets, enjoy delicious food and comfortable accommodations. The newly restored antique steam locomotive has been renovated to ensure quality and luxury while keeping the beauty of the authentic train.



Cotopaxi National Park is a popular destination for hikers, climbers, and wildlife excursion lovers. Enjoy hiking trails and multi-day treks with beautiful views of Ecuador's Volcán Cotopaxi, one of the world's highest active volcanoes. As the second highest point in Ecuador, Cotopaxi is a favorite amongst climbers. No matter what the activity you choose to do, you are sure to witness some beautiful nature and wildlife. The ecosystem in the area consists of a wide variety of flora and fauna, with a unique feature of condors, hawks, wild horses, foxes and more.

View Tour: [Heart of the Andes](#)



TOP ECUADOR TOURS

Galapagos Cruise and Colonial Quito Ecuador

8 Days — Quito, Mitad del Mundo & Galapagos Island

Explore Ecuador's highlights - the capital of Quito, the famous indigenous Otavalo market, the Middle of the World Equatorial Monument and the Galapagos Islands. Combine a 4-day Galapagos Islands Cruise with a city tour of Quito and its highlights. So many people travel to Ecuador and simply bypass the mainland, opting to go straight to the Galapagos Islands, but mainland Ecuador is simply beautiful, with its colonial churches in Quito and the Avenue of the Volcanoes. Don't miss out on Ecuador's highlights - add this Quito Ecuador tour to any of our Galapagos Cruise.

[VIEW FULL ITINERARY >>](#)



Luxury Galapagos Cruise & Ecuador Train Tour

14 Days — Quito, Galapagos Islands, Tren Crucero & Cotopaxi

The Luxury Ecuador Galapagos and Train Tour is a 3-for-one special! Start by visiting some of Quito's best highlights, on a guided city tour. Then embark on a luxury Galapagos Cruise aboard the Petrel Catamaran. Cruise around the exotic islands and enjoy close-up encounters with blue-footed boobies, iguanas, giant tortoises and more. Then, continue the luxury Ecuador tour by rail on South America's most exciting train, the Tren Crucero. Sit back and relax on the Tren Crucero and travel past the Avenue of Volcanoes.

[VIEW FULL ITINERARY >>](#)

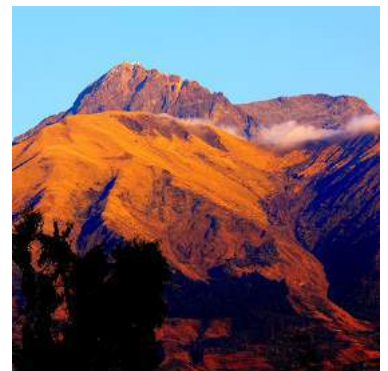


Tren Crucero Train Tour

7 Days — Quito, Tren Crucero, Chimborazo Volcano, Cotopaxi & Guayaquil

This exciting Ecuador railway journey takes 4 days to complete, including time to explore the towns and national parks adjacent to the rail line. Each night, passengers stay at local hotels and haciendas. The highlight of the trip is the Avenue of the Volcanoes, where you can see 11 volcanoes, including the dominant Cotopaxi, one of the tallest active volcanoes in the world. Along the way, see chagras (cowboys) tending to their cattle ranches, as well as condors, wild horses, llamas and towns inhabited by Quechua-speaking indigenous locals.

[VIEW FULL ITINERARY >>](#)



Quito & Devil's Nose Train Ecuador Tour

9 Days — Quito, Otavalo, Avenue of the Volcanoes, Cotopaxi & Cuenca

This Quito-to-Cuenca Ecuador tour is chock-full of highlights in Ecuador's fascinating mainland. Ride the Chaski Antawa and the Devil's Nose trains, visit the Otavalo indigenous market, explore the Avenue of Volcanoes and walk through Cotopaxi National Park. Continue the adventure to Baños, see the Ingapirca ruins, shop for Panama hats in Cuenca, bird-watch in Cajas National Park and enjoy some free time walking along the boardwalk in Guayaquil.

[VIEW FULL ITINERARY >>](#)



Ecuador Amazon Eco- Lodge Napo Wildlife Center

4 Days — Amazon Rainforest

The Napo Wildlife Center in the Yasuni National Park offers an authentic wildlife and nature experience, perfect for couples on a romantic honeymoon or for families looking for adventure. Paddle down tranquil lakes and rivers, hike through terra firma forests and go birdwatching. You may spot kingfishers, herons, monkeys, giant river otters, Saki monkeys, toucans, parrots, parakeets and even macaws. You'll also have the opportunity to visit a local jungle community one day.

[VIEW FULL ITINERARY >>](#)



The Heart of the Andes

8 Days — Quito, Riobamba, Devil's Nose, Cuenca & Cotopaxi

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.

[VIEW FULL ITINERARY >>](#)



Galapagos Cruise and Machu Picchu Tour

12 Days — Lima, Cuzco, Quito, Machu Picchu & Galapagos Islands

Want to see two of the highlights of South America, the Galapagos Islands and Machu Picchu? It's easy to combine these two destinations into one Peru and Ecuador trip since Lima and Quito (or Guayaquil) are a relatively short flight from each other. Take a whirlwind tour of the Inca ruins in Cuzco, the Sacred Valley and Machu Picchu. Then continue to the Galapagos Islands to spot wildlife and swim in sparkling warm waters.

[VIEW FULL ITINERARY >>](#)



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