



**ANDANDO^o
TOURS**
Mainland Ecuador &
Galápagos Islands

2011

Cuenca and Train Train ride to a colonial city full of traditions...

Day 1

We travel south alongside the city of Quito above the cloud filled valley floor and down into the Avenue of the Volcanoes. The route takes us toward the majestic volcano, Cotopaxi, the neck of the moon in an ancient indigenous language.

Further down the road in the Andean town of Tambillo, we cross the tracks of the Ecuadorian Train Network; 965km of railroad that runs all the way to the coast and is currently under restoration. Our first stop is at the old working hacienda of La Alegria. Here we will taste typical highland breakfast dishes from the haciendas own production: fresh eggs, fruits and cow's milk from the dairy.

We will take a walk around this old working hacienda and learn about Humboldt's expedition to the cordillera, the natural mineral waters of the region and the surrounding haciendas with Incan ruins. If it is a clear day there will be spectacular views of the Avenue of the Volcanoes.

Cotopaxi, at 5,898 m.a.s.l., is one of the highest volcanoes in the world and easily the most visited summit in Ecuador due to its easy access for amateur climbers and experts alike. Our drive through the park brings us out onto the plain of Laguna de Limpiopungo, a lake fed by water from the volcano Rumiñahui which towers over it. It is thought that the Inca Rumiñahui hid his gold up on the mountain and many search parties have set out to find it some never to be seen again. Ducks, swallows, frogs and toads can be seen at the



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water's edge and you may spot an eagle or a great Andean Condor.

We head south along the Avenue of the Volcanoes; this stretch is dominated by the magnificent snow-covered peaks of Cotopaxi and its neighbours: Rumiñahui, Sincholagua and the Ilinizas.

On through the countryside, sheep and llamas grazing in the surrounding fields and farms, past the town of Latacunga; its name comes from Llacata Kunka which means God of the Lake. Latacunga is famous for its Mama Negra festival in which the virgin of Las Mercedes is honoured for giving the people the fertile land. This highland town is also renowned for its typical dishes; chugchucara, pork, potatoes and maqueño and allullas prepared with lard, eggs and flour.

Lunch is at the Hostería Rumipamba de las Rosas in Salcedo, an old hacienda that has been converted into a nice hotel.

Before moving on to Riobamba we will visit an ice cream store, where the sweet ice creams, in the shape of flags, are made with fresh local fruits. We continue south to the colonial city of Riobamba and if the weather is favourable we might see the majestic volcano of Chimborazo, the highest in Ecuador.

Riobamba, also known as the Sultan of the Andes, was the first city founded in Ecuador in the year 1534, it is a typical highland city surrounded by the snowy peaks of the Andes. Here we will visit the Museo de las Conceptas and enjoy a panoramic view of the main park, municipal palace, independence Monument and the colonial style train station.

The Museum houses Christian allegories in oil, sculptures and an ancient collection of priest's personal effects. We finish the day at Hostería Abraspungo, a colonial building in wood, in a similar style to the old haciendas of the region. Here we will spend the night before our early start the following day.

Day 2

After a delicious highland breakfast we travel to Alausí where our adventure on 'La Nariz de Diablo' begins (please ask for availability). The 'Devils Nose' as it is known, is an unforgettable train ride down an almost sheer rockface; the train makes switchbacks all the way down the cliff and then back up again. From Alausí we continue our journey



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on to Cuenca.

We visit the ruins of Ingapirca in Cañar; they are the most important Incan remains in Ecuador. The ruins are constructions of perfectly carved stones that fit together seamlessly and the main ruin is the elliptic structure of the Temple of the Sun. This temple was used for the ceremonies and ritual of the Cañari and Inca culture. Also among the remains are a cemetery, solar observatory, paths, priest's chambers and an indigenous plaza. Before heading back to Cuenca we will have a box lunch in the countryside surrounding the ruins.

Day 3

We will spend the day in Cuenca walking through the cobble-stoned streets past old colonial houses perched on the river banks and to the central plaza.

Here we will visit the old cathedral where we can see the private family chapels and the priest's catacombs. In the unfinished, new cathedral, the architect miscalculated the weight of the front two domes; they were too heavy for the underlying structure and never put in place, hence the uncompleted construction. Around the corner is the colourful flower market where indigenous women in traditional dress tend their overflowing stalls of roses.



You can stay the night at the Hotel Santa Lucia or the Casa del Águila, both old colonial houses that have been restored maintaining their original structure.

From here we head over to El Suspiro, a long established sweet shop offering Cuenca's most traditional sweets like mini quesadillas and frutitas de leche.

We head on to the Museo de las Conceptas, housed in the oldest cloister in Cuenca, where we will taste agua de pitimas, an aromatic water made with

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herbs said to cure all ills. The ground floor of the museum is dedicated to the history of the monastery and its people. On the first floor is a stunning collection of beautiful sculptures from the 17th through to the 19th century, colonial art, works in wood and marble, and a curious collection of toys, brought into the cloister by little girls entering into nun life.

We will have a typical lunch at El Maíz, a cosy home-style restaurant offering a menu of Andean fusion. Extravagant dishes such as Quínoa risotto and chachis (cheesefilled tamales) are served along with delicious juices like yahuana (apple and blackberry blend).

After lunch we take in the Museo del Banco Central and visit the Parque Arqueológico Pumapungo where we can see some of the remains of the Incan city of Tomebamba. It was the second most important city of the Incan Empire and is testimony to the syncretisation of the Cañari and Inca cultures. Our last stop is at a 20th century house on the ravine looking over the river, and colonial and modern Cuenca. It is home to a Panama Hat workshop where we will be shown the materials, the paja toquilla and techniques used in the elaboration of these world famous hats.

The evening meal is not included in the tour.

Day 4 (CUE 01 - 02)

At the viewpoint of Turi there are spectacular views of the historic centre, the mountains and Cajas National Park. We visit the town of Gualaceo, an Ecuadorian Heritage Site renowned for its colonial architecture.

Our first stop en route to Gualaceo is to a rush adobe house full of pedal looms used to create the beautiful shawls, famous in this region. Doña Ana will show us the materials and plant based dyes they use and how the shawls are woven. Further along our route we visit the Centro de Acopio de las Mujeres Campesinas where they will show us their woollen, leather and ceramic crafts. Then onto the fruit wine factory in Chicagüiña where they produce wines with fruits like capulí (small wine coloured grape-like fruits)

Next we arrive at Chordeleg, a town famous for its ceramics and gold and silver jewellery and whose name means 'stream of gold'. We will visit the Lituma Brother's gold and silver watermark workshop and go near to the central square to see the giant candonga (an enormous earring) they created. At the pottery of Doña Cristina we will see how they work with clay and you can purchase the pieces on display.

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Also on offer are the gold and silver jewellery crafted by local artist on display in the many stores lining the square. We finally arrive in Gualaceo for lunch at the Casona de Diego, a restaurant offering the regions typical dishes.

To end our day in Cuenca we suggest you to visit La Esquina de las Artes. Here you can relax in one of the many cafes and look around the handicraft shops.

The evening meal is not included in the tour.



Cajas National Park

Day 5 (CUE 03 - 04)

Option Cajas National Park

We have an early start for our day trip to Cajas National Park, one of the biggest wetland reserves in the country, with over 30,000 hectares of forest, more than 230 lakes and a great number of bird species. We arrive at the tourist information centre at Laguna La Toreadora where we will take a two hour walk around the lake.

The surrounding countryside is interspersed with interesting geological formations while orchids and mosses hide in the twisted trunks and branches of

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the Polilepis tree.

From here we make our way up to La Loma de las Tres Cruces, one of the highest points in the park and the only place in Ecuador where rain water falling on the eastern side of the hill flows to the Atlantic and water falling on the western side to the Pacific. History has it that the name comes from the many people that perished here as they took shelter on their long journey from the coast up into the highlands.

We head to the airport in the afternoon to catch the flight back to Quito.

Note:

Combine our tours to create your own itinerary staying at colonial haciendas and historic hotels.

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