

Ecuador Tour

14 Days Orchids and Incas

Day 1: Quito

We depart this morning from London to Quito in Ecuador due to arrive where we will be met by our coach and guide and transferred to our comfortable hotel here in Ecuador's capital city, the 4-star Hotel Dann Carlton, Av. Republica del Salvador N34-377 E Irlanda, Quito, (Tel: +593 (0)2224 9008). All rooms are en-suite with TV, telephone, radio, internet connection, mini-bar, hair dryer and iron. The hotel also offers superb Spa facilities, including a complete fitness room equipped with modern workout machines, a heated swimming pool and a wellness centre with sauna, Turkish bath, Jacuzzi and a wide range of therapeutics treatments.

Dinner included, with ½ bottle of wine. (Dinner)

Day 2: Quito

Following breakfast the remainder of the day is free to relax and acclimatize – please note that Quito is 5 hours behind GMT, lies at an altitude of around 3000m (9500ft) above sea level and is just 22km (14 miles) from the equator.

Dinner included, with ½ bottle of wine. (Breakfast, Dinner)

Day 3: Quito

Enjoy your breakfast. We begin today with a guided tour of our host city of Quito, which is set in a hollow at the foot of the volcano Pichincha, surrounded by hills and several snow-capped mountains. It is known for its treasure trove of colonial churches, monasteries, paintings, sculptures and carvings and an eclectic blend of Spanish, Flemish and Moorish architecture, which has been formally recognized by UNESCO.

First, we will be taken to a viewpoint called Guapulo, a natural terrace from which to admire the spectacular views of the Pichincha volcano, the Valleys of Cumbayá and Tumbaco and the eastern mountain chain. On a clear day the snow-capped Cayambe and Puntas volcanoes can be seen. We continue on a guided tour through the old part of the city, where the colonial heritage of Ecuador is very much in evidence and the culturally diverse history of Quito itself will be explained. Notable sights include Independence Square, the Government buildings and the Bishops Palace. We will visit the Cathedral and its museum and see the church of La Compañía, which has the most ornate and richly sculptured façade and interior – with so many beautiful 16th and 17th century churches and monasteries, Quito is known as the "Convent of America".

Lunch included.

Later we visit the Botanical Garden of Quito, which is located in the capital's popular La Carolina Park. Plants from all the different ecosystems of the country, such as the rare Frailejon and the Espelitia from the high paramo regions of the northern Andes, are exhibited, giving us a good introduction to some of the plants we may see in the wild later in the tour.

Evening at leisure in Quito.

Dinner included, with ½ bottle of wine. (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)

Day 4: Otavalo

After breakfast we depart by coach for Otavalo, travelling along a section of the Pan American Highway (La Panamericana). The road descends into the spectacular Guayllabamba gorge and with a bit of luck we should see the snow-capped peak of Cayambe. The Equator goes directly through the glacier of this immense volcano and in doing so reaches its highest point on earth. We break our two-hour journey to Otavalo with a visit to the Hacienda Cusin, a restored 17th-century Andean estate and now a hotel with beautiful gardens. Subsequent erosion of a large, melt-water fed lake created the rich, black lake-bed soil of Cusin's present gardens. That rich soil, cool nights and a predictable equatorial sun have conspired with avid gardeners to create several acres of continuously blooming gardens. Among the plants here are: belladonna, bougainvillea, agapanthus, acanthus, foxgloves, mauve, hollyhocks, roses, cosmos, daisies, aztec lily, cala lily, paws, orchids, hydrangea, lantana, fuchsia, ferns, lycheness, heliotrope, buddleia, pyrocanthus; a

variety of vines including jasmine & thumburgia; many succulents; avocado, banana, palm, eucalyptus, datura, magnolia, cedro, walnut, laurel, jacaranda, brazilian pepper, broom, arayan, grapefruit and lemon – whew!

After enjoying a walk around the gardens and a lunch of typical local fare, we continue to the market town of Otavalo, world-renowned for its crafts. The town consists of rather functional buildings with the Plaza de los Ponchos as the focal point at its centre. The indigenous residents of the area, whom you will hear speaking Quichua as their first tongue and Spanish as their second, have achieved economic prosperity as a result of their skill in weaving a tremendous variety of designs in belts, tapestries, ponchos and other clothing items. It will be hard to resist picking up a few souvenirs to take home.

Lunch included

On our way back to Quito we will visit one of the local rose plantations (from Monday to Friday) operating under the Flower Label Program, which promotes the socially and environmentally responsible flower, fern, plant and foliage cultivation by setting universal standards. The objective is to improve especially labour, social, health and safety standards, use of pesticides and chemicals and environmental protection standards.

After a long but interesting day we return to our hotel in Quito.

Dinner included, with ½ bottle of wine. (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)

Day 5: Pakakuna Gardens

After breakfast this morning we visit Pakakuna Gardens. Pakakuna is a newly designed senior resort which lies within an estate comprising some 30.000m² of gardens, one of the largest and most gorgeous of all private gardens in South America. The gardens, with more than 500 species of flowers and plants from all over the world, have thrived thanks to the favourable climate and the daily dedication of their owners. Visitors from around the world have marvelled at the species which have adapted so well to the soil irrigated by melted water and where fuchsias, brugmansia, bromeliads, orchids, roses among many others, bloom almost permanently. An expert botanical guide will lead us through the gardens. Lunch Box included.

Later we return to Quito and visit of the show room and two small greenhouses of the Ecuagenera Orchid Centre (from Monday to Saturday), which specializes in the cultivation, reproduction and sale of native Ecuadorian orchid species, and has its head office close to Cuenca (we will visit later).

Evening at leisure in Quito.

Dinner included, with ½ bottle of wine. (Breakfast, Box Lunch, Dinner)

Day 6: Quito - Mindo

After breakfast we check out of our hotel in Quito – please ensure any extras are paid for and you have all your luggage. We depart for the Equatorial Line Monument, known as Mitad del Mundo – the Middle of the World. Here we have the truly rare experience of standing in both the Northern and Southern Hemispheres simultaneously. The Equatorial Monument, located as focal point of the park, marks the spot where an 18th century French scientific expedition established the exact position of the Equator. The area has been built as a typical colonial town, with restaurants, gift shops and Post Office which issues commemorative stamps. We also visit the Ethnographical Museum, which shows the history of the Indian cultures of Ecuador.

From here we transfer to El Pahuma Orchid Reserve, a 650 hectare (1600 acre) cloud forest reserve. The lush vegetation is fed by abundant moisture from the mist-laden air and provides home to a multitude of epiphytes (air plants) including bromeliads, orchids, mosses and ferns. The botanical garden celebrates the forest as habitat; no trees were cut to create it. Plantings of hundreds of native species of orchids, aroids, bromeliads, ferns and shrubs are interspersed within the trees, highlighting the diversity and beauty of the region's flora. The garden is a good place to see native orchids in bloom and learn about the diversity of montane forest plants with the aid of informative signs. Lunch Box included.

Day 7: Mindo

Enjoy your breakfast. Our heads will be in the clouds today, as we set out on a full day tour of the Mindo Cloud Forest, which has one of the world's greatest diversities of flora and fauna, and we will be able to enjoy an abundance of plants and flowers. Tour leader will be in his element here and you are more than welcome to test the extent of his knowledge of native orchids and countless other plants!

Lunch is included today and dinner is served back at our hotel in the evening with ½ bottle of wine. (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)

Day 8: Mindo - Baños

After breakfast, we leave the hotel in Mindo – please ensure any extras are paid for and you have all your luggage. Today we head back towards Quito, and then continue southwards, along the “Avenue of the Volcanoes”, which was given its name by Alexander von Humboldt. Travelling once again on the Pan American Highway, which winds its way through the Andean mountain chain, we should have a spectacular view of the snow-capped volcano Cotopaxi, at 5897m one of the highest volcanoes of the world. The 33.000 ha highland zone, protected since 1975, belongs to one of the most attractive ecological reserves of the country. On a walk near the shallow lake ‘Laguna de Limpiopungo’ at an altitude of almost 4000m, we will learn about the typical vegetation of the so-called ‘Páramo’ region, with stunning views of Cotopaxi in the background. Lunch Box included.

We continue our way south in the direction of Baños, passing wonderful landscapes featuring some of the highest and most beautiful mountains and volcanoes of the Andes. All rooms are en-suite with balcony and the hotel offers several leisure facilities including Turkish baths, hot and cold pools and numerous spa treatments. Dinner is served in the evening.

Dinner included, with ½ bottle of wine. (Breakfast, Lunch Box, Dinner)

Day 9: Baños

Enjoy your breakfast. This morning we tour the town of Baños, known as ‘Gate to the East’ as it is barely 60km from the Amazonian rain forest and has an almost tropical vegetation and climate. Attractions include the Cathedral, where one of the nation’s miraculous virgins is venerated; small street cafés, restaurants and inviting gift-shops. The volcano Tungurahua (5016m) provides an impressive backdrop. Lunch Box included.

Later we travel east of Baños following the Pastaza Canyon, where spectacular waterfalls are to be seen, on our way to Puyo. Here we will visit the Omaere Ethno Botanical Park (from Tuesday to Sunday) - Omaere means “nature of the rainforest” in the Waorani language, one of the indigenous groups of the Ecuadorian Amazon. The Park was founded in the year 1993 by an indigenous Shuar woman with the help of two companions from France. They formed the Omaere Foundation and bought 15 hectares of land close to the town of Puyo. Now, years later, the plants have grown and the forest has been cared for with a focus on useful and medicinal plants. We will learn about the importance of these plants to the indigenous cultures of the Amazon, as well as enjoying the peace and tranquility of the rainforest. Dinner is served in the evening. Dinner included, with ½ bottle of wine. (Breakfast, Lunch Box, Dinner)

Day 10: Baños - Riobamba

After breakfast we leave Baños and visit the Chimborazo National Park, named after Ecuador’s highest mountain (6221m). As we climb higher the vegetation will change and we should see a number of alpine plants. With a bit of luck, we may also see wild llamas, alpacas and vicuñas.

Lunch Box included.

We will break our journey south in Riobamba, the capital of the province of Chimborazo where a great number of indigenous communities live. Dinner included, with ½ bottle of wine. (Breakfast, Lunch Box, Dinner)

Day 11: Riobamba - Cuenca

Following breakfast we continue on our way to Cuenca – please ensure any extras are paid before leaving and you have all your luggage. We stop en route for a visit to the Inca ruins of Ingapirca, the most important monument of pre-Spanish culture in Ecuador. The ruins are located on a grass-covered hill at an altitude of about 3100m and even before the construction of the sun-temple (1450-1480) this place is thought to have had an important spiritual significance for the Incas. In 1470, Yupanqui, the king of the Inca, subjugated the local Cañari tribe and built the town of Ingapirca. On a walk through the ruins where the Incas formerly lived and held their ceremonies, we will learn about their beliefs and rituals as well as the way the buildings were constructed – no mortar was used, instead the stones were cut to size and chiselled so that they fitted perfectly together. The most significant building, the temple of the sun, is aligned so that on the solstice the sun would fall directly on the doorway of a small chamber on top of the temple. Lunch Box included.

Later we continue to Cuenca, the third largest city of Ecuador, with some fine early 19th century architecture

Day 12: Cuenca

After breakfast, we are taken for a city tour of Cuenca, which was founded in 1557 on an Inca settlement, is redolent of the colonial period of Ecuadorian history. Many Ecuadorians themselves regard it as the most beautiful of their cities and it is noted for its arts, ceramics, panama hats and gold and silver products. Among the sights are the historical buildings located along the Tomebamba River, the ‘Todos los Santos’ ruins, the flower markets and the main square with the old and new Cathedral. We will also visit a panama hat factory – as every schoolboy knows, the MCC member’s favourite headwear comes not from Panama but from here in Ecuador! Lunch included.

In the afternoon we will visit the biggest orchid centre of Ecuador and have a tour through the green houses and show room. Ecuagenera was born out of the search for the proper use and preservation of a natural resource of incalculable value for Ecuador and the world: the orchid. Recent field research suggests that more than 4000 orchid species live in the wilds of Ecuador.

Dinner included, with ½ bottle of wine. (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner)

Day 13: Cuenca - Quito

Enjoy your breakfast - please ensure any extras are paid for at check-out and you have all your luggage. On this, our final day of touring, we visit El Cajas National Park, located to the west of Cuenca. The Park has an area of 28,544 hectares (70,500 acres) and was legally established on June 6, 1977. Humidity, relatively low temperatures, high altitude with low atmospheric pressure create an ecosystem that accumulates water-retentive organic material in the soil. The high grassland ecosystem (páramo) contains plants typical for high grasslands, 19 of them endemic to El Cajas, the dominant species being Calamagrostis intermedia (straw grass). Above 3300m the quinoa or "paper tree" (Polylepis) forest can be found - unusual trees with papery, continually-shedding bark. We also hope to see some of the bizarre puya bromeliads, whose flower spikes can grow up to 3m tall and support colourful flowers surrounded by protective 'wool'. Lunch box included.

Dinner included, with ½ bottle of wine. (Breakfast, Lunch Box, Dinner)

Day 14: Quito – back home

This morning we will check out of our hotel and transfer to the airport in time for our return flight .

End of the Program

Orchids and Incas Tour		
	SGL	DBL
Mainland Ecuador (1 Pax)	\$ 8.191	-
Mainland Ecuador (2 Pax)	\$ 6.278	\$ 5.495

***Price per person in USD**

INCLUDES:

- Private transportation and tours with English Speaking Guide in Mainland Ecuador
- Accommodation as listed on the itinerary
- Meals as listed on the itinerary
- Entrance fees as listed on the itinerary

NOT INCLUDED:

- Airfare CUE-UIO, USD 144 pp
- International flights
- Travel insurance
- Personal expenses
- Items not specified

NOTE: RATES AND ITINERARY subject to change without prior notice

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(ADA-25/07/2019)