TOUR CODE

EQ1

ADVENTURESABROAD

ECUADOR

Amazon, Otavalo & Avenue of the Volcanoes

12 days

Updated 09/02/2013

Day 1 *Arrive in Quito*

Arrive in Quito and transfer to our hotel. Quito (2788 m / 9,200 feet) is Ecuador's lovely capital city, nestled against Pichincha Volcano high in the Andes.

Overnight in Quito. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 *Quito - Amazon*

Today we fly to the Ecuadorian Amazon and the Cuyabeno Lodge, our preferred accommodation.

Our 30-minute flight takes us from Quito to Lago Agrio where we will meet our naturalist guide and continue by bus to the Cuyabeno Reserve bridge where we will continue our trip by boat for an other hour and a half. From the boat we will have the chance to see some of the wildlife of the reserve, like monkeys and many bird species such as the colourful macaw

Cuyabeno National Park is the largest protected area of Ecuador, covering about 603,380 hectares of mostly pristine jungle. The lakes and narrow rivers are the secret of wildlife visibility of Cuyabeno. Throughout the Amazon region, most national parks lack narrow rivers and can only be seen from very wide branches of the Amazon river and from trails through the jungle. In Cuyabeno, on the other hand, the shores are so close on both sides that you feel that you are part of the jungle. The Cuyabeno Amazon Rainforest Lodge is one of the longest established jungle lodges within the Amazon region and is operated by international conservationists who helped create and protect the park.

Seven detached cabins made of wood with thatched roofs scattered throughout the grounds, each sleeping two people in double or twin beds. All rooms have a balcony or terrace and private bathrooms with hot water showers.

Upon arrival we'll have some welcome drinks and, after a little break, go for the first jungle walk on the Chorongo Trail where we can learn more about the local flora and fauna. After dinner an optional night walk.

Please note that groups of fewer than 8 participants will not be accompanied by an Adventures Abroad Tour Leader for this Amazon portion (you will be very capably looked after by lodge staff & guides).

Overnight in the Amazon. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 3 *Amazon*

You will experience a pristine rainforest gallery that is home to 1,500 species of trees, hundreds of climbing vines, and exotic flowers, as well as 550 species of tropical birds, 13 species of monkeys and 1,000 beautiful butterflies. Guides with extensive knowledge of the Amazon wildlife and biodiversity can give guests the true experience of the Ecuadorian Amazon jungle. All of our jungle adventures will be guided by a naturalist guide.

This morning we'll visit the canopy tower where we will have the chance to spot more bird and mammal species. This afternoon we can enjoy an easy canoe ride and perhaps fish some piranhas! After dinner, an optional canoe trip to see some caimans.

Overnight in the Amazon. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 4 *Amazon*

Today we visit a local Siona community, an integral part of any complete tour of the Cuyabeno Reserve. This ethnic group lives along the Cuyabeno River in a community named Puerto Bolivar.

You will be able to experience native culture as it has existed unchanged for millennia. The local Shaman will instruct you in some of their religious practices and explain their medicinal knowledge, passed down from ancestors whose intimate relationship and deep understanding of the natural resources and rhythms of the jungle are the basis for many of our modern pharmaceuticals.

Overnight in the Amazon. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 5 *Amazon - Quito*

Today we transfer to the Cuyabeno Reserve bridge where the bus will be waiting to take us back to the Lago Agrio Airport for our flight back to Quito.

Overnight in Quito. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Quito - Otavalo Valley - Ibarra*

Today we journey north to the Otavalo Valley region.

In early years the Otavalo Valley was filled with farmers who raised crops in fertile lands where they lived. In the 14th century the Inca expansion reached north into the Otavalo area. The Caraquis who inhabited the area resisted the invaders. For 17 long years fierce fighting continued as the defiant Caraquis refused to be subjugated by the Incas. The Spanish arrived a few years after the Incas. They established a Hacienda system of workshops where Otavalenos were forced to work 15 hour days weaving fabrics. Today this weaving tradition forms the basis of a lucrative industry that has allowed the Otavaleno indigenous peoples to join the world economy while retaining their traditional values and skills. During our time in the valley we will have a chance to visit with the local Otavalenos and see them working their craft. We visit a traditional home with adobe walls and visit with the owners who raise guinea pigs, a local delicacy.

Our hosteria is located nearby the colonial town of Ibarra (2121 m / 7,000 feet), known as the "White City" since many of it houses are colonial style, red-tiled and whitewashed.

Overnight in Ibarra. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Ibarra - Otavalo Market - Avenue of Volcanoes - La Cienega*

This morning we visit Otavalo to experience the market. This market is centered around 'Poncho Plaza'. All day long, the whir of cotton candy machines, Andean pipe music, and Quichua, the native tongue derived from the Incan tongue, drift across the square. A blinding maze of coloured textiles spills from the square across the town.

We depart Otavalo to follow in the footsteps of the German scientist, Alexander von Humboldt, and rediscover what in 1802 he called the "Avenue of Volcanoes," a 325 km (202 mi) long valley between the major cordillera ranges. Massive and standing alone, the volcanoes provide brooding, snow-covered contrast to the green equatorial lushness. We see snow-capped summits, mystical brooks and rivers, terraced farmlands, small villages and fascinating cultures.

The area is also home to a number of exceptional haciendas, some of which date back to the 16th century. La Cienega Hacienda is located near the village of Lasso near the foot of Cotopaxi and has been witness to centuries of important events in the history of Ecuador.

Overnight at Hosteria La Cienega. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *La Cienega - Banos*

Today we continue our journey to Banos. This small town's elevation gives it an extremely agreeable climate and the surrounding mountainsides are brilliant green against the white summit of the Volcano Tungurahua. En route we have a short walk to view one of the most impressive waterfalls in South America, the Devil's Bowl.

The word Banos means "baths" and, as the name indicates, the highlight is the numerous hot spring baths in the area. Today we have opportunity to visit the hot springs as well as wander the streets and market of this picturesque town. You can also hike into the nearby hillsides, along farmers' donkey trails through fields of corn, passion-fruit, and various other local products. A must-see is the Basilica dedicated to the Virgin of the Holy Water, credited with performing many miracles in the Banos area.

Overnight in Banos. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Banos - Riobamba*

After lunch in Banos we travel through open farmland flowing over the high ridges of the Western Andes. On arrival in Riobamba we will have a walking tour including the cathedral and the restored 1920's era Post Office, with free time for independent wanderings.

Overnight in Riobamba. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Riobamba - Chimborazo Reserve - Quito*

We depart Riobamba and head for Chimborazo Reserve for a scenic drive around the base of this almost perfectly-conical dormant volcano. Chimborazo (6310m / 20,833 ft), the highest summit in Ecuador, is the gem of the reserve along with the neighboring Carihuairazo Volcano. In the Indian language, Chimborazo means "mountain of snow". It is an enormous mass of overwhelming scale. Alexander Von Humboldt made an unsuccessful attempt to climb the mountain in 1802, and believed it to be the highest mountain in the world. This distinction lasted until the discovery of Mt. Everest fifty years later. Chimborazo was finally climbed by Edward Whimper in 1880. The Reserve of Chimborazo was created in October of 1987 to protect the extensive moors, the flora and the fauna of the region.

We will make several photo stops on our drive, and enjoy this starkly beautiful volcanic landscape. We have a chance to

see a vicuna, an endangered species. Vicuna are the smallest of the Camelid family standing at just 2ft 8"-3ft 7" at the shoulder. They are extremely refined and delicate to look at, cinnamon in colour with an apron of long white hair on their chest. The vicuna produces one of the finest fibres of any animal in the world. We also visit an interesting indigenous community at the foot of the mountain where they have been successful in creating a responsible travel and tourism industry.

We continue north to Quito.

Overnight in Quito. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *Quito: City Tour*

Today we tour old Spanish Colonial Quito, preserved by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. As we enter the streets of Old Quito we step into the past, surrounded by centuries-old architecture. We stop at the commanding Legislative Palace, whose murals record Ecuador's history. We will see Quito's most beautiful religious buildings, including the cathedral, the Independence Plaza, San Francisco Church, and visit one of Quito's most impressive religious buildings, La Compania church, whose ornate facade and solid gold altars make it one of the most famous of South American churches. We visit the famous Panecillo Hill with its towering winged statue of the Virgin of the Apocalypse with views of north and south of Quito and the surrounding mountains.

This afternoon we travel 22 km (14 miles) north of Quito to the Equator line monument, known as the "middle of the world," where you can stand with one foot in the Northern and the other in the Southern Hemisphere. We also visit the excellent on-site ethnographic museum with exhibits pertaining to the many indigenous peoples of Ecuador.

PLEASE NOTE: Due to logistical reasons, this is a "floating day" that may occur at a different point of our programme.

Overnight in Quito. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 12 *Departure*

Departure from Quito.

BUEN VIAJE! Meal plan: Breakfast.