TOUR CODE

PQ2

ADVENTURESABROAD

PERU, BOLIVIA, ECUADOR with Nazca

Ecuador's Amazon, Otavalo & Avenue of the Volcanoes

28 days

Updated 06/01/2013

Day 1 *Arrive in Lima*

Today we arrive in Lima, Peru.

In recent years, this city has undergone some wonderful restorations of the plazas, ornate facades, and wooden balconies for which it is famous. Named the 'City of Kings' by the Spanish Conquistadors, Lima is the capital of Peru. Founded in 1535 by Francisco Pizarro, where the River Rimac meets the Pacific Ocean, this was the most important Spanish city during the colonial era with a population of about 100,000 inhabitants. Today the city is home to more than 7 million
people.

Overnight in Lima (Miraflores). Hotel Exclusive or similar. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 *Lima - Nazca Lines Scenic Overflight*

We have an early morning* private transfer to the bus station for the Cruz del Sur or Ormeno Royal Class public bus to Nazca (6-7 hrs). We have an arrival transfer from Nazca bus station to the Casa Andina hotel. After a brief break for refreshment, you will head directly to the small airport to board your scenic overflight of the 2,000 year old Nazca Lines, comprised of about three hundred figures made of straight lines and geometric shapes most clearly visible from the air.

The lines were supposedly built by an ancient civilization called the Nazca, though no one knows for sure who built them or why. Since their discovery, the Nazca Lines have inspired fantastic explanations from ancient gods, a landing strip for returning aliens, a celestial calendar, used for rituals probably related to astronomy, or a map of underground water supplies. Your total flying time will be about one hour; the total time spent over the lines themselves will be approximately 25-35 minutes.

After the flight we drive back to our hotel in Nazca.

* Given the early morning departure, passengers with flight routings that land in Lima late on Day 1 might consider arriving a day earlier.

Overnight in Nazca. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 *Nazca - Ica*

After breakfast, we visit the Maria Reiche Museum. Maria Reiche (1903-1998) was a German-born mathematician and archaeologist famous for her research on the Nazca Lines. We then drive from Nazca to Ica and check into the Hotel Las Dunas. Our afternoon is free to enjoy the surroundings or visit the Ica Regional Museum.

This evening we drive to Huacachina, built around a small lake in the desert. Called the "Oasis of America," it serves as a resort for local families from the nearby city of Ica. Legend holds that the lagoon was created when a beautiful native princess was apprehended at her bath by a young hunter. She fled, leaving the pool of water in which she had been bathing to become a lagoon.

Return to Ica.

Overnight in Ica. Hotel Las Dunas. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Ica - Ballestas Islands - Lima*

This morning we travel to Paracas and enjoy a boat trip to the spectacular Ballestas Islands, often described as Peru's answer to the Galapagos. Though they don't quite match the splendour of their northern cousins, they are quite spectacular in their own right. The islands have been eroded to form countless natural caves and arches. In fact, this is where the islands' name comes from -- the word Ballesta means 'bow' (as in archery). There are colonies of thousands of seabirds such as pelicans, Inca terns and cormorants as well as a small colony of Humboldt penguins. You will also see hundreds of sealions and often schools of dolphin.

We return to Paracas and the take the bus north, arriving back in Lima late afternoon. Tonight we meet other incoming group members who are not participating in the Nazca extension.

Overnight in Lima (Miraflores). Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Lima: City Tour*

This morning we start our tour with a visit to San Francisco's Church to visit the extensive catacombs that lie underneath. We then continue to the Plaza de Armas, the most important plaza in Lima. The oldest surviving part of the plaza is the impressive bronze fountain, erected in 1650. Surrounding the plaza is the exquisite Archbishop's Palace, the cathedral, and the Government Palace where handsomely uniformed presidential guards are on duty all day. We visit the cathedral where the great conquistador Francisco Pizarro's tomb lies.

We then proceed to the Larco Museum, which showcases remarkable chronological galleries and an excellent overview on 3,000 years of development of Peruvian pre-Columbian history. Located in a unique vice-royal mansion of the 18th century built over a 7th century pre-Columbian pyramid, is surrounded by beautiful gardens. Features the finest gold and silver collection from ancient Peru and the famous erotic archaeological collection, one of the most visited Peruvian tourist attractions. For an unforgettable experience, Larco is one of the few museums in the world where visitors can also choose to enter the storage area with its 45,000 classified archaeological objects.

Later we head to the trendy area of Miraflores where people stroll along the cliff tops and watch the sun setting on the Pacific Ocean. The best location is the new "Love Park," with its magnificent monument to lovers at its centre. We continue to the Hacienda Mamacona for an exhibition of beautiful Peruvian Paso horses, accompanied by a delicious dinner of Criollo food and a folkloric show.

Overnight in Lima (Miraflores). Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Lima - Cuzco - Urubamba Valley - Ollantaytambo - Yucay*

Early this morning we fly to Cuzco, located in a fertile valley at 3354 m (11,004 feet). This is the archaeological capital

of the Americas and the ancient capital of the Inca Empire that, at its height, stretched from Colombia in the north, through Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia, and down to central Chile in the south. Although the empire already existed in the 12th century, it remained small until the mid-15th century. Over the next 100 years, it expanded massively but declined due to the civil war and the conquest by the Spanish conquistadors under Francisco Pizarro in 1533.

On arrival we will travel by road into the Urubamba Valley, or "Sacred Valley of the Incas," along one of the most scenic drives on our trip, to the Inca ruins of Ollantaytambo located on a spectacular ridge with deep valleys on either side. We can admire the carefully constructed and maintained farming terraces on the surrounding hillsides.

We continue to the town of Yucay on the bank of the Urubamba River (2300m / 7,590 ft). This is an attractive little town of particularly fertile lands whose name translated into Spanish means "deceit" or "bewitchment". According to legend, in the middle of the 15th century, the Inca Huayna Capac was captivated by the incomparable magnificence of Yucay's setting and decided to settle here.

Overnight in Yucay. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Yucay - Machu Picchu Area*

Today we take the early morning train from Urubamba to Aguas Calientes and Machu Picchu. The train journey to Machu Picchu is a highlight of any trip to the Andes; the scenery is simply spectacular, and the train allows you to enjoy it in comfort. The +/- 3 hour trip takes us through a changing landscape with wonderful vistas of the mountains and, deep in its dramatic canyon, the beautiful Urubamba River. Our early arrival from Urubamba ensures that we are at the site before the tourist throngs arrive on the train from Cuzco later in the morning.

Upon arrival at the Aguas Calientes train station, a bus will take us on the 6 km (4 mile) twisting journey up the mountainside to the site of Machu Picchu. Having already dropped our baggage at our hotel, we proceed immediately for a guided 3-hour walking tour of the ruins (please be prepared with all that you need for our tour). We will enter the site through the House of the Terrace Caretakers, which flank the agricultural sector. Once on the site, we will see, among other features: the Temple of the Sun, the Fountain Caretaker's House, the Royal Sector, and the puzzling Temple of the Three Windows. We will also see the Common District, the Sacred Rock, and the prison-like Temple of the Condor.

Machu Picchu, popularly known as the 'Lost City of the Incas,' is an ancient city of stone palaces, towers, temples and staircases. It is a very mysterious place, and to this day our knowledge of it remains sketchy. There are no records or artifacts on the site to indicate what any of the buildings were used for. Archaeologists have ascertained that the site was most likely a ceremonial centre and possibly used for administrative purposes for the populous region.

After our tour, you may choose to proceed to the hotel or remain on the site for some independent exploration (your ticket is good for the day), and return to the hotel on your own using the return portion of your bus ticket.

Overnight at Agua Calientes (near Machu Picchu). Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Machu Picchu Area - Train to Cuzco*

A large part of the beauty of Machu Picchu is created by its setting on a mountain top surrounded by deep valleys. By staying for a second day to visit Machu Picchu, rather than visiting as a day trip from Cuzco, we are able to savour the atmosphere of this very special place.

In the early morning of our second day at Machu Picchu, most group members choose to take the bus back up to the

site with the weather-dependent hope of seeing the mist-clad mountains greet the morning sun. Weather notwithstanding, the best thing about going up the second day is being there early when there are fewer people, allowing time to "soak it in," as well as the opportunity to climb Huayna Picchu and/or to the Sun Gate (approximate optional costs to revisit the site today: bus 12 USD round trip, and 40 USD site entrance, payable locally).

During our time at Machu Picchu, we will also include a visit to the Manuel Chavez Ballon Site Museum, which focuses on the "discovery", excavation, and history of Macchu Picchu. On display are historical photos, including photos of Hiram Bingham at Machu Picchu shortly after he came across the ruins, informative write-ups on the construction of Machu Picchu and the life of the Incas, and artifacts found at the site. Outside the museum is a very lush botanical garden running along the river; some plants are labeled and there are a few short trails. This is a nice shady area to rest on a hot day and is an easy 25 minute walk from Aguas Calientes down the road leading to Machu Picchu.

Later in the afternoon we board the direct nonstop VISTADOME train from Aguas Calientes to Cuzco. On route we will see the locals working their potato and grain fields, and see children at play near their adobe brick homes.

Overnight in Cuzco. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Cuzco Area*

This morning we visit some of the most important Inca sites in the Cuzco area.

Sacsayhuaman is an impressive complex which, like so many others of that time, had both a religious and military purpose. The fortress known as the 'storehouse of the sun' incorporates some of the largest stones ever used in a building. The zig-zag walls represent the teeth of the sacred puma and provide an excellent defensive structure. The stones fit so perfectly together without mortar that not even moss can grow in the cracks!

In the afternoon we return to Cuzco and enjoy a tour of the town. We visit Coricancha, the temple of the sun which was the most important location in the Inca empire. Entombed in the closed cloister of the Sto Domingo Church, these sacred walls were hidden from modern civilization until the colonial walls were brought down in 1950 by a powerful earthquake. We also visit the church of San Blas with its fabulously carved pulpit. Wandering the narrow streets of the San Blas artisan region we make our way to the cathedral which towers impressively over the Plaza Mayor. Inside we find precious paintings from the Cuzco School of Art, one of the most prolific of its era.

This Inca city was laid out around a great central square in the shape of a puma, the god of lightning. Today, stone walls built by the Incas line most of Cuzco's central streets and form the foundations of colonial and modern buildings. The Inca buildings were so well built that the Spaniards simply knocked down the upper parts of the Inca temples and palaces and built their churches and mansions on top of the Inca walls. Shortly after the Spanish conquest, the capital was moved to Lima on the coast. Thus Cuzco has retained a wonderful, untouched colonial atmosphere. The culture is also very much alive here, and is evident in the music, clothing and handicrafts of the people.

We have dinner at a local restaurant where we can try some typical Peruvian dishes. One may wish to try the "Pisco sour", a powerful drink made with a Peruvian liquor distilled from white grapes.

Overnight in Cuzco. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Cuzco - Pisac - Cuzco*

This morning we visit the ruins at Tambo Machay, Puca Pucara and Qenko. The latter is an Inca sacrificial site carved

with inscriptions.

We continue to Pisac with its lively market where you will encounter traditionally dressed locals with whom you can barter for colourful craft items. You will see many unique Andean musical instruments as well as dazzling textiles. Peruvian woolen items are justifiably famous for their imaginative designs, based on Inca art and the local flora and fauna. You can buy sweaters and caps made from the extremely warm wool of alpacas and llamas.

We return to Cuzco with balance of the day at leisure.

Overnight in Cuzco. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *Cuzco - "Andean Explorer" - Puno*

Today we take the "Andean Explorer" train from Cuzco to Puno, a full day's journey.

From Cuzco, our train heads south-east, following the Huatanay River through green fields dotted with willow trees and eucalyptus groves, passing outlying communities gathered around colonial churches that conceal their artistic treasures behind crumbling adobe facades. The first half of the journey is dominated by magnificent Andes, towering over the deep valleys of the meandering Huatanay River. It then reaches the gentler, rolling Andean Plains, where vicuna and alpaca are often seen. This is a wild, high, windswept and sunburned prairie of isolated communities of shepherds and cattle farmers, wedged between the two distant branches of the Andes visible occasionally on either horizon, when not melting completely with the giant cumulus clouds that dominate the skyline.

The train continues to climb La Raya, some 210 km (130 mi) from Puno. At 4321m (14,260 ft) above sea level, we reach the highest point on our journey, a cold, remote place whose surrounding snow-draped peaks are often shrouded by mist or fine rain, and whose eerie silence is at least partly attributable to eardrums blocked by the dizzying altitude.

Puno, at 3830m (12,562 feet), is the main settlement on the Peruvian shore of Lake Titicaca and the highest place on our tour in which you will spend some time. Puno is the greatest centre of Peruvian folk dancing and traditional instruments; the markets and streets of Puno are bustling with the brightly coloured costumes of the different groups of the region.

Overnight in Puno. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 12 *Puno: Floating Islands*

This morning we travel north and east to Sillustani, situated on a wind-swept peninsula on tiny Lake Umaya. The burial towers of the nobles of the Colla civilisation are up to 12 metres / 40 feet high. However, it is not known exactly when they were built. Known as chullpas, it is thought that whole families were buried in the towers.

Returning through the stark landscape to Puno, we take an afternoon boat excursion to the floating islands of Los Uros. The Uros people began their floating existence centuries ago in an effort to isolate themselves from their rivals, the Collas and the Incas. Today, about 300 people live on the islands. The islands are constructed from many layers of floating tortora reeds which grow in the shallow waters of Lake Titicaca. The reeds rot away from the bottom and are replaced at the top, so the ground is soft and springy as you walk over it. Even the buildings on the islands are made of tortora. The whole life of the Uros people revolves around the reeds. They even eat the lower stalk and root, which is supposed to taste like celery.

Today the Uros live mainly from fishing, including catching the giant pejerray which can grow up to 13.5 kg / 30 lb.

Overnight in Puno. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 13 *Puno, Peru - Copacabana, Bolivia*

Today we travel round the Peruvian side of the lake and cross into Bolivian territory. The village of Chucuito is built over an Inca settlement and has an Inca sundial on display which was assembled in the mid-1800s using colonial, Inca, and modern era stones. The turbulent history of the lake region can be seen in the many Inca and pre-Inca sites as well as Spanish colonial churches dotted across the area.

We drive along the western shores of the lake taking in various small towns which are famous for their colonial churches and architecture. One of the most unusual towns along the lake is Juli, which has four huge churches and yet is a small town. The town was originally the Spanish capital of the lake region and the Spaniards hoped to convert most of the indigenous population to Catholicism. While building the Church of Santa Cruz the local stonemasons incorporated Inca motifs into the Christian decorations.

This afternoon we will enjoy a relaxed walking tour of Copacabana. For centuries, Copacabana has been a site of religious pilgrimage, beginning with the Incas. We visit the Cathedral of the Indian Virgin, built between 1605 and 1820. It is a brilliant Moorish structure with mudejar domes, colourful azulejos (decorative tiles), and a beautiful church courtyard decorated with wonderful flower gardens. Every year, hundreds of thousands of pilgrims travel from distinct parts of Bolivia and other Latin American countries to take part in religious festivals in Copacabana. Legend says that if the statue is removed Lake Titicaca will rise up and flood the whole Altiplano region.

For the energetic, there is a walk up to Cerro Calvario (Calvary Hill) for beautiful views of the town and lake. Pilgrims pass the 14 stations of the cross to reach the top but once there they encounter, as so often in Bolivia and Peru, a fusion of Catholic and pagan beliefs.

Overnight in Copacabana. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 14 *Lake Titicaca*

Today is spent exploring Isla del Sol in Lake Titicaca by boat. This is the most important of the thirty-six islands in the lake. Lake Titicaca, South America's largest lake, straddles the Bolivia-Peru border and is said to be the highest navigable body of water in the world at an altitude of 3810 m (12,497 ft). Lake Titicaca was once much larger than the 8560 sq kilometres (3,305 square mi) it occupies today. The great city of Tiahuanaco was built at the edge of the lake, but today it is more than 25 km (15 mi) from the lake. This reduction in the lake size has had a tremendous effect on the climate of the Altiplano region over the past 1,000 years and has made this cradle of cultures able to support far fewer people today.

The cleverly terraced slopes of Isla del Sol contain numerous ruins and small traditional villages. We see the Inca steps where water from a natural spring runs through three stone channels. The sacred water is supposed to cure ailments and bring long life. The three stone channels represent the three commandments of Inca life: Don't Lie, Don't Steal, and Don't be Lazy. The Inca society was highly organised and industrious; laziness was punishable by death.

We return to Copacabana for dinner. This evening you may like to take a stroll along the lake shore at sunset.

Overnight in Copacabana. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 15 *Copacabana - Tiahuanaco - La Paz*

This morning we drive towards La Paz. We take first a ferry across from the peninsula on which Copacabana sits to the Bolivian mainland and drive to La Paz, one of the world's highest major cities.

En route we stop at Tiahuanaco. This flat, desolate landscape would not seem capable of supporting life, and yet this is where the majority of Bolivia's population live. Here we may see llamas and alpacas, the only surviving relatives of the camel found in the Americas. Tiahuanaco is an ancient ceremonial site constructed around AD 700. After about AD 1200 the Tiahuanaco people disappeared, becoming another 'lost' civilisation. We know little about the people of Tiahuanaco but it is believed that their civilisation developed over a period of 2,000 years and then mysteriously vanished.

Our destination is La Paz, located at 3686 m (12,090 ft) above sea level. La Paz is situated in a bowl-shaped canyon in the Cordillera Real (Royal Range) of the Andes. As we travel across the Altiplano, the ground suddenly drops away 400 m (1,312 ft) to reveal the city hidden in a bowl in the mountains.

This evening you may like to enjoy a 'pena', a traditional Bolivian folk music performance (optional; subject to availability). The music is played on typical Andean instruments such as quenas, zamponas pan pipes and charangos, small, banjo-like instruments, the bodies of which are traditionally made from armadillo shells.

Overnight in La Paz. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 16 *La Paz: City Tour*

The mountains surrounding La Paz soar to an average of 5500 m (18,040 ft) above sea level. The most spectacular views of the city come on a clear evening when one can see the twinkling lights of the city stretching up the hillsides, under the the snow-capped triple peak of Mount Illimani at 6402 m (20,999 ft).

Today will explore the Spanish colonial quarter of the city and visit the Archeological Museum of Bolivia, which has a special exhibit dedicated to the site of Tiahuanaco visited yesterday. We also experience the colourful markets of La Paz. The markets are a great place to observe the colourfully-dressed native Quechua and Aymara-speaking people. The women wear many layers of petticoats covered by a colourful dress, and over their shoulders they sling a multi-coloured striped blanket called a 'phulla' in which they carry their groceries or babies -- or both! On their heads they wear a bowler hat (which always appears to be too small) at a jaunty angle. The British brought the bowler hat to Bolivia when they were building the railway and somehow it became part of the everyday dress of Andean women.

We finish our day with a visit to a great place to buy some of the handicrafts, such as colourful sweaters woven from sheep's wool or from the light-weight, very warm wool of the native Andean animals. We finish at the unusual Mercado de los Brujos, better known as the Witches' Market, where you will see all sorts of potions, herbs and folk remedies used to guard against evil spirits.

Overnight in La Paz. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 17 *La Paz, Bolivia - Quito, Ecuador*

Today we fly to Ecuador (usually via Lima). We arrive in Quito and settle in our hotel. Quito is Ecuador's charming capital city, nestled against Pichincha Volcano high in the Andes.

Overnight in Quito. Hotel Reina Isabel or similar. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 18 *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 19 *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 20 *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 21 *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 22 *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 23 *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 24 *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 25 *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 26 *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 27 *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 28 *Departure*

Departure from Quito.

BUEN VIAJE! Meal plan: Breakfast.