Tour Code
PQ10

ADVENTURESABROAD

PERU, BOLIVIA & ECUADOR

Featuring Ecuador's Amazon & Andes

28 days

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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).

Included Meal(s): Dinner

Day 2 Lima: City Tour

Few cities wear their contradictions as openly as Lima. Skyscrapers in Miraflores look out over mud-brick pyramids that predate the Inca by a thousand years; Spanish baroque cathedrals rise from stones the conquistadors stripped from earlier temples. Today's tour traces that long, layered story.

The day begins in the Historic Center, a UNESCO World Heritage district where the Plaza de Armas is framed by the Government Palace, the Municipality, and the Cathedral of Lima — its interior a centuries-long conversation between ambition, earthquake, and repair. Nearby, the Convent of Santo Domingo offers a quieter counterpoint: a handsome colonial complex holding the relics of three Peruvian saints, its cloisters a refuge from the plaza's bustle.

The afternoon shifts registers. In the residential district of Pueblo Libre, the Larco Museum occupies a graceful 18th-century viceregal mansion built — in a satisfying irony — atop a pre-Columbian pyramid. The collection spans more than 3,000 years of Andean civilization, from exquisite goldwork to ceremonial ceramics of extraordinary refinement.

The day closes at Huaca Pucllana, a massive adobe pyramid rising improbably from a quiet Miraflores neighbourhood. Built by the Lima Culture around 400 CE — centuries before the Inca — it served as a ceremonial centre for a civilization most visitors have never heard of. Standing at its base as the modern city hums around it, the full arc of the day comes into focus: Lima isn't a colonial city with an indigenous past. It's an ancient city that a colonial chapter happened to inhabit.

Overnight in Lima.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Lima - Fly to 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 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. Light snacks and beverages are included on board. 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.

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.

Upon arrival at the Aguas Calientes train station, we will have the opportunity to pick up a packed lunch before a bus takes 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 our timed entrance and 2.5-hour guided walking tour.** During this guided exploration we will visit the central and lower areas of the citadel, home to Machu Picchu's most iconic sections, including the Temple of the Sun, the Temple of the Three Windows, and the residential area. This route offers beautiful views with Huayna Picchu mountain in the background—perfect for memorable photos—and is quieter with fewer steps, allowing us to take our time and appreciate the site's historical and architectural details.

Following our guided tour, you'll have the opportunity to continue exploring the site on our own for several additional hours. It's important to note that the site operates on a one-way circuit system—visitors cannot backtrack or re-enter previous areas, and park guards actively manage visitor flow to ensure a smooth experience for all. After spending the afternoon soaking in the extraordinary atmosphere of this mountaintop sanctuary, we return by bus to Aguas Calientes.

* PLEASE bring an overnight bag for this one night at Aguas Calientes as the train enforces strict luggage limits. Our larger bags will be transported back to Cuzco for us. Please also note that, due to group size limits, groups exceeding 15 participants will be split between two guides for today's site tour.

** Machu Picchu ticketing is managed directly by the government authorities and is beyond the control of Adventures Abroad. While we will do everything in our power to confirm exactly which circuit we will be completing as a group well in advance, this may not be confirmed until closer to your chosen tour start date.

Overnight at Agua Calientes (near Machu Picchu).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Machu Picchu Area - 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, some group members may 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 (an optional excursion).* 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.

During our time in the village below the site, 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 labelled 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 VISTADOME train from Aguas Calientes to Ollantaytambo Station (1.5 hours) from where we bus back to Cuzco.

* Due to strict limits on the number of visitors daily, if you elect to visit again today (optional - at your expense), you will need to book well advance. Full details will be included in your pre-trip info package provided at time of booking.

Overnight in Cuzco.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Cuzco Area Touring

Today we enjoy a combined half-day excursion visiting some of the most important Inca sites in the Cuzco area along with key landmarks in the city itself.

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!

We also 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 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.

Our excursion concludes by early afternoon. 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Cuzco & Pisac

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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Cuzco - Pucara - Raqchi - Puno & Lake Titicaca

Today we travel by road to Puno on the shores of Lake Titicaca (+/- 7 hours, with stops).

From Cuzco, we head south-east, 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 followed by 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.

Along the way we visit Pucara (aka Pukara), where we visit the ruins of the Pucara culture and its museum, located at the breathtaking elevation of about 3900m (almost 13,000 feet). This town is known across Peru for the archaeological site of Pukara and a vibrant modern pottery-making tradition. The fort is made of large walls, terraces, and staircases and was part of defense of Cuzco in particular and the Inca Empire in general.

We then stop at Raqchi and the ruined Temple of Wiracocha, named for a deity believed to be the giver of all life; the temple was thought to be built to to appease him and honour him. The temple is said to be specifically built so that people had to walk in a zigzag motion, which is related to the relationship between Wiracocha and Inca cosmology.

Finally we will pay a visit to the district of Andahuaylillas with its Baroque church, known as the "Sistine Chapel of South America".

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 we 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Lake Titicaca: Floating Islands & Taquile Island

We will begin our day by visiting 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.

Later today we will make our way to Taquile Island. Here we will have some time to explore and also have lunch in a local home.

Overnight in Puno.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 10 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 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.

Later today we return to Copacabana. You may like to take a stroll along the lake shore at sunset.

Dinner on your own this evening.

Overnight in Copacabana.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 12 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.

Overnight in La Paz.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 13 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 La Paz, Bolivia - Fly to 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 15 Quito - Fly to Amazon Region

We take to the skies this morning, trading the cool Andean air for the warm, humid embrace of the Amazon basin. Our flight delivers us to a world where time moves differently, measured not by clocks but by the rhythm of flowing water and the calls of exotic birds.

The Napo Cultural Centre welcomes us from the banks of the Napo River, the Amazon's largest tributary in Ecuador and our gateway into Yasuni National Park—one of Earth's most biodiverse sanctuaries. We board traditional ecological canoes powered by outboard motors, beginning a two-hour journey downstream that feels like travelling back through evolutionary time.

As we glide along the chocolate-coloured waters, herons stand motionless as sculptures while kingfishers dart like jewelled arrows across our bow. Terns wheel overhead, and the dense green walls of the rainforest stretch endlessly in all directions. Upon arrival, we're greeted with a traditional Kichwa drink, our first taste of indigenous hospitality that has welcomed river travellers for generations.

This afternoon, we walk to the Napo's sandy beaches to witness one of nature's daily spectacles—an Amazonian sunset painting the sky in brilliant oranges and purples while the forest awakens with its nocturnal symphony.

PLEASE NOTE that your Amazon stay will not be accompanied by an Adventures Abroad Tour Leader, during which you will be very capably looked after by lodge staff & guides. Please also note that the itinerary description for the next few days in the Amazon is subject to change by lodge staff and is indicative only.

Overnight in the Amazon

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 16 Amazon Activities

We begin before the forest fully awakens, boarding our canoe as mist still clings to the water's surface. Our destination is one of the Amazon's most spectacular natural gatherings—a parrot clay lick where approximately 11 species of parrots, including brilliant macaws and diminutive parrotlets, congregate to consume essential minerals from exposed riverbank clay.

This morning ritual, dependent on weather and season, offers us front-row seats to a symphony of colour and sound as dozens of birds create a living kaleidoscope against the green backdrop. The clay provides nutrients these birds cannot obtain from their fruit and seed diet, making this site crucial to their survival and a privilege for us to witness.

We then proceed to the Interpretation Center "Kuri Muyu," where Kichwa women share the profound knowledge their ancestors have accumulated over millennia. Here, we discover how every vine, leaf, and bark serves a purpose in traditional medicine and daily life, understanding that the forest is not wilderness to be conquered but a pharmacy and hardware store perfected by nature.

This afternoon, we climb a 35-metre (115 ft) observation tower that lifts us into the rainforest canopy—a vertical journey into different worlds. At the top, we're eye-level with howler monkeys whose territorial calls can be heard 5km (3 mi) away, while toucans display their magnificent beaks and three-toed sloths move with deliberate slowness that has ensured their survival for 35 million years.

Overnight in the Amazon

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 17 Amazon Activities Continued

We venture deeper into Kichwa territory today, visiting community projects that demonstrate how indigenous peoples have sustainably managed these forests for over 4,000 years. Our hosts share their worldview—a philosophy where humans are not separate from nature but integral threads in its vast web.

Walking among giants, we stand before ceiba trees that soar 60m (200 ft) skyward, their massive buttressed roots creating natural amphitheatres. These forest cathedrals have witnessed centuries pass, serving as landmarks and spiritual centres for generations of Kichwa families. We discover bamboo groves so dense they create their own microclimates, and vines thick as ship cables that provide highways for monkeys and pathways for countless other creatures.

As afternoon light filters through the canopy in golden shafts, we board smaller canoes for Anangu stream. This intimate waterway winds through primary forest largely untouched by outside influence, where every bend reveals new wonders. As darkness falls, we search for caimans—ancient predators whose eyes reflect our lights like rubies floating on black water.

The forest's nocturnal awakening surrounds us with a symphony that includes over 160 species of frogs, each contributing their unique voice to nature's oldest composition. Tonight, we understand why indigenous peoples consider the rainforest alive with spirits—here, every shadow moves and every sound tells a story.

Overnight in the Amazon

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 18 Amazon - Fly to Quito

We rise at 4:30 AM to participate in wayusa (optional), an ancient Kichwa ritual that connects communities with their ancestors and the forest spirits. This sacred tea ceremony, accompanied by traditional songs passed down through generations, energizes both body and soul while sharing wisdom that predates written history.

As we prepare for our return journey to Coca, the modern world feels simultaneously near and impossibly distant. The motorised canoe carries us back along the Napo, but now we see this mighty river through different eyes—understanding its role as a highway, a source of life, and a sacred waterway that has sustained indigenous communities for millennia.

For those seeking final aquatic adventures, tubing and regatta activities on the Napo provide playful farewells to this liquid landscape. Our

flight back to Quito lifts us from the green infinity of the Amazon basin to the sharp-edged reality of the Andes, trading humid warmth for crisp mountain air.

Tonight in Quito, we carry with us the sounds, scents, and profound lessons of the rainforest—understanding that we've witnessed one of Earth's most critical ecosystems and the people who have been its guardians for countless generations.

Overnight in Quito

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 19 Quito: City Tour

We step into the cobblestone streets of Old Quito this morning, entering a UNESCO World Heritage Site where Spanish colonial ambition created one of South America's most magnificent architectural treasures. Founded in 1534 on the ruins of an important Inca city, Quito became the artistic heart of the Spanish empire in the New World.

At the commanding Legislative Palace, elaborate murals chronicle Ecuador's tumultuous journey from indigenous kingdoms through colonial rule to independence. We discover the cathedral where Ecuador's founding fathers planned revolution, and stand in Independence Plaza where liberty was first declared in 1809—ten years before the rest of South America followed.

San Francisco Church astounds us with its massive scale and intricate stonework, but La Compania church truly takes our breath away. Here, Jesuit architects created what many consider the most ornate religious building in the Americas, with every surface covered in gold leaf that required seven tons of precious metal. The baroque facade alone took 160 years to complete, representing the accumulated wealth of an entire continent flowing through colonial Quito.

We then ascend Panecillo Hill, where the towering Virgin of the Apocalypse spreads her wings 45m (148 ft) above the city. From this vantage point, Quito spreads below us like a living map, with the snow-capped peaks of the Andes forming a magnificent amphitheatre around this remarkable capital.

This afternoon, we journey 22km (14 mi) north to the Equator line monument, where we stand with one foot in each hemisphere. The on-site ethnographic museum reveals Ecuador's incredible diversity—a country where 14 distinct indigenous nations maintain their unique languages, traditions, and worldviews.

Overnight in Quito

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 20 Quito - Otavalo Valley - Ibarra

We journey north today into the Otavalo Valley, where the threads of history weave together indigenous resistance, Spanish colonialism, and modern economic success into a story unlike anywhere else in South America.

In the 14th century, when Inca expansion reached northward, the fierce Caraquis people inhabited these fertile valleys. For 17 years, these defiant warriors resisted Inca subjugation in battles that became legendary throughout the empire. The Spanish arrival brought different chains—a hacienda system forcing Otavalenos into 15-hour weaving shifts that nearly destroyed their culture.

But the Otavalenos transformed oppression into opportunity. Today, their weaving tradition forms the foundation of a lucrative industry that has allowed indigenous peoples to join the global economy while proudly maintaining their traditional values, language, and distinctive dress. We visit a traditional adobe home where guinea pigs—considered a delicacy for over 5,000 years—still scurry around the kitchen, representing one of the Andes' original sources of protein.

In Otavalo city, we wander through some of South America's most vibrant handicraft markets, where textiles in brilliant colours display techniques perfected over centuries. The quality and artistry evident in every weaving, carving, and piece of jewellery reflects a culture that refused to disappear.

Our hosteria near colonial Ibarra provides views of this "White City," so named for its red-tiled, whitewashed houses that climb the hillsides at 2,121m (7,000 ft). Founded in 1606, Ibarra has survived earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and revolutions while maintaining its dignified

colonial character.

Overnight in Ibarra

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 21 Ibarra - Avenue of Volcanoes & Cotopaxi - La Cienega

Today we 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.

We'll take the Pan-American Highway southwards and take a side road to discover the impressive volcanism, flora, and bird-life that the Cotopaxi national park protects. Whilst in the national park, we will visit to the Interpretation Center and the Limpiopungo Lake and also complete a short hike that will let us enjoy this natural wonder.

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 (Lasso area).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 22 La Cienega - Pillaro - Banos

Today we continue our journey to Banos. We will make a stop in Pillaro where we will visit a traditional workshop of masks that are used in the Pillaro Devil parade, an important cultural expression of the local indigenous people.

We arrive in Banos, a small town whose elevation gives it an extremely agreeable climate and the surrounding mountainsides are brilliant green against the white summit of the Volcano Tungurahua. 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 23 Banos - Devil's Bowl - Riobamba

Before departing Banos, we witness one of South America's most impressive waterfalls—the Devil's Bowl, where the Pastaza River plunges through a narrow gorge with thunderous power. The waterfall's name reflects indigenous beliefs that such dramatic natural features serve as portals between the physical and spiritual worlds.

At El Manto de la Novia (Bridal Veil Falls), we experience a cable car ride over the Pastaza River Canyon, suspended above roaring rapids that have carved their path through solid rock for millennia. The sensation of flying through this dramatic landscape provides perspective on the incredible forces that continue shaping the Andes.

After lunch, we travel through rolling farmland that flows over the high ridges of the Western Andes toward Riobamba, situated at 2,750m (9,035 ft). This charming Andean city, with its colonial architecture and cobblestone streets, serves as the gateway to Ecuador's highest peaks, including Chimborazo—the point on Earth's surface closest to the sun due to our planet's equatorial bulge.

Riobamba's impressive plazas and fascinating markets buzz with activity from indigenous people dressed in traditional clothing, creating a living museum where ancient customs continue alongside modern life. The Monasterio de las Conceptas and other colonial buildings reflect the city's importance during Spanish rule, when it served as a crucial stop on the royal road connecting Quito with Peru.

The city's small-town atmosphere intensifies as evening approaches, with the surrounding peaks creating a natural amphitheatre that makes Riobamba feel both protected and dramatically exposed to the raw power of the Andes.

Overnight in Riobamba

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 24 Riobamba - Ingapirca - Cuenca

Today our journey continues by road to Cuenca, detouring to visit the Archaeological Complex of Ingapirca, the best-preserved and most important Inca site in Ecuador. Though not on the same scale as, say, Machu Picchu, the ruins include a large oval construction once used for ritual and astronomical purposes. Just outside the ruins, the Museo Sitio de Ingapirca displays a skeleton, tools, and other artifacts recovered from the area. We'll also visit a local market, see the first church established in Ecuador, tour the historic town of Alausi, and enjoy views of Devils Nose Mountain.

Once the site of an Inca settlement, Cuenca today is considered Ecuador's most beautiful city. Its historical connection with Spain is marked by narrow cobblestone streets, quaint parks, and romantic plazas. Charming adobe houses, wrought iron balconies, and religious art treasures capture the spirit of centuries long past. Cuenca, almost hidden away in a southern valley, was isolated until recent times; it wasn't until 1960 that paved roads were built to Quito and Guayaquil. Today's Cuenca is surrounded by small villages whose citizens create intricately detailed jewelry, beautiful ceramics, and masterfully-designed hand-woven shawls.

You'll have time to wander the quaint streets in the compact centre of this charming town before reconvening for our evening meal.

Overnight in Cuenca.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 25 Cuenca: Walking Tour & Museo del Banco Central

We begin our leisurely walking tour at Parque Calderon, Cuenca's main plaza, where the rhythms of daily life unfold as they have for centuries. The old Cathedral, renovated for Pope John Paul II's 1985 visit, showcases the religious art that made colonial Cuenca famous throughout the Spanish empire.

We explore the Monastery of El Carmen and visit La Inmaculada Concepcion while strolling cobbled streets that echo with centuries of footsteps. Every corner reveals architectural details that reflect the wealth flowing through colonial trade routes—carved stone facades, intricate ironwork balconies, and courtyards designed around Spanish ideals of beauty and status.

This afternoon, we visit the Museo del Banco Central, where black and white photographs capture 19th and early 20th-century Cuenca in remarkable detail. The archaeological pieces and ethnographic dioramas reveal layers of history, from pre-Columbian indigenous cultures through Spanish colonisation to modern Ecuador.

We also visit a Panama hat factory, discovering the fascinating story behind these world-famous hats that actually originated in Ecuador. In 1835, Spanish entrepreneur Manuel Alfaro arrived in Guayaquil and recognised the economic potential of toquilla straw hats. He established production chains from straw plantations to weaver networks, exporting his hats through Panama—which was becoming an important centre for international trade.

Overnight in Cuenca

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 26 Cuenca: At Leisure

Today belongs entirely to you in this enchanting UNESCO World Heritage city that Travel and Leisure magazine once named the best place in the world to retire. More than 8,000 US and Canadian citizens have made Cuenca their home, drawn by its perfect climate, low cost of living, and the timeless beauty of its colonial architecture.

Cuenca's compact historic centre invites wandering, with each street revealing new architectural treasures and hidden courtyards. The city's four rivers—the Tomebamba, Yanuncay, Tarqui, and Machangara—create natural boundaries that frame different neighbourhoods, each with its own character and history.

You might visit additional museums, explore local markets where vendors still speak Kichwa alongside Spanish, or simply find a plaza café where you can watch daily life unfold at its unhurried pace. The surrounding mountains create microclimates that keep temperatures comfortable year-round, making every day perfect for exploration.
Many travellers use this free time to purchase local crafts directly from artisans, understanding that every purchase supports traditional skills passed down through generations.

This is your day to absorb the rhythms of a city that has successfully balanced preservation with progress, creating a living museum where past and present coexist in remarkable harmony.

Overnight in Cuenca (due to the informal nature of the day, and for a break from the group meal dynamic, we don't include your evening meal today)

Included Meal(s): Breakfast

Day 27 Cuenca - Cajas National Park - Guayaquil

Today we travel by road to Guayaquil via Cajas National Park.

The park contains hundreds of clear, cold lakes, streams, and rivers. Weather-permitting (which can be highly changeable at this altitude), the park can provide an excellent opportunity for us to hike the grassland of Paramo Region or visit a forest of polelypsis trees, the highest altitude tree in the world. Recently the park's management introduced llamas and alpacas as part of a breeding program to re-introduce these animals to the southern highlands. Keep your eyes peeled for the many bird species that make the park their home, especially for the silhouette of a soaring (and extremely rare) Andean Condor, which can sometimes be spotted here riding the thermal up-drafts.

We continue our descent toward the coast, stopping at a cocoa plantation to learn about cultivation and production of Ecuadorian chocolate, considered among the world's finest due to unique soil conditions and traditional fermentation techniques.

Our destination is Guayaquil, Ecuador's main port city and gateway to both Pacific beaches and the Galapagos Islands. Stretching along the Guayas River, the waterfront Simon Bolivar promenade showcases La Rotonda monument, celebrating the historic meeting between South America's great liberators.

Overnight in Guayaquil.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 28 Departure

Departure from Guayaquil.

Our remarkable journey through Ecuador's most treasured landscapes concludes today as we depart from Guayaquil, carrying with us memories of snow-capped volcanoes, pristine rainforests, and colonial cities where time moves at its own pace. From the biodiversity of the Amazon basin to the dramatic peaks of the Avenue of Volcanoes, from indigenous communities maintaining ancient traditions to colonial cities preserving Spanish architectural treasures, Ecuador has revealed itself as one of South America's most extraordinary destinations.

BUEN VIAJE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast