

ECUADOR NATIONAL PARKS TOUR

When studying the Amazon of Ecuador, world famous botanist, Dr. Gentry, discovered the greatest number of plant species per hectare in the world, which made Ecuador the country with the highest biodiversity in the world. Ecuador has worked hard at the conservation of its biodiversity and currently it has 50 protected areas, that together make up about 13% of the territory of the country. Spread across the country, these areas are found in totally different climate zones and elevations, protecting breath taking landscapes, fascinating wildlife, cloud forests in the Andes, rainforests in the Amazon, and at the coast, mangroves and cactus-clad dry forests.

Many of those areas are only hours away from Ecuador's main cities, and yet..... very few of those jewels of nature are ever visited. World traveler of 80+ countries and renowned national parks adviser of the World Bank and United Nations, Dr. Daan Vreugdenhil, developed the “ECUADOR NATIONAL PARKS TOUR” which takes you to 10 protected areas in 11 days. Having been part of the United Nations team that selected the majority of the protected areas of Ecuador between 1974 and 1976, nobody knows the ecology and protected areas system of Ecuador better than Dr. Daan Vreugdenhil. This fantastic journey shows you all major ecosystems of the country, as well as Ecuador's major cultural highlights: Otavalo, Guayaquil, Cuenca and Ingapirca.

As tours to the Galapagos Islands and the Amazon are already amply offered to the public, we decided not to include those destinations, thus facilitating a modular approach allowing visitors to compose their tour by combining one's own selection of modules. A visit to the Amazon has now become within reach of many visitors. Particularly, the Cuyabeno Wildlife Reserve has now become one of the world's highest valued Amazon parks for (1) its incredible biodiversity, (2) its convenient access and (3) its reasonable pricing. We also left out a visit to the highest and most beautiful capital of the Americas, Quito, as there is enough opportunity to see it between modules. So, when combining all three modules, one gets a selection of most ecosystems of the entire continent of South America, as well as all major cultural highlights of Ecuador! For those who want to complete their journey with a guided tour to Lima, Cusco and Machu Picchu, we even offer a 5 – 7 days module, with which you get the most spectacular highlights of nature and culture of South America in one epic journey!

ITINERARY

Day 1: Cotacachi-Cayapas Ecological Reserve and Peguche Waterfall community reserve

1. Pick up from hotel in Quito to travel to Cotacachi-Cayapas Ecological Reserve to visit the Cuicocha Caldera with the incredibly blue Cuicocha Lake. Mammalian wildlife is not commonly seen, but several species of ducks and grebes are usually found on the lake;
2. Visit the Peguche Community Forest of Otavalo with the famous Peguche Waterfall. A trail through an old grove eucalyptus forest usually gives sightings of song birds and several species of hummingbirds;
3. Visit the Otavalo Indian market;
4. Spend the night in Ibarra.



Crater Lake Cuicocha in Cotacachi-Cayapas Ecological Reserve. Peguche Waterfall in the community forest reserve. Otavalo Indian market.

Day 2: El Angel Ecological Reserve

1. Depart for the El Angel Ecological Reserve, a paramo (Andes meadow) reserve in Northern Ecuador, where the famous “Frailejones Asters” almost reach their Southernmost limit. Visit the Voladero Lake where you will also see some of the most spectacular and ancient bromeliads of the Andes, the Hercules Club. Some 320 species of birds are known to the park, including the Andean Condor, a variety of hummingbirds, as well as several species of ducks and grebes, etc.;
2. Return to Quito, Airport, in the village Tababela at 10 minutes from the airport;
3. Spend the night in a Hotel in Tababela.



*Lake Voladero in El Paramo del The famous Frailejones Aster.
Angel Ecological Reserve.*

Hercules Club Bromeliad.

Day 3: Machalilla National Park

1. Transfer from the hotel to the airport;
2. First flight to the coastal city of Manta;
3. Travel from Manta to Puerto Lopez;
4. Excursion into the interior of Machalilla National Park to get to know the extremely rare Tropical Pacific dry forest, which only occurs in a narrow stretch of land between the wet tropical coastal forest near the border with Colombia and the desert starting in the south of Ecuador near the Peruvian border. Machalilla National Park is the only main park in the world protecting this type of forest.
5. In the afternoon visit the virgin beach “Los Frailes” within the park.
6. Spend the night in Puerto Lopez.

Day 4: Machalilla National Park with Isla de la Plata

1. Visit Isla de la Plata, part of Machalilla National Park, where one – depending on the season – can see Red-, Nazca- or blue-footed booby nesting colonies and with some luck a colony of Frigate birds. While ecologically not really correct, one can observe how tour operators have joined together to feed wild green turtles in the harbor of the island, allowing visitors to see the turtles right under their boat in the Crystal clear sea water. Occasionally, one may see Sea Lions frolic in the deep blue waters surrounding the island, while different species of whales migrate along any time during the months of June – September (sightings are not guaranteed);
2. After return time off for a late afternoon swim at the beach in Puerto Lopez;
3. Spend the night in Puerto Lopez.



Blue-footed Booby with chick.



Green turtles being fed by tour operators swimming right under your boat.



Like on Galapagos, fearless marine birds totally ignore visitors at Isla de La Plata.

Day 5: Travel from Machalilla National Park to Guayaquil

1. A morning excursion into the interior of Machalilla National Park before traveling to Guayaquil;
2. Travel to Guayaquil;
3. In the late afternoon and/or evening stroll along the Malecon = boulevard, along the riverside;
4. Spend the night in Guayaquil.



The extremely rare Pacific tropical dry forest. Ceibo trees resemble the Baobab trees in Africa.



Bromeliads get most of their moisture from fog and an occasional drizzle.



A strangler tree starts out as a vine and then gradually envelops its host tree until it perishes under the vine.

Day 6: Churute Ecological Reserve

1. Early in the morning leave for South America's southernmost important mangrove in Churute Ecological Reserve, where more than 250 species of birds have been recorded, including Frigate birds, Brown Pelicans, Spoonbills, a multitude of different herons, White Ibises, etc. Other fauna elements include different crabs as well as dolphins that occasionally enter the mangroves;
2. Travel to Cuenca;
3. Time permitting, stroll the colonial streets of Cuenca at night after dinner
4. Spend the night.



Visit of the Churute Mangroves, the southernmost high mangrove of South America. *A bright red crab hiding among the mangrove roots.* *Typical stilt roots of a red mangrove.*

Day 7: Ingapirca World Heritage Site

1. Visit the UNESCO World Heritage site Ingapirca in the morning, a mixed Inca and Canari (= Inca contemporary culture) style fortress, which was the northern-most main defense fortress of the Inca Empire;
2. In the afternoon, travel to Riobamba;
3. Spend the night in Riobamba.



Ingapirca, the northernmost Inca fortress. *The famous Inca walls of the fortress.* *The temple of the sun.*

Day 8: Chimborazo Ecological Reserve

1. Get to know the Vicuñas of Chimborazo Ecological Reserve. As anywhere high up in the mountains, one may stumble upon an Andean Condor and different species of birds of prey;
2. Visit the Refugio for a high elevation walk and exploration of the high paramo of the highest mountain in the world measured from the center of the earth. The vegetation is very sparse at this elevation;
3. Travel to a hotel near Cotopaxi National park to spend the night.



The peak of the Chimborazo is the point furthest away from the center of the earth.



Vicuñas are thriving on the relatively dry paramo of the Chimborazo.



Alpaca in Chimborazo Ecological Reserve.

Day 9: Cotopaxi National Park

1. Visit Cotopaxi National Park, the world's highest active volcano to rise to the “Jose Rivas Shelter” parking lot;
2. Visit Lake Limpiopungo;
3. Look for an Andean Wolf (= Fox);
4. Return to Quito.



Cotopaxi seen from one of the lakes in the park.



On Cotopaxi, the world's highest active volcano, snow in the afternoon is not uncommon.



Andean wolfs are usually very tame in Cotopaxi National Park.

SHORT MODULES

We developed several shorter modules, that still give you an impression of the Andes and coastal habitats, which can vary depending on your place of departure being Quito, Guayaquil or Cuenca.

OPTION A: RETURN TO QUITO (6-days tour)

OPTION B: RETURN TO QUITO VIA CHIMBORAZO ECOLOGICAL RESERVE (7 days tour)

Day 6: Travel Chimborazo Ecological Reserve

1. A morning excursion into the interior of Machalilla National Park;
2. Spend the night in a hotel near Chimborazo Ecological Reserve.

Day 7: Visit Chimborazo Ecological Reserve

See the Vicuñas along the highway passing by the reserve; Ascent to the mountain house of the volcano. Drive over the new western highway to Quito to admire the alpaca's that usually can be seen along that route. For pictures of Chimborazo Ecological Reserve see days 10 and 11.;

Arrive in Quito in the afternoon to be dropped off at hotel of choice (hotel not included).

OPTION C: START AND FINISH IN GUAYAQUIL (5-days tour)

While starting in Guayaquil, Option C visits:

Machalilla for 2 nights (Days 5 and 6);

return to Guayaquil (Duran) for the night.

Visit the Churute Mangroves (Day 7);

Spend the night in Cuenca.

Visit Cajas National Park (Day 8) to return to Guayaquil in your hotel of choice (not included)

OPTION D: START IN CUENCA AND FINISH IN GUAYAQUIL (5-days tour)

This particular module reverses Module C. In stead of passing the night in Duran, it passes the night in Guayaquil.

PRICING

8 PARKS AND NATURE RESERVES IN	9 DAYS:	\$1999
5 PARKS AND NATURE RESERVES IN	7 DAYS:	\$1349
4 PARKS AND NATURE RESERVES IN	6 DAYS:	\$1249
3 PARKS AND NATURE RESERVES IN	5 DAYS:	\$1149

Prices are based on a minimum 2 passengers.

INCLUDED

- All hotels;
- Transportation;
- An English speaking naturalist guide who has an adequate – but not professional – knowledge of the birds of Ecuador. A German or French speaking guide may also be available, but can't be guaranteed. Preference must always be given to a guide who knows his/her birds, because a guide who knows the birds, knows about nature, while without such knowledge, a guide is useless for this specialized tour. If another guide is needed because our preselected guides are otherwise engaged, we will always first test both their linguistic and biological knowledge;
- All entry fees.