



PRIVATE JOURNEYS WITH JOURNEY LATIN

SELF-DRIVE ECUADOR: THE BACK ROADS OF THE ANDES

10 days from **£3,050pp**

**ECUADOR & GALAPAGOS ISLANDS / QUITO / ANDES TO AMAZON / AVENUE OF THE
VOLCANOES**



WHY US

We are the UK's No.1 specialist in travel to Latin America and have been creating award-winning holidays to every corner of the region for over four decades; we pride ourselves on being the most knowledgeable people there are when it comes to travel to Central and South America and passionate about it too.

OUR JOURNEY

As our name suggests, we are single-minded about Latin America. This is what sets us apart from other travel companies – and what allows us to offer you not just a holiday but the opportunity to experience something extraordinary on inspiring journeys throughout Mexico, Central and South America.

WE LOVE LATIN AMERICA

A passion for the region runs through all we do

All our Consultants have lived or travelled extensively in Latin America

Up-to-the-minute knowledge underpinned by 40 years' experience

TRAVEL WITH CONFIDENCE

Fully bonded and licensed

ATOL-protected

On your side when it matters

Book with confidence, knowing every penny is secure

THE REAL LATIN AMERICA

Our insider knowledge helps you go beyond the guidebooks

We hand-pick hotels with character and the most rewarding excursions

Let us show you the Latin America we know and love



OVERVIEW & OUTLINE ITINERARY

An exhilarating self-drive adventure exploring the cloud forest of Ecuador's Andean foothills on the fringe of the Amazon basin.

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| DAY 1 | Arrive Quito, transfer to hotel in the historic centre. |
| DAY 2 | Guided walking tour of colonial Quito. |
| DAY 3 | Transfer to the airport to collect your hire car; set off on your self-drive adventure. |
| DAY 4 | Full day to explore the area around Cabañas San Isidro. |
| DAY 5 | Drive to Santa Rita, guided Pacari chocolate tour. |
| DAY 6 | Optional activities. |
| DAY 7 | Drive to Baños via Puyo, visiting a botanical garden and waterfalls en route. |
| DAY 8 | At leisure in Baños. |
| DAY 9 | Drive up the Avenue of Volcanoes to Cotopaxi National Park. |
| DAY 10 | Morning optional excursions; drop off car at airport; international flight. |

ITINERARY

Between the high Andean plateaux studded with snow-dipped volcanoes and the sultry rainforest of the Amazon basin, the eastern foothills and valleys of Ecuador are stifled with the giant ferns, creepers and orchids of misty cloud forest. Winding its way south through this ethereal landscape, parallel with the Andean spine and tracing what is known as the 'eyebrow of the jungle' is a the paved road, Route 45. Recent improvements to this road mean that places once almost inaccessible to visitors are now brought within easy reach of Quito and the country's principal highland cities.

The traffic is relatively light and the route is wondrously scenic throughout, creating for independent drivers a brand new opportunity to discover a little-visited region by self-drive hire car. We've designed an innovative itinerary for you where you travel under your own steam down this road staying at forest-based lodges along the way, with opportunities to take a dip in thermal pools, go river rafting, jungle trail walking and wildlife spotting, while visiting local indigenous communities and their farms to immerse yourself in their way of life.

Climbing back up to the high Andes you'll return north to Quito along the famed Avenue of the Volcanoes, a completely different environment of wide open spaces blanketed by sprawling pastures and haciendas pitted with the perfect cones of a string of ice-clad mountain peaks, some still fizzing with activity. You'll pull over to discover the dazzling colours of an indigenous market and venture off the paved road to explore safely the sublime Cotopaxi National Park, the most beautiful in the country.

DAY 1

Arrive Quito, transfer to hotel in the historic centre.

Transfer to your hotel in Quito, the Andean capital of Ecuador. The active volcano Guagua Pichincha, to the east, glowers over the dynamic city which, at 2,850m, is one of highest capitals in the world. Quito is divided into two contrasting districts. The modern zone is characterised by towering glass buildings and houses banks, international companies, hotels, shops and restaurants, while the central colonial area has well-conserved and recently spruced-up white-washed architecture, open air markets and graceful Spanish-style mansions and churches.

DAY 2

Guided walking tour of colonial Quito.

Visit the colonial centre of the capital, the first city ever to be named a World Heritage site. High on the agenda is a walk through the main plaza, the Plaza de Independencia, where you will see the government palace, the cathedral, and some of the most important churches built around the 16th and 17th centuries, including the monastery of San Francisco.

DAY 3

Transfer to the airport to collect your hire car; set off on your self-drive adventure.

As you leave the car hire agency, which is well beyond the urban sprawl of Quito, you'll follow a major road through Andean forests of hardy, red-barked polylepis shrubs up to the wind-blown prairie grasslands of the upland páramo. Having climbed over a pass at over 4,000m, you start to descend towards the cloud forest (this is bear country – keep your eyes peeled!) with if it's clear, views on the snowy bulk of Antisana volcano.

It's only about an hour's drive from your departure before you reach the thermal baths at Papallacta – feel free to stop here to take a dip in the steamy waters at the leisure facility and maybe have a snack or even lunch.

The road then descends a valley between the crinkly mountains of two nature reserves, enriched with the dripping foliage of ever-thickening cloud forest and enlivened by the fluttering of birds' wings. At Baeza you turn onto the pristine tarmac of Route 45, turning off to reach your lodge at San Isidro. If you haven't lingered too long at Papallacta (which is a temptation) you may arrive in time for lunch there.

In the afternoon you can choose from a variety of activities and experiences offered at the lodge. We suggest you set out on their self-guided walking trail, which is marked with interpretation boards helping you to familiarise yourself with this new and exotic environment. There's a thermal pool here too, a bit cooler than at Papallacta, with wonderful views of the conservation area..

DAY 4

Full day to explore the area around Cabañas San Isidro.

There's a good choice of things to do from your lodge. The principal attraction for wildlife lovers is bird-watching: this is one of the country's prime locations for spotting the myriad of bird species of the forest. But that's not all: as well as feeders for hummingbirds, there are feeding stations placed to attract tapirs and agoutis if you're lucky you'll spot one or two of these creatures.

You can set off with a local guide on a hike along the many kilometres of trails through the woodland, exploring by day, or by night (with a guide). Visit the Biology Station to see what scientific research is going on in the region, or, back at the lodge, take a cookery lesson to create Ecuadorian delicacies or try out the eight course tasting menu in the restaurant. (You have dinner included, this more extensive menu is charged extra).

DAY 5

Drive to Santa Rita, guided Pacari chocolate tour.

If you are at all interested in birds you won't want to miss the pre-breakfast dawn hike as the forest awakes from its slumbers. Spot species with bright plumage such as trogons and tanagers, tree-creepers and flycatchers as they seek out their breakfast.

After your own meal, stretch your legs with a stroll to the waterfall but be sure to be on the road by 10.30. driving through the Antisana Reserve where the road follows the transition zone between the Andes and the Amazon basin. On your left is the Sumaco Napo-Galeras National Park, featuring the pointed peak of symmetrical volcano Sumaco, which is in constant eruption. The road twists and turns as it descends, the vegetation fringing it becoming more and more succulent as the temperature rises. In harmony with a more tropical environment, local people live in thatched homes on stilts, and luscious fruits are on sale from stalls beside the road.

You'll visit the cocoa plantation at Santa Rita, which is set off the main road down a gravel track. Having observed the beans growing on the farm you'll be taken through the production process, where the beans are picked, roasted and ground. There may also be weaving, ceramics and dance presentations, interpretive trails to follow and talks about local legends.

Your appetite having been stimulated by tasting the high quality end product, you'll have a traditional lunch, cooked in banana leaves, at a community tourism project in the village.

Afterwards, continue to your lodge.

DAY 6

Optional activities.

At 300m above sea level, in the foothills of the Andes, this is a transition zone for vegetation between cloud and rainforest, the climate is fresher than lower down in the Amazon basin proper, creating an agreeable environment with few mosquitoes.

Here there's a real choice to make according to your personal interests and enthusiasms. (These optional trips should be pre-booked before you go, discuss your choice with us when you book).

The undulating landscape means that there are plenty of waterfalls and fast-flowing rivers to explore and this region is a centre for white water rafting, you can experience grade III rapids on the river Jatunyaku while enjoying magnificent jungle views.

Alternatively, drive to nearby Paikawe lagoon to take a canoe trip on the calm water accompanied by a knowledgeable guide, with opportunities to spot hoatzim (startling prehistoric-style birds), spider monkeys and caimans and then move on with a tranquil boat ride down the Napo river to visit the AmaZoonico animal rescue project to see how damaged animals recuperate and released back into the wild.

There is also a wide range of hikes through the forest to choose from near to your lodge.

DAY 7

Drive to Baños via Puyo, visiting a botanical garden and waterfalls en route.

It's only 96km to Puyo, a market town serving the various tribal communities in the vicinity and where you've a three course lunch booked at an excellent restaurant. En route you will have a scheduled stop at Omaere Ethnobotanical Gardens which, as you would expect has collections of endemic medicinal plants, but is also concerned with reforestation and there's an education programme to assist local indigenous communities.

In the afternoon you'll start driving back up towards the Andes. The drive from Puyo to Baños only takes an hour and a half or so without stops, but the variety of landscapes is stunning.

It's a dramatic drive through a narrow gorge, a corridor between the ever-rising crests of vertiginous mountain ranges. In fact, it's known as the Route of the Waterfalls and you can stop to stretch your legs with an hour long round trip to look down on the Pailon del Diablo (Devil's Cauldron), one of the most impressive of these.

The valley narrows and you pass through several tunnels as you climb back through cloud forest rampant with orchids to the pleasant spa resort town Baños, clinging to the edge of a cliff face and rimmed by emerald hills. Glowering over the town is the volcano Tungurahua, still active with a few hissing fumeroles but not expected to erupt in the near future. Your lodge and spa, built in the style of a colonial hacienda, has a countryside location where you can drink in the views of exquisite Andean scenery.

DAY 8

At leisure in Baños.

With its thermal baths, agreeable climate and relaxed atmosphere, it's easy to spend a day just relaxing in Baños and at your lodge. If you fancy something a bit more active however, you can fix yourself up with a rafting, tubing, horse-riding or cycling trip locally, there are plenty of agencies in town. The latest fad is for "swing jumping" where you jump from a bridge and swing like a pendulum. It's a bit like bungee-jumping and not really something we'd recommend you try, but it might be fun watching others doing it!

DAY 9

Drive up the Avenue of Volcanoes to Cotopaxi National Park.

Now back in the highlands, you'll drive along one of Ecuador's key arteries – possibly one of the most scenic roads in Latin America. The aptly named Avenue of the Volcanoes is flanked by a regiment of dizzyingly-high snow-mantled mountains striding south of Quito down the Andean spine. It passes through a valley rich with a landscape of dense forest and tiny fields plastering impossibly steep slopes. Dotted around is a mix of deeply traditional indigenous and colonial settlements with horticultural and artisan markets and cottage industries.

Set off from Baños early if you'd like to visit one of the indigenous markets along the way (depending on day of travel). There are fine ones in Saquisilí and Pujilí, where mountains of agricultural produce and jumbles of domestic and artisan goods jostle for space..

Now you'll be setting off away from the main road to drive through Cotopaxi National Park, dominated by the superbly photogenic volcano of the same name (5,897m), a (very) occasionally active peak of shimmering ice surrounded by rumpled skirts of highland moor with a tundra-like vegetation of altitude-resistant shrubs and flowers.

The park is inhabited by over 90 species of bird from pocket-sized hummingbirds to giant condors and a variety of hardy mammals including deer, rabbits, Andean foxes and puma, which shelter from view in the lacy veils of frequent swirly mists. You can visit the interpretation centre and you have the opportunity to walk the trail surrounding the stunningly reflective Lake Limpiopungo, ringed by bird-filled reed beds.

Lunch is arranged for you at Tambopaxi, a lodge in an equally exquisite location, after which you drive on gravel tracks at lofty altitude in remote landscapes -adventurous, but safe.. You should arrive to spend the night at your cosy countryside lodge Chilcabamba, set within sight of Cotopaxi's perfect cone, well before nightfall.

DAY 10

**Morning optional excursions; drop off car at airport;
international flight.**

If you have time, you might go for a hike or horse ride from the lodge in the morning.. Or you can set off on a 5 hour guided walk along the course of the Pita river, which is fed by the glacial meltwater of Cotopaxi, before continuing to Quito airport to fly home – or maybe we can tempt you to fly west to the Galápagos Islands...

WHAT'S INCLUDED IN THE PRICE

Services of our team of experts in our London office

Services of Journey Latin America local representatives and guides

All land and air transport within Latin America

Accommodation as specified

Meals as specified

Excursions as specified, including entrance fees

INCLUDED EXCURSIONS

Walking tour of colonial Quito

Visit Cotopaxi National Park

WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED IN THE PRICE

Tips and gratuities

Meals other than specified

International flights to Latin America

Airport taxes, when not included in the ticket

Optional excursions

ESSENTIALS

TRANSPORT

8 days self-drive hire car. Suzuki SZ 2.4L 4x2 Automatic transmission or similar.

ACCOMMODATION

This holiday incorporates a smart mid-range hotels with character in Quito and Baños, and small, friendly countryside lodges en route to the Amazon basin and Cotopaxi National Park. The countryside hotel in Baños has spa facilities.

MEALS

Breakfast daily, lunch days 6,8,9, dinner days 3,4,9..

GUIDES

We carefully select our local partners, some of whom we have worked with for over 30 years. Their English-speaking guides understand the expectations of our clients very well, and are consistently singled out for praise by the latter on their return.

SUMMARY OF NIGHTS

10days, 9 nights: Quito 2, San Isidro 2, near Tena 2, Baños 2,Cotopaxi National Park 1..

CURRENCY

The unit of currency in Ecuador is the US dollar.

HOW TO TAKE IT

Cash machines are available in all major cities and towns, and so taking a debit or credit card with a PIN number is the most convenient way of withdrawing money while on your trip, and in most shops and restaurants you can also pay by card. However, since cards can get lost, damaged, withheld or blocked, you should not rely exclusively on a card to access funds.

We recommend that additionally you take a reasonable quantity of US dollars cash (no more than is covered by your insurance). Dollar bills should be in good condition, soiled or torn bills may be refused.

DAILY SPEND

It is very difficult to give a guideline for essential expenses but a budget of around US\$50 per person per day should cover the cost of good quality meals,drinks and the odd souvenir. Other expenses include petrol (probably no more than about \$US100) and tips (see separate paragraph), optional excursions and entry fees.

TIPPING

Tips are welcomed and local guides often rely on their tip as a significant proportion of their income.

Most service industry workers will hope for a tip of some kind and so it is useful to have spare change for hotel porters, taxi drivers and the like. It is common to leave 10 – 12% in restaurants.

Tipping guidelines can be found in our Briefing Dossier.

INSURANCE

Travel insurance is essential. Details of our recommended policy can be found on our Travel Insurance pages. Total Damage Waiver (LDW – zero excess) Insurance for your hire car is included in the price of the holiday, please inquire if you would like to upgrade it. .

AIRPORT TAXES

If you have purchased your flights through Journey Latin America, the international departure tax is usually included in the ticket.

TRIP SUITABILITY

This holiday is suitable for all able, reasonably fit visitors.

The driver should have reasonable experience and be a confident driver. While most of the roads are paved, they can involve blind bends and steep gradients. The behaviour of local drivers with regard to the rules of the road is not always predictable. 4WD off-road experience is not necessary but some experience of driving on gravel roads and tracks is advisable. Minimum age of driver 21, upper limit 80. A second driver can be added for an extra charge. See our separate document for more information about the car hire element of the holiday. .

VISAS

Holders of a full British passport do not require a visa, although passports must be valid for at least 6 months after the trip begins. Anyone with a different nationality should enquire with us or check with the relevant consulate.

If flying to the US, or via the US you will need to fill in your online ESTA application.

CLIMATE

Lying at 2-4,000m close to the equator, the highlands, including Quito have a permanent spring-like climate: altitude is the determining factor with regard to temperature. The rainy season in the Andes runs between January and April when there are showers most afternoons. The dry season is June, July and August when the sun is strong during the day, but at night the temperature drops dramatically (maybe as low as freezing point). May, September and October are less predictable, with both rainy and sunny spells. In the mountains at any time of year you should expect a variation between 15°C and 25°C.

The eastern slopes of the Andes are blanketed in cloud forest so rain and drizzle can be expected at any time, but some clear days are also possible at any time of the year. It is a lot more humid than in the highlands and temperatures during the day can rise to over 30°C.

Baños has a pleasant sub-tropical climate with an average year-round daytime temperature of 25°C, where January is the hottest month, July the coolest and February the driest.

ALTITUDE

Several days are spent at high altitude (over 2,500m). You may notice the effect of high altitude; symptoms vary: most common are mild headaches and breathlessness. If you drink plenty of water and allow your body to acclimatise (don't exert yourself or drink alcohol) in the first couple of days after arrival, you will minimise your chances of being adversely affected.

Following a couple of days in Quito you visit the high altitude Cotopaxi National Park and may elect to drive up to the volcano's snow line at 4,800m. Only do so if you are not feeling any symptoms of altitude sickness, such as dizziness and nausea.

Please refer to our Briefing Dossier for further information.

CLOTHING AND SPECIAL EQUIPMENT

For day-to-day wear you should go prepared to encounter all seasons. Breathable rain wear is essential for the jungle areas as are light long sleeved-shirts and trousers. Both warm clothing and a sun hat are essential at altitude; a light fleece jacket and a waterproof/breathable outer shell makes a good combination.

Strong, comfortable footwear is essential and you should bring swim-wear, insect repellent, sun block, hat and sun glasses.

Don't forget your camera, charger and cards.

Please get in touch with the office before departure if you have any doubts.

VACCINATIONS

Preventative vaccinations are recommended against the following: typhoid; polio; tetanus; hepatitis A. You should consult your GP for specific requirements such as protection against malaria, although outbreaks are not likely on this itinerary. .

You can also find helpful information on the Masta Travel Health website.

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GET IN TOUCH WITH US...

Our friendly, knowledgeable team of travel experts are always happy to chat about holiday ideas and share helpful advice. Give us a call today and begin planning your perfect trip to Latin America.

GIVE US A CALL

We'd love to chat

0208 747 8315

OPENING HOURS

Monday – Friday: 9am – 6pm

Saturday & Sunday: Closed

SEND US AN EMAIL

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