

# MAJESTIC ANDES

5-Day Tour in the Andes



*Embark on a comprehensive 5-day adventure through the majestic Sierra of Ecuador, featuring stunning volcanic peaks, lakes, and haciendas. This journey delves into the heart of the nation's culture, including an in-depth exploration of Cuenca, a UNESCO World Heritage site locally known as the 'Athens of Ecuador.' The adventure culminates with moorland vistas transforming into fruit plantations, and the Andean winds giving way to tropical breezes in Guayaquil.*

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## Day 1: Cotopaxi & Rose Plantation (-/L/-)

Embark on this volcanic journey, heading south from Quito, with a first stop at a traditional open market that offers great insights into Andean cuisine and its rich cultural heritage.

Upon arrival at the Cotopaxi National Park, diverse experiences await:

**Limpiopungo** lake offers a magnificent Andean experience. A walk around the lake and grounds, may grace you with sightings of local wildlife.\*

**\*Cotopaxi's first basecamp** (located at 16,400 feet) features a rewarding panoramic view after an invigorating hike of about 1,500 feet.\*

The Inca ruins of **Pucará Del Salitre**, a strategically built 15th century military fortress, offer a stunning view of the highlands plateau and the surrounding Andes.\*

**Cueva de los Buhos** (Owls Cave), a geological fault believed to have formed after an eruption, is home to two owl species, eagles and other wildlife.\*

To end this wonderful day of discovery, you will learn about the significance of Ecuador's rose industry at a blooming local plantation.





## **Day 2: Quilotoa Crater Lake & Tigua Workshop (B/L/-)**

A scenic drive through the central Andes takes you to Quilotoa, where you will admire the incredible, turquoise-colored lake inside the volcano's caldera. Enjoy the ever-changing water's color, perfectly contrasting with the breathtaking Sierra views and peaks.



There are three options to explore the breathtaking scenery of Quilotoa:

- Traditional Viewpoint: An easy 20-minute hike.
- Shalala Viewpoint: An active hike of approximately one hour.
- Lake-Shore Hike: A strenuous 2-hour trek.

Later, visit the Tigua art gallery and workshop, renowned for vibrant wood masks and intricate paintings on sheepskin, depicting everyday life scenes. Spend time admiring and shopping for these unique artworks before continuing the journey towards Baños.

## **Day 3: History en-route: Inca Fortress, First built church & Beyond (B/L/-)**

The adventure continues southward through quaint indigenous villages, offering insights into the region's historical significance in Ecuador.





The first stop of the day is on the outskirts of Riobamba. La Balbanera, built in 1534, is Ecuador's first Catholic church. Though relatively small, it endures with its original stone facade. Nearby lies Laguna de Colta, a picturesque lake surrounded by traditional indigenous structures and homes, offering a glimpse into local life.

Continuing through the southern Andes, your next destination is Ingapirca, Ecuador's largest Inca ruins. This Inca fortress was built atop a Cañari civilization adoration site, revealing the intriguing blend of both cultures before Spanish colonization.

#### **Day 4: Cuenca, the gem of southern Ecuador (B/L/-)**

A visit to the remarkable city of Cuenca awaits today!

Discover how ancient traditions persist amidst modernity in the third-largest city in Ecuador, a UNESCO World Heritage site.



Mestizo, expats and indigenous locals stroll through its beautifully maintained historic district, where colonial architecture harmoniously blends with modern structures and natural surroundings, such as the Inca complex of Pumapungo, visible from both near and far. With a rich cultural background, the city offers numerous modern art and pre-colonialism exhibitions in its galleries and museums.



Enjoy stunning viewpoints of the city's terracotta roofs and the blue domes of the Cathedral, walk along evergreen river trails, and partake in a fascinating tour of a "Panama" hat workshop and museum—a fantastic opportunity to acquire this unique Ecuadorian souvenir.



### **Day 5: Paramo, Moorlands & Cacao (B/L/-)**

Today, you will embark on a remarkable road trip from the highlands of the Sierra to the modern city of Guayaquil, making the most of your journey towards the port city.

Located west of Cuenca, the Cajas National Park offers a wonderful opportunity to explore its captivating moorlands, wetlands, hundreds of lakes, and its Polylepis tree forest. Capture stunning photographs of the breathtaking vistas of the mountains shaping the western Andes.



Continuing the journey towards the Coastal region, you'll enjoy an immersive experience on a traditional local family farm. Specializing in cacao cultivation, this location provides a fascinating insight into the process of turning cacao into world-renowned Ecuadorian chocolate! As you explore the farm, marvel at the abundance of fruit trees such as mango, banana, plantain, and more. After a tasty lunch, the road trip to Guayaquil continues. Hotel drop-off and end of our services.

## **INCLUDED**

- Hotel Pick-up (Quito) & Drop-off (Guayaquil)
- Private Transportation
- Bilingual Guide
- Meals as described in the itinerary (B=Breakfast, L= Lunch, BL= Box Lunch, BB= Box Breakfast). Meals include one soft drink per serving.
- Four nights of accommodation
- Entrance Fees
- Snacks

## **NOT INCLUDED**

- Dinner and meals not described in the itinerary
- Accommodation in Guayaquil
- **Cotopaxi Horseback riding** (available for an extra cost)
- Personal Expenses
- Extra soft beverages
- Alcoholic beverages
- Extra and/or non-scheduled visit/activity
- Tips

### **Notes:**

The itinerary and order of visits are subject to change due to guests' interests, time constraints, physical endurance, weather, municipal regulations, safety, and/or unforeseen circumstances.

\*Due to time constraints, not all these activities will be included in one day; your guide will tailor the experience to suit you and your party.