

Avenue of the volcanoes, Ecuador



While being one of the smallest countries in area and population, Ecuador is also one of the richest in terms of geographical wonders, flora and fauna. Centre stage is the masterpiece of Ecuador's varied geography - the dramatic, beautiful and seemingly endless Andes, which bisect not only Ecuador from north to south but also the entire South American continent. These legendary mountains are the location for your challenging mountain trek - the 'Avenue of the Volcanoes'.

Beginning in the laid-back, multi-ethnic city of Quito - one of the highest capitals in the world - you will visit the equator and the amazing statue of the Virgin overlooking Quito before heading for the nearby volcanoes to start your trek in the beautiful Andes, gradually acclimatising to the thin air at an altitude of 10,000ft. Your challenge begins with trekking up several Volcanoes including rarely visited peaks such as the Corazon volcano, culminating in the magical mountain of Cotopaxi.

The varied but always beautiful landscape will entrance even the most seasoned traveller during this tough but exceptional trek. Cotopaxi, the highest active volcano in the world, standing a few metres higher than Mt. Kilimanjaro, Tanzania, is first seen on the horizon as a near perfect snow-capped cone rising out of the lush Andean cloud forest. The climb to its snow-capped summit is really tough and is open to those on the expedition who are exceptionally fit and prepared for the tough summit bid.

Much of the final Cotopaxi summit climb is on its glacier, and you will leave the refuge to start your climb at about midnight when the ice is hard and easier to trek on. It's only as the sun

slowly starts to rise, that you realise how high up you really are, as the clouds that for days have been so far up, are now way down below you. Through gaps in the cloud, there are spectacular views of the Andes in every direction. If the day is clear, you will be able to see the three other volcanoes that you have trekked on or reached the summit of.

Having descended to the refuge triumphant, you will return to Quito for a final celebration meal.

Day 1: International Departure

Meet at London Heathrow for your flight to Quito. Our Charity Challenge representative will be at the airport to assist you with the check-in and any last minute questions. On arrival in Quito (2800 m above sea level), you will be met at the airport by a Charity Challenge local agent who will transfer you to Mercure Accor hotel or similar.



Day 2: Acclimatisation day in Quito and its surroundings.

Start the morning with a taxi ride up El Panecillo to the huge statue of La Virgen De Quito, from the summit there are marvellous views of the whole city stretching out below as well as views of the surrounding volcanoes. In the afternoon, visit Mitad Del Mundo, the Equatorial Monument marking the line dividing the northern and

southern hemispheres as established by a French expedition in the 18th century. Apart from the Ethnographic Museum that displays artifacts from all Ecuador's ethnic groups as well as a visual history of their way of life, the "Middle of the World" village provides a variety of attractions. You can even obtain a certificate for having crossed the Equator. Overnight at Mercure Accor hotel or similar.

Day 3: Pasochoa Volcano (4,199m)

You will start the day with a 1hour drive to the Pasochoa Volcano. You will then start a 6-7hr trek from the Ecology Reserve entrance to the summit. The trek will take you through rain forest and upper grasslands. It's a challenging trek to the summit, along the ridge of the volcano, where you will hopefully see hummingbirds and smaller Ecuadorian birds. Drive to Machachi. Dinner and overnight at La Estacion lodge (3,200m).

Day 4: El Corazon Hike (4,721m)

El Corazon is located between the Ilinizas and the Atacazo in the Western Cordillera. El Corazon is Spanish for 'heart.' The old eroded volcano is thought to be so-named because some claim that two gullies form a heart shape.

After breakfast you will enjoy a strenuous trek up the slopes of El Corazon (4,721 m) which makes an ideal acclimatization climb. There will be a picnic lunch. Return to La Estacion lodge for overnight.

Day 5: Los Ilinizas Hut (4,650m)

In the early hours of the morning, we will drive along the Avenue of Volcanoes to reach our next point "Los Ilinizas". After a short drive we arrive at El Chaupi, the nearest town to the mountain. From here we will walk for approximately 6 – 7 hours to reach the Los Ilinizas hut set at the base of the Ilinizas in between Iliniza Norte (our goal tomorrow) and Iliniza Sud (a technical ice climbing peak).



Day 6: Iliniza Norte (5,126m) / Cotopaxi National Park

From the hut in the morning, weather dependent, you can get awesome views of Cotopaxi and many other volcanoes including Pasochoa and Ruminahui. You will be walking on a ridge, where there is a faint possibility of snow (there is snow on the ridge for around 5 days a year) and if this happens crampons and ice axes are needed (we usually can tell this with a few days in advance). After the ridge (5,100m) you walk along the

mountain to its end and then summit via a rocky gully to stand on the main summit peak. Drive to the Cotopaxi National Park. Overnight at Tambopaxi Mountain Lodge.

Day 7: Rest day – Cotopaxi National Park / Incan ruins-Glacier practice

Today there is the option of a gentle hike to the pre-Incan archaeological site, Pucara and an easy trek around el Manantial. Around midday you will have lunch and do some ice climbing practice in the afternoon. Overnight at Tambopaxi lodge.

Day 8: Cotopaxi – Jose Refugio (4,800m) –

Your support vehicles will drive you for approximately 45 minutes to the Cotopaxi refuge car parking area at 4,550m and then you will make your way up the scree slope to the refuge at 4,800m, about 2 hours of hard walking. You will have an early dinner and be encouraged to go to bed early to acclimatise and stay warm in this rarified atmosphere.



Day 9: Summit Cotopaxi (5,897m)

You will leave the refuge at around midnight for Cotopaxi summit, which is a gruelling 8 hours of constant climbing up steep glaciers. Using crampons and ice axes, and roped up to professional guides, this climb is tough but with unbelievably rewarding views from the summit. After summiting, you will descend to the refuge for lunch time snacks and the opportunity to buy a t-shirt. You will then return to the vehicle stop at 4,550m and drive to Quito where you will enjoy hot showers and a celebratory dinner.

NB: If you choose to climb Cotopaxi you can hire crampons and ice axes from the local supplier, speak to your guide on arrival. They will then be brought out to you for the summit and glacier practice by the climb support team.

Day 10: Quito to London

You have the morning to pack and buy any last minute bargains before an early afternoon transfer to the airport for the flight to London.

Day 11: Arrive Home

Arrive in London.

N.B. The itinerary is there as a guide and may change due to unusual weather patterns, wildlife movements, the strength of the group and so on. We will do our very best to keep to the set itinerary however we cannot be held responsible for any last minute changes that might occur. In all such circumstances, your expedition leader will have the final say.

Optional extension:

Rafting on Taochi and Rio Blanco River (3 days, 2 nights)

- White water Rafting on the Taochi River and watch impressive canyons
- Rafting on the Rio Blanco River, thrilling rapids and see pristine jungle canyons with an Overnight stay in Quito

To find out more information, visit Avenue of the Volcanoes challenge page on our website or click on “extensions” in your member’s area.

