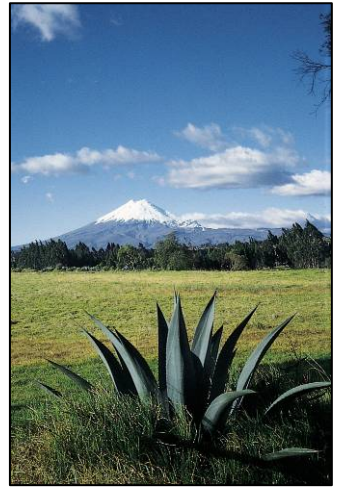
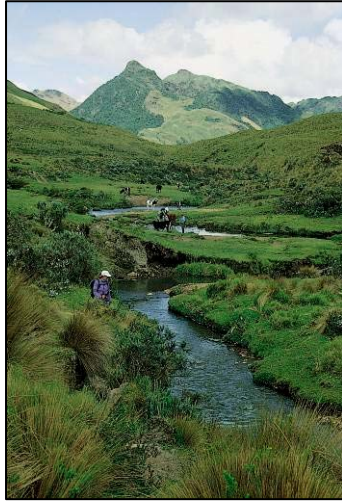




ECUADOR

HIGHLANDS FULL MOON TREK



DURATION: 10 days / 9 nights (2 nights tent camping)
SEASON: June through February
DEPARTURES: Guaranteed with a minimum of 4 participants
TRIP RATING: Moderate/Strenuous Trek, Grade (III) - This active adventure features a fully supported trek of 3 days duration, averaging 6 miles per day at elevations ranging from 10,500' to 14,000', plus 2 days of lodge-based hiking in Cotopaxi Park.

2012 DATES: On request any week during the season for a minimum of 4 travelers

INTRODUCTION:

Ecuador's *Sierra*, or highlands, is an ideal destination for a trekking adventure. The region is scattered with beautiful azure lakes, groves of *quishuar* trees and quaint Andean communities, all nestled beneath the icy summits of the country's highest volcanoes. Designed for active travelers, this trip provides a superb overview of the Ecuadorian highlands, highlighting the fascinating natural and cultural wonders of the northern Andes. Our hiking routes are the country's best, leading us through lush Andean valleys and the treeless páramo highlands, whose unique vegetation is dwarfed by the extreme climatic conditions it has to endure. We explore Pre-Columbian ruins and soak in natural hot springs along the way, always watching for sightings of such unusual birds as the Andean condor. Our cultural exploration leads us to Indian markets and rural communities where we interact with indigenous peoples, living much as their ancestors did centuries ago.

In the Lake District we meet weavers and craftsmen at the famous Otavalo market before visiting Cuicocha Lake, where our walk helps us acclimate for the longer hikes to come. The picturesque route from Antisana to Cotopaxi skirts ancient lava fields, extinct volcanoes and gorgeous mountain lakes in a magnificent wilderness area. First-class trekking means a hot cup of tea brought to your tent door in the morning followed by breakfast prepared by our camp chef. After carrying only a daypack while hiking, you are greeted at camp by a 3-course meal featuring local cuisine. We finish our hike beneath the world's highest active volcano. This exhilarating backcountry experience is followed by a hike to the glaciers of Cotopaxi National Park. Three nights at an ecolodge allow plenty of time to relax and explore this amazing natural landscape. We end by driving back to Quito touring the colonial sector and a local museum. Before going on to the next adventure or returning home, we say goodbye to new friends with a farewell dinner.

Ecuador: Highlands Full Moon Trek

DAY-BY-DAY ITINERARY:

DAY 01 (FRI): USA/QUITO

This evening we arrive to Ecuador's capital city, **Quito**, located at an invigorating 9,350' elevation. Our local guide meets us at the airport and transfers us to one of the city's finest hotels, the centrally located Swissotel, about 20 minutes from the airport.

DAY 02 (SAT): OTAVALO MARKET

Following breakfast, a scenic drive north through the twisted canyons of the Guayabamba River brings us to the fertile valleys of the Lake District and the community of **Otavalo** (8,300'). We catch the start of the famous weekly market that dates to before the Inca occupation when Indians from the lowland jungles would visit the highlands to trade their products. Otavalo is now one of South America's largest and best markets. We join dozens of locals and visitors wandering through the 4 main plazas where the handicraft and produce stalls are set up. We find a multitude of crafts such as wood carvings and leather goods from all over the country. There will be plenty of opportunities to purchase some of the exquisite woolen products or embroidery work for which the Otavalo weavers are renowned. Following our explorations, we enjoy a typical Andean lunch. Later this afternoon, we explore some of the neighboring Indian communities before continuing to the Hacienda Pinsaquí, located in a lovely valley north of Otavalo, where we spend the night. **Driving distance:** 98 miles or 2.5 hours. (B,L,D)

DAY 03 (SUN): CUICOCHA LAKE/PAPALLACTA

This morning we enjoy a moderate, 3-hour hike near **Lake Cuicocha** (10,500'), a beautiful reservoir formed in the crater of an extinct volcano in the Cotacachi-Cayapas Ecological Reserve. Along our route we have excellent views of rolling farmlands and patchwork quilt-like green and gold valleys, dominated by the glacier-clad Cayambe (18,995'), Imbabura (15,120') and Cotacachi volcanoes. We hope to see typical highland birds, such as hawks, caracaras, and hummingbirds. Along the lake's shores, we might spot several species of waterfowl including yellow-billed pintails, speckled teals, and American coots. We have lunch overlooking Cuicocha then return towards **Quito** and, time permitting, stop at Cochasqui, a pre-Inca archaeological site featuring 15 pyramidal structures. Taking a different highway through a desert-like canyon, we then head eastward across La Virgen Pass (12,900') in the Eastern Cordillera. Checking in to the beautiful Termas de Papallacta Resort & Spa (10,565'), we spend the remainder of the afternoon visiting the community, soaking in the crystalline hot springs and preparing for our trek. We dine this evening at the resort. **Driving distance:** 145 miles or 4 hours. (B,L,D)

DAY 04 (MON): LAGUNA VOLCAN CAMP

Leaving early this morning for the trailhead where we begin our 3-day trek near **Papallacta**, we meet our camp staff and Indian handlers, who along with their pack animals will support our high mountain journey. We begin our hike at 11,000' following an occasionally obscure trail, on a gradual uphill route through the El Tambo Valley, toward a high saddle at 12,350'. Our trek takes us primarily through the *humid páramo* ecological zone, a highly specialized region found only in tropical America. From the top of the pass, we have impressive views of Antisana's four snow-capped summits. The highest reaches 18,715' and was first climbed by Edward Whymper and the Carrel brothers in 1880. Our gentle descent is through rolling terrain until we arrive to our first camp, set across from a 4-mile-long lava flow which drops into the waters at the far end of **Laguna Volcan**, or Volcano Lake. **Trek length:** 5 miles or 4.5 hours; **Camp elevation:** 11,600' (B,L,D)

DAY 05 (TUE): QUEBRADA SECA CAMP

The birdwatching opportunities are excellent as we continue our trek today, possibly observing the short-eared owl, the Andean lapwing, the carunculated caracara, and several of the more than 126 species of hummingbirds which have been recorded in Ecuador. Our trail starts off by climbing steeply, following ridges that run above deep gorges as well as passing through boggy terrain and small patches of *quishuar* and *cholán* trees, as we hike toward the plains at the base of **Antisana**. After a period of relatively level cross-country travel, we ascend to a high plateau at 13,900' and pass by a dry lake located between the rocky peaks of Antisana, a near completely destroyed volcano, and the impressive Antisana. From this altitude we have extensive views in all directions, and as we draw nearer to the slopes of Ecuador's fourth highest mountain we have a good chance of observing a majestic condor or two soaring above the highland valleys. Condors can fly more than one hundred miles almost without beating their wings as they search the Andes for carrion. Designated as a wildlife sanctuary, this is one of the few areas in the country where these impressive birds can still be seen. We pass one of Antisana's ancient lava flows as we descend toward a stream in **Quebrada Seca**, near where we set our second camp. **Trek length:** 8.5 miles or 7 hours; **Camp elevation:** 13,360' (B,L,D)

Ecuador: Highlands Full Moon Trek

DAY 06 (WED): MICACOCHA LAKE/COTOPAXI PARK

This morning we have a short trekking day with a descent to the south. We notice that much of the regional vegetation grows close to the ground and has unique characteristics, like fuzzy hairs or succulent-type leaves, for protection from the strong sunlight during the day and the sharp drop in temperatures at night. Some of the unusual species of flora we observe are the puya, senecio (rabbit ears), genciana, achupallas, and chuquiragua plants. We enjoy an abundance of alpine wildflowers as well. Most of our route today is cross-country, passing through some wet areas and crossing several streams as we hike beneath hills on the way to Micacocha Lake (12,960'), known for its good trout fishing. Today we may spot wildlife like rabbits, the white-tailed deer, the rare Andean pudu (one of the smallest deer species in the world), the Andean wolf (a misnomer as this animal is a member of the fox family) and plenty of waterfowl. Not far away stands Sincholagua, an extinct volcano whose summit reaches 16,055'. After a lunch break by the lake, we say goodbye to our staff and their horses and board our vehicle for a descent along a paved winding road to the community of Pintag. Once in the valley we drive to Machachi and the entrance to **Cotopaxi National Park**, home of the world's highest active volcano. Cotopaxi (19,350') dominates the landscape for miles around. We stop at the Hacienda Santa Rita for a walk in its private Ecological Reserve and the option to try their zip-line. We then drive a short distance to the nearby and comfortable Chilcabamba Ec lodge for dinner and overnight. **Trek length:** 4-5 miles or 3-4 hours. (B,L,D)

DAYS 07 (THU): COTOPAXI HIKES

Today we hike towards the *Pucara de Salitre* ruins, a small Incan checkpoint used to control transit through the Pita River Valley. Our route winds across the highland plains of **Cotopaxi National Park**, created in 1975 to protect 82,514 acres and several volcanoes, the most notable being the perfectly cone-shaped and snow-capped Cotopaxi. While hiking, signs of its most recent eruption, in 1902, are evident in the sand, stone and volcanic debris. Typical páramo plants include tussock grass, *chuquiragua* (large ground daisies), and *cacho de venado* (deer's antlers). We visit Tambopaxi ecotourism complex, a recently built hostel and acclimatization center housing a restaurant serving tasty cuisine with panoramic views. Tambopaxi was built with the surrounding páramo environment in mind and caters to climbers heading up Cotopaxi. In the afternoon, we walk around **Limpiopungo Lake**, enjoying an abundance of birds and scenic vistas. Nearby Ruminahui peak (15,490') was named for the Inca Atahualpa's general, whose stony expression was renowned throughout the Inca Empire. We return to the Chilcabamba Ec lodge and relax as the sunset turns the glaciers varying shades of gold and mauve. **Hike length:** 6-7 miles or 6 hours. (B,L,D)

DAYS 08 (FRI): COTOPAXI GLACIERS

Leaving early, we drive a short distance towards Cotopaxi, taking the high road that leads to the José Ribas Climber's Refuge, so we can approach the mountain for close-up photographs of its glaciers and mile-wide summit. We hike uphill from the parking area for about an hour to reach the refuge at 15,750'. From this point, we continue hiking and approaching the glaciers. After plenty of time to enjoy the vistas and capture photos, we descend to the parking area and board our vehicle for the return to Chilcabamba. This afternoon we have time for another short hike in the area before dinner at the Ec lodge. (B,L,D)

DAY 09 (SAT): COTOPAXI/QUITO

After a leisurely breakfast and time for a morning walk, we board our vehicle for the return drive to **Quito**. Leaving Cotopaxi National Park, we head back through the Avenue of the Volcanoes, named for the eleven snow-capped, volcanic peaks that line either side of the central valley. Upon arrival, we check in to the familiar Swissotel. This afternoon, we join our local guide for a brief tour of the "*Jewel of the Andes*", as this charming capital city is often called. We stroll along the cobbled streets of the colonial section, visit the main plaza and cathedral, and tour the impressive La Compañía or San Francisco churches before heading up to the top of *El Panecillo*, or breadroll hill, for an excellent panoramic overview of Quito and the glacier-clad volcanoes: Cotopaxi, Antisana and Cayambe. Later, we tour the archaeological museum to appreciate Ecuador's rich historical heritage. The remainder of the afternoon is unstructured, allowing time for personal shopping or sightseeing before we join our local guide for a congenial farewell dinner at one of the best gourmet restaurants in the city. **Driving distance:** 55 miles or 2 hours. (B,L,D)

DAY 10 (SUN): QUITO/USA

Transfer to the airport with check-in assistance for the flight back to the USA. (B)

NOTES ON THE ITINERARY: Although we do our best to adhere to the schedule listed above, the day-by-day activities and camping locations listed on this itinerary are subject to change for numerous reasons beyond our control including group pace, interests and acclimatization, weather, trail, or road conditions and/or water availability at the campsites according to the time of the year. Hiking distances and altitudes are approximate, and times indicated are

Ecuador: Highlands Full Moon Trek

NET hiking or driving times that do not include lunch breaks, rest stops, time to explore the area, etc. This program is suitable for physically fit participants accustomed to outdoor activities, minimum seven years old.

2012 LAND COST:	\$3,825 p.p.d. (4-6 participants)
	\$3,595 p.p.d. (7-12 participants)
	\$ 595 Single Supplement

p.p.d.=per person based on double occupancy

SERVICES INCLUDED:

- Comprehensive **pre-departure planning packet** and expert travel advice.
- All **in-country transfers** as scheduled (transfers on different days are additional). Ground transportation in spacious and comfortable private vehicles with professional drivers.
- Local and return flight reconfirmation, **in-country airport check-in and luggage assistance**.
- All **accommodations in First-Class hotels** as listed (or at similar hotels, best lodges at remote locations) on a shared basis with private bath. Double beds for couples (king/queen) can be requested in advance, but cannot be guaranteed, as most hotels offer few rooms with double beds.
- Single Supplement includes single room and single tent on trek. Due to the small size of the hotels in the Ecuadorian highlands, the number of singles available per group are limited to 2. Single accommodations at the small Chilcabamba Lodge may not be available. If you require single accommodations, making reservations well in advance is recommended.
- All **meals** indicated on the itinerary (B=breakfast, L=lunch, D=dinner); **Vegetarian diets accommodated** on request (advance notification required). For other diets, consult your travel specialist before making a reservation.
- All **guided tours** (as listed) conducted on a private basis by knowledgeable, English-speaking local guides (includes applicable entrance fees).
- **First-class trekking service** includes:
 - Experienced, licensed, English-speaking, Andean guide & assistant guide (assistant provided for groups with 8 or more participants).
 - Expert camp chef & kitchen assistant, camp assistant & local horse handlers with their pack animals (handlers are treated & compensated well, horses/mules carry a maximum of 45 lbs of an individual trekker's personal gear).
 - All group camping equipment: spacious 3-person all season Eureka K-2, North Face VE-25 or similar tents (shared by just 2 members), Thermarest™ sleeping pads, kitchen & dining tents, folding tables & camp stools and an environmentally friendly toilet tent.
 - All meals: we serve a variety of healthy food with fresh & native ingredients. A cup of hot wake-up tea is brought to your tent door followed by a hot breakfast, box or picnic lunch, and a 3 course served dinner.
 - First-aid kit.

NOT INCLUDED:

- US domestic nor International flights.
- Ecuadorian airport departure taxes (\$41 when leaving the country).
- One (1) meal at about \$20-30.
- Tours, excursions, accommodations or services not indicated on the itinerary.
- Tips to the tour guides & drivers, plus main trekking staff (trekking guide, assistant, chefs & handlers).
- Alcoholic beverages nor items of a personal nature; such as clothing, equipment, laundry & phone calls.
- Sleeping bag & other personal gear. Southwind has a **limited** number of synthetic sleeping bags rated to 0°F available for rent for \$40 per person. Advance reservations and prepayment are required.
- Expenses incurred in preparing for this program such as, but not limited to, non-refundable airline tickets or traveler's insurance, and additional expenses resulting from flight delays, schedule changes, cancellations, or missed connections.

TRAVEL INSURANCE: We strongly recommend purchasing a plan to protect your trip investment. Travel insurance helps to cover unexpected events prior to departure causing the need to cancel or change your dates. Weather, geologic events, local strikes, a personal injury/illness to you, family member or your traveling companion could cause interruption or changes to your itinerary, missed connections, delayed arrival, lost/delayed baggage or

Ecuador: Highlands Full Moon Trek

need for medical attention on the trip or evacuation which is why coverage is important. We recommend the *Worldwide Trip Protector (WTP)* plan offered by Travel Insured International (TII). **Kids 17 and under are free with related adult on the WTP plan.** Information and an application are sent upon receipt of your deposit (sooner if requested). Policies can be purchased securely online at: www.southwindadventures.com/insurance.html. If you, your traveling companion or a family member has a pre-existing medical condition, you should purchase the WTP policy within 21 days of your deposit in order to be reimbursed for non-refundable costs if a recurrence of the condition forces you to cancel your trip (some restrictions apply). Please call our office or visit our website for more information.

EARLY ARRIVAL TO QUITO: Participants living at sea level and travelers with an extra day of vacation time are **strongly encouraged** to consider arriving to Quito a day earlier, on Thursday. Not only does this provide a head start in the process of acclimating to the higher elevations (a definite advantage when you are trekking), but also allows more time to explore this historical city and enjoy some of the great shopping and sightseeing available.

ESTIMATED AIRFARE: The Land Cost for this trip DOES NOT INCLUDE ANY FLIGHTS.

Round-trip airfare from a US gateway city to Quito is about \$800-\$1,000. Flights to Quito are currently serviced by American Airlines (Miami), United/Continental (Houston), Delta (Atlanta) and LAN Airlines (Miami or JFK). Upon receipt of your deposit, Southwind will send you more information about booking your flights to match your land itinerary. Southwind will need your flight schedule 45 days prior to departure to arrange transfers.

WEATHER: Influenced by its equatorial location, the Humboldt current, Amazon rainforests and Andean peaks, Ecuador's weather patterns are unique in South America. Typically, the country has a mild climate with temperatures varying more by altitude than by season. Instead of four seasons, each region has a "wet" and "dry" season. **Quito** and the central highland's "dry" season is generally from June-September, with another spell of "dry" weather from November-January, although rain can be expected year round. Temperatures in the capital range from 40°F at night to 70-75°F during the day. **Cotopaxi Park** has an average temperature of 45°F year-round with daily variations ranging from 32°F at night to 68°F during the day. The area receives approximately 42" of rain per year with the majority concentrated between March and May and the least amount of rainfall occurring between June and September.

Why a full moon trek? In addition to beautiful vistas, moon-rises behind glacier-clad peaks and clear moonlit nights are particularly spectacular. **Typically**, the period around the full moon in the Andes tends to have clearer weather than the rest of the month, so we use this period to increase our chances of having the best climatic conditions.

○ **2012/13 Full Moon:** Jun 04, Jul 03, Aug 01 & 31, Sep 29, Oct 29, Nov 28, Dec 28, 2012. Jan 26 & Feb 25, 2013.

HOW TO SIGN UP: Submit Southwind's Trip Reservation Form along with a \$1,000 per person per trip deposit (payable by check or credit card). The form and deposit can be completed securely online at www.southwindadventures.com by clicking on "Book a Trip" at the top of our homepage. If you prefer, you can print the Trip Reservation Form and mail/fax it to our office with your deposit. You can also call us at 1-800-377-9463 to make payment arrangements (**your deposit will be charged and your reservation confirmed once we receive your Trip Reservation Form**).

Due to the popularity of Ecuador's highlands, we recommend making reservations at least 4 months in advance. Once your trip is guaranteed to operate, you will receive a comprehensive pre-departure packet.

Land Balance: Final payment is due at 90 days by Visa, Mastercard, Discover, American Express or check. You will receive a trip invoice indicating your balance due. Provided services and space are available, reservations can be accepted up to 21 days before departure.

Cancellation Fees and other policies are outlined under the 2012 Terms & Conditions on Southwind's website (click Book a Trip>2012 Terms & Conditions).

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