



## ECUADOR

**Custom Sample Itinerary**  
**Andean Lake District, Quito & the Galápagos Islands**  
**12 days/11 nights**  
**(can be adjusted longer or shorter according to preference)**



[Map of South America](#) (interactive links)

Destination Maps: [Galapagos Islands](#) & [Ecuador Mainland](#)

**SEASON:** Year round. The equatorial location gives Ecuador a typically mild climate, with temperatures varying more by altitude than by season. The country has a dry season in the Andean highlands from June to September and November to January. Quito ranges from low 40's at night to mid 70's during the day. From July to October, the Galápagos highlands experience a cool misty season, so we recommend staying lower on the coast near Puerto Ayora where Finch Bay Hotel is located where warm weather is found all months of the year.

**TRIP RATING:** Easy/moderate highland & island tour (Grade I) - This activity oriented trip includes excursions at elevations of up to 12,600 ft in the Andes together with optional water activities in Galápagos such as swimming, snorkeling and kayaking with marine wildlife and easy hikes of up to 4 hours duration on occasionally rough or rocky trails. Anyone in reasonably good fitness and condition can enjoy a visit to the highlands and the *Enchanted Isles*.

This is a personalized guided trip with your own private guide and vehicle/driver in Quito and the Lake District. At Finch Bay, you can choose from a variety of nature excursions led by on-site expert guides in small groups with other guests.





**INTRODUCTION:** Ecuador's highlands feature some of the most beautiful countryside vistas in South America. In this majestic region, we encounter haciendas dating back centuries where proprietors still work the fertile rolling hills, and have opened their doors to visitors interested in traditional Andean culture. In this setting, we are swept away to a land where time stands still. The tranquility, here at the center of the world, is arrayed with patchwork fields, awe-inspiring glaciated volcanoes, lush cloud forests and centuries-old colonial villages. Handicrafts flourish, including wood carving, leather working, ornament making and intricate weaving. In addition to exceptional cross-cultural opportunities, we find unique species of flora and fauna in well-protected ecological reserves.

**Quito** is a charming city along the Avenue of the Volcanoes as a rising star among South American capitals and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The mainland Andean climate is spring-like year round and just outside the city is a visitor site marking the equators path through the country where you can put a foot in both hemispheres at the same time.






**Galápagos National Park** straddles the equator 600 miles west of Ecuador's Pacific coast. Undisturbed for centuries and isolated from the mainland, unusual species of birds, plants, reptiles and some mammals developed on the island's rocky, volcanic atolls. Darwin's visit and subsequent studies of the island's flora and fauna in 1835 contributed to the formulation of his theory on the evolution of species and brought this fascinating ecosystem to the world's attention. Ecuador's largest park, was established in 1959 to protect the archipelago's unique environment and wildlife. The landmass consists of nearly 3,000 square miles which is divided between 6 large islands, 12 smaller islands, and over 40 islets. The creation of the Marine Resources Reserve expanded the preserved area to include more than 27,000 sq miles of ocean.

**Finch Bay Galápagos Hotel** is a member of National Geographic's Unique Lodges of the World and the only hotel in the area located on a beach. While based at the hotel, explore Santa Cruz Island's natural wonders with swimming, snorkeling, sea kayaking, nature hiking, birdwatching and bike touring. Try a surf lesson or bike ride along quiet island roads. The nearby village of Puerto Ayora is home to the Charles Darwin Research & Visitor Center and a pleasant main street along the bay with cafes and shops. Farms nearby offer the chance to see giant tortoises in the wild and large underground lava tunnels to walk through. Day yacht excursions to nearby islands can be arranged. There is no road access, the hotel is reached by way of a 5 min launch ride across the harbor and a short walk.

**DATE TOURING / HOTELS / MEALS** (indicated as B,L,D)

<p><b>DAY 01</b> <b>THU</b></p>	<p><b>TO ECUADOR</b> Depart home and arrive this evening to Quito, Ecuador's Andean capital set in a wide valley between rugged volcanic peaks. Meet your friendly Southwind guide at the airport and transfer 20 min to a nearby colonial style country-inn at an elevation of 7,875 ft. <a href="#">Hostería Rincon de Puembo</a></p>	
<p><b>DAY 02</b> <b>FRI</b></p>	<p><b>ANDEAN LAKE DISTRICT</b> After breakfast, meet your guide and drive by private vehicle 2 hours north to the fertile valleys of Lake San Pablo. Stop en route at sites of interest such as the <b>equator monument</b> in Cayambe marking the path through the country where you'll cross from the Southern Hemisphere to the Northern. Continue to your colonial hacienda located just 12 miles north of the equator and known for sunny days and a climate described as an "ever- blooming spring." The elevation here is 8,530 ft. This afternoon can be a hike in the <b>Cotacachi-Cayapas Ecological Reserve</b> for views of Lake Cuicocha formed in the crater of an ancient volcano. Along the way we have good views of the snow-capped Cayambe, Imbabura and Cotacachi volcanoes. Or in place of a hike, there are several <b>nearby villages</b> such as Cotacachi known for their leather work, hat making, bread dough artistry and embroidery products where you can meet the locals and learn about their artisan talents. Dinner is included at the hacienda. (B,L,D) <a href="#">Hacienda Cusin</a></p>	 
<p><b>DAY 03</b> <b>SAT</b></p>	<p><b>ANDEAN LAKE DISTRICT</b> Saturday is <b>market day</b> in the Lake District community of <b>Otavalo</b> (8,300'). This is one of South America's largest and best markets dating back centuries when Indians from the lowland jungles would visit the highlands to trade their products. After breakfast, join your guide to catch the colorful action of the live animal auction where the Otavaleños' practice a unique form of silent bartering. Next, join in with the locals heading to the plazas where produce and craft stalls are set up. A multitude of artisan crafts here overflow into the streets including exquisite woolen products and embroidery work for which the Otavalo weavers are renowned. Also found are ceramics, wood carvings and leather goods from all over the country. The Otavalo weavers are renowned for their talent, this combined with a sharp business sense has contributed to world-wide recognition of their proficiency as weavers and they have become one of the most prosperous of all indigenous groups in South America.</p>	

	<p>Next, drive to the <b>San Clemente community</b> (9,485 ft), located in a higher valley outside Ibarra on the hills of the Imbabura volcano. Enjoy lunch and an opportunity to explore the area on foot and learn about the history and traditions of this Quichua Karanqui people that welcome travelers as part of their <b>ecotourism initiative</b>. Return to the hacienda with a stop in <b>Peguche</b> to visit a textile or Andean instruments workshop. (B,L,D)  <a href="#">Hacienda Cusin</a></p>	
<p><b>DAY 04 SUN</b></p>	<p><b>ANDEAN LAKE DISTRICT / QUITO</b>  Morning visit of the <b>Condor Park Bird Sanctuary</b> and rescue center to learn about a variety of native birds such as eagles, hawks, owls and condors. The park also features nice gardens with unique flora. Afterwards, we drive 2 hours south to the capital, stopping at the <b>Cochasqui ruins</b> to visit this pre-Inca astronomic observatory and ceremonial center featuring 15 pyramidal structures. It is believed that the complex was constructed by the Cara Indians starting around 950 AD. In 1979 it was named a site of Cultural Patrimony. Shamans still congregate here for spiritual ceremonies, especially around the solstices and equinoxes. Your guide will provide interpretation on a walk among the grass covered pyramids where excavations have found circular platforms thought to have served as calendars of the sun and moon. There is also evidence of pillars acting as sundials casting shadows and of alignment with the summit of <b>Cayambe volcano</b> seen in the distance. The hilltop location offers stunning landscape views of northern Ecuador.</p> <p>Continue south along Ecuador's <b>Avenue of the Volcanoes</b> to Quito - a rising star among South American capitals with narrow cobbled streets, fine eateries, flowered balconies and colonial churches. Join your guide for an introductory tour of the city highlights before settling in at your boutique hotel (elev 9,350 ft) with an ideal location in the center of pedestrian friendly <b>old town Quito</b>. The main plaza (Independence Square) is only a half block away. Cafes, shops are museums are also within walking distance. The hotel features a central atrium for dining with warm natural light and an inviting colonial-style architecture with large arches and interior patios. (B,L)  <a href="#">Patio Andaluz Boutique Hotel</a></p>	 
<p><b>DAY 05 MON</b></p>	<p><b>QUITO</b>  After a leisurely breakfast, join your guide for a private city tour of Quito, a <b>UNESCO World Heritage Site</b> for its whitewashed adobe buildings, historic churches and preserved plazas for strolling. Visit the main <b>Plaza de la Independencia</b>, home to the Presidential Palace and nearby La Compañía and San Francisco churches with collections of colonial paintings. We also visit the Casa del Alabado Museum and enjoy lunch at Pims either at Panecillo or Itchimbia Hill with nice views of the valley and surrounding mountains. At a <b>local chocolate workshop</b> learn how Ecuador has risen to the top of world fame for producing award winning chocolate from locally produced cacao - you can try some local treats. Return to your hotel with the evening at leisure to relax and dine in or nearby at one of Quito's fine restaurants. (B,L)  <a href="#">Patio Andaluz Boutique Hotel</a></p>	

<p><b>DAY 06</b> <b>TUE</b></p>	<p><b>QUITO / MITAD DEL MUNDO</b></p> <p>After breakfast, join your guide for a drive about an hour north of the capital to <b>Mitad del Mundo</b>, marking the equator's path through the country where you can put a foot in each hemisphere. Nearby, visit the intriguing open air <b>Inti-ñan solar museum</b> with exhibits unique to the geographical location, such as balancing an egg on the head of nail and the Coriolis Effect, demonstrating equal forces only found on the equator. A sun dial not only tells time, but produces a shadow on its south and north face precisely for 6 months and only on both faces during the equinoxes. Exhibits of Ecuador's ethnic groups feature typical clothing, housing styles and local customs. Lunch is included at the nearby Santana Brewery to try craft beers and local dishes before returning to Quito for some leisure time to shop and dine out in old town this evening. (B,L)</p> <p><a href="#">Patio Andaluz Boutique Hotel</a></p>	
<p><b>DAY 07</b> <b>WED</b></p>	<p><b>QUITO / GALAPAGOS ISLANDS</b></p> <p>After an early breakfast, meet your guide for a private transfer to the airport to check-in for a <b>flight from Quito to Galápagos-Baltra Airport</b> (2 hours). Meet your naturalist guide and transfer with other guests to nearby <b>Santa Cruz Island</b>. Drive to the top of the island to explore the Gemelos twin craters and enjoy lunch at a local farm while searching for giant tortoises roaming in the wild. These lush highlands include dense forests consisting of Galápagos daisies, orchids and bromeliads as well as several endemic land birds. Large underground lava tunnels can be found nearby.</p> <p>Continue to the village of <b>Puerto Ayora</b> and check-in to the Finch Bay on Santa Cruz Island. A member of National Geographic's Unique Lodges of the World, this is the only hotel in the area located on a beach. The coastal location is warmer compared to the cooler and more humid highlands where other hotels are located. Finch Bay has a pristine ecological location only accessible with a 5 min launch ride across the harbor and a short walk. (B)</p> <p><a href="#">Finch Bay Galapagos Hotel</a> - 5 day/4 night stay</p> <p><b>Note:</b> Your activities and meals at Finch Bay are a-la-carte arranged directly on arrival according to preference. Breakfast is included daily and you can choose to dine in the hotel's open air dining room for lunch and dinner or explore a variety of nice restaurant choices in Puerto Ayora. There is a swimming pool, white sand beach, snorkeling, sea kayaking, nature hiking, birdwatching, biking and exploring the charming main street in the village and nearby Charles Darwin Visitor Center.</p>	  
<p><b>DAY 08</b> <b>THU</b></p>	<p><b>GALAPAGOS ISLANDS / FINCH BAY</b></p> <p>Activities at Finch Bay arranged on your own with the hotel according to interest. This morning, we recommend an active small group excursion with a 2 mile walk from town out to the white sand beach at <b>Tortuga Bay</b>. This is considered one of the most beautiful beaches in all of Galápagos. You'll likely get to share the beach with sea lions and marine iguanas. A secluded cove at the end of the beach is ideal for sea kayaking and snorkeling to spot rays and fish. Return to the hotel around mid-day.</p> <p>Or, if you prefer to kayak, we recommended a half day paddling outing from the hotel beach to the quiet and wildlife-rich <b>Divine Bay</b>. This pristine and calm cove is protected by natural reefs on one side and mangrove trees and lava cliffs on the other side. Look for herons, nobby terns nesting alongside blue-footed boobies. Sea turtles graze on the ocean floor and you might even spot a curious young reef shark.</p>	

	<p>This afternoon works well to walk along main street to watch the local fisherman bring in their catch at the market pier. At the end of town, you'll find the <b>Darwin Station</b> offering a wealth of natural history interpretation along outdoor pathways, wildlife viewing and learning about famous Lonesome George - the last known survivor of his species who serves as a symbol for conservation in the islands. The visitor center has an exhibition hall and a nice gift shop where proceeds support the non-profit foundation. Afterwards, you can walk back along main street before returning to the hotel for some leisure time to enjoy the pool and beach. (B)</p> <p><a href="#">Finch Bay Galapagos Hotel</a></p>	
<p><b>DAY 09 FRI</b></p>	<p><b>GALAPAGOS ISLANDS / DAY YACHT EXCURSION</b>  Today we recommend a day on the water with a visit to one of the nearby islands. If you choose this option, after breakfast you'll transfer to the port to board a day yacht for a charter excursion. Enjoy the casual relaxed ambiance of the yacht and do a shore excursion in the national park to view unusual wildlife, walk along nature paths, swim and snorkel. This is a guided group excursion with other travelers onboard (up to 16 maximum), the boat has several comfortable sitting areas including an observation deck. Snorkeling gear and wetsuits are provided. A buffet style prepared lunch is included on the yacht. Return to the hotel for sunset and to unwind. (B,L)</p> <p><a href="#">Finch Bay Galapagos Hotel</a></p>	
<p><b>DAY 10 SAT</b></p>	<p><b>GALAPAGOS ISLANDS / FINCH BAY</b>  Activities at Finch Bay arranged on your own with the hotel according to interest. This morning, we recommend a small group excursion to <b>Cerro Mesa Hill</b> for an impressive view of the archipelago. This is a great spot to observe numerous endemic plants as well as up to 7 subspecies of finch and the Vermillion Flycatcher. The area is characterized by a persistent mist 8 months of the year making for a lush landscape. The west side features the largest crater on Santa Cruz. Afterwards, continue to the pristine <b>Garrapatero Beach</b> for a nature walk and picnic lunch. Black lava, mangroves, white sand, Pioneer cacti and turquoise water combine to create a spectacle setting. A small lagoon near the beach sometimes has pink flamingos and bahama ducks. Enjoy sea kayaking, snorkeling and swimming according to local conditions. Return to the hotel to swim in the pool or enjoy a cocktail by the ocean before dinner. (B)</p> <p><a href="#">Finch Bay Galapagos Hotel</a></p>	
<p><b>DAY 11 SUN</b></p>	<p><b>GALAPAGOS ISLANDS / QUITO / DEPARTURE</b>  Depart Finch Bay and transfer to the airport for your <b>flight from Galápagos (Baltra) to Quito</b> (1 stop in Guayaquil en route). Reception by your local guide and transfer to the nearby community of Tumbaco to relax during the layover at the peaceful grounds of Rukka Lodge. You can dine among several open-air eateries at the adjoining Garden House and relax by the pool. Your guide will pick you up later this evening and transfer you to the Quito airport with check-in assistance for your overnight flight home. (B)</p>	
<p><b>DAY 12 MON</b></p>	<p><b>ARRIVE HOME</b>  Arrive in your gateway city this morning, clear customs and make onward connections home.</p>	

**Meals:** B=breakfast; L=lunch; D=dinner. If a meal is not indicated above, you have flexibility to dine out at your leisure.

**OPTIONAL LONGER OR SHORTER TRIPS:** For travelers with less time, we can take out 1 night from the Lake Region or Quito. If you have more time, consider a 3 night pre-extension to the southern city of [Cuenca and the Inca site of Ingapirca](#). For those interested in the [Amazon rainforest](#), a 3 night stay at Sacha Lodge can be arranged or a 3 night nature cruise on the Anakonda riverboat. For avid hikers, we can plan 2-3 nights in the Riobamba/Chimborazo Volcano area with a stopover in the hot springs town of Banos beneath the active Tungurahua Volcano.

**NEXT STEP:** Please contact Tom Damon to setup a custom planning phone call. With your feedback on the destinations, activities and accommodations in this sample itinerary, Southwind will create a custom proposal tailored to your travel style, goals, dates and budget. Your proposal will provide Land Cost pricing and more details. Accommodations shown in this sample itinerary are in the 4-5 star category with superior or preferential rooms with views. Optional upgrades to exclusive top tier hotels can be provided during the planning. Note that space or room types cannot be guaranteed until a design fee or deposit is paid and Southwind receives confirmation. It will help to finalize plans at your soonest convenience for best selection. For high season or holiday dates, we are able to place a complimentary hold with a design fee to help secure space while we fine tune your itinerary.

**We look forward to having you travel with us in Ecuador & the Galápagos Islands!**

For more information please contact your personal travel planner:  
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