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LATIN AMERICA



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WALKING IN ECUADOR AND GALAPAGOS

12 days from **£5,485pp**

ECUADOR & GALAPAGOS ISLANDS / AVENUE OF THE VOLCANOES / QUITO / OTAVALO AND THE NORTHERN HIGHLANDS / SANTA CRUZ ISLAND (INDEFATIGABLE) / ISABELA (ALBEMARLE)



WITH OVER 40 YEARS EXPERIENCE, NO-ONE KNOWS LATIN AMERICA LIKE WE DO

EXPERIENCE SOMETHING EXTRAORDINARY

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

This scenic outdoor holiday offers an in depth experience of Ecuador's traditional Andean culture and a land-based exploration of a select few of the wildlife-rich Galápagos Islands.

DAY 1	**Arrive Quito, continue by road to Otavalo.**
DAY 2	**Visit Andean craft villages and Otavalo market.**
DAY 3	**Trek from Zuleta to Cotopaxi.**
DAY 4	**Climb Pasochoa peak 4,200m.**
DAY 5	**Hike the Pedregal Trail in Cotopaxi National Park.**
DAY 6	**Climb to the snowline on Cotopaxi volcano, 5,100m.**
DAY 7	**Quito: walking city tour.**
DAY 8	**Fly to Baltra in the Galápagos Islands.**
DAY 9	**Explore the Galápagos seas - snorkelling and kayaking**
DAY 10	**Discover Isabela's giant tortoise breeding centre and Tintoreras Island.**
DAY 11	**Hike to Sierra Negra Volcano.**
DAY 12	**Return to the mainland via Baltra for your international flight.**

ITINERARY

With gentle hillwalking and a couple of a bit more challenging climbs, this holiday offers a unique perspective on the deeply traditional rural lifestyle of the indigenous Andean communities in Ecuador while at the same time you appreciate glorious mountain scenery.

Having explored the markets, craft villages and fertile valleys studded with snow-clad volcanoes, you will fly to the Galápagos Islands - rather than join as more conventional cruise you'll spend for a few days discovering a select few of the contrasting islands with walks, water-based activities and short trips by motor launch. The famous trusting wildlife is everywhere to be seen, both from afar and way up close.

DAY 1

Arrive Quito, continue by road to Otavalo.

Upon arrival at Quito's lofty international airport you'll be whisked off into the rugged Andean countryside beyond the capital en route to Otavalo, renowned market town in the north of the country. Your rustic, family-run accommodation with its cottages and open fireplaces, provides a warm welcome, and glorious views of the mountain landscape.

DAY 2

Visit Andean craft villages and Otavalo market.



Today you have a mixture of moderate hiking with visits to some of the little towns and villages which stud the plains and valleys of this picturesque region. The people here lead a slow-paced, traditional lifestyle, some raising hardy crops and livestock on their pocket-sized farmsteads while others are artisan craftsmen and women, producing intricate textiles and leather goods which are sold in the many local markets as well as on the international stage.

Walk an age-old track from Mojanda to reach the lively town of Otavalo. Your guide will help you understand more about the local economy, but you are at leisure to explore at your own pace. Otavalo hosts one of the largest and most vibrant indigenous markets in South America. Stalls are laden with tapestries and woollen goods, some intricate, some brash, and all in a wild array of colours, as well as traditional musical instruments and leather goods. You're bound to find something to take home.

Move on to explore on foot some small communities including Agato, where we will be hosted by a family which preserves the tradition of weaving on a backstrap loom. Later you will head deeper into the countryside, learning about small-scale agriculture and meeting local farmers. Spend the night at a countryside 17th century hacienda.

DAY 3

Trek from Zuleta to Cotopaxi.



Today you head out by road for the start of a day of fairly gentle high-altitude walking (4-5 hrs) across mountain trails and past remote homesteads into the Zuleta valley beyond. This agricultural area is famed for its traditional embroidery, dairy products, alpaca farming and highland crops such as wheat, maize, potatoes, lentils and quinoa.

The people of Zuleta jealously protect their culture and traditions, and wear a different costume from the striking blue and white attire of the Otavalo indians. The strong sense of community was fostered by the liberal reformist agenda of the aristocratic family who owned one of the larger haciendas in the area; their enlightened helped create a thriving local community which is now one of the country's premier eco-tourism destinations.

In Zuleta you will learn how to prepare a typical Andean lunch, coached by a local family in their welcoming home. In the afternoon, you are driven south (2-3hrs) to your next accommodation, in the heart of Ecuador's volcano country.

DAY 4

Climb Pasochoa peak 4,200m.



Today is a serious hiking day, where you'll be on foot for a total of around seven hours, including a climb up to Pasochoa peak, which is measured at a challenging 4,200m. However you'll be walking at a leisurely pace, initially over grassland trails. Your efforts to reach the peak will be rewarded with a spectacular view of the Pasochoa crater, and beyond you'll survey the mountains surrounding Quito, including identifiable snow-draped volcanoes including the imperious Cotopaxi.

Later you descend to the Pita river canyon, a downhill walk of about 3 hrs through grasslands and low forests, ending at your rural lodge, Chilcabamba, situated at an altitude of about-3,500m, with tantalising views of Cotopaxi beyond.

DAY 5

Hike the Pedregal Trail in Cotopaxi National Park.

Today is a definite highlight: you head into Cotopaxi National Park, one of the most delightful protected areas of Ecuador. When the weather cooperates, views of the volcano Cotopaxi 's ice-clad, near symmetrical cone are awe-inspiring. You start at the Pita river, fed by the volcano itself and which you follow for much of the walk.

The hike enters the Cotopaxi National Park near an archaeological site – Pucara de Salitre – where you will be able to observe a variety of migrant and resident Andean birds. On the way, you might also spot some of the wild horses, deer or llamas which make the park their home, as well as gorgeous seasonal mountain wildflowers and wild and remote highland scenery. Finish your walk at Lake Limpiopungo, speckled with birdlife. During this adventure, you will stop to enjoy a picnic in the crisp alpine environment, and return by road after the day's exploration to your cosy mountain lodge, Chilcabamba.

DAY 6

Climb to the snowline on Cotopaxi volcano, 5,100m.



This is the culmination of all your efforts: the final push up to the snowline on the majestic slopes of Cotopaxi. From the lodge you will drive in your private vehicle to the parking area of the Cotopaxi mountain refuge. You will then walk for approximately an hour before reaching the mountaineers' lodge, and hike from there to the edge of the glacier, a further hour beyond.

From this point the northern side of the mountain offers a spectacular panorama. You will be able to identify (with the help of your guide) all the ground you have covered since the first day of your adventure.

For many of you, this will be the highest place on earth you have ever reached, some 5,100m above sea level and the sense achievement will be great. The descent, which will take approximately 2 hrs, follows the same route back to the vehicle and we head back to Quito.

DAY 7

Quito: walking city tour.



The active volcano Pichincha glowers over Quito, a dynamic city which, at 2,850m, is one of highest capital cities 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 where your hotel is located has well-conserved and recently spruced-up white-washed architecture, open air markets and graceful Spanish-style mansions and churches.

In the morning there's a walking tour of colonial Quito, where you will survey the grand buildings of the cathedral and government palace, as well as some of the other ornate baroque churches which cluster in the historic core. You have the afternoon at leisure to continue exploring, or just relax.

DAY 8

Fly to Baltra in the Galápagos Islands.



Today you head off to the airport for our jet flight to the Galápagos Islands, which takes from 2-3 hours, depending on whether there is a stop in Guayaquil. Baltra is a tiny island which hosts the Islands' principal airport. You'll be collected and taken by boat to Puero Ayora, the principal town on Santa Cruz Island, where your hotel sits in an oasis of tranquility not from the centre of all this lively little resort's activity.

You have time to explore the town, its little shops, bars and restaurants (you may need to step over the odd iguana), head off to the snow-white beach where sea-lions laze, or visit the world-famous Charles Darwin Research Centre, a brisk 1.3km walk from the hotel on the edge of town.

Founded in 1959, the Charles Darwin Foundation is dedicated to the preservation and conservation of the Galápagos Islands and its flora and fauna. There are many projects going on at any given time, such as the removal of introduced species, monitoring the health of certain animal or plant populations, and helping set fishing limits.

DAY 9

Explore the Galápagos seas - snorkelling and kayaking

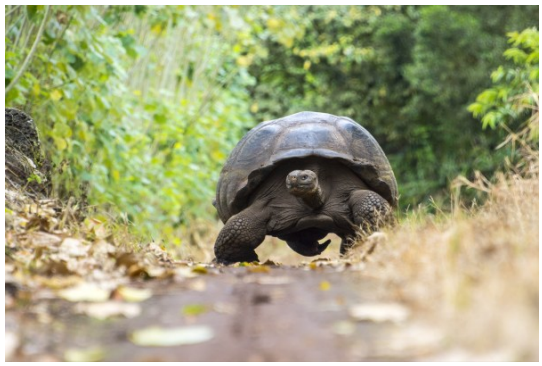


In geological terms, 'grieta' means crevasse or crack. Las Grietas is a place where you can swim or snorkel (equipment provided) in cool ocean waters between two high cliffs where the earth has opened a fissure.Take a water taxi from the pier at Puerto Ayora to a point from where you walk to La Grietas, following a short trail which begins sandy and rocky and winds up crossing over a jagged lava field, through a cactus forest, and up a sandy path once again. Upon arriving at Las Grietas walk down narrow wooden steps to a jumble of large boulders. From there, you can climb carefully into the calm, crystal-clear water, which shimmers with a gem-bright, aquamarine glow. There's a short tunnel from one pool to another, allowing you an adventurous swim underwater.

Following a picnic lunch, walk for 2.5km through a forest to one of the most beautiful beaches on the island, blessed with fine white sand – follow the beach to Playa Mansa for a guided kayak ride in the sheltered waters of Tortuga Bay.

DAY 10

Discover Isabela's giant tortoise breeding centre and Tintoreras Island.



Take an early morning speed boat to Isabela Island. Once you have checked in at your accommodation you will visit the Giant Tortoise Breeding Centre, a 1km walk along a hand built walkway from Puerto Villamil, passing salt water mangrove lagoons inhabited by flamingos and marine iguanas. Isabela is the only island with several species of tortoises. The distances between the volcanoes and the different environments have allowed five different species to evolve. At the breeding centre you can see these different examples of tortoises up close at various stages of development from small hatchlings, to juveniles, to sub adults until they are eventually ready to be introduced to the wild where they can live to be over 100 years old and weigh a hefty 200kg.

After lunch, continue on to Tintoreras, a group of small islands near the village of Puerto Villamil. The islands are named after the white tipped 'Tintoreras' reef sharks which swim in these calm waters. On Tintoreras you will also see almost all of the archipelago's signature wildlife: sea-lions, turtles, rays, penguins, pelicans and blue footed boobies. After walking on the island, you can snorkel in the bay. Don't be surprised if some of the penguins or sea-lions jump in to play alongside you in the water! You will have the pleasure of sharing the experience with other Galápagos visitors.

DAY 11

Hike to Sierra Negra Volcano.



Volcanic eruptions created all the islands of the Galápagos, and you will get to witness this geologic process first-hand as you explore Isabela, one of the youngest and most volcanically active islands of the archipelago. This 16km hike usually begins with some morning fog and rain but not to worry, the sun will be shining by the time you reach the rim of the Sierra Negra Volcano. This vast crater which is the largest in the archipelago and the second largest in the world is one of the most active volcanoes in the Galapagos, last erupting in 2005.

The crater views are so expansive photographs struggle to convey its size, but you should bring your camera and binoculars anyway. Head towards Volcan Chico through a martian landscape of black and pinkish rock desolate of vegetation and at first appearance void of all life, though on closer inspection reveals small lizards scurrying among the rocks. Enjoy a picnic lunch with spectacular views over central and northern parts of Isabela and in the distance the islands of Fernandina to the west and Santa Cruz to the east before returning to your hotel.

DAY 12

Return to the mainland via Baltra for your international flight.

UK clients arrive home the following day.

INCLUDED EXCURSIONS

- Mojanda to Otavalo Market walk, with community visits
- Zuleta Valley hike with Andean cookery lesson
- Climb Pasachoa peak
- Hike Pedregal trail in Cotopaxi National Park
- Climb to the snowline of Cotopaxi volcano
- Walking city tour in Quito
- Full programme of daily activities in the Galápagos

ESSENTIALS

1-2hr drives by private vehicle in and around Quito. 2 flights (3.5hrs and 2hrs). 2 speedboats (2hrs each).

You'll be staying at countryside lodges and a remodelled old residence in mainland Ecuador, a beachfront hotel and a friendly guesthouse-style hotel in the Galápagos Islands.

Breakfast daily. Lunch days 2,3,9,10,11. Full board days 4,5.

12 days, 11 nights: Otavalo region 2, Cotopaxi region 3, Quito 2, Galápagos 4 (Santa Cruz and Isabela Islands).

The unit of currency in Ecuador is the US dollar.

It is very difficult to give a guideline for essential expenses, but as most meals are included you should only need an extra $20-30 a day for drinks and souvenirs.

Cash machines are available in Quito, 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), which you can spend as the dollar is the local currency especially in the Galápagos. Dollar bills should be in good condition, soiled or torn bills may be refused. You can take sterling or euros, but the exchange rate is not always competitive or even available, restricting the number of places where you can change money.

Tips are normally welcomed and expected. Local guides often rely on their tip as a significant proportion of their income. We recommend approximately $US5-10 per person per day for each of guides and drivers, depending on the size of the group.

Travel insurance is essential. Details of our recommended policy can be found on our Travel Insurance page.

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

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This holiday is suitable for all able, fit visitors who have hiking experience and are used to an active lifestyle at home.

Lying at over 2,500m on the Equator, the highlands have a permanent spring-like climate. The rainy season in the Andes runs between November and April when there are showers most afternoons, so this departure falls in the height of the dry season when the sun is strong during the day, but at night the temperature drops dramatically (maybe as low as freezing point.). Given the proximity to the equator, altitude is the determining factor with regard to temperature. In the mountains at any time of year you should expect a variation between 15°C and 25°C.

In the Galápagos, from January to April it's hot and the sun is relentless, with some sudden showers. May to July, and October to December is cloudier; August and September it's often cloudy and cool, and a stiff breeze makes the waters choppier.

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.

Your hikes are at high altitude (2,800-5,100m). A small minority of visitors may suffer temporarily from altitude sickness.

Symptoms vary; most common are mild headaches, slight nausea and breathlessness. If you don't recover in a day or two speak to our representatives; in very rare instances it is necessary to descend to lower altitudes. Most people are unaffected and 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 suffering any symptoms.

Please refer to our Briefing Dossier for further information.

You should go prepared to encounter all seasons. A light fleece jacket and a waterproof waterproof/breathable shell makes a good combination for highland regions. You will need good walking boots, waterproof trousers, scarf, hat and gloves. Some trekkers like to use trekking poles: best to bring your own.
Sun screen and sunglasses are also highly recommended.
Don't forget your binoculars, camera, charger and cards.

Preventative vaccinations are recommended against the following: typhoid; polio; tetanus; hepatitis A. You should consult your GP for specific requirements such as malaria prophylactics. For admission to the Galápagos a yellow fever certificate is required for anyone over 1 year old coming from an area with risk of yellow fever transmission. You can also find helpful information on the Masta Travel Health website.

Cases of Zika virus have been reported in parts of Latin America. If you're pregnant, or planning to be, you should follow the advice of the National Travel Health Network and Centre

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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.

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Saturday & Sunday: Closed

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