

## Amazing Ecuador

Exploring the Ecuadorian Amazon and the Northern Highlands

*July 12 – July 24, 2009*

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**A note:** All of our itineraries are flexible. Our philosophy at Crooked Trails is to let the country guide our experiences and not to live by a strict itinerary. If unexpected events arise, we may change plans to take advantage of the situation or deal with an issue. However, we will do all we can to offer you everything that is on the schedule. Please be flexible yourself and allow the program to unfold.

\*\* Meals included in the program cost are listed as **B (breakfast)**, **L (lunch)** and **D (dinner)** for each day.

### **JULY 12 FLIGHT TO QUITO**

Travel day to Quito. You will be met at the airport by your Crooked Trails facilitator and transferred to your hotel in the center of downtown Quito. Welcome drinks and rest.

### **JULY 13: QUITO: THE CAPITOL OF ECUADOR**

Heading out to explore the city, we will start by exploring Guapalo, one of the most famous bohemian neighborhoods of Quito. We will walk through the narrow cobblestone streets and visit the small colonial church at the base of the hill. With the bright sun on the equator shining down on our shoulders we can walk through small craft stalls of local artisans. Heading to a more modern part of the city, we will visit the gallery of one of the most famous artists in Peru—Guayasamin. Here we can have lunch on the beautiful terrace overlooking the city. In the afternoon you will have some free time to self explore. **(B)**

### **JULY 14: FROM THE HIGHLANDS TO THE RAINFOREST**

We depart Quito in the early morning for the small town of Baños, driving through the “Avenue of the Volcanoes” along the way. Here the vegetation starts to change to highlands to tropical rainforest. From here we will take a 45 minute private flight to Acaro, the land of the Huaorani people. You will fly on a very small plane for 3 to 4 people, so plan well and pack light. Our Huaorani guides will meet us at the grass landing. In the afternoon while we prepare our campsite,

have lunch and enjoy the river. Here you have the chance to fish for piranha as well as learn how the Huaorani fish for the large cat fish and other species. In the Huaorani Territory you we will be sleeping comfortably on platforms with tents and our food will be prepared hygienically from our camp cook. We'll have dinner and stay overnight at our campsite. **(B,L,D)**

### **JULY 15-16: LIVING WITH THE HUAORANI**

This time will be spent experiencing the daily activities of each family, with opportunities to plant, harvest, make handicrafts, prepare the meals, etc. We'll spend time learning about survival in the Amazon jungle, where our guides will show us how to use spears and blowguns, just as the Huaorani do to get their food and how they make the fire to cook their food. Time will also be spent with a Huaorani leader, who will teach us about the jungle plants' different uses and share stories of his struggle against the oil companies in his area. **(B,L,D)**

### **JULY 17-19: CANOE TRAVEL THROUGH THE HUAORANI TERRITORY**

After breakfast we will take dugout canoes down stream by the Shiripuno River. During the trip your guide will share the legends of the Huaorani while we enjoy the landscape and the wildlife. Lunch will be enjoyed on the banks of the river. Then we will travel to Enquepare, where we will meet other Huaorani families. The canoes are not very deep and you sit on tiny boards that cross the bottom since water collects at the bottom of the canoe. It is hard to sit like this for long, so a great addition would be soft chairs like the Thermarest Chairs, which can sit directly on the bottom of the boat. The first day we'll spend 7 hours along the river and the second day will be about 6 hours. It is a magical experience to go by dugout canoe with our Huaorani friends poling the boat along. (You can give it a try but it's not easy - no paddles!) **(B,L,D)**

### **JULY 20: BACK TO QUITO**

Today we will travel by small plane back to Shell and then by van back to Quito. **(B,L)**

### **JULY 21: OTAVALO**

After breakfast, accompanied by your guide, you will visit one of the most prosperous communities in the country, Otavalo and the famous Ponchos' Market. Stopping along the way, you can visit Carabuela town to meet Don José, who will share traditional weaving and textile process. After the visit you will go to the well know Otavalo market or the Ponchos market, that is considered the most important indigenous market of South America; here you can find different and colourful handicrafts like rugs, tapestries, clothes jewelry, etc. In the afternoon we will visit San Antonio de Ibarra town where fine wood handicrafts are made. Return to Otavalo for dinner and overnight in Hacienda Pinsaqui, one of the most beautiful haciendas of Ecuador.

### **JULY 22: CUICOCHA LAKE**

After breakfast you will depart to Cuicocha Lake located at 30 minutes from Otavalo, in route we can visit Cotacachi town known for its famous leather handicrafts; here you can explore one of the leather factories where to observe leather making of purses, shoes, boats, wallets, hats, jackets, pants, etc. Arriving to Cuicocha Lake which is part of Cotacachi Cayapas Ecological Reserve we will explore the area. This lake lies inside the crater of an active volcano surrounded by native vegetation. This place is considered as a sacred lake and in a certain season of the year the native people celebrate traditional rituals here to purify and clean their souls. If time and weather permits we can walk through the trail that surrounds the crater (3 hours approximately) and enjoy of the amazing view of Taita (Quichua word that means father) Imbabura, Cayambe mountain and others. Late afternoon, return to Quito. **B.L**

### **JULY 23 MINDO CLOUD FOREST**

Today you will travel to the magical cloud forest of Mindo situated approximately two hours west of Quito. The Mindo Nambillo reserve has a primary forest with an immense biodiversity that includes one of the greatest concentrations of bird species anywhere in the world. In addition to the vast array of birds, many of which are endemic to the Chocó bioregion, the area is home to over 375 types of orchids and a wide variety of bromeliads, butterflies and other insects. During your visit you can climb the canopy tour, an amazing journey on which you can swing through 10 cables of different sizes that permit you to fly from tree to tree. Later you can visit one of the most beautiful waterfalls in the park where you can swim the pools below or visit the butterfly farm, where the butterflies eat from your hands. A final float down the Nambillo river can be done on inner tubes. Lunch in the beautiful Sachatamia lodge located close to Mindo where you also can walk through the trails of this reserve and see the tiny and colorful hummingbirds. Back to Quito in the evening. **B.L**

### **JULY 24 QUITO--HOME**

We'll rise early, have breakfast and our guide will meet us at the hotel to transfer us to the airport for our international flights home. **(B)**