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## The Equator Route ~ Ecuador

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Sheri Griffith Expeditions has teamed up with Ecuador Uncommon Adventures to offer you an adventure of a lifetime. Ecuador is a magnificent land of contrasts and one of the most diverse countries in the world boasting four very distinct regions: the Amazon Jungle, Andean Highlands, Pacific Coast, and the unique Galapagos Islands.

The Equator Route offers a smorgasbord of adventures in the Middle of the World. You will experience the splendor of snow-capped Andean volcanoes, mile after mile of world-class whitewater, spectacular rainforest, basalt canyon scenery, and the most colorful indigenous cultures while you bike, hike and raft the Equator.

### “Trip at a Glance” (Short Itinerary)

**Day One ~ Saturday** • Fly into Quito. Transfer to your hotel.

**Day Two ~ Sunday** • Mountain bike Cotopaxi. Ride down one of the world’s highest active volcanoes (15,000 to 10,600 feet). Overnight near Riobamba in a country inn. (B+L)

**Day Three ~ Monday** • Mountain bike Chimborazo. Whiz down Ecuador’s highest mountain, across high altitude grasslands and past vicuñas (16,700 to 9,400 feet). Overnight in a hosteria overlooking Baños. (B+L)

**Day Four ~ Tuesday** • Spectacular drive from Baños to Tena. A cliff-hugging descent of the Avenue of the Orchids from the highlands to the jungle (6,010 to 9,400 feet). Enjoy the wonders of the primary forest while learning about the abundant medicinal plants that can be found in our jungle forest. Overnight at a riverside lodge. (B+L)

**Day Five ~ Wednesday** • Full day of jungle exploration. Canoe ride down the imposing Napo River. Visit the animal rescue center, “AmazOOnico.” Learn about local native Quichua ways. Overnight at a riverside hotel in Tena. (B+L)

**Day Six ~ Thursday** • Rafting the Upper Quijos River. Raft mile after mile of class IV+ whitewater through basalt gorges and high jungle. Overnight at a lodge overlooking the Quijos Valley. (B+L)

**Day Seven ~ Friday** • Rafting the Lower Quijos River. Paddle the big, technical rapids of the lower canyons down to the calmer reaches that host cormorants, egrets, and striated herons. Overnight at Papallacta Hot Springs resort. (B+L)

**Day Eight ~ Saturday** • Visit Otavalo—South America’s biggest and most colorful handicrafts market. Overngiht in Quito at a converted mansion. (B+L)

**Day Nine ~ Sunday** • Fly home or extend your Uncommon Adventure with a trip deep into the Amazon Jungle, a trek in the Andes, or a naturalist cruise to the extraordinary Galapagos Islands. (B only)

Legend:

B = Breakfast included,

L= Lunch included,

**Trip Cost:**

\$1,300.00

**INCLUDES:** Expert activity guides, safety kayaker, all rafting and biking equipment, 8 nights' accommodations, breakfast and lunch everyday, private transportation.

**NOT INCLUDED:** Entrance fee to Cotopaxi National Park (\$10), alcoholic beverages, personal expenses, gratuities, and meals not indicated above.

**2006 TRIP DEPARTURES (SATURDAY TO FOLLOWING SUNDAY)**

September 30

October 14

**Detailed Itinerary:**

**Day One ~ Saturday:** Arrive at Quito airport. You will be met by an Ecuador Uncommon Adventures representative and be transferred to your hotel just 15 minutes from the airport. The hotel is comfortable, the staff are friendly, and the building has plenty of character as the reception area and restaurant feature much of the original stonework of the house it was built around. You won't be far from the lively bars and restaurants of the Mariscal sector though you may want to take it easy on arrival as at an altitude of 9,405 feet many new arrivals find Quito literally breath-taking. Most flights arrive in Quito in the evening so we recommend that you have a good night of rest and drink plenty of water to be well hydrated and ready for action the next day.

**Day Two ~ Sunday:** After breakfast we travel by 4-wheel drive up across the vast paramo (high altitude grasslands) of Cotopaxi National Park to the edge of the glaciers at 15,000 feet. Here begins our mountain bike descent off the world's highest active volcano. The first part of the ride is an exhilarating downhill on dirt roads and trails to Inca ruins at 12,200 feet. The views along the route include the surrounding volcanoes and the snowcapped cone of Cotopaxi towering above us. When we stop to enjoy a packed lunch it's worth keeping an eye towards the sky - you might see a condor! In the afternoon we bike on dirt roads and single track down from Lake Limpiopungo through pine forest and finish at 10,600 feet. After an activity-filled day we drive to nearby Riobamba to spend the night in a country inn.

**Day Three ~ Monday:** We continue south along the Avenue of the Volcanoes to Chimborazo which at 20,823 feet is Ecuador's highest peak. We drive up to the first refuge then ascend on foot to the second refuge at 16,700 feet. Expect another memorable day biking as you prepare to whiz down the side of the volcano and across wild stretches of paramo inhabited by vicuñas. The final part of the ride passes the farms of hardy Andean dwellers, descendants of the Incas, to finish in Ambato at 9,400ft. We spend the night in a cozy inn in the town of Baños.

**Day Four ~ Tuesday:** Leaving the high Andes we drive down into the jungle along what's known as the Avenue of the Orchids. The descent follows a recently reconstructed road that at times hugs the valley wall and at others tunnels straight through it. Look out for the numerous waterfalls that plunge into the river below and the noticeable change in vegetation from paramo, to cloud forest and finally to jungle. Once down we continue north through the jungle to our lodge where we base ourselves for the next two nights. The lodge is set right on the banks of the Napo river which is one of the principal tributaries of the Amazon. After lunch we do an exploratory hike in the surrounding forest and learn about the medicinal and practical uses of the many plants and trees with a local Quichua guide. On our return to camp you may choose to chill out on the deck of your cabin or meet up at the bar for a pre-dinner drink.

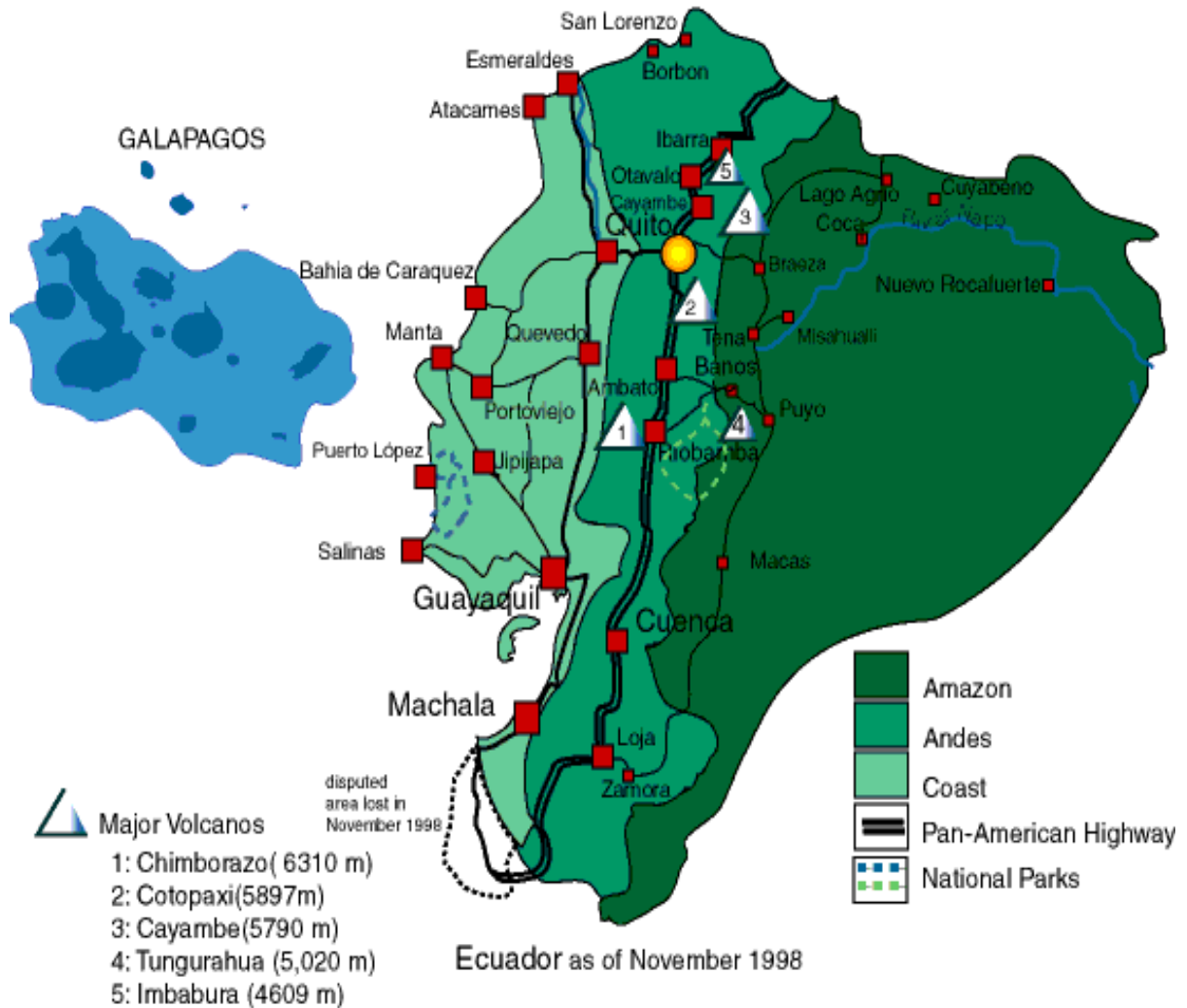
**Day Five ~ Wednesday:** There's time to spend the whole day getting a taste of the Ecuadorian amazon. To begin we set off from the lodge and travel downstream by canoe passing numerous communities carved out of the jungle-fringed riverbanks. Canoes are traditionally sculpted from tree trunks but many large canoes are now of timber or fibreglass construction and powered by an outboard motor. They remain the preferred form of transport along the upper reaches of the river carrying passengers and cargo from designated canoe ports to isolated settlements sometimes miles up a tributary. A visit to the animal rescue center "AmazOOnico" is the guaranteed way to see jungle wildlife up close including tapir, toucans, wild cats and snakes. On the return trip to the lodge we experience life the Quichua way. You'll learn about life in the native communities and about their gardens sown with fruit trees and local medicinal plants. You'll also see how local women make their pottery and a naturally fermented drink from the manioc plant called "Chicha". Back at the lodge you'll have a final chance to enjoy the sounds of the jungle night.

**Day Six ~ Thursday:** We make an early departure from the lodge to head north through the jungle up to the Guacamayos pass and then down the Cosanga valley into the UN-declared Sumaco Biosphere Reserve and our put in on the Quijos river. Ecuador's premier whitewater river, with mile after mile of class IV-IV+ rapids through basalt gorges and spectacular jungle scenery, was chosen as the site of the 2005 World Rafting Championships. Expect to run more whitewater in a day than you'd do in a week elsewhere. On arrival you'll be issued with wetsuits, life jackets and helmets. The Trip Leader will give a thorough safety briefing and we often take a swim to become accustomed to the equipment and the water. Then you'll split into groups for an intensive in-boat paddle practice with your guide. Once we set off we're straight into the action but with some easier rapids to warm up. Along the way we'll stop for a riverside picnic lunch. In the afternoon we'll raft through the first canyons of the Quijos running big, technical rapids. At the end of the day we pull the boats into shore and head to the lodge where we have cold beer, hot showers and a hearty dinner waiting for us.

**Day Seven ~ Friday:** After a good night's sleep and a full breakfast we'll pull on our wetsuits again and head back to the river for a lot more whitewater action. Today you should be prepared for one of the most exciting days of your life. We paddle the big, technical rapids of the lower canyons down to the calmer reaches that host cormorants, egrets and striated herons. And to top it off you'll be doing it all in one of the most beautiful parts of Ecuador. From the take-out we'll head back to the Papallacta Hot Springs resort for a well-earned soak in the volcanically heated mineral waters. We spend the night in the resort so there's time to just soak or enjoy a massage at the health spa.

**Day Eight ~ Saturday:** No trip to Ecuador would be complete without a visit to the world-famous Otavalo market. Hundreds of stalls offer chunky sweaters, woolen tapestries, felt hats and so much more in the Plaza de Ponchos and the surrounding streets. Bargaining is expected and everything can be bought at very reasonable prices. We'll also visit nearby Cotacachi that is well known for its quality leather goods. For lunch we'll try delectable Ecuadorian specialties! In the afternoon we head back to the hotel in Quito for the final evening of your Ecuadorian adventure. No doubt there'll be memories to share, and maybe plans for further adventures to be made.

**Day Nine ~ Sunday:** We take you from the hotel to the airport for what is usually an early morning departure for the flight home. Or extend your Uncommon Adventure in Ecuador with a trip deep into the Amazon jungle, a trek in the Andes or a naturalist cruise in the extraordinary Galapagos islands. We are happy to assist you with any additional travel arrangements.



Map of Ecuador courtesy of [ecuadorexplorer.com](http://ecuadorexplorer.com)

## GENERAL INFORMATION:

**Getting to Ecuador.** You should fly into Quito, the capital of Ecuador. Direct flights from the USA depart Miami (American, LAN Ecuador) and Houston (Continental).

**Visas.** For US citizens a tourist visa of up to 90 days will be issued upon arrival in Ecuador.

**Currency.** The official currency is the US dollar. In Quito and major towns ATM's work for all major credit and debit cards. Banks can also give cash advances. A 12% sales tax applies to most purchases including hotels and restaurants but not to transport. A 10% service charge is also added in better hotels and restaurants.

**Travel insurance.** We recommend that you take out travel insurance at the time of booking to cover cancellation, loss of baggage, medical expenses, etc.

**Health and safety.** Traveling on the Equator, especially at high altitudes, requires some precautions. Stay well hydrated by drinking lots of bottled water (the amount will depend on how much you are exercising) and use plenty of SPF 20 or higher sunblock even if it's overcast. Don't eat food sold on the street and ask in restaurants if they use bottled or boiled water to wash salad vegetables and make juices.

In Quito, the Mariscal area is the tourist zone and has the highest concentration of hotels, hostels, restaurants, bars and internet cafes in the city. After dark only walk in busy and well lit areas as tourists have been subject to theft in the darker streets surrounding the area. Even though your hotel is just a ten minute walk away, exercise the caution you would in any large city and preferably take a taxi in the evening. At \$1 to \$2, it's a very inexpensive insurance policy. The other towns we stay in or near are much smaller and generally safe to walk around at night.

**Departure Tax.** This \$25 tax (subject to change at any time) must be paid after check-in and before passing passport control.

**LOCAL CONTACT INFORMATION:**

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We are so passionate about what we do that we are out there doing what we love on our day off too. That passion drives a commitment to consistently run safe, high quality trips. But don't take our word for it, come and experience amazing Ecuador with us!!