



# ECUADOR BUCKET LIST: 12 Things to See & Do

The Local  
Experience Curator

**KUODA**

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# Stand In The Middle Of The World

As a travel company specializing in private journeys, Kuoda has the expertise to craft your unique luxury journey to Ecuador, whether you are traveling as a family, couple or by yourself. In our Ecuador bucket list, we have selected a wide range of unforgettable experiences that take place in the South American nation's highlands, jungle and coast. Of course, this is your tailor-made journey, so allow our favorites to become the inspiration, not the limit, for your Ecuador adventure.

Allow Kuoda to show you the top things to see and do in Ecuador—from exploring archaeological ruins to kayaking at the crater of an active volcano— while maintaining values of sustainability, integrity and respect of local culture and heritage.



# 1

## Ride to The Top Of an Urban Volcano While in Quito

Did you know that you can hike up an active volcano without leaving Quito, the capital of Ecuador? Rucu Pichincha is one of three summits of the Pichincha volcano, which has remained dormant since 2000. The summit of the high-altitude peak (15,413 feet) can be reached by a 6-hour hike or by a 15-minute cable car ride (teleférico). Either way, getting started is just a short taxi ride from downtown Quito.

Once you've reached the top of Rucu Pichincha, enjoy panoramic views of the capital below and snow capped volcanoes that tower in the distance. If worried about the 2,000-plus feet gained in elevation, an oxygen bar awaits at the upper teleférico station to help alleviate any uncomfortable symptoms. On the way back down, those on a South America family vacation may want to stop by the Volcano Amusement Park, located at the base of the cable car.



# 2

## Snap a Selfie Between Two Hemispheres

Named after the equator, Ecuador straddles the imaginary line that divides the world's northern and southern hemispheres. In Ciudad Mitad del Mundo (Middle of the World City), just 16 miles north of Quito's center, visitors can mark the rare occasion of setting each foot in unique hemispheres and snap a selfie in front of the Monument to the Equator. Be sure to step inside the monument for a display of artifacts pertaining to the indigenous cultures of Ecuador.

A ten-minute walk from the middle of the world is the Intiñán Solar Museum, a slightly quirky yet ever-entertaining stop for families and travelers of all ages. Be mystified by exhibitions that display water flowing in distinct directions, eggs balancing on a needle and various other oddities.

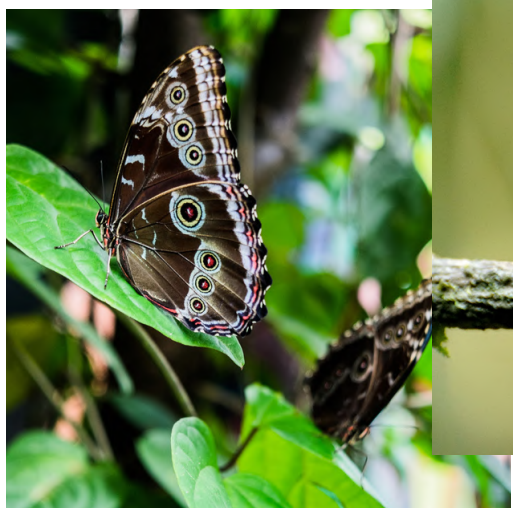


# 3

## Witness a Parade Of Butterflies in Mindo

Tucked in the cloud forest region of Ecuador, the Mariposas de Mindo butterfly garden is a stunning kaleidoscope of one of nature's most majestic creatures. If the weather is warm and dry, the butterflies will take flight and dance around one another in colorful splendor. Admire the diverse shapes and sizes of this winged insect as you feed them, learn about their life process and (with luck) witness a butterfly emerge from its cocoon.

Located in a valley northwest of Quito, Mindo is also home to several flowing rivers ideal for tubing. Assisted by responsible tour guides, you and your travel companions can float atop the rapids (varying from levels 1 to 3) for an adrenaline-filled afternoon.

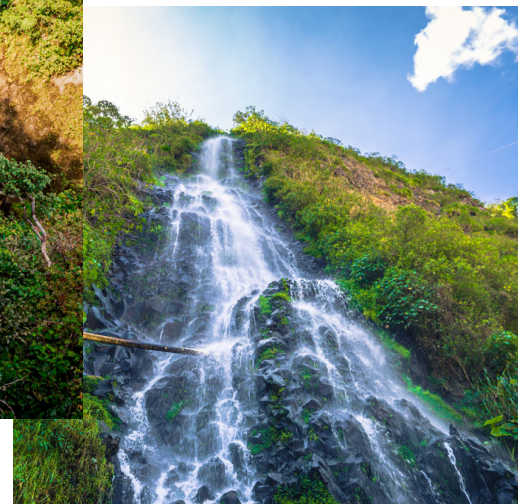


## 4

## Swing Into the End Of the World in Baños

As a kid, you probably wouldn't have believed that a swing dangling 8,500 feet off the ground existed, but one can be found in Baños, Ecuador and it will surely reawaken your childlike glee! Though the iconic attraction is known as the Swing at the End of the World, the ride is not that extreme and the swing itself is safe. Located on a mountainside overlooking the Tungurahua volcano, the swing neighbors a charming treehouse, making it a picture-perfect —and completely thrilling— Ecuador experience.

Going from Baños by bike or car, visit Pailón del Diablo (Devil's Cauldron), an impressive waterfall. On the 11-mile route, you will follow the Pastaza River and pass by misty foothills, eventually hearing the roar of the cascade as you near the final destination. A network of paths and viewing platforms invite visitors to rest their legs and even grab a bite to eat.



# 5

## Explore Cuenca's Inca and Colonial Past

Recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site, Cuenca displays a breathtaking blend of Incan and colonial architecture. The center boasts the 16th-century Sagrario church (built with Inca stones from Tomebamba), the striking Cathedral of the Inmaculada Concepción and tree-lined public areas like Calderón Park. Be sure to stroll through the traditional San Sebastián neighborhood and, if time permits, along the Tomebamba River.

Just two hours from Cuenca is the ancient Inca fortress known as Ingapirca, meaning "Inca wall" in the indigenous Kichwa language. The best-preserved ruins of its kind in Ecuador and an Inca rarity for its oval shape, a visit to Ingapirca is optimized in the company of an English-speaking guide, which your Kuoda travel designer will gladly arrange.





# 6

## Ride Horseback in Cotopaxi National Park

A few hours south of Quito looms the snow-capped and active volcano Cotopaxi (19,437 feet), just one of the many standouts in the Cotopaxi National Park. Within the park's 333 square kilometers can be found a seasonal lake visited by wild horses (Laguna Limpiopungo) as well as plenty of hiking and biking trails to fit your level of fitness. Keep your eyes out for hummingbirds, deer, the Andean fox and herds of guanaco (a camelid, similar to llamas).

Those on a family travel trip will experience transformative moments while riding through Cotopaxi on horseback. Share the opportunity to witness the lesser-known Inca ruin, Pucará Del Salitre, tucked inside the park. Pucara means 'fort' in Quichua and the ancient stone walls were likely used for defense.



## 7

## Sleep in a Historic Hacienda at the Foothills Of the Andes

Travel back in time when you step foot in a traditional ranch home in the countryside of Ecuador. A handful of exceptional haciendas remain from the colonial era, when these large homes were built on expansive grasslands by wealthy Spaniards.

For a luxury travel experience, rest your head at Hacienda Zuleta, a stunning 17th-century hotel and working farm. To extend your stay at Cotopaxi National Park (see above), consider a stay at the 15th-century Hacienda San Agustin de Callo— once an Inca fortress and Augustinian monastery. Partake in excursions such as horseback riding, biking and hiking in the nearby Cotopaxi National Park.

Kuoda encourages travelers on private tours to spend at least two nights in the hacienda of the traveler's choice to truly relish the laidback energy and contact with nature.

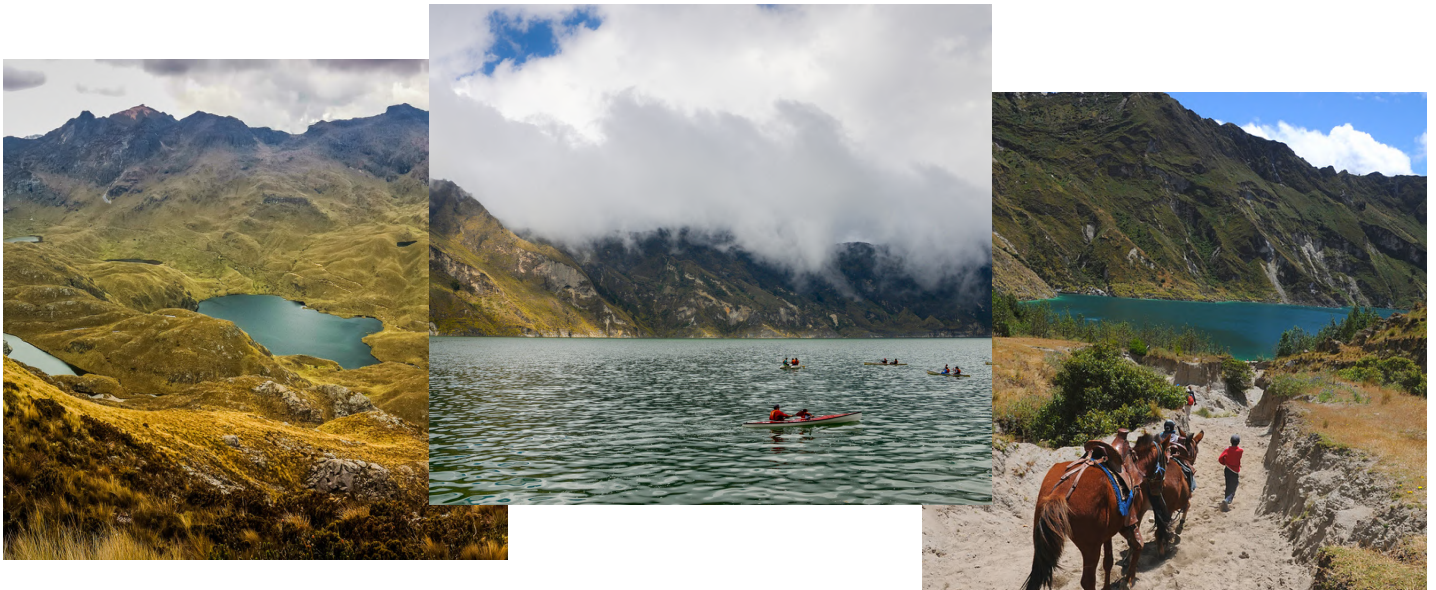


## 8

## See the Andean Lakes by Foot, Horse or Kayak

Dazzling and remote, high-altitude lakes splash across the landscape of Ecuador, often backdropped by the majestic Andes mountains. While on your eco-friendly luxury vacation, you can opt between circling the azure bodies of water by foot or horseback, depending on time and physical fitness level. And in some special cases, you can even glide across the Andean lakes in a kayak!

Just three hours south of Ecuador's capital lies the Quiltoa Lagoon, a vibrant green-blue caldera at an altitude of 12,000 feet. Flanked by trails designed for hiking and horseback, visitors can also kayak across the 2-mile-wide lake. About a 30-minute drive from Cuenca, in the southern region of Ecuador, is Cajas National Park, home to over 200 lakes. Don't miss the opportunity to fish for (and later eat) fresh trout.



## 9

## Journey to the Galapagos Islands

The ultimate destination for wildlife lovers, the Galapagos Islands are perhaps the most isolated luxury travel destination in Ecuador. The archipelago lies some 600 miles west of mainland Ecuador and the number of visitors on each of the 13 major islands is restricted. From the comfort of a stylish yacht to a trek across the volcanic islands, you and yours can relish a private travel experience in the company of endemic creatures.

Little was known of the Galapagos Islands before biologist and naturalist Charles Darwin made his voyage in the 19th-century, publishing the influential *On the Origin of Species* just decades later. With such a short shared history with human visitors, local animals have yet to develop a fear of tourists. As a result, you can swim beside sea lions, sleep in an eco-luxury resort located on the Galapagos Giant Tortoises Territory, kayak above a colorful parade of fish, walk beside dancing crabs and Blue-footed boobies and so much more in Ecuador's Galapagos Islands.



# 10

## Kayak Across the Crater of an Inactive Volcano

Glittering blue-green in a stunningly quiet area, Quilotoa crater lake is just 2.5 hours from the capital city of Quito yet feels worlds away. Visiting the lagoon can be a scenic, all-inclusive day trip from the hustle and bustle of the city into the remote Andes mountains. On the way to or from Quilotoa lake, stop by communities of the rural highlands like Tigua and La Victoria to check out their local and traditional art scenes.

At 3900 masl, Quilotoa welcomes visitors with a chilly breeze—but you will soon forget as you begin your active visit. Kayak across the frigid volcanic crater lake or, if you prefer, hike or horseback your way around the loop encircling the laguna. Either way, you can appreciate the caldera's majestic turquoise color (the result of dissolved minerals) and possibly active fumaroles, bubbly expulsions of gases on the lake floor.



# 11

14

## Swim in a Sulfur Lake in Manabí

On a private journey to Ecuador designed by Kuoda, our guests are able to experience truly unique sites in the South American nation. Take, for example, the Manabí province, located on Ecuador's central coast. Tucked inside the area's Machalilla National Park is a tropical dry forest with a sulfur lake. Visitors will need to take a short hike from the Agua Blanca Museum (housing a collection of incredible artifacts found in the area), a route that takes visitors past countless fruit trees and a variety of livestock as well as endemic wildlife.

Although the lagoon itself is simple, the real luxury lies in the mud collected from the bottom of the lake. Apply a facial mud mask with skin rejuvenating benefits then sip on a fresh coconut juice and be charmed by local hummingbirds that frequently visit the plants surrounding the small body of water. After the mud has dried, take a dip in the sulfur lagoon to rinse off, followed by a massage for a truly rustic spa day.



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## Support Local Artisans in a Legendary Handicraft Market

Lakes, waterfalls and a legendary market can be found in the town of Otavalo, located in the Andean highlands of north-central Ecuador. Sitting at an elevation of 8,441 feet (2,573 meters), the Otavalo market is one of the largest handicraft centers on the continent. This is the place to go if you are looking to mingle with locals and score textiles and ceramics inspired by pre-Inca traditions.

Nearby, enjoy an active excursion to Lake Cuicocha, a 2-mile wide volcanic crater that welcomes visitors to kayak, hike or take a scenic horseback ride. Meanwhile, a 30-minute drive from the center of Otavalo can bring you to Cayambe, a town renowned for its blooming flowers, cheese production and warm bizcochos— flaky and buttery biscuits, often baked in a woodfire oven.

