

WILD FRONTIERS



Darwin's Ecuador: Andes to Galapagos

Straddling the equator on the Pacific coast, wedged between Colombia and Peru, the smallest of the Andean nations covers an area no bigger than 284,000 square kilometres. For all its diminutive size, however, the country is packed with the most startling contrasts of scenery, and the diversity of this tiny country is simply dazzling. Encompassing tropical islands, towering snow-capped peaks, cloud forests, and simmering jungle, visitors are treated to a variety of unique landscapes, and many say that Ecuador manages to capture an entire continent in one country. This trip incorporates traditional villages, bio-diverse cloud forests, colonial towns and the incredible volcanic Galapagos Islands, where the vast variety of flora and fauna will delight the nature lover and activity seeker alike.

“This is one of the best trips I have taken in my life! ... it was amazing. My experience with Wild Frontiers was a real pleasure from start to finish. The guides that you use are awesome in that their knowledge and attention to the guests is unsurpassed. Well done on organising such a great trip. I wouldn't have missed it for the world.” *Wendy Winnard*

HIGHLIGHTS

- Bellavista Cloud Forest and eco-lodge
- Crossing the equator
- Quilotoa volcanic lake & Chimborazo National Park
- Colonial Cuenca
- Exploring less-frequented areas of Galapagos Islands on foot

Duration: 17 Days

Average group size: 5 - 12

Start: Thu 23 Aug 12

Finish: Sat 08 Sep 12



Why Wild Frontiers?

As a young, innovative company, Wild Frontiers is delighted to have been voted one of the 'Top 10 Tour Operators' by the readers of both Wanderlust and National Geographic Adventure. We are frequently asked what makes us different from other tour operators, and feel that the factors below answer this important question.

The Traveller's Ethos: WF is a company that has been set up by travellers for travellers, and our ethos is to help adventurous souls get to incredible and inaccessible places in safety and as much comfort as local conditions allow. We are firm believers that travelling is all about the experience and it's the details that make the trip - we specialise in drawing on our own extensive local knowledge and array of contacts to give our clients the very best experience possible.

Personal Service: Our London office is manned by experienced expedition leaders and every trip we run stems from their extensive knowledge - in short, we run the kind of trips that as passionate travellers, we like to do ourselves! When you ring our office, you can be guaranteed to chat to someone that knows the trips and the terrain, and is able to offer sound and practical advice.

Authentic Experiences: Our unique, original itineraries allow our clients to take journeys that venture beneath the surface of the region. Unlike the plethora of 'world specialists' out there who purport to know a hundred destinations, we concentrate on the locations we know and love. We don't run the same tour over and over, thus running the risk of creating a 'tourist circuit' and spoiling untouched regions. Instead, we rarely run any tour more than a couple of times a year and they are on routes we have discovered for ourselves, meaning we are able to give a truly authentic, off-the-beaten-track experience.

Be the First: Our style of travel is all about exploration, and nothing excites us more than opening up new routes to genuine travellers. We keep abreast of new destinations and are often the first to return to places that have vanished from the tourist map. We were the first back into Pakistan after 9/11, the first to return to Kashmir after a decade of tourist isolation, and the first to run a commercial travel trip to Afghanistan for almost 30 years. Since then we have helped bring Colombia, Yemen and Georgia back into the tourist fold, specialising in groundbreaking reconnaissance trips and imaginative expeditions.

Small Group Size: We believe it is imperative to keep the group sizes small. Most trips are limited to a maximum of approximately 12 travellers, thus giving you more access to fragile cultures, better opportunities to interact with local people, and the knowledge you are making less of an impact while there.

Cost of Tours: We believe in an honest, upfront pricing system so you know exactly what the tour will cost before you book. We avoid local payments, 'optional extras' or forcing our clients to split every meal bill. Our tours are provided on a predominantly full board basis, with mineral water, government permits, entrance fees and transport all included.

Added Value: We aim to give our clients the very best (not the least expensive) experience through whatever facilities are available to us. We always try to provide accommodation that is interesting, characterful and convenient, and transport - another important part of any tour - that is as varied and comfortable as possible.

Our Clients: Your companions can make or break a trip, and it's lucky therefore that our clients are our greatest asset. Travelling to remote regions is not for everyone, and as such we tend to attract open-minded travellers looking for genuine experiences, and a desire to reach those hard to get to places.

Responsible Travel: Awarded 5 star status by AITO (Association of Independent Tour Operators), responsible tourism has always been an integral part of our company ethos and our adventures are designed with the local people, culture and eco-system in mind. For further details please refer to the RT section on this dossier.



Day 1: Quito (2850m): Join the tour at the hotel this afternoon. After freshening up at our hotel, we shall have free time to wander around before having dinner.
Hotel (D)
(Please see our Getting There section)

Day 2: Quito - Mindo - Bellavista Cloud Reserve (2000m): Departing Quito we shall drive northwest, taking in the views over the city. Leaving the metropolis of Quito behind us, the scenery changes dramatically becoming green and sub-tropical as we enter the cloud forest. Here we stop to visit an orchid and butterfly farm on the way to Mindo, before continuing on to the Bellavista Cloud Reserve for a late lunch. In the afternoon we shall take an introductory walk into the forest with a local guide, to learn about the region's unique ecology. Overnight at the Bellavista Eco-lodge.
Eco-Lodge (B,L,D)

Day 3: Bellavista: Spending a full day at Bellavista, there is plenty of time to explore the region further, taking some of the well-marked trails through the forest. The trails span a large area around the lodge and there is plenty of opportunity for bird watching, learning about the medicinal plants of the forest, plus the options of cycling and horse riding. For those preferring down time, there are numerous hideaways around the

lodge to relax and watch the hummingbirds in an idyllic setting.
Eco-Lodge (B,L,D)

Day 4: Bellavista - Equator - Tigua - Chugchilan (3200m): We will depart Bellavista early this morning and head south, with a brief stop at the Equator monument as we cross from the northern hemisphere into the southern hemisphere. Our drive takes us along 'the avenue of the volcanoes' where the road is flanked by the majestic snow-capped peaks of the Andes. Passing Cotopaxi Corazon, Pasachoa, Ruminahui and Illinizas, some of Ecuador's most impressive volcanoes, we will stop en route at the tiny town of Tigua, an important centre for local arts and crafts of the region. Finally we arrive in the Andean village of Chugchilan.
Guesthouse (B,L,D)

Day 5: Chugchilan: Nestled in the heart of the country, this region showcases the sheer beauty of Ecuador's mountains and is rated as one of the hidden gems of the Andes. The region is riddled with splendid hikes, traditional highland villages and indigenous people. Today is a free day to recover from the journey and take advantage of some of the activities on offer in the area. Options include treks (of varying degrees of difficulty) and horse rides.
Guesthouse (B,L,D)

Day 6: Chugchilan - Quilotoa (3854m) - Banos (1800m): After breakfast we set off from our accommodation to the rim of the spectacular Quilotoa crater lake, which offers tremendous views of the surrounding peaks of Cotopaxi and Illiniza Sur, and the green, mirror-like lake below. Here we will take time to walk into the crater (or for those preferring a less strenuous experience it is possible to hire mules) before continuing on to Banos, where we'll spend the next two nights.
Hotel (B,L,D)

Day 7: Banos - Chimborazo - Banos: Two choices today... either head to the Chimborazo Volcano for a unique trekking experience and to participate in the ancient 'Iceman' tradition (see facts section). Alternatively have a free day to explore the spa town of Banos - indulge yourself in the hot springs, or try your

hand at one of the various activities on offer.

Hotel (B,L,D)

Day 8: Banos - Ingapirca - Cuenca (2530m): After breakfast we may have the opportunity to board the 'Nariz del Diablo' (Devil's Nose) train* for a ride along the historic Trans-Andean Railroad. Travelling from Alausi to Sibambe, we pass through the most dramatic section of the railroad that once ran to the coast, where a series of steep switchbacks cut through the rock face and offer amazing views of the surrounding countryside. **The train can be unreliable - if it is not running we will visit one of the project sites supported by Inti Sisa.* Afternoon visit to the archaeological site of Ingapirca (15th century) - Ecuador's most important set of Inca ruins - before continuing on to the Colonial city of Cuenca.

Colonial Hotel (B,L,D)

Day 9: Cuenca: Morning half-day city tour of the 'jewel of the south': Cuenca (declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site) visiting some of the parks, churches, plazas and local landmarks. Despite being the country's third largest city, Cuenca retains the feel and pace of a much smaller town and is a pleasure to wander around. We'll have a free afternoon to explore the museums, shops and markets or visit one of the centres that produces panama hats and other haberdashery. Evening is also free to carry on exploring - dinner at own expense.

Colonial Hotel (B,L)

Day 10: Cuenca - Guayaquil: Heading northwest today, a 5-hour drive takes us through the El Cajas National Park, where we'll make a few photo stops. El Cajas is the lake district of Ecuador with breathtaking glacial valleys and over 200 lakes, and is also home to forests of Polylepis, the world's highest altitude tree. We continue down through steamy banana and cocoa plantations to the city of Guayaquil, where we'll prepare for our Galapagos adventure.

Hotel (B,L,D)

Day 11: Guayaquil - Galapagos Islands (Isabela): A morning flight takes us to the main airport in the Galapagos Islands. After clearing immigration we take a bus ride to Puerto Ayora, where we'll board

our boat and transfer to Isabela. Isabela is the largest of the Galapagos Islands (4588 sq km) and home to a string of volcanoes, mangrove beaches and wildlife colonies. The boat crossing takes around 2 hours, giving us a free afternoon to settle into our stunningly located hotel - our base for the next 3 nights - and relax on the white sandy beaches.

Hotel (B,D)

Day 12: Galapagos Islands (Isabela): This morning we'll take a walk in the National Park to see the Giant Tortoise Breeding Centre and investigate the plant and bird life en route in the mangrove wetlands. After lunch we will take a short boat ride to visit the small islet of Las Tintoreras, where a colony of white-tipped reef sharks can often be seen resting in the black-lava canal. This area is also famed for an abundance of marine iguanas, birdlife and sea lions, and we'll take time to snorkel in the crystal clear waters before returning to Isabela for the night.

Hotel (B,L,D)

Day 13: Galapagos Islands (Isabela): A full day trekking trip on Isabela Island takes us to the top of the Sierra Negra Volcano (1,124m) - a geological feature that is the second widest active crater in the world and dates back approximately 535,000 years. Spotting various wildlife en route, our walk up to the crater is a return journey of around 2½ hours and on a clear day we'll be rewarded with spectacular views of the island.

Hotel (B,L,D)

Day 14: Galapagos Islands (Santa Cruz): After breakfast we'll take a boat to Santa Cruz, where we'll spend the next two nights. The remainder of the day will be free to explore and there will be time to visit the Charles Darwin Research Station to learn more about these unique islands. The centre is responsible for conducting a number of important scientific research projects on the flora, fauna and geology of the islands and houses an informative museum, as well as a number of famous Galapagos tortoise and a hatchling centre. Dinner tonight will be at your own expense.

Hotel (B,L)

Day 15: Galapagos Islands (Santa Cruz): Today we plan to take a day trip to the nearby island of North Seymour. North

Seymour is rich in bird life, specifically colonies of blue-footed boobies and frigate birds, and it is also possible to see both land and marine iguanas here. There is a 2km trail which we will follow along the island through typical vegetation of prickly pear cactus and palo santo trees with our naturalist guide, who will explain about the wonderful wildlife we encounter en route. We will then return to Santa Cruz Island to Las Bachas, a scenic white sand beach on the southwest coast. Here we can commonly see herons, pelicans, sea lions and a green turtle nesting site (in warmer months) and there will also be time to swim and enjoy the beach before returning to our family-run accommodation for the night.

Hotel (B,L,D)

Day 16: Galapagos - Quito (2850m): Returning to the mainland today, we take a flight up to Quito where there's time to wander around and do any last minute shopping before our farewell dinner. Last but not least, we'll finish up with a horse-drawn carriage ride through the Colonial old town. Lit up at night, the vintage facades, churches and plazas (some of them dating back to the 15th century) offer a great example of the grandeur of the old town and a great end to our trip. Overnight at one of the best hotels in the city.

Colonial Hotel (B,D)

Day 17: Quito: Tour ends after breakfast.
(B)

Wild Extensions:

Arrive early to adjust to a new time zone or just to get a feel for the country before your tour starts. Explore the country after your tour on a bespoke Wild Extension or just allow a few days to relax afterwards. Maybe choose all of the above and get cheaper flights mid-week?

A sample of what you could do...

Amazon Jungle Trip: Stay at the award winning Yachana Lodge in the heart of the Amazon, taking part in naturalist-guided walks in the primary and secondary rain forest, visits to the local medicine man and communities, panning for gold, night time safaris, star gazing and river cruises. 4 and 5 day packages available.

The Galapagos Islands: Explore these spectacular and unique islands further with a 5 or 8 day cruise.

Papallacta Spa & Retreat: For health, recreation and relaxation extend your stay at the Papallacta hot springs for relaxing hydrotherapy and spa treatments in a stunning setting. 1 and 2 night packages available.

Contact the office for extension specifics.

TOUR DETAILS

Tour Code: DWE/B

Tour price: All our tours are priced on a LAND ONLY basis, giving you maximum flexibility when deciding how to get to and from your tour.

Single Supplements: These are NOT compulsory for any Wild Frontiers tour. Where single supplements are available please note that a single room cannot always be guaranteed for every night of the tour as depending on the destination, rooms may be limited. On this tour we are able to offer an optional single supplement that will cover you for all nights of the tour.

Flights: If you would like us to send you a quote for the suggested tour flight (see GETTING THERE) or on any alternative flight that may suit you better, please let us know.

In all cases, for the latest prices, please refer to our website or contact the office.

Please remember that all Wild Frontiers tour prices mean NO hidden extras, NO local payments or kitty and NO compulsory single supplements.

WHAT IS INCLUDED?

- Full services of a Wild Frontiers Tour Leader with local guides and drivers
- Meal plan as detailed in the itinerary (B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner) with mineral water as required
- All transport as outlined in the itinerary
- All accommodation
- All entrance fees, as per itinerary including Galapagos National Park fee

WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED?

- Visas (if necessary)
- Local airport taxes
- Tips to local guides
- Beverages & any costs of a personal nature
- Some optional activities, see below for details
- International flights
- Airport transfers (unless booking suggested flights through WF office)

On this trip there are a number of activities available that not everyone may wish to participate in. Therefore we have decided not to include these costs within the trip price, but instead allow you to pick and choose what you wish to do and pay locally. Here are the details of the costs (subject to change):

In Bellavista:

Visit to "cock of the rock" for bird watching \$40
Zip-line canopy \$40
Horse riding \$15 per hour

In Chugchilan:

Horse riding tour \$15
Guide for trekking \$15 per group
Sauna/hotpool \$15 per group

In Quilotoa:

Mule ride out of crater \$8

In Baños:

Spa treatments vary from \$15 to \$50

Sierra Negra Volcano:

Horse-trek (instead of walking) \$35

GETTING THERE

For this trip our suggested flights (subject to change) are:

23AUG IB3169 LHR-MAD 06:20/09:40
23AUG IB6463 MAD-UIO 12:00/17:10
08SEP IB6464 UIO-MAD 18:45/13:45 +1
09SEP IB3172 MAD-LHR 15:15/16:35

Key:

LHR - London Heathrow

MAD - Madrid

UIO - Quito

IB - Iberia

NB If you wish to arrange your own flights you are completely free to do so and in this case we can arrange any transfers or supplementary accommodation that you may require.

Please note that if you are making your own flight arrangements, we recommend that you only purchase flights that are totally flexible and refundable as due to the nature of adventure travel, itineraries can change at any time. For more information, please refer to our booking conditions.

PRACTICALITIES

Accommodation will be staying in hotels, eco-lodges & guesthouses.

Any accommodation mentioned in the itinerary is subject to availability and if not available substitutes will be of a similar quality.

Transport on this tour includes minibuses, boat, train and domestic flights.

Trip Grading:

Adventure Rating ❖❖❖❖❖❖

Comfort Grade ❖❖❖❖❖

Fitness Level ❖❖❖❖❖

Cultural Interest ❖❖❖❖❖

Please note that this grading is an indication only and should you have any concerns please contact the office

Fitness...

Anyone in a reasonable state of health, an open mind and a sense of adventure

should be perfectly able to cope with our tours to Ecuador. Where larger treks are available (days 6 & 13), alternative options are given for those who prefer something less strenuous.

It may sound obvious but...

Wild Frontiers tours are not always for everyone and it is important to us that the tour you choose is the most suitable. Please therefore take time to read the dossier carefully. All our tours are graded to give an overall picture of the trip but these are only guidelines and you should check the daily itinerary. Should you have any concerns about your ability to partake in any aspect of the tour then please contact the office.

Insurance: Insurance that provides cover for emergency repatriation in case of a medical emergency is compulsory for all tours. You should be aware that many standard insurance policies may not cover you adequately for all aspects of a Wild Frontiers trip and so we strongly recommend that you purchase a suitably designed insurance policy. One such policy is the "Wild Frontiers" policy underwritten by Travel & General Insurance Company plc, which is available to UK and Republic of Ireland residents through our website or via the insurance company direct on 0845 408 0583. Under this policy there are two different levels of cover available and for this trip the minimum requirement would be the Standard policy.

Cover explained:

Standard policy: a comprehensive travel insurance policy that provides cover for all Wild Frontiers activities, including trekking up to 6,000m. This policy does not provide cover for travel to areas where the FCO is advising against all or all but essential travel.

Elite policy: provides the same comprehensive level of cover as the standard policy. In addition the Elite policy also provides cover for travel to areas where the FCO is advising against all or all but essential travel. The policy will not provide cover for any claims arising from or relating to the reasons why the FCO is advising against travel.

If purchasing the Elite policy you also have the option to **extend the cover** provided by the policy to include cover for claims arising from a terrorist act in an area where the FCO is advising against travel. You can add this cover to your policy when purchasing online or over the telephone.

These policies are only available to those travelling on a Wild Frontiers holiday.

For more information and to purchase your policy online please visit the Insurance section of our website.

The cover is underwritten by the International Insurance Company of Hannover Limited (IICH), who are authorised and regulated by the Financial Services Authority (FSA). Wild Frontiers Limited is an Introducer Appointed Representative of Travel & General Insurance Company plc, details of which can be found at the FSA's website www.fsa.gov.uk

If you do decide to purchase alternative insurance, then you must ensure that it covers you for every aspect of this trip. Please pay particular attention to ensuring that you are covered for travel up to 4000m, and trekking up to 4800m if you plan to participate in the Chimborazo Iceman Trek.

Visas: Visas are necessary for many of the destinations we travel to and while we aim to provide you with the most up-to-date information, requirements frequently change and as such we advise that you check with the relevant embassies or contact our recommended visa agency, Travcour (020 7223 5295) www.travcour.com for the latest advice.

For this tour, UK passport holders do not currently require a visa for Ecuador.

Non-UK passport holders should contact the relevant embassies for individual requirements.

Further details will be sent out to you on booking, however ensuring that correct and valid visas are obtained remains the sole responsibility of the client.

Responsible Travel: Responsible travel and sustainable tourism are fundamental

ideas that Wild Frontiers has been committed to since our birth. It is our strong belief that these words should not be simply 'tagged on' to dossiers and websites but should be at the very core of each trip, and our adventures are therefore designed with the local people, culture and eco-system in mind. We believe that a successful trip not only delivers a unique and unsurpassable journey for our clients, but that it also benefits the peoples whose lands we are privileged to visit.

The Wild Frontiers Foundation: In order to facilitate an enduring support structure for the communities we visit, and to show a commitment to these values, Wild Frontiers has set up a charitable foundation through which we can channel funds to both existing NGOs and our own development projects. In addition to organising ethically sensitive tours, having our own charitable foundation allows us to raise money - through the cost of our tours, charity trips and fund raising events - which can then be used to fund various projects in education, sanitation, reforestations and a number of other important issues facing developing communities. Wherever possible we are happy for our clients to visit these projects to see for themselves where and how this money is being spent. For a comprehensive list of all partner NGOs please visit our.

Should you wish to donate to the foundation please contact the office for details.

The Environment: Trying to do our bit for the environment, in 2005 we were among the first UK-based travel companies to automatically offset every client's international flight (if booked with us) with a payment to Carbon Clear to help promote sustainable energy.

Safety and Security: Most visitors have an untroubled stay in Ecuador, however, there are incidents of theft and petty crime, especially in Quito. During your stay we strongly advise you to exercise common sense and caution, keeping a close eye on your belongings at all times.

Most hotels offer security boxes either at the reception or in the rooms, and it is recommended to take advantage of these

facilities to store your valuables when you are not using them.

We also advise you not to carry your passport and large quantities of cash on you. When in Quito, do not walk around the town after dark - taxis are easy to flag down and are very cheap.

Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO): The FCO travel advice highlights potential hazards people might experience when travelling abroad. Given the nature of destinations offered by Wild Frontiers it is inevitable that from time to time some itineraries contravene this advice. Whilst WF takes the safety and security of its clients extremely seriously, we will not necessarily cancel a trip because of the FCO advice. It is recommended therefore that clients check this advice before booking and contact us if they have any queries or concerns. Please see our website for further information.

Climate: Being situated so close to the equator Ecuador is a year round destination and weather can vary dramatically depending on the region you are in. You WILL encounter rain (it's not called the rain forest for nothing!), but the sun can also be fierce (especially at altitude) and you should be prepared for all eventualities. Quito is quite prone to experiencing all four seasons in one day!

Further information:

When you make a confirmed booking with Wild Frontiers we will send you our confirmation pack with complete pre-departure information giving you details on visas, health and vaccinations, packing lists, suggested reading on the region, insurance, photography and other useful tips to make your trip more enjoyable.

ECUADOR - THE FACTS



Quito: Ecuador's capital city is considered one of the finest in Latin America, and its setting, which is flanked by volcanic peaks, is simply breathtaking. Divided into the old and new towns, Quito offers a diverse mix of tradition and modernity, somehow managing to retain a wholly Ecuadorian flavour. The old town is a wonder, with blocks and blocks of colonial architecture, narrow streets and picturesque plazas, which date back to the mid 1500s when the Spanish founded the city. Declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1978, the old town suffered a major earthquake in 1987, which led to extensive repairs and renovations, but it has managed to retain its charm and 'old world' feel. In contrast, the New town is a sprawling mass of modern shopping malls, multi-story hotels and high-rise government buildings, and offers a lively, vibrant face to modern-day Ecuador.



The Cloud Forest, Mindo and Equator Region: Stretching from Quito to Colombia, the Northern Sierra encompasses an astounding range of terrains and a large portion of this region is taken up by 'cloud forest' - the name

given to a particular type of vegetation found between 900 and 2500m on the slopes of the Andes. They are forests of high biodiversity with plunging valleys filled with tall, orchid-festooned trees and a plethora of plants, birds and mammals, making the region a delight for anyone with an interest in ecology.



The Bellavista Reserve spans 700 hectares of protected land and is one of 12 officially certified eco-tourism projects in the country, dedicated to education and preservation of the cloud forest. Famed as a humming bird haven (you will spot hundreds of them feeding around the lodge and outside your rooms!), the area has a multitude of trails through the primary and secondary forest, allowing visitors to explore this unique area and spot some of the 340 species of birds that reside in the surrounding woodland. Trails are all graded from easy to challenging, and lead to areas of astounding natural beauty and hidden waterfalls within the reserve. Hiking, bird watching and guided walks with local naturalists are available, and there is also the option of horse riding on request. The eco-lodge itself is a haven for nature, and consists of a Geodesic Dome built out of natural fibres and local resources, offering 360-degree views of the surrounding scenery.



The Avenue of the Volcanoes: Quito and Cuenca are the bookends enclosing the "Avenue of the Volcanoes", a phrase coined by Alexander Von Humboldt to describe the perpetually impressive stretch of real estate that makes up the

bulk of Ecuador's mountainous spine. Spread across the Pan Americana highway, small mountain towns and colonial cities rest beneath the soaring peaks, and several of the volcanoes, lakes and rivers have been set aside as national reserves.

The 'Devils Nose' Train: After 25 years of abortive attempts, work finally began in 1899 on a railway to link Quito in the highlands to the coastal town of Guayaquil. This major feat of engineering had to traverse the steep, inhospitable Andes and the greatest obstacle was met south of Guamate where the tracks had to traverse a near vertical wall of rock, known as the Devils Nose. Dubbed "the most difficult railway in the world" engineers managed to tackle the wall by carving a series of tight zigzags into the rock, allowing the train to climb at a gradient of 1-in-18, from 1806m to 2607m, by going forwards and backwards in a series of switchbacks up the tracks. Riding on the train from Alausi to Sibambe offers unparalleled views of the surrounding countryside and this astonishing feat of engineering.

NB - Please be informed that the train is notoriously unreliable. If it does not run we will visit the nearby national park instead.

The Quiltoa Loop: One of the hidden gems of Ecuador, the Quiltoa loop is a remote and isolated area located 90 kilometres west of Latacunga and the Pan Americana highway. Rarely visited by foreigners due to its inaccessibility, this is one of the most beautiful areas in the Andes, and is home to a spectacular volcanic crater lake filled with emerald green waters. The lake is one of Ecuador's most staggering sights and from the rim you can catch views of the snow-capped peaks of Cotopaxi and Illinizia mirrored in the glassy waters of the lake. The surrounding area is peppered with tiny traditional highland villages and is an important centre for arts and crafts, especially the town of Tigua, whose inhabitants produce distinctive colourful paintings of Andean life on sheepskin canvasses. Visiting these towns, we shall base ourselves in a delightful award-winning eco-lodge in Chugchilan, (a tiny settlement embraced by the mountains

overlooking the Rio Toachi canyon) and take time to explore the area.

Chimborazo Iceman Trek: This unique hike on the Chimborazo Volcano joins "Los Hieleros", the Icemen who cut blocks of ice from the glacier of Chimborazo and bring them down on donkeys to the Riobamba market. This is a very special tradition, dating from the colonial era, which is maintained by a few indigenous men. Starting at 06:00 we make the 2-hour drive to the small indigenous village on the eastern slopes of Chimborazo where the icemen live. In the early morning light you will have beautiful views of Chimborazo, passing fields of potatoes and maize. In a small refuge we break for lunch and then continue on the paramo highlands, covered with tussock grasses and cushion plants. After about 4 hours hiking we reach the glacier at 4500m, where the icemen start to work. With an axe and spade he hacks out big blocks of ice from the ice wall, before wrapping them in a bundle of paramo grasses and tying them to the donkey with handmade ropes. When the job is done, we start our 2 hour descent.
DIFFICULTY OF TREK: strenuous

Cuenca & Ingapirca: Ecuador's "3rd city" after Guayaquil and Quito, Cuenca is arguably the most charming. The narrow, cobblestone streets are filled with whitewashed, red-tiled buildings and the pretty plazas and domed churches help it retain the grandeur of its colonial past. 50 years before the arrival of the Spanish, the Inca Tupac-Yupanqui began constructing a major city on the site of present day Cuenca, intended to rival Cusco in terms of splendour and importance. Stories abound of gold-covered temples and stone carved palaces in the city known as Tomebamba, but the fate of this city is largely shrouded in mystery. By the time the Spanish arrived in 1547, the city lay in ruins but its strategic location led the Spanish to establish the city of Cuenca, which was honoured by UNESCO in 1999, declaring it a World Cultural Heritage Site.

The road that linked Cusco and Machu Picchu in Peru with Tomebamba and Quito passed through several Inca settlements en route, including that of Ingapirca. Ingapirca (which literally

How to book:

In order to confirm your booking we need to have a completed signed booking form for each client together with a £400 deposit per person. You can either return your booking form to us by post or by booking online at www.wildfrontiers.co.uk.

You can contact the office by email to info@wildfrontiers.co.uk or we are very happy to take your call on **020 7736 3968**.

Wild Frontiers is a fully licensed and bonded tour operator and our ATOL number is 5975. You can book your holiday with Wild Frontiers in complete confidence that all monies you pay to us for your tour are fully protected.

We are also bonded with the Association of Independent Tour Operators (AITO). AITO members comply with the highest standards of consumer protection. Every AITO holiday is backed not only by AITO's Quality Charter but also by full financial protection.

We do recommend that you take out adequate travel insurance at the time of booking in the event that you are no longer able to travel as all deposits are non-refundable - full booking conditions can be found on the booking form and online at our website.