

ECUADOR - MYSTERIES OF THE ECUADORIAN CLOUD FOREST

Cost per person double occupancy \$2,930; Number of participants: 10; Duration: 11 days



Objectives: Learn about the equatorial cloud forest ecosystem, with an emphasis on ornithology, plant communities, including medicinal plants, mammals, reptiles, amphibians and insects. There will be discussions of and experiences with sustainable human activities in northwestern Ecuador.

Duration: 11 days

Overnight stays: Comfortable cloud forest lodge and Quito city hotel

Itinerary: Quito- Bellavista Cloud Forest reserve – Mindo, - Visits in the region – Otavalo – Quito.

Overview: The cloud forests of Ecuador are a unique and fascinating ecosystem located at between about 800 meters to 2,500 meters elevation, on both slopes of the Andes. Our base is Bellavista Cloud Forest Reserve, about 1 hour 40 minutes from Quito, in the northwest of Pichincha Province. The reserve and surrounding privately protected areas offer opportunities to learn about the flora and fauna of this special environment, in which the epiphytic flora is considered the most diverse on the planet.

Activities: You will explore many trails within Bellavista Reserve, with hands- on discovery of the secondary and primary forest ecosystems. You will visit a butterfly farm and an orchid reserve, and meet local people involved in environmental education and other sustainable activities. There will be discussions of the flora and fauna to gain deep insight into the ecosystem, experiential activities integrated into the reserve explorations and field visits. You will also visit the indigenous market of Otavalo and the colonial center of Quito.

Tour Leader: Richard Parsons, owner of Bellavista Cloud Forest Reserve, former academic director with the School for International Training's College Semester Programs in Ecuador and Madagascar, and Galapagos guide and lecturer. Local guides and experts will also be on hand.



Preliminary Program

Day One: Arrival in Quito. Transfer to Hotel Sebastian.



Day Two: After breakfast, there will be a full-day visit to the old city of Quito, a UNESCO World Heritage site. The old colonial center of Quito has countless churches with lavish decoration and an abundance of gold. The open squares and colonial houses of the city are complemented by excellent museums. Lunch at a restaurant in colonial city. Lunch-time talk by guide about Ecuadorian culture and different ethnic groups. Afternoon visit to the Mitad del Mundo, equatorial monument and museum. Welcome dinner with city view.

Day Three: Box breakfast included. Travel on the old road, Ecoruta El Paseo del Quinde (The Hummingbird Trail) to Bellavista. Stop at Andean elfin forest reserve Yanacocha, and other private reserves en route. Discussion of micro-verticality (human land use) and altitudinal ecosystem contrasts. Late lunch at Bellavista. Short introductory hike into forest, preliminary discussion of cloud forest ecosystems. Evening: in-depth discussion of birds in Ecuador's cloud forests, discussion of birds as example of biodiversity in mountain forests.

Day Four: Early morning bird hike around immediate area of reserve. After breakfast, guided hike on trail, where hands-on activities will deepen the learning process. Lunchtime lecture on cloud forest ecosystems and further explorations of primary and secondary forests. In the evening discussions of human activities and culture in northwestern Ecuador, with an emphasis on sustainability.

Day Five: You will start the morning with a bird hike followed by a visit to Tucanopy – a zipline – and a discussion of sustainable life options, including an environmental education program at Miraflores school. You will also visit Mindo, a butterfly farm and orchid garden.

Day Six: You will discover plant communities in the cloud forest and take part in a discussion of medicinal plants and their potential development. Planting of native trees in a regenerating pasture will complement the day. In the

evening, you will hike into the forest and hear a talk about nocturnal adaptations.

Day Seven: There will be an early morning excursion to Angel Paz Antpitta Reserve, where you will view rare birds, including various species of Antpittas and Cock-of-the-Rock. You will enjoy a local culinary experience. Afterward, you continue to Tulipe archaeological site and listen to a lecture on Yumbo culture with emphasis on land use and belief systems.

Day Eight: This morning you will hike down into Tandayapa Valley to experience altitudinal variations and explanation of high endemism, with an emphasis on birds and rare old trees (grove of giant strangler figs) in El Quinde Private Reserve. Local lunch at Alambi Reserve where you can spot hummingbirds. Lastly, a visit to riparian ecosystem of Rio Alambi..



people.

Day Nine: Optional activities: horse-back ride, hike up to hidden waterfalls within the reserve, birding explorations in new areas of the reserve. Also a “wrap-up” discussion on the cloud forest and evening talk on the customs of Otavaleño indigenous

Day Ten: Depart to Otavalo. There will be time for shopping and discovering Otavaleño culture. Partake in the discussions of contrasting ecosystems of Interandean Valleys and land use patterns. The day concludes with a farewell dinner overlooking the old city of Quito. Overnight accommodations at Hotel Sebastian.

Day Eleven: Breakfast. Transfer to airport. Departure from Ecuador.