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Peru & Ecuador

# HIGH AND MIGHTY

With their 'must-see' attractions, abundant wildlife and rich cultural charm, Peru and Ecuador make a perfect Latin American twin-centre itinerary, says *Andy Hoskins*

**N**eighbouring Peru and Ecuador, stretching from the Pacific Ocean high into the Andes and dropping back down to the Amazon rainforest, together present a quintessential Latin American experience.

Itineraries combining the two countries tick off iconic sites such as Machu Picchu and the wildlife mecca of the Galapagos Islands, with historic colonial towns, Amerindian culture and local cuisine mixed in along the way.

Longer Peruvian itineraries are likely to incorporate the mysterious Nazca Lines, lofty Lake Titicaca, a stay in an Amazonian lodge, and the mighty Colca Canyon, while all visitors heading to Machu Picchu will have the pleasure of two or more days in Cusco.

Littered with pretty cobbled plazas, colonial churches and other historic buildings, Cusco was the heart of the Inca empire and is the perfect place for visitors to acclimatise to the high altitude before setting off on the famous Inca Trail trek – or more leisurely train journey – to Machu Picchu.

The Peruvian government has been making efforts for some years to promote the less-visited north of the country and is now in talks with several Latin American airlines with regard to new connections to cities such as Chiclayo and Piura.

Plans are also underway to relaunch Kuelap Fortress in Chachapoyas as the

'Machu Picchu of the North' and to highlight other nearby archaeological sites, as well as the Gocta Falls which, at 771 metres, are one of the world's highest waterfalls.

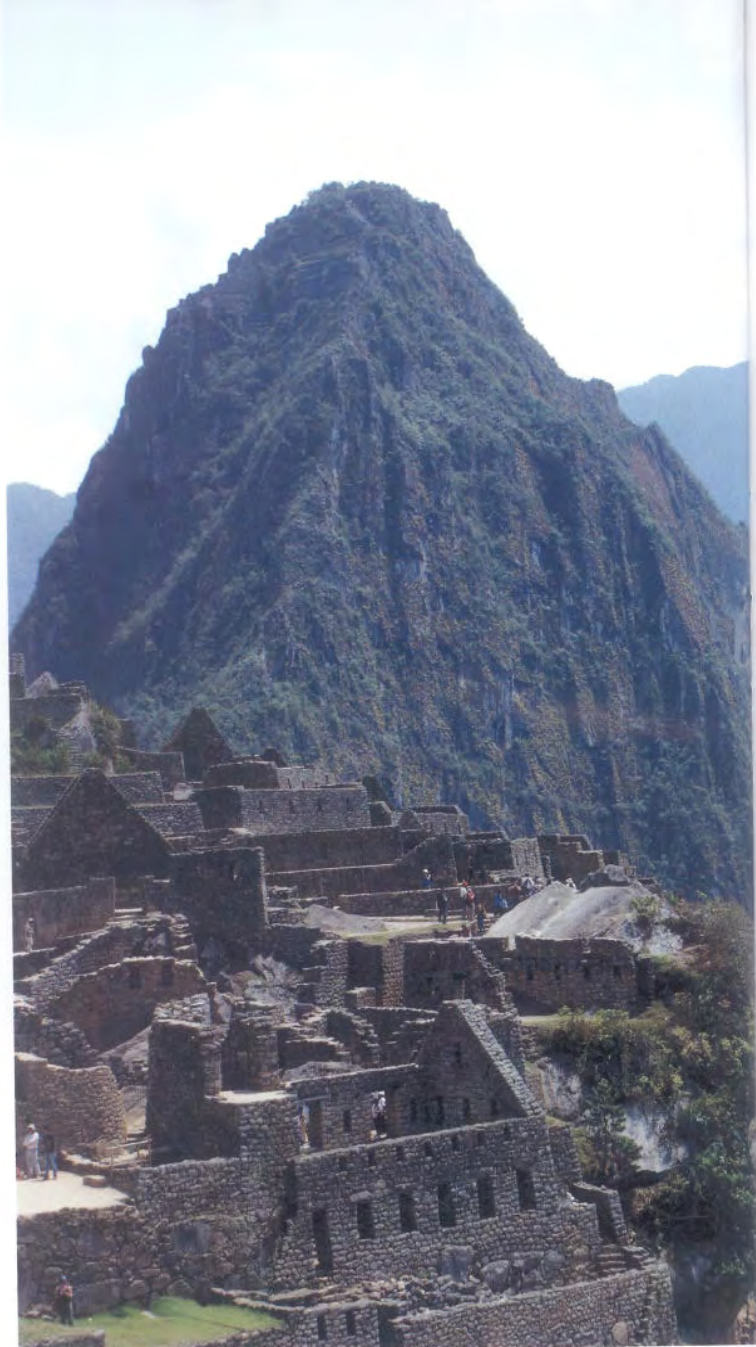
Like northern Peru, Ecuador's mainland is also often overlooked by visitors on tight schedules as the incredible wildlife of the Galapagos Islands is the principal highlight for visitors heading to the country.

However, many operators are now pushing Ecuador's mainland destinations – and it's well worth suggesting clients add on time to discover its many charms. The historic capital city, Quito, is majestically set in the 'Valley of the Volcanoes', high in the Andes. Close to the equator the historic city centre (as well as that of pretty Cuenca, further south) is a UNESCO World Heritage Site such is the wealth and diversity of buildings in the area.

A short flight away to the east, the town of Coca is the gateway to jungle lodge experiences in the Amazon where guests can enjoy guided walks, wildlife watching, kayaking and various other experiences designed to help visitors enjoy an up-close-and-personal experience of the rainforest.

## What's New

Already well marshalled, further legislation was introduced for cruise operators in the Galapagos Islands last year and is effective as of this month. All cruise operators must now implement itineraries that last for 14 nights during which the boat cannot visit the same



Top: Machu Picchu, Peru; Ecuadorian Amazon; Quechua child, Peru; Kuelap Fortress, Peru. Opposite: Sacha Lodge canopy walkway, Ecuador

site twice, with the exception of the Charles Darwin Research Station on Santa Cruz. It is expected that operators will divide their 14-night itineraries into three or four segments from which visitors can pick their preferred section.

Operators must now also include the airport on San Cristobal as part of the 14-night cruise, with the aim of taking pressure of the airport on Baltra Island and some of the most visited sites, and to distribute visitors more evenly throughout the archipelago.

Bus services will replace trains between Cusco and Ollantaytambo until April 15 – with rail services continuing on to Machu Picchu – as a precaution during the rainy season.

A 153-room **JW Marriott** (July) and the 55-suite **Palacio Nazarenas** (early summer) open for business in Cusco, Peru, this year, both set in historic buildings. The latter is an **Orient Express** hotel and will have the city's first outdoor heated infinity pool.

In the Amazon, **Aqua Expeditions** added a second boat to its fleet last year. The luxury *MIV Ariahas* operates three-, four- and seven-day itineraries in the remote Pacaya Samiria National Reserve.

**Metropolitan Touring** opened two hotels in Ecuador last autumn. The 31-room boutique hotel **Caso Gangotena** is located in the heart of Quito's old town, while the 21-room **Mashpi Lodge** is set amid rainforest on the slopes of the Andes.

Another recent opening is the **Hacienda Concepcion**, the second property to launch under the new **ByInkaterra** brand which offers a more casual and informal alternative to regular **Inkaterra** hotels. The lodge is located in the Peruvian Amazon, 20 minutes



down river from Puerto Maldonado.

The **Westin Lima Hotel** has added the 'Heavenly Spa' which it claims is the largest spa centre in the country. The hotel is part of the **Starwood** group which also operates the **Paracas** and **Tambo del Inka Luxury Collection Hotels** in Peru and **Sheraton** hotels in Quito and Guayaquil.

### Tourism Talk



**CLAUDIA CORNEJO MOHME**, Vice Minister of Tourism, Peru

"Tourism is the third biggest sector of our economy – it is a real priority for the government.

"Traditionally the south has been the main region for tourism, but now the north is growing fast and the Amazon has been named one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the world.

"Remember that the Amazon covers

60 per cent of Peru so this will be a good opportunity to raise awareness of tourism in the rainforest, though we've already been pushing it for four or five years. Our strategy is to attract the bigger spenders – not necessarily just more visitors – and the UK market is a good fit for this."

**CARLOS GUZMÁN**, Sub-Secretary for Promotion and Marketing at the Ecuador Ministry of Tourism

"Travel and tourism is an important component of Ecuador's economy and the UK remains one of the country's priority markets. The UK is already Ecuador's second biggest market in Europe and we are looking for further growth in the number of British visitors in the coming years.

"We already have a marketing and PR presence in the UK, and are planning to expand our relationships with the trade

and tour operators, as well as organisations such as LATA.

"We will also be encouraging the press to come and visit Ecuador; and are delighted with the news that Sir David Attenborough is going to be shooting a new TV series this year that is based in the Galapagos."

### From The Frontline



**LOUISE MUMFORD**  
Americas Product Manager,  
Abercrombie & Kent

"Iconic Machu Picchu is Peru's best-known 'must see' attraction, but there are still plenty of less visited sites to discover, especially in the north of the country, from coastal towns to adobe and stone cities and remains of ancient civilisations older than the Incas.

"You can also discover the Amazon basin on one of the continent's most



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FEATURE  
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► luxurious cruise expedition ships and explore the diverse flora and fauna of the rainforest.

"Ecuador, meanwhile, is best known for being the gateway to the Galapagos Islands which are justifiably one of the top destinations in the world on travellers' wish lists. The wildlife there is abundant, unique and easy to spot – it really is the experience of a lifetime.

"Although it's not a cheap destination, it is vastly rewarding. In fact, the Galapagos Islands are set to be even more popular in 2012 with new park regulations meaning greater flexibility and choice in terms of itineraries and the duration of cruises available.

"We have already seen availability aboard Galapagos cruises become harder to find for the coming year so booking ahead really is essential."



**SIMON FORSTER**  
 Latin America Product  
 Manager, Rainbow Tours

"While Ecuador is perhaps best known for the Galapagos Islands, we believe that the country offers far more and the mainland deserves to be promoted without the Galapagos occasionally.

"The country has some of the strongest indigenous connections in the whole of the Americas, in both the Andes and Amazon, as well as serious natural beauty.

"It also has stunning colonial cities and Inca ruins, so it incorporates everything you could want out of a trip to South America, except for great beaches. With this in mind we have created a new 'Ecuador Explorer' itinerary, to help visitors gain a better understanding of the natural wonders and cultural highlights the country has to offer."

**PERU & ECUADOR**

⇒ *Top Selling Tips...*

• **Cultural highlights...**

"Ecuador has some of the strongest indigenous culture in the whole of the Americas, in both the Andes and Amazon, as well as serious natural beauty"

**SIMON FORSTER**  
 Rainbow Tours

• **Consider Northern Peru...**

"Machu Picchu is Peru's best-known attraction, but there are still plenty of less visited sites to discover, especially in the north of the country"

**LOUISE MUMFORD**  
 Abercrombie & Kent

• **Look beyond the Galapagos...**

"Ecuador's mainland is often overlooked by visitors on tight schedules but is well worth adding on time in which to discover its many charm"

**ANDY HOSKINS**  
 Journalist, *Selling Long Haul*

• **Take to the water...**

"You can discover the Amazon basin on one of the continent's most luxurious cruise expedition ships and explore the diverse flora and fauna of the rainforest"

**LOUISE MUMFORD**  
 Abercrombie & Kent



*Where To Book It*

**ABERCROMBIE & KENT**  
 0845 485 1523  
[www.abercrombiekent.co.uk](http://www.abercrombiekent.co.uk)

The operator's 14-night Classic Peru and Galapagos itinerary visits Lima, the Sacred Valley, Machu Picchu and Cusco, before moving on to Ecuador to visit Quito and the Galapagos Islands. It is priced from £6,395pp.

**ON THE GO TOURS**  
 020 7371 1113  
[www.onthegotours.com](http://www.onthegotours.com)

On the Go has launched a new 'value for money' Latin America programme for more adventurous travellers. The seven-day Machu Warrior itinerary featuring the famous four-day Inca Trail trek, a stay in Cusco, and a visit to Ollantaytambo in the Sacred Valley is priced from £740 not including flights.

**RAINBOW TOURS**  
 020 7666 1250  
[www.rainbowtours.co.uk](http://www.rainbowtours.co.uk)

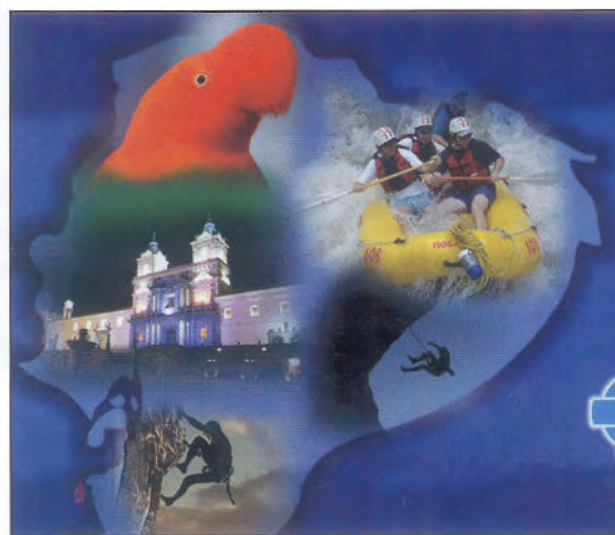
The 13-day Ecuador Explorer itinerary (from £3,150pp) visits Quito, Guayaquil, the Amazon, Quito, Cotopaxi National Park, Otavalo and Cuenca and includes an excursion on the Devil's Nose train.

**HAYES & JARVIS**  
 0844 855 4488  
[www.hayesandjarvis.co.uk](http://www.hayesandjarvis.co.uk)

The 'From the Andes to the Galapagos' escorted tour of Peru and Ecuador is priced from £3,995 departing in April. It visits Machu Pichu, Cusco, Lake Titicaca, Quito, Otavalo and the Galapagos. •

Keen on Quito?

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