



YOUTH FOR UNDERSTANDING
Programa de Intercambio Estudiantil

A Taste of Ecuador

Start: February 20th, 2026

End: March 9th, 2026

We are excited to offer a fun YFU experience to staff, volunteers and/or alumni that would like to discover Ecuador, one of the most diverse countries in the world!

Our goal is to give you a taste of what your students experience during their exchange trips in Ecuador. We'll begin with an adventure in the Amazon, where you'll explore indigenous communities, traditional handicrafts, and the incredible wildlife of the region.

Next, we'll spend two nights in Quito, including a visit to the YFU Ecuador office, a guided city tour, and—of course—a stop at the Equator.

We've also planned a three-day journey through northern Ecuador, where you'll learn about the customs and traditions of indigenous communities and meet YFU students placed in the area.

From there, we'll head to southern Ecuador to experience the stunning Cotopaxi—one of the highest and most scenic volcanoes in the world.

And last, but certainly not least, you'll explore the incredible Galápagos Islands. This part of the journey includes visits to several areas within the Galápagos National Park, overnight stays on two different islands, and some of the best snorkeling spots in the region. You'll swim with sea turtles, sea lions, and rays, and encounter giant tortoises, marine iguanas, blue-footed boobies, and other unique species found only in the Galápagos.

Don't miss this amazing opportunity to immerse yourself in Ecuador—its landscapes, wildlife, culture, traditions, handicrafts, and of course, its delicious cuisine. What better way to inspire and recruit future students than by living the experience yourself?

An adventure of a lifetime—all in just eighteen days!

Itinerary:

Day 1 – Friday Feb 20th: Arrival to Quito

Please, book a flight to Mariscal Sucre International Airport in Quito. Our staff will be waiting for you at the airport. 20 minutes transfer to a beautiful Garden Hotel.

DRIVING: 0,5 hour

MEALS INCLUDED: none

HOTEL: San José de Puembo





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Day 2 – Saturday Feb 21st: Community of Indigenous Women

Welcome to the jungle! In the morning drive to the community of “Sinchiwarmi”, which, in the local language means “brave women”.

After a delicious typical lunch, we will learn how to make bracelets and then take a walk through a cocoa tree farm to learn how to process the cocoa beans and make your own chocolate.



The rooms are typical houses of the Rainforest with private bathroom but no hot water.

DRIVING: 4 hours WALKING: 2 hours

MEALS INCLUDED: breakfast, lunch, dinner
HOTEL: Sinchi Warmi Indigenous Community

Day 3 - Sunday Feb 22nd: Jungle excursion

Canoe trip and wildlife watching on Lake Paikawe before breakfast. Here there is a chance to see monkeys, birds and sloths. Walk through the community and prepare lunch: smoked fish.

In the afternoon, drive to Liana Lodge, a great facility in the middle of the private reserve "Selva Viva". Monkeys are at home here and you can observe them well in the afternoon. Liana Lodge is an ecolodge near the Arajuno River that can be reached just by canoe. All rooms are bungalows made with local materials. Every room has a private bathroom. There is electricity in the reception and restaurant area but not in the bedrooms.



After a 10 minute motorized canoe drive enjoy doing "Tubing" on the refreshing waters of Arajuno River.

DRIVING: 1 hour WALKING: 2 hours Tubing: 1 hour

MEALS INCLUDED: breakfast, lunch, dinner
HOTEL: Sinchi Warmi Indigenous Community



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Day 4 – Monday Feb 23rd: Jungle excursion

The day will start with a short canoe ride to the “AmaZOOnico Animal Rescue Center”, one of the most important places in the region for wildlife conservation. A volunteer will explain the efforts that are being done to protect wildlife and we will have the chance to see some animals of the jungle.



Afterwards, visit to a community where you can taste a traditional drink called “chicha”. Learn about the use of blowguns and visit a lake full of caimans. Lunch at the lodge, followed by “siesta” time.

The afternoon will be a fun and unique experience as we build a raft out of balsa wood and travel on the Arajuno River back to the lodge!

After dinner, short night walk in search of insects and frogs.

WALKING: 3 hours CANOE: 1 hour BALSA RAFT: 1 hour

MEALS INCLUDED: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

HOTEL: Liana Lodge

Day 5 – Tuesday Feb 24th: Drive back to Quito

Sadly, it’s time leave the magical rainforest. Lunch on the drive back to Quito. Transfer to hotel Casa Aliso or to a host family, depending on what you have chosen. The Hotel Casa Aliso is located in the traditional artistic neighborhood of “La Floresta” where you will find several small cafeterias, as well as a variety of restaurants. Of course, we will give you insider tips of the best places to go!



DRIVING: 5 hours

MEALS INCLUDED: Breakfast, lunch.

HOTEL: Casa Aliso or host family



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Day 6 – Wednesday Feb 25th: Quito City Tour and Middle of the World

Breakfast at the YFU Ecuador National Office. Afterwards, city tour through the old part of Quito, also known as "the Monastery of America" and UNESCO's World Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Walk through the streets of the old downtown to the golden church "La Compañía", the square of "San Francisco", the main square and much more. Lunch at a traditional restaurant with typical food of the city.

In the afternoon, Intiñan Museum located at the equator where you will have the chance to step with one foot on the northern hemisphere and the other on the southern hemisphere.

DRIVING: 2hour WALKING: 4 hours

MEALS INCLUDED: Breakfast, lunch

HOTEL: Casa Aliso or host family



Day 7 – Thursday Feb 26th: Andean Cosmo-vision and Traditions

Depart from Quito to take the Pan-American Highway to the northern Andes. First stop will be at the Cultural Center "Luna Sol", where you will learn about the Andean Cosmo-vision and Spirituality of the natives from the Middle of the World. This Workshop will allow you to understand the indigenous beliefs and how they see the Universe. You will learn how to connect with the energies of "Pachamama" (Mother Nature) through simple breathing and concentration techniques. You will then enjoy a traditional lunch from this part of the Andes.



In the afternoon, visit to two native families in a small artisan village called Peguche to see how some of Ecuador's handicrafts and musical instruments are made. Afterwards, drive to the Imbabura Volcano where you will stay the night in a center run by indigenous families in the village of San Clemente. Each room is an independent small house with a private bathroom. In the evening, we will enjoy live music from the Andes played by local musicians.

WALKING: 2 hours DRIVING: 3 hours

MEALS INCLUDED: breakfast, lunch, dinner

HOTEL: Indigenous Village San Clemente



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Day 8 – Friday Feb 27th: Cuicocha lake and meeting with YFU inbound students

Another exciting day in which you will spend the morning doing some of the daily activities of the indigenous people, such as feeding domestic animals (lamas). You will also learn about important festivities, farming tasks and community activities of the indigenous people and how these are deeply connected with the seasons and cycles of nature.

After a delicious lunch we will leave the peaceful village of San Clemente and visit one of the most impressive, active volcanoes in Ecuador: the Cuicocha crater-lake. After a short hike around the crater, you will meet the YFU students placed in this region while enjoying our delicious “humitas and quimbolitos”. These are a traditional tamale type dish from the Ecuadorian Andes. Overnight at the village of San Clemente.



WALKING: 4 hours DRIVING: 2 hours

MEALS INCLUDED: breakfast, lunch, dinner

HOTEL: Indigenous Village of San Clemente

Day 9 – Saturday Feb 28th: Otavalo handicraft market

As we start moving to the south, we visit the famous handicraft market of Otavalo, considered the largest handicraft market in South America. On Saturdays, the streets of Otavalo are full of handicrafts, textiles, huts, jewelry, T-Shirt, ponchos and so much more.

In the afternoon, drive to the next hotel near the amazing Cotopaxi Volcano. This is the only place to stay overnight inside the National Park Cotopaxi, which means we will enjoy an amazing view of this active volcano. The German scientist Alexander von Humboldt wrote in his diary on 1802: *“Cotopaxi is the most beautiful mountain in the world with a perfect pyramid shape”*. The hotel is a private mountain refugee with large rooms, each with multiple beds and shared bathroom. If you wish, you may also book with an upgrade to include private room and private bathroom.



WALKING: 1 hours DRIVING: 4 hours

MEALS INCLUDED: breakfast, dinner

HOTEL: Multiple bed rooms in Tambopaxi Lodge

OPTIONAL UPGRADE: private room with private bathroom USD 150 extra per person for 2 nights



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Day 10 – Sunday Mar 1st: Cotopaxi National Park

Start the day with a unique opportunity of seeing a volcano in eruption! Although the Cotopaxi is active again, it remains calm enough to have the national park open for visitors.

Visit to the Limpiopungo Lake located at 3900 meters high where you will see some wildlife animals such as birds, wild horses and more. If the weather conditions are optimal, participants that feel well acclimatized to the altitude can drive up to 4500 m where you can then leisurely climb the last 300 meters to the refuge on foot. A magnificent view of the surrounding peaks awaits you! After a break at the Refugio José Ribas, we descend together to the parking place and continue through the enchanting landscape of Cotopaxi National Park.



The afternoon is free to enjoy the surroundings of the hotel, relax or if you want, book a horse-riding tour.

WALKING: 4 hours DRIVING: 1 hours

MEALS INCLUDED: breakfast, dinner

HOTEL: Multiple bed rooms in Tambopaxi Lodge

OPTIONAL UPGRADE: private room with private bathroom USD 150 extra per person for 2 nights

Day 11 – Monday Mar 2nd: Drive Back to Quito and YFU Dinner

In case the weather conditions were not the best the past days, this morning stays free to have a second chance of climbing the Cotopaxi volcano or booking a wonderful 2 hour horse riding tour in this beautiful valley surrounded by volcanoes. At midday drive back to Quito.

Transfer to a hotel with beautiful gardens near the airport because the next day we will leave early in the morning to the Galapagos Islands. In the evening we will meet for a special dinner organized by YFU Ecuador in the Cumbaya neighborhood, not too far from the hotel.



DRIVING: 2 hours

MEALS INCLUDED: breakfast, dinner

HOTEL: San José de Puembo



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Day 12 - Tuesday Mar 3rd: Flight to Galapagos and first snorkeling with sea lions

Transfer to the airport of Quito, where you will be assisted to pass the Galapagos Biocontrol and Transit Card formalities. Flight to San Cristobal airport. Galapagos is considered “the most amazing place on Earth” according to the English magazine Wanderlust. We have carefully chosen the best excursion for you to enjoy these fantastic Islands.



After arriving to San Cristóbal Island, check into the hotel and immediately leave to explore the waterfront by foot, where you will see the first sea lions. We will enjoy a first amazing snorkeling in the calm bay of “La Lobería”. This name was given because you will find some sea lions resting on the beach.

DRIVE: 1 hour FLYING: 4 hours

WALKING: 2 hours

SNORKELING: 1 hour

MEALS INCLUDED: breakfast, lunch

HOTEL: Blue Marlin

Day 13 – Wednesday Mar 4th: Snorkeling excursion to Kicker Rock or Isla Lobos

In the morning we will head out to the sea: We will start with a boat drive to Kicker Rock or to island Lobos (depending on availability). In both you will see many birds nesting and also enjoy a snorkeling tour to explore the amazing underwater world. Depending on the current of the sea we may be able to see ray, turtles and sea lions.

Lunch will be served on the boat on the way to a nearby beach where you will have time to swim and discover some of the animals before returning to the port in the early afternoon.

Free afternoon to enjoy the island of San Cristobal and its beautiful sunsets.



BOAT DRIVING: 2 hours

WALKING: 1 hour

SNORKELING: 1 hour

MEALS INCLUDED: breakfast, lunch

HOTEL: Blue Marlin



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Day 14 – Thursday Mar 5th: Galapagos Giant Tortoises

Take a speedboat to the island of Santa Cruz. After our check-in at the hotel in Puerto Ayora, we will visit the Charles Darwin Station where you will learn about some of the tasks of the national park as well as get an overall view of the rich fauna. Giant turtles from many islands of the archipelago live in several enclosures. Here you will also learn to distinguish the different shapes of the shells, as well as the importance of breeding the turtles in the research station to ensure their survival.



After a lunch break in Puerto Ayora, we will visit the highlands of the Santa Cruz Island. Here you will visit the Twin Crater formations and walk inside a vast natural Lava Tunnel. Afterwards, search for Giant turtles in the wilderness! One of the best moments you will experience on the Galapagos Islands will be to see these giant reptiles eating, walking slowly or just lying on the grass.

BOAT DRIVING: 2 hours WALKING: 3 hours DRIVING: 1 hour

MEALS INCLUDED: Breakfast, lunch

HOTEL: Deja Vu

Day 15 – Friday Mar 6th: Boat excursion to non-inhabited island

Shared yacht excursion to one of the non-inhabited islands: Seymour, Plazas or Bartolome (depending on availability). We will be picked up at the hotel and cross the Island by bus. At the Itabaca channel, our naturalist guide and the crew of the yacht will be waiting for us.

Enjoy iconic fauna and fantastic landscapes of one of those islands. Of course, snorkeling is on the program as well! Enjoy a delicious lunch on board.



BOAT DRIVING: 3 hours WALKING: 2 hours SNORKELING: 1 hour

MEALS INCLUDED: Breakfast, lunch

HOTEL: Deja vu



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Day 16 – Saturday Mar 7th: Free Day

Free day to enjoy your last full day on the Galapagos Islands. A good option with no cost would be to visit the beautiful beach of Tortuga Bay by your own. The trail to Tortuga bay lasts around one hour and you will find beautiful cactus, Darwin finches, marine iguanas and much more. The first beach may have strong currents, so if there is a red flag, no swimming is allowed. Past this beach, you will find a calm bay where you may swim or rent a kayak.



If you want to experience a top excursion, we can add a day tour to one of these amazing non-inhabited islands: Bartolome, Plazas or Seymour, depending on which one you visited the day before (around 300usd per person). These yacht tours include a hike, snorkeling and lunch on board. Take into consideration that last minute options are very limited. The sooner you let us know you want to take this option, the better!

Enjoy a farewell dinner together with your travelling group.

MEALS INCLUDED: Breakfast, dinner

HOTEL: Deja vu

Day 17 - Sunday Mar 8th: Flight back to Quito

Unfortunately, it is time to say good bye to this natural paradise. We drive to the channel of Itabaca and take a short boat ride to Baltra Island where the other airport of Galapagos is located. From here we fly back to Quito.



DRIVING: 1 hour

FLYING: 4 hours

MEALS INCLUDED: Breakfast

HOTEL: San José de Puembo

Day 18 – Monday Mar 9th: Transfer to airport for international flight

According to your flight, we will organize your transfer to the airport. (aprox 20 min drive)

MEALS INCLUDED: Breakfast