Otavalo’s Woven Colors, Blue-Footed Boobies at Dawn

An 8-Day Ecuador Itinerary

Ecuador in eight days: two nights in Quito’s UNESCO-listed colonial center, a market day in the Andean highlands trading in hand-woven textiles, then four islands across the Galápagos where giant tortoises wallow in highland mud, blue-footed boobies strut through an elaborate courtship dance, and sea lion pups barrel into snorkelers without a hint of fear. Real hotels, real flight and boat logistics, and 2026 prices for every stop.

DURATION
8 Days

BEST TIME TO GO
June–November
the cooler, drier garúa season, when nutrient-rich currents bring blue-footed boobies, penguins, and sea lions into a feeding frenzy and Andean skies stay clearest — swap for December–May if warm, glassy snorkeling water matters more to you than wildlife density

FROM
$2,850 USD / person
for 2 people

Day 1 Arrive in Quito

Dinner — La Ronda Street Food Stalls

~1.5 hours, self-guided · Est. $8–$15 USD / person

A pedestrian colonial street strung with lanterns, where family-run stalls ladle out encebollado (tuna-and-yuca fish soup) and canelazo (hot cinnamon-and-aguardiente punch) beside artisan workshops kept in the same families for generations.

Overnight — Illa Experience Hotel

From $210 USD / night, for 2 people, breakfast included

A boutique restoration of a colonial house in the San Marcos neighborhood, a few blocks from Plaza Grande, with a rooftop terrace looking out over the historic center's red-tiled roofs and church domes.

Illa Experience Hotel · www.illaexperiencehotel.com

Day 2 TelefériQo Cable Car & the Middle of the World

A cable-car climb above the city for a condor's-eye view of the Andes, then an afternoon standing on the equator itself.

TelefériQo Cable Car — Cruz Loma Viewpoint

~2 hours round trip · $8.50 USD / person

A 10-minute gondola ride up the flank of Pichincha volcano to roughly 13,000 feet, where thin, cold air and a condor-eye view stretch over Quito's red-roofed sprawl 9,000 feet below in the valley.

Mitad del Mundo & Museo Intiñán

~35 minutes each way · $5 USD (monument) + $4 USD (Intiñán museum)

The 30-meter equatorial monument marks the (slightly off) line surveyed by an 18th-century French expedition; the smaller, more accurate Museo Intiñán next door runs the classic balance-an-egg-on-a-nail and water-drains-straight-down demonstrations right on the true equatorial line.

Dinner — Mama Clorinda

~1.5 hours · Est. $15–$25 USD / person

A long-running, family-owned restaurant in the Mariscal district serving traditional Ecuadorian plates — llapingachos (cheese-stuffed potato cakes), fritada, and seco de chivo — in a dining room decorated with Andean textiles.

Overnight — Illa Experience Hotel

From $210 USD / night, for 2 people, breakfast included

A second night at the Illa, resting up before tomorrow’s drive north into the highlands.

Illa Experience Hotel · www.illaexperiencehotel.com

Day 4 Fly to the Galápagos & Santa Cruz Island

A morning flight out over the Pacific to the Galápagos, then a first afternoon with the islands' most famous residents: the giant tortoises.

Flight — Quito (UIO) to Baltra (GPS), Galápagos

~2.5 hours, with a technical stop in Guayaquil · From $480 USD round trip

Avianca, LATAM Ecuador, and EQUAIR all fly the mainland–Galápagos route — book a morning departure to land with a full afternoon still ahead of you on Santa Cruz.

Galápagos National Park Fee & Transit Control Card

Paid on arrival, cash only · $200 USD (park entrance) + $20 USD (TCT card)

Every visitor buys the Transit Control Card before departing the mainland and pays the $200 park entrance fee on landing in the islands — keep both, since they're checked again on departure.

Charles Darwin Research Station & Rancho Primicias Tortoise Reserve

~3 hours combined · Est. $15–$25 USD / person

The research station's breeding program in Puerto Ayora up close, then a highland reserve where wild giant tortoises — shells the size of a dinner table, slick with mud — wallow in cool pools within arm's length of the path.

Overnight — Finch Bay Galápagos Hotel

From $520 USD / night, for 2 people, breakfast included

An eco-luxury property on its own private beach in Puerto Ayora, reached by a short boat shuttle across the harbor, with a saltwater pool built into the surrounding mangroves.

Finch Bay Galápagos Hotel · www.finchbayhotel.com

Day 5 Bartolomé Island — Pinnacle Rock & Penguins

A full day by boat to the archipelago's most photographed islet, snorkeling alongside the only penguin species found north of the equator.

Boat Day Tour — Bartolomé Island

~8 hours · From $270 USD / person

A small group speedboat crosses to Bartolomé for a boardwalk climb to the summit's panoramic view of Pinnacle Rock's volcanic spire, then a snorkel off the beach below.

Choko Tours · choko.tours

Snorkeling with Galápagos Penguins & Sea Turtles

~1.5 hours · Included in tour

Galápagos penguins — the only penguin species living north of the equator — dart like torpedoes past snorkelers in the cove beneath Pinnacle Rock, alongside green sea turtles grazing the shallows.

Dinner — Charles Binford Street Food Stalls

~1.5 hours, self-guided · Est. $8–$15 USD / person

Puerto Ayora's open-air seafood grills fire up at dusk along Charles Binford street, serving fresh-caught tuna and lobster ceviche a few steps from the harbor.

Overnight — Finch Bay Galápagos Hotel

From $520 USD / night, for 2 people, breakfast included

A second night at the Finch Bay before tomorrow's speedboat crossing to Isabela.

Finch Bay Galápagos Hotel · www.finchbayhotel.com

Day 6 Isabela Island — Los Túneles

An open-water speedboat crossing to the archipelago's largest island, for the signature snorkel through collapsed lava-rock tunnels.

Inter-Island Speedboat — Santa Cruz to Isabela

~2.5 hours · $30–$35 USD / person

A small open "fibra" speedboat runs twice daily between Puerto Ayora and Puerto Villamil — mornings are calmest; book ahead through an online ticket seller and expect some spray.

Ferry Galapagos · www.ferrygalapagos.com

Los Túneles Snorkeling Tour

~5 hours · From $90 USD / person

A boat threads through collapsed lava-rock arches south of town, where black marine iguanas pile on the rock in scaly heaps, white-tipped reef sharks rest motionless in the shallows, and sea turtles glide beneath the turquoise bridges.

Poza de los Flamingos & Concha de Perla

~1.5 hours, self-guided · Free

A short walk from town to a lagoon where American flamingos wade the shallows, then a calm cove at Concha de Perla for a late-afternoon snorkel with sea lions and marine turtles right off the boardwalk.

Overnight — Iguana Crossing Boutique Hotel

From $195 USD / night, for 2 people, beachfront

A beachfront hotel on Puerto Villamil's black-sand shore, a short walk from the flamingo lagoon, with rooms that open onto a shared terrace facing the Pacific.

Iguana Crossing Boutique Hotel · www.iguanacrossing.com.ec

Day 7 San Cristóbal Island — Kicker Rock

A final island crossing for the archipelago's most dramatic dive site, a sheer twin spire rising straight out of the Pacific.

Inter-Island Speedboat — Isabela to San Cristóbal, via Santa Cruz

~4.5 hours total, with a connection in Puerto Ayora · $60–$70 USD / person

There's no direct route between Isabela and San Cristóbal, so the crossing connects through Santa Cruz — plan for a mid-morning departure to land with the afternoon still free.

Ferry Galapagos · www.ferrygalapagos.com

Kicker Rock (León Dormido) Snorkel Tour

~6 hours · From $150 USD / person

A sheer volcanic-rock formation splitting the Pacific in two, its channel a top Galápagos snorkel site for sea lions, spotted eagle rays, and, in the right season, hammerhead sharks cruising the deep blue below.

Choko Tours · choko.tours

Cerro Tijeretas Trail & Tijeretas Bay

~1.5 hours, self-guided · Free

A short hilltop trail above Puerto Baquerizo Moreno through a frigatebird colony inflating scarlet throat pouches to attract mates, ending at a sheltered cove where sea lion pups barrel into snorkelers without a hint of fear.

Overnight — Casa Playa Mann

From $175 USD / night, for 2 people

A small hotel steps from Playa Mann, San Cristóbal's in-town beach where sea lions haul out on the sand each evening as the sun goes down.

Casa Playa Mann · www.casaplayamann.com

Day 8 San Cristóbal to Quito & Departure

A last morning on the islands before the flight back over the Andes to close out the trip.

Flight — San Cristóbal (SCY) to Quito (UIO)

~2.5 hours, with a technical stop in Guayaquil · Return leg of round-trip fare

The return domestic flight retraces the route over the Pacific and the Andes back to Quito, typically landing in the early-to-mid afternoon.