



Ecuador

Discover the Rainforest

17 Days

This 17-day adventure shows us the very best Ecuador has to offer. Starting in Quito's historic centre and venturing to the equator, cloud forests, and the Amazon rainforest where we volunteer at an animal rescue centre. Along the way, we experience vibrant indigenous markets, traditional art workshops, and breathtaking natural wonders like Quilotoa Crater and Cotopaxi Volcano. This journey is full of adventure, culture and conservation – certainly not one to be missed!



[Learn more about our Carbon Labels](#)

Your Recommended Expedition Itinerary

Days 1 - 2

UK to Quito

LD

After departing London, we will arrive in Ecuador's capital city, Quito, high in the Andes at an altitude of 2,850m. Known for its well-preserved colonial centre and stunning views of surrounding volcanoes, Quito is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the perfect place to begin our journey. Upon arrival, we'll be welcomed by our guide and transferred to our accommodation in the city, where we can settle in and rest after the flight. Depending on the flight schedule, we will land on day 2.

Day 3

Colonial Centre & Teleferico

BLD

We begin our full-day tour with a visit to Quito's Historic Centre. As we walk through the charming colonial streets, we explore iconic landmarks such as La Compañía de Jesús Church, Plaza Grande, and the historic San Francisco Church. Along the way, we will learn about the city's Incan and colonial history, as well as its vibrant culture. After the morning tour, we enjoy a traditional Ecuadorian lunch at a local restaurant, sampling authentic flavours and local dishes. In the afternoon, we head to the Quito Teleférico, where we take a scenic cable car ride up the Pichincha Volcano. At the top, we are rewarded with spectacular views of Quito and the surrounding Andes Mountains.

Day 4

Equator Line, Pululahua Crater & Mindo

BLD

Today we begin our day with a visit to the famous Mitad del Mundo (Middle of the World), where we'll explore the Intiñan Museum, known for its interactive exhibits about the equator and ancestral traditions. Next, we will stop at the Pululahua Geobotanical Reserve, one of the few volcanic craters inhabited in the world, where you can enjoy stunning views of the unique landscape. In the afternoon we'll continue our journey towards Mindo, a lush cloud forest known for its biodiversity. There, we'll have the chance to visit a hummingbird garden to observe these beautiful birds up close in their natural habitat. We will also visit a local chocolate factory, where we'll learn about the entire chocolate-making process and enjoy some delicious tastings.

Day 5

Mindo

BLD

Today is all about adventure in the beautiful cloud forest of Mindo, with a range of optional activities to enjoy. We start the day with an exciting zipline experience, gliding over the treetops and taking in the incredible views of the forest below. Next, we head to the river for some tubing, a fun and refreshing ride down gentle rapids surrounded by lush vegetation. To finish the day, we enjoy a scenic hike to visit some of Mindo's stunning waterfalls, where we can relax, and cool off with a dip in the natural pools.

Day 6

Otavalo Market & Cuicocha Lagoon

BLD

Today, we travel to the town of Otavalo, home to one of the most famous indigenous markets in South America. At the Otavalo Market, we have time to explore and shop for beautiful handicrafts, textiles, and other locally made products, whilst experiencing the culture of the Otavalo people. Afterwards, we will continue to Cuicocha Lagoon, a stunning crater lake located at the foot of the Cotacachi Volcano. Here, we enjoy a peaceful boat ride around the lake, taking in the breathtaking scenery and learning about the geological and cultural significance of the area.





Day 7

Otavalo Traditions and Community

BLD

Today we spend time with the community of Calera, where ancestral knowledge and warm hospitality come together. We'll start the day preparing a traditional Pachamanka – an earth-cooked meal using volcanic stones and locally sourced ingredients. From choosing the ingredients to sealing them underground, we'll learn how this sacred cooking process reflects the community's respect for the land. While the food cooks, we will be invited to a spiritual ceremony at Tun Dun, a sacred site guided by a local Yachak (spiritual leader). This ritual offers a unique insight into the community's deep connection with nature, energy and the Andean cosmivision. In the afternoon, we'll visit a local weaving family in San Pablo to hear their stories and see the traditional techniques that have been passed down through generations and even try our hand at weaving by making our own bracelet to take home.

Day 8

Journey to the Amazon

BLD

After breakfast, our tour leader guides us through an engaging introduction to Ecuador's geography, history, and customs. We then venture into the Amazon Basin, travelling through lush valleys and cloud forest as we descend into the jungle. Our destination is Puyo, often referred to as the gateway to the Ecuadorian Amazon. After a 5–6-hour drive, we arrive at the Animal Rescue Centre, which will be our home for the next few nights. We settle into simple but welcoming dorm-style cabañas, surrounded by the sounds of the jungle, and begin preparing for our volunteer experience, supporting the care and rehabilitation of rescued Amazonian wildlife.

Days 9 - 13

Volunteering in the Amazon Jungle: Animal Rescue Centre

BLD

During our time at the Amazonian Animal Rescue Centre, we'll take part in a hands-on volunteer experience. Established in 2006, the centre provides a safe sanctuary for injured, orphaned and illegally trafficked animals, many of which are being rehabilitated with the hope of returning to the wild. Our days usually begin around 08:00 and follow a flexible but structured schedule, with tasks geared towards our skills, interests and the needs of the centre. We will assist with daily animal care such as feeding, cleaning enclosures and checking in on the wellbeing of the animals, as well as preparing food, and helping with habitat construction and maintenance. Other tasks might include gardening, trail upkeep, sign-making for educational purposes and helping new arrivals settle into their environment. Beyond the day-to-day work, there's time to explore the surrounding jungle and deepen our understanding of the conservation challenges facing the Amazon.

Day 14

The Jungle to the Andes

BLD

After breakfast and a final goodbye to the jungle, we begin our journey northwest to the Andean town of Baños. The 1.5 to 2-hour drive takes us along a scenic route from the edge of the Amazon Basin into the foothills of the Andes. On the way, we stop at Los Yapas, a permaculture project focused on restoring and regenerating the Amazon since 2006. What began as a reforestation effort has grown into a vibrant sanctuary for plants, animals, and people. Here, we take part in a hands-on workshop exploring regenerative living, agroforestry, and natural building, guided by local instructors. By late afternoon, we continue to Baños, check into our accommodation, and enjoy a relaxed evening. Surrounded by waterfalls and thermal springs, this scenic town will be our base for the next few days.

Day 15**Quilotoa Crater, Tigua art workshop & Chugchilán**

BLD

This morning, we take a scenic 4 to 5-hour drive from Baños to the breathtaking Quilotoa Crater Lake, a volcanic caldera filled with vibrant turquoise water at nearly 3,900 meters above sea level. We'll enjoy stunning panoramic views and have time to walk along the crater rim or, for those who wish, hike down to the lake shore. Quilotoa holds deep spiritual significance for the local Kichwa communities. On our way to Chugchilán, we will take part in a Tigua art workshop, where local Indigenous artists introduce us to this traditional painting style known for its bright colours and detailed depictions of Andean life. We'll try our hand at painting and learn about how this art helps preserve cultural identity and supports the community. By evening, we arrive in Chugchilán, a quiet mountain town on the famous Quilotoa Loop, where we will spend the night.

Day 16**Cotopaxi National Park & José Rivas Refuge**

BLD

After breakfast, we set out for Cotopaxi National Park, home to Cotopaxi Volcano, one of the highest active volcanoes in the world at 5,897 meters (19,347 feet). The drive from Chugchilán takes about 3.5 to 4 hours. Upon arrival, we transfer to local pickup trucks, known as "camionetas," which will take us deeper into the park. At the park's parking area, around 4,500 meters (14,760 feet) elevation, we begin a guided hike up the volcanic slope towards the José Rivas Refuge, a high-altitude shelter at approximately 4,864 meters (15,953 feet). The hike is challenging but rewarding, offering panoramic views and the incredible feeling of walking near the roof of the world. After the hike, we descend and enjoy a well-deserved lunch before continuing north to Quito's valley region for the evening, where the altitude is a bit lower than the city centre.

Day 17**Quito to UK**

BLD

We will be transferred to Quito airport for our return flight home.



Look what's included:

- International flights
- All accommodation, transportation and activities
- All food as described above
- Local, bi-lingual, first-aid qualified STC leader
- Parent and student trip launch presentation
- Pre-travel training programme
- ATOL financial protection
- Group first aid kit and prescription medication pack
- BS8848 safety management and risk assessments
- Detailed pre-departure information and kit lists
- Comprehensive teacher travel packs
- Permanent operations team in your destination
- 24-hour UK operational support whilst overseas
- Donations to two carbon & conservation charities
- Free Fairtrade t-shirt for every participant and teacher
- Free travel guide book to your destination upon request



What's not included:

- Transport to airport in UK
- Drinks (advice will be given on purification of water)
- Visas or tourist cards if required
- Any required inoculations
- Emergency Medical & Repatriation Insurance
- Personal spending money
- Tips for guides, drivers and porters (ask for guidance)
- Airport departure taxes paid locally
- Personal effects and cancellation insurance

A word about Responsible Tourism

On our expeditions and educational journeys, we strive to connect teachers and students with the people they meet, nurture the cultures they experience and protect the beautiful environments they are lucky enough to explore.

Many companies talk the talk, few truly walk the walk. We are far from perfect, but we are leading the way in sustainability in the school travel sector. In 2018 we were the first UK travel company to become **Travelife Certified** – a verified sustainability certificate formally recognised by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council.

Trees for Life

This is our passion, and we'd love to tell you more about it in due course. In the meantime, for more information on some of the steps we take as a company to make our operations more sustainable, please visit: <https://www.thestc.co.uk/travel/what-do-we-do/>

Physical Rating for this trip: Grade 4



Fitness is important at this grade, which compares to extended walking in mountainous terrain such as the Lakes or Snowdonia, for up to three to five days in a row. It is likely that significant sections of a trip will involve walking and trekking with some days up to eight hours. Some of the trip could be at altitudes of up to 4,500m, but the itinerary will be designed with appropriate acclimatisation in mind. Be prepared for significant possible variations in temperatures throughout the tour. There is not usually time to 'get fit' on these treks, so a two to four-month fitness improvement programme would ensure you get the most out of the trip.

Cultural Rating for this trip: Grade 3



Students should expect some culture shock. You'll be exposed to signs of poverty. The food will be quite different to home and English, whilst still spoken, will be less prevalent. Respecting the local culture will make it easier to fit in and get the most out of your trip. We're likely to visit remoter locations on this tour where access to western style services may be sporadic. Often on trips of this grading there are parts of the itinerary which are more remote, interspersed with sections which are more 'comfortable'.



Travel Safety & Other Expedition Training

Preparing students and teachers for their upcoming adventure is an opportunity to teach important life skills and a vital part of our overall approach to safety management. Please ask for your quote for the training schedule specific to your expedition. Topics covered will include:

Responsible Tourism workshop

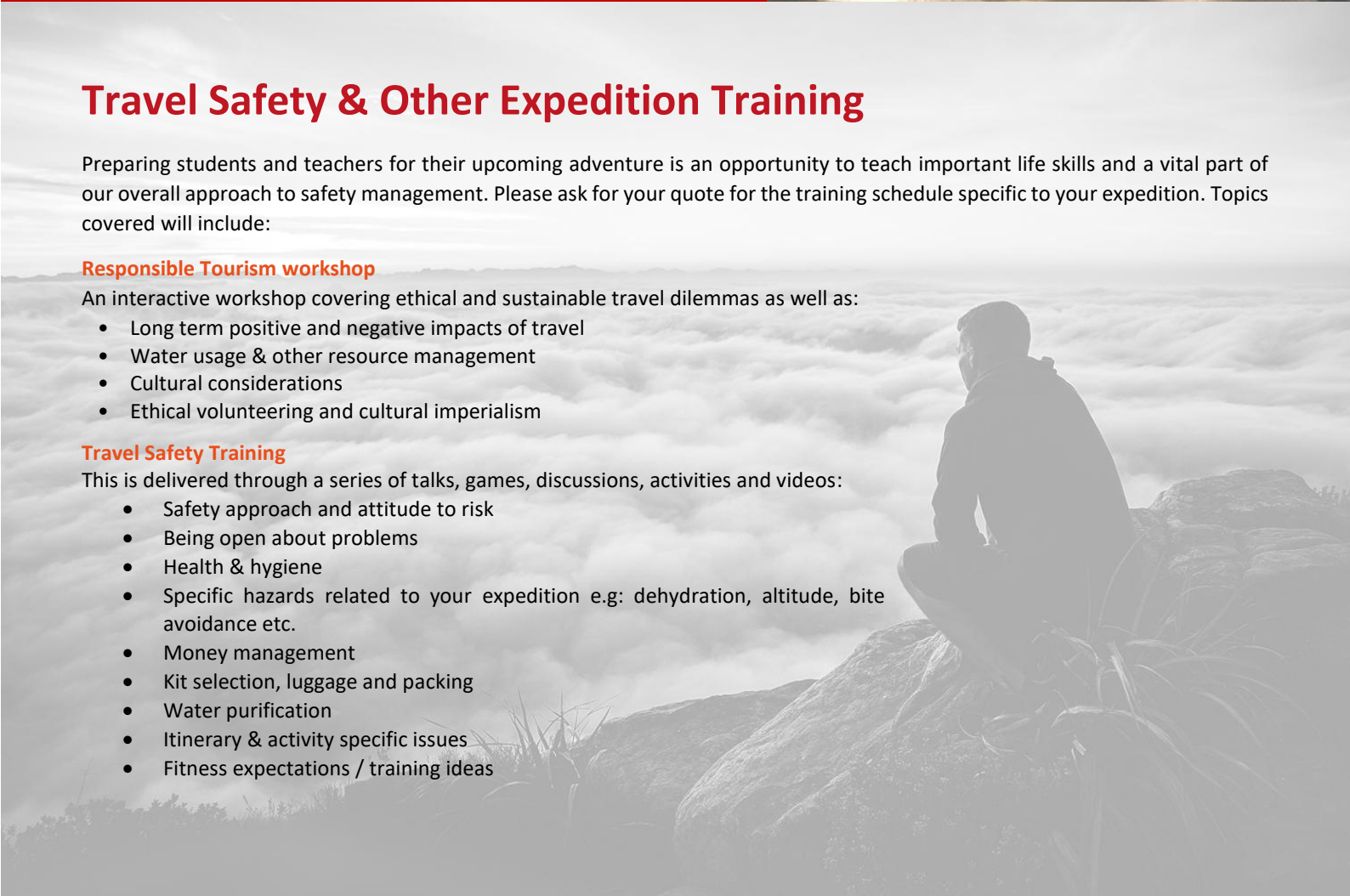
An interactive workshop covering ethical and sustainable travel dilemmas as well as:

- Long term positive and negative impacts of travel
- Water usage & other resource management
- Cultural considerations
- Ethical volunteering and cultural imperialism

Travel Safety Training

This is delivered through a series of talks, games, discussions, activities and videos:

- Safety approach and attitude to risk
- Being open about problems
- Health & hygiene
- Specific hazards related to your expedition e.g: dehydration, altitude, bite avoidance etc.
- Money management
- Kit selection, luggage and packing
- Water purification
- Itinerary & activity specific issues
- Fitness expectations / training ideas





A journey of 1,000 miles...

Starts with a single step... Contact us now to start your expedition journey

1 Ask for your personalised quote & further information

If this itinerary doesn't quite scratch your expedition itch then let us tailor-make one for you. Our wealth of experience and expert in-country contacts means we can design an adventure that's just right for you and your students. Contact us for more information and a detailed quote.

2 Ask for risk assessments and marketing materials

We can provide initial risk and threat assessments to help you with your expedition approval process. Ask for posters and your Pre-Booking Information Pack too.

3 Arrange an expedition launch evening

This is a chance for students and parents to hear more about the expedition with a comprehensive information evening covering the itinerary, safety management, the build-up to the trip and lots more. There is also plenty of opportunity for questions.



The home of the modern, innovative school expedition, where a sustainable, ethical approach guarantees unique experiences and a life enhancing adventure.

"I am being completely serious when I say that I won't ever run a school trip without you guys. I trust you and your team completely - and the in-country staff that you carefully cultivate and train are a cut above the rest."

Teacher feedback, King's High Warwick



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