



Ecuador

Ecuador & The Galapagos

18 Days

This trip takes us through the stunning Galápagos Islands and the scenic highlands of Ecuador, blending wildlife exploration with cultural immersion. From observing giant tortoises and snorkelling with sea lions, to visiting volcanic lakes and learning about sustainability, we'll experience the unique biodiversity of the region. We'll explore charming towns, enjoy picturesque hikes, and reflect on conservation efforts. The journey is a perfect mix of adventure, education and relaxation in one of the world's most extraordinary natural environments.



[Learn more about our
Carbon Labels](#)

Your Recommended Expedition Itinerary

Days 1 - 2

UK to Quito

LD

After departing London, we arrive in Quito, the capital city 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, where we can settle in and rest after the flight.

Day 3

Quito Cultural Exploration & Journey to the Amazon

BLD

After breakfast, we explore Quito's historic centre, soaking in the vibrant atmosphere of its plazas and markets. A fruit tasting gives us a chance to sample Ecuador's exotic flavours, many of which are unique to this region. Before leaving, our tour leader guides us through an introduction to Ecuador's geography, history, and cultural customs, helping us feel more confident in navigating the country. We then embark on our journey southeast into the Amazon Basin. Our destination is Puyo, known as a gateway to the Ecuadorian Amazon. After a 5-6 hour drive, we reach the Animal Rescue Center, our home for the next few nights. We settle into simple but welcoming dorm-style cabañas, surrounded by the sounds of the jungle and prepare for our volunteer experience, supporting rescued Amazonian wildlife.

Days 4 - 8

Volunteering in the Amazon Jungle: Animal Rescue Center

BLD

The Amazonian Animal Rescue Center, founded in 2006, serves as a sanctuary for injured, orphaned and trafficked animals, many of which are on the road to recovery and potential reintroduction into the wild. Our days will begin early with tasks assigned based on our skills, interests, and the needs of the centre. We will help with daily animal care, which includes feeding, cleaning enclosures, and monitoring the wellbeing of the animals. Additionally, we will prepare food and manage the animals' diets, create enrichment activities, and assist with habitat construction and maintenance. Other tasks may include gardening and trail upkeep, supporting educational efforts through sign-making, and helping new arrivals settle into the center. Beyond our work, we will have the chance to explore the surrounding jungle and deepen our understanding of the conservation challenges in the Amazon.

Day 9

The Jungle to the Andes

BLD

After breakfast, we will head northwest toward the Andean town of Baños. The drive from Puyo to Baños takes approximately 1.5 to 2 hours, following a scenic route along the edge of the Amazon basin and into the foothills of the Andes. Before reaching Baños, we will stop at Los Yapas, a permaculture project that has been restoring and regenerating parts of the Ecuadorian Amazon since 2006. What started as a reforestation initiative for endangered tree species has grown into a living sanctuary for flora, fauna, fungi, and people. Here, we will participate in a transformative permaculture workshop, learning about regenerative living, sustainability, agroforestry and natural building techniques. Guided by local instructors, we will explore how humans can live in harmony with nature, working with the land instead of against it. Our stay will provide us with an opportunity to contribute to the ongoing restoration of the Amazonian ecosystem. By late afternoon, we will continue to Baños. Surrounded by waterfalls, thermal springs, and towering green cliffs, Baños will be our home base for the next few days.





Day 10	Quilotoa Crater, Tigua art workshop & Chugchilán	BLD
<p>This morning, we will head deeper into the Andean highlands toward one of Ecuador's most breathtaking natural wonders: the Quilotoa Lagoon. The journey from Baños to Quilotoa takes approximately 4 to 5 hours. Our first stop will be the Quilotoa Crater Lake, a collapsed volcanic caldera filled with striking turquoise water. At nearly 3,900 meters (12,800 feet) above sea level, Quilotoa offers panoramic views of the surrounding peaks and valleys. We will have time to walk along the crater rim, or for those feeling adventurous, descend the steep trail to the lake shore. This natural marvel holds spiritual significance for local Kichwa communities, offering a powerful reminder of the Earth's elemental forces. After visiting the lagoon, we will continue to Chugchilán, a small mountain town where we'll spend the night. On the way, we will participate in a Tigua art workshop. Tigua painting is a traditional art form developed by the Indigenous Kichwa artists of the Tigua community in Cotopaxi province. Tigua art celebrates everything from agricultural rituals to spiritual festivals and mountain landscapes. We will try creating our own art and engage with the artists about how their work preserves cultural identity and supports the local economy. In the evening, we will arrive in Chugchilán.</p>		
Day 11	Cotopaxi National Park & José Rivas Refuge	BLD
<p>After breakfast, we will set out towards 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 to Cotopaxi takes approximately 3.5 to 4 hours. Upon arrival at the park entrance, we will switch to local pickup trucks ("camionetas") that will take us deeper into the protected area. The route offers views of Cotopaxi's snow-capped cone, grasslands and if we're lucky, sightings of wild horses and Andean foxes. At the Cotopaxi parking area, located around 4,500 meters (14,760 feet), we will begin a guided hike up the volcanic slope toward the José Rivas Refuge, a high-altitude mountain shelter at approximately 4,864 meters (15,953 feet). The hike will be challenging but rewarding, offering panoramic views of the national park and the sensation of walking on top of the world. After completing the hike, we will descend and continue our journey north to Quito's valley region for the evening, located at a slightly lower altitude than the city centre.</p>		
Day 12	Quito - The Galapagos, Santa Cruz & Charles Darwin Research Station	BLD
<p>This morning, we return to the airport to transfer to the Galapagos Island, where we will arrive at Baltra Airport. After being picked up at the airport, we will be transferred to Santa Cruz Island. After a ferry ride across the Itabaca Channel, we head to the highlands of Santa Cruz, known as Parte Alta. This area is the habitat of the giant Galápagos tortoises. We'll walk through the trees, searching for the giant tortoises that prefer to stay near the small lagoons. We will also visit the lava tubes, which were formed when the surface of a lava flow solidified while the liquid lava beneath continued to flow out like a river. In the afternoon, we will visit the Charles Darwin Research Station, a centre for scientific research and conservation efforts dedicated to preserving the biodiversity of the Galápagos archipelago.</p>		
Day 13	Boat tour to Academy Bay & snorkelling in Tortuga Bay	BLD
<p>Today we will embark on a half-day bay tour starting from the harbour of Puerto Ayora. The tour takes us across the canal to Academy Bay, also known as La Loberia. As we arrive, we will have the chance to observe blue-footed boobies and other birds on the cliffs. We will then begin a guided walk, passing a viewing point where we may spot white-tipped reef sharks resting. We will continue</p>		

along the path to Playa de los Perros, where marine iguanas often rest on sunny days. In the afternoon, we will hike to Tortuga Bay, a sandy beach that is home to a wide range of Galápagos wildlife species. With our snorkels and flippers, we'll swim out to coral reefs in small guided groups, where we can view marine iguanas and the brightly colored Sally Lightfoot Crabs.

Day 14

San Cristobal Island

BLD

In the morning, we will transfer from our hotel to the island of San Cristobal. The boat ride will take about 2 hours and, depending on the weather, it can be a bit bumpy. Upon arriving at San Cristobal, we will be transferred to our hotel. While the island is not the largest (it is the fifth largest in the archipelago), it has the second-largest population. San Cristobal is home to a wide variety of wildlife, including blue-footed boobies, sea lions, sea turtles, frigate birds, marine iguanas, and the Chatham mockingbird, which can only be found on this island. In the afternoon, we will enjoy a walking tour around the island, taking in its beauty and wildlife.

Day 15

Kicker Rock or Isla Lobos

BLD

Today, we will have a day tour to either Kicker Rock or Isla Lobos.

Isla Lobos - We will take a small boat to Isla Lobos, where we can begin observing wildlife even before getting to land. During our guided visit, we'll see frigate birds, blue-footed boobies, and sea lions inhabiting the island. We'll enjoy a walk on land, followed by the opportunity to snorkel in the small canal between the two islands. Here, we can swim with playful sea lions and observe rays and turtles. Afterward, we'll visit Playa Ochoa or similar, a white coral beach where we can relax, walk around and swim in shallow waters before returning to Puerto Baquerizo Moreno.

Kicker Rock - We will sail to Kicker Rock, also known as Leon Dormido, a distinctive lava formation in the middle of the ocean. We'll circle around the rock to observe various bird species that use the formation as a resting or nesting place. Afterwards we'll jump into the water to snorkel in the canal between the rock formations. Here, we might encounter different species of sharks (including hammerheads), turtles, rays and more. Depending on the season, we may also encounter jellyfish, but wetsuits will be provided if needed. After snorkeling, we'll head to Manglecito or a similar beach for a walk, relaxation and swimming in shallow waters.

Day 16

Return to Quito

BLD

It's time to hit the road again as we make our way back to Quito. Our transfer will take us from the hotel to the airport for our flight back. We will stay in the valley of Quito, located closer to the airport and at a lower altitude than the city centre. Here, we can take the afternoon off to reflect on our journey and prepare for our return journey home. The area is green and offers opportunities to explore and enjoy the beautiful views.

Days 17 - 18

Quito to UK

BLD

We will be transferred to Quito airport for our return flight home. Depending on the flight schedule, we may land on day 18.



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
- Emergency Medical & Repatriation Insurance
- Group first aid kit and prescription meds 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



What's not included:

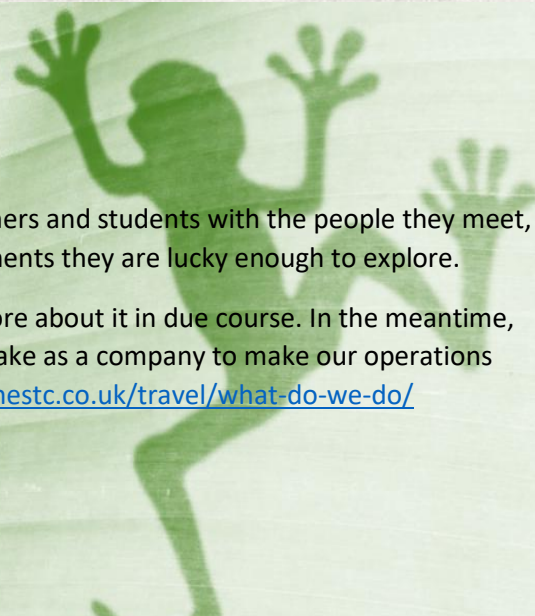
- Transport to airport in UK
- Drinks (advice will be given on purification of water)
- Visas or tourist cards if required
- Any required inoculations or Covid tests
- Personal spending money
- Tips for guides, drivers and porters (ask for guidance)
- Airport departure taxes paid locally
- Personal effects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

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

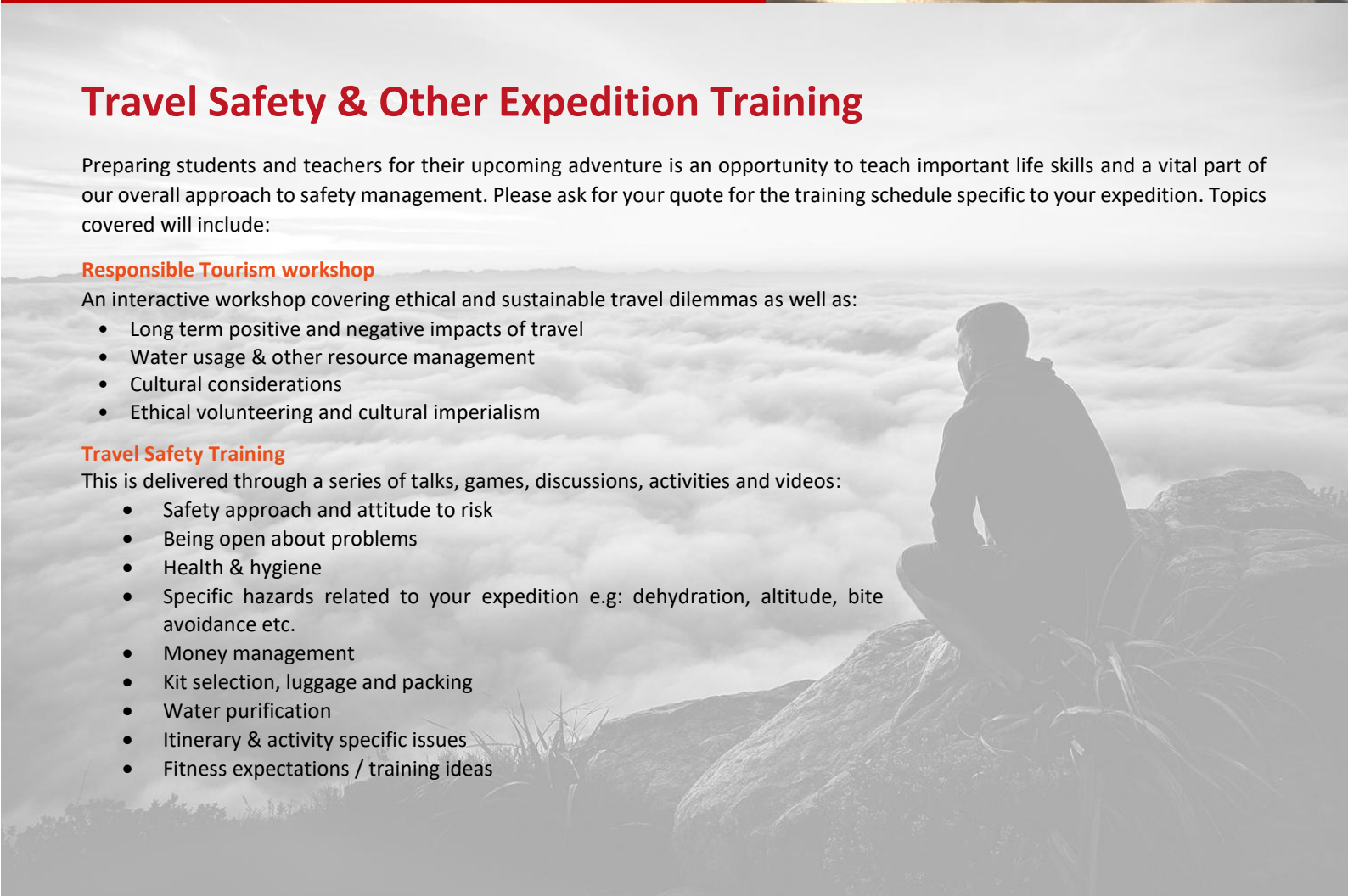
An interactive workshop covering ethical and sustainable travel dilemmas as well as:

- 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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