



# Acadia Mountain Guides Climbing School

*Director, Jon Tierney, IFMGA Licensed Guide  
Accredited by the American Mountain Guides Association since 1993*



## **ECUADOR VOLCANO'S MOUNTAINEERING TRIP AND GLACIER SCHOOL 2011 Dates**

**Peak Climb and Glacier School • January 1<sup>st</sup> -10<sup>th</sup> • Cayambe 18,997ft/5790m  
Peak Climb Extension • January 11<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup> • Cotopaxi 19,348ft/5897m  
Peak Climb Extension • January 14<sup>th</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup> • Chimborazo 20,703ft/6310m**

Ecuador's "Avenue of the Volcanos" provides one of the best introductions to high altitude mountaineering in the world. Several mountains rise to over 5,000 meters (16,400') and offer exciting mountaineering challenges to both beginning and experienced climbers. The accessibility, ease of travel, stable weather and friendly people make it the perfect place to expand your mountaineering experience. Our trips focus on climbing and learning important high altitude mountaineering skills.

Ecuador is a beautiful and diverse land that is home to friendly people and a colorful culture. Ecuador is home to an amazing natural diversity that includes the Galapagos Islands, the Amazon rain forest and the cloud forest. Our trip is designed to make the most of mountaineering opportunities while exploring the land and people of Ecuador. Ecuador offers year round mountaineering opportunities to mountaineers. You may choose from one of our scheduled trips or book your own customized date and itinerary at any time during the year. If you are limited on time, our trip may be split into segments. Ecuador is relatively inexpensive and easy to travel in. It's only a single day away and in less than two weeks you can attempt several rewarding high altitude peaks.

Our journeys begin in the Incan city of Quito, the capitol of Ecuador located at 9500' in the fertile Central Valley of the Andes that was called "The Avenue of the Volcanoes" by German explorer and scientist Alexander von Humboldt in 1802.

To the east is the larger, older and generally higher mountain range known as the Cordillera Real. The eastern cordillera is home to the world's highest active volcano, Cotopaxi (19,348ft/5897m) and numerous other major glaciated peaks. Further east is the tropical rainforest and jungle of the upper Amazon Basin known as the Oriente. The western cordillera contains Ecuador's highest peak, the glaciated dormant volcano called Chimborazo. Once thought to be the highest point on earth, Chimborazo (20,703ft/6310m) is the closest point on earth to the sun due to its location on the equatorial bulge.

The first few days are typically spent immersing ourselves in the local history and culture as we acclimate to the higher altitudes in and around Quito. In Quito, we stay at the warm and welcoming home of Eliza (La Casa de Eliza). Eliza is principal founder of Fundacion Golondrinas, an organization committed to preserving cloud forest and rain forest in northern Ecuador and to providing education about environmentally friendly forestry and agricultural practices. Eliza uses the money raised from hostel to purchase land for preservation and to fund educational programs.

Acadia Mountain Guide's Ecuador trip includes several high altitude ascents and an immersion in Ecuadorian life that will create lifelong memories. The itineraries outlined below are typical of our trips. There are many options for different objectives or activities if desired.

### **Sample Itinerary for 10, 13, and 16 Day Mountaineering and Glacier School Climbing Trip**

1<sup>st</sup>, Day 1: Arrive in Quito and check into our hostel.

2<sup>nd</sup>, Day 2: From our hostel, we visit markets, parks, colonial areas, and museums of cultural and natural history as well as some of the smaller towns surrounding Quito. At an elevation of 9500', this is an important day to be active and we will

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Summer  
198 Main St.  
Bar Harbor, ME  
04609

walk around both the new and old city exploring the history and culture of Quito. Please plan to arrive in Quito on the evening prior or earlier.

3<sup>rd</sup>, Day 3: Put one foot in the northern hemisphere and the other in the southern hemisphere! A short visit to the equator at Mitad al Mundo is followed by a hike into an extinct volcanic valley housing a traditional village. Alternatively, a visit to the well known Otavalan markets.

4<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup>, Day 4 - 5: By day three, its time to pick a peak for our first acclimatization hike. A short bus trip and truck ride take us to beautiful Pasachoa Preserve. Pasachoa is home to over 200 species of birds including the rare American Condor which we have seen twice. Here we will hike as high as we can perhaps reaching the distant summit of Cerro Pasachoa before descending and returning to Quito. Some years we choose from Guagua Pichincha as an acclimatization hike. Pichincha, when not erupting, provides a glimpse into an active volcano and a gentle hike through farmland to the village of Lloa. Other acclimatization options include El Corazon, Imbabura or Cotocachi.

6<sup>th</sup>- 7<sup>th</sup>, Day 6 - 7: Today we head to the refugio on Cayambe at 4800m. We have always felt this was the best hut in Ecuador with a friendly guardian, spacious, clean quarters and few people. Well, others have discovered it now so don't count on the few people but it's a great setting overlooking the glacier flowing down from Cayambe just meters away. On the glacier we will begin our snow and glacier school. We have found that our glacier school is often more extensive than similar guide services. You can expect to learn many important skills including:

- Snow and ice climbing, ice axe positioning, and moving in balance
- Self arrest techniques
- Snow and ice anchor selection, construction, and equalization
- Ascending fixed lines and team crevasse rescue practice. Mechanical advantage systems such as C/Z drags and drop loop methods.
- Roped glacier travel and route finding through crevassed areas
- Glaciology and crevasse pattern prediction
- Navigation using maps, altimeters, and compasses
- Discussions on high altitude physiology and other related expeditionary topics
- Expedition medicine and basic wilderness medical topics

8<sup>th</sup>, Day 8: After two and a half days of skill development, we will attempt to climb Cayambe (18997'). A midnight departure for the summit begins with a scramble over a rock ridge to the base of the glacier. Increasingly steep slopes lead toward the steep summit cone, which is reached early in the morning. We will descend in two hours what took us 8 – 10 hours to ascend. After a cat nap in the hut and a meal we will catch a ride to Otavalo.

9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup>, Day 9 - 10: We descend from Cayambe in the AM and return to Quito for a well deserved rest day. Plan on departing for home from Quito on the 10<sup>th</sup> if you are unable to join us for Cotopaxi.

11<sup>th</sup>, Day 11: We travel by bus to Cotapaxi National Park home of Ecuador's jewel peak. A short but steep hike up volcanic rubble brings us to the Jose Ribas Refugio (14,750'). After socializing with other climbers and a hearty dinner we turn in early in preparation for another early morning ascent. Rising just after midnight, we then attempt the summit of one of highest active volcanoes on the planet 19,348'. From the hut we climb steadily upward skirting crevasses and ice towers toward the Yanaschaca wall which is reached around dawn. From here, steeper snow climbing leads toward the summit only a few minutes away. On the way down, those who still have energy may practice their newly learned glacier skills. In the afternoon we pack up and leave for the jungle border town of Banos or Quito.

12<sup>th</sup>, Day 12: Descend and return to Quito. Plan on departing for home from Quito on the 13<sup>th</sup> if you are unable to join us for Chimborazo.

13<sup>th</sup> - 15<sup>th</sup>, Day 13-15: Travel to the refugio on Chimborazo where we will spend up to two days to provide our best opportunity to attempt the summit. Prepare for a midnight departure for the summit. In recent years glacier changes have made the route more challenging with greater potential for ice covered slopes and avalanches increasing the difficulty and danger. Late in the day we return to Riobamba. Alternatively, attempt the equally challenging and lesser climbed Antisana.

16<sup>th</sup>, Day 16: Return to Quito. Final sightseeing and shopping for family and friends. Plan on departing for home from Quito on the 17<sup>th</sup> of January.

## DESIGNING YOUR OWN TRIP

Our Ecuador programs are also offered on a custom basis throughout the year allowing you or your group of friends to design your own schedule and hand pick climbs.

## DIFFICULTY AND PREREQUISITES

Difficulty: The majority of routes follow easy to moderate glacier slopes with occasional sections of 40-50 degree snow/ice before reaching summit ridges. The trip is suitable for both beginning and intermediate level mountaineers. Participants should have previous backpacking experience and be in excellent physical condition. Some climbing experience is preferred, but not necessary. Recommended reading for skill sets: *Mountaineering: The Freedom of the Hills*, published by The Mountaineers Books

## TUITION, RESERVATIONS & CANCELLATIONS

10 day program	\$2595.00 per person	student fee: \$2095.00 per person
13 day program	\$2995.00 per person	student fee: \$2595.00 per person
16 day program	\$3295.00 per person	student fee: \$2995.00 per person

The fee covers:

All meals and hut fees while on climbs  
lodging and breakfast meal while in cities and towns  
all in country transportation  
Common group gear : stoves, cooking utensils, ropes, etc.  
Guiding and instructional fees  
Related administrative, preparation, park fees

The fee does not include the following:

getting to and from the designated location in Quito (La Casa de Eliza)  
Passport fees  
Airport / exit taxes  
Alcoholic beverages  
Lunch and dinner meals while in cities and towns  
Excess baggage charges  
Travel insurance or charges incurred from situations beyond our control  
Gratuities for guides, service personnel, hostels, etc.

A 50% deposit is required for registration. Balance is due forty five days (45) before the beginning of program. Fifty percent (50%) of deposit is refundable if cancellation is made more than 45 days in advance. No refund of deposit will be given for cancellations made forty five (45) days or less prior to start of program. Extreme weather, avalanche conditions, inadequate personal fitness or difficult terrain may make it impossible to achieve our stated objective of the summit. No refunds will be made in anticipation of inclement weather or for not reaching the summit. If, for any reason, Acadia Mountain Guides Climbing School must cancel the course, a full refund will be made. There is a \$20.00 charge for returned checks.

## EXPEDITION LEADER / RATIO

This trip will be led by Jon Tierney. There is a 5:1 ratio for the trip and a 3:1 ratio for the technical portions. Maximum group size is ten. For a complete guide background visit [acadiamountainguides.com](http://acadiamountainguides.com).

## TRAVEL REQUIREMENTS / RECOMMENDED IMMUNIZATIONS

Passport - to obtain, you will need a stamped copy of your birth certificate and passport photos. Obtaining a passport usually takes about a month and can be done through the larger post offices. Tourist cards will be issued upon arrival. A visa is not required. There are no required immunizations, however, the following are recommended:

Hepatitis A or immune globulin, Hepatitis B, Typhoid, Yellow fever, Tetanus (DPT), Rabies

A yellow International Certificate of Vaccination card should be carried. Please consult personal physician or immunization clinic for most current information. Some immunizations are given monthly and may require travel to a distant hospital. Be sure to plan ahead.

## RECOMMENDED READING

Medicine For Mountaineering. Wilkerson.

Climbing and Hiking in Ecuador. Rachowiecki, Rob and Wagenhauser.

Modern Snow & Ice Technique. Bill March.

Travels Amongst The Great Andes of Ecuador. Whymper, Edward.

South American Handbook.

Adventuring in the Andes. Frazier, Charles.

## PERSONAL EQUIPMENT LIST

Please work on consolidating your gear enough to fit it in one mule bag. If you need assistance in this effort please let us know. The smaller our packs, the easier it will be to get around.

- Passport and an extra passport photo
- International Certificate of Vaccination
- copies of all numbers, etc of important documents such as passport, credit cards, licenses, etc., include phone numbers to call if lost or stolen
- shorts, pants, t shirts, long sleeve shirts as needed for dinner and touring
- sneakers
- Toilet kit, personal towel
- Small padlock (TSA approved is high recommended)
- Pictures of yourself, friends, crayons, postcards, etc. to trade / give away
- Spanish / American dictionary, phrase book
- Sturdy backpack (large enough for carrying items needed) \*\* We recommend the Wild Things Andinista pack.
- please leave enough empty space in your pack to accommodate a stuff sack of group gear about 12" x 18" in size.
- Mule bag for gear storage
- Durable bowl, spoon, pocket knife
- Sleeping bag good to 20 F \*\*
- One wide mouth nalgene water bottle with insulative cover\*\*
- Headlamp with extra batteries and bulbs \*\*
- Iodine or water purifier if you wan't your own.
- 1 pr. mountain boots: plastic double boots (preferably soft shells) or stiff leather boots with supergaitors  
\*\*Provided from AMGCS but it is highly recommended to purchase your own for better fitting.
- Gaitors
- 1 pr. polypropylene or wool long underwear
- 2 pr. wool or equivalent socks
- 1 pr. polypropylene or wool liner socks
- 1 pr. medium weight wool or pile pants
- Goretex pants or equivalent
- Pile Jacket or heavy wool sweater (easily available in Ecuador)
- Goretex jacket or equivalent
- Down or synthetic jacket to fit over outer layers, i.e., Wild Things Makalu
- Wool cap or balaclava
- Visored ball cap
- underwear as needed
- 1 pr. wool mittens or pile with shell
- 1 pr light wool/polypropylene gloves
- Walking Axe (70cm or longer) \*\* Provided but may use own.
- Mountaineering Crampons \*\* Provided but may use own.
- Sit Harness \*\* Provided but may use own.
- 2 6mm prussik slings (one 5 1/2', one 11')
- 1 16' 7mm cordellette
- 2 Locking carabiners, 2 oval carabiners
- Climbing rucksack or pack that converts such as Andinista
- Sunscreen (20+ SPF rating) and lip sun screen
- UV Sunglasses with nose protector rated to at least Category 3 protection
- UV Goggles rated to at least Category 3 protection
- Medications as prescribed for trip with prescription papers / Small personal first aid kit
- Trekking pole(s) optional
- Camera and film, Personal journal
- Handiwipes
- Swimsuit

## GEAR PURCHASE DISCOUNT – SAVE MONEY

You receive a 20% discount on any items purchased for the trip through our retail store – Alpenglow Adventure Sports and a 10% discount on all future purchases. Alpenglow carries a full selection of climbing and backpacking gear.

## **MAJOR MOUNTAINS**

### **Cayambe (18,997 ft)**

A broad, beautiful mountain with a glacier extending almost the door of the hut making it a ideal location for glacier instruction. The mountain is somewhat complex with huge crevasses and seracs looming around you. Careful route finding leads to a steep summit cone. Located northeast of Quito, Cayambe is Ecuador's third highest peak. The hut is by far the best in Ecuador and is reached by a rough but scenic drive through high grassland. Average ascent / descent time is about 10 –12 hours.

### **Cotopaxi (19,348 ft)**

A perfectly symmetrical volcanic cone, Cotopaxi is the alpine jewel Ecuador and is located in beautiful Cotopaxi National Park. It is surrounded by alpine lakes, pine forests, and the stark, desolate landscape formed of ash above the paramo. This mountain is Ecuador's most frequently climbed glacial peak. From the 15,750-foot José Ribas hut we travel in rope teams crossing crevasses and passing occasionally steep sections with belays aiming for the Yanasacha wall. This foreboding dark wall (which means "black wild place" in Quechua) is passed to the right on steep snow leading the final summit plateau and crater rim. From the summit you are afforded a 360 degree view of Ecuadorian peaks as well as a view into the spectacular 1000-foot deep summit crater. On our last ascent, we were treated to a spectacular ash eruption on Tungurahua – a peak we used to climb before it boiled over. Average ascent / descent time is 8 – 10 hours.

### **Chimborazo (20,703 ft)**

At 20,703 feet this is Ecuador's highest peak. It is a massive peak with five distinct summits. Snow, avalanche, and ice conditions often prevail on Chimborazo making an ascent less predictable. A typical ascents includes over 4000 feet of elevation gain on 35 – 40 degree hard neve (snow) with sections of glacial ice requiring careful protection. Average ascent / descent time is 12-14 hours.

### **Rucu Pichincha (15,706 ft)**

Overlooking Quito, the 15,706-foot Rucu Pichincha has for years been the standard acclimatization hike for arriving mountaineers. Beginning from the antennas, you ascend through paramo (grassland) emerging onto rocky ridges with superb views of the surrounding valley. Nowadays, theft is a common occurrence on this peak so we utilize other nearby peaks for acclimatization.

## **TRIP RISKS**

A trip to the mountains of Ecuador presents numerous objective risks and hazards. As in any mountaineering situation, even flawless technique supported by good decision-making cannot guarantee group and individual safety. Discussing each potential hazard would necessitate several volumes which, even when seemingly complete, would probably represent only a fraction of the potential risks.

Consequently, I have included information on medical and travel concerns – two areas that I consider to be of primary concern to the trip.

### **1. Medical Concerns**

One should not think of climbing or trekking in Ecuador without a pretty good idea of the health hazards and how to prevent and handle them. It's a whole different world out there and a lot of things we never consider in the ultra - safe, ultra - civilized world can at best spoil your trip, and at worst, can kill you. Consider the following facts presented by Dr. Charles Houston:

17% of all people going to 9500 feet (Quito) will have problems with altitude illness. Something like 1 in 10,000 will die. The percentage increase to 45% for those going too fast to 15,000 - 16,000 feet, and the death rate rises accordingly.

No one has counted how many people on trekking or climbing trips have had diarrhea, but I'd guess it is close to 100%. And for many of the victims it will spoil the trip. Perhaps 25% will come home with an intestinal infection like amoebiasis or giardiasis.

Even world class climbers have been turned back near a summit, and some have died from preventable, treatable High Altitude Pulmonary Edema (HAPE) or High Altitude Cerebral Edema (HACE), simply because they didn't think it could happen to them, didn't recognize what was happening, or took a big risk by rushing too high too fast. Altitude kills the best and the brightest as easily as the slobs.

No one has counted the numbers of toes and fingers lost because of carelessness or ignorance or both. No one knows how many excellent or indifferent climbers have died from hypothermia or from an accident indirectly caused by hypothermia.

### **Gastrointestinal Infection & Diarrhea:**

The most likely causes of GI problems will be food and water. As for food, stay with food that has been peeled or boiled. Water needs to be filtered and/or purified. You should consult with your personal physician to decide what antibiotic medications you should have to treat GI related problems. Suggested non prescription medications include Pepto Bismol and Immodium. These are available in Ecuador. A number of prescription medications may be used to prevent and treat GI problems.

### **Altitude Illnesses:**

Most climbers are aware of the hazards of altitude. There are 2 major manifestations of altitude illness – one affecting the brain and causing increased intra-cranial pressure and the other causing respiratory distress through pulmonary edema. They are called High Altitude Cerebral Edema (HACE) and High Altitude Pulmonary Edema (HAPE). Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS) represents the mild symptoms of HACE and is sometime discussed separately. They may occur separately or together and form a spectrum of pathology caused by lack of oxygen through decreased pressure.

AMS is common, begins 4 - 12 hours after reaching altitude too fast, is usually unpleasant but rarely serious. Headache, weakness, dyspnea, nausea, vomiting and sleep disturbances are common. These go away in a day or two and seldom need treatment. Altitude reached, speed of ascent, time at altitude, and unknown individual characteristics determine its occurrence. No one is immune.

HACE is uncommon and is the severe manifestation of AMS. It often follows along with HAPE. HACE severely limits your ability to make rational decisions and to maintain effective motor control. A person suffering from HACE is in extreme trouble.

HAPE is less common, may occur anywhere above 9,000', begins 18 - 48 hours after arrival depending on altitude and speed of ascent. Dyspnea, rales, irritative cough often with pink, frothy sputum, extreme weakness, ataxia, confusion, coma, and death is the progression. It is likely that everyone will encounter mild signs of HAPE with spontaneous recovery, i.e., minutes to hours. Both HAPE and HACE can be rapidly fatal.

Prevention: Gradual ascent - 1000' increase in sleep altitude per day with rest day every 3000'. Carry high and sleep low to reduce hypoxia from respiratory depression during sleep. Limit exertion at new altitude within first 24 hours. Push fluids and high carbohydrate diet to reduce headache, nausea from dehydration which mimics AMS.

Medications: Aspirin and Acetaminophin and Diamox as indicated to reduce headache, mild pain. Decadron is used for HACE and Nifedipine counters HAPE to some degree. Descent is the definitive treatment.

Info on the indications, contraindications, side effects, etc. of the usual expedition medications may be obtained from the trip leader.

## **2. Traveling Concerns**

During our time in Ecuador we will be traveling by public and private transport. Ecuadorian highways are not maintained with the diligence given to roads in the U.S. It is common to find boulders, debris, etc. in the middle of the highway and drivers pass each other with seeming abandon. Accidents and breakdowns are common and you should be aware of such risks. Theft and robbery are also a potential concern as they are in most areas nowadays. In over a decade of running Ecuadorian trips we have had only one small robbery incident. Nonetheless, we recommend taking every precaution to minimize such risks.

### **RISK SUMMARY**

Enjoying the outdoors necessitates a certain degree of risk-taking. You are participating in this trip and entering a third world country and high altitude mountain environment at your own risk. Ultimately, it is your responsibility to minimize various hazards through the application of good judgment gained from a foundation of education and experience. Some of the other hazards that can lead to injury associated with this trip include but are not limited to extreme cold, demanding physical travel, avalanche, vehicle transportation, and illnesses from food and drink. Please be sure that you are fully aware of such risks. Self-reliance in the face of adversity is expected on the part of the wilderness traveler.

Communication should not be relied upon in an emergency. While most risks cannot be completely eliminated, it is our goal to interpret the environmental, situational and group variables and to make educated decisions to minimize dangers to you while at the same time providing an enjoyable and memorable experience.

While on the mountains rockfall, weather, snow, ice, and associated crevasses will present the most objective hazards. In these situations, no list of rules or policies can be substituted for good mountain sense and good judgment.

The leader's decision is final while on these mountains or traveling to and from. Any decision to discontinue a climb, to turn an individual or small group around is ultimately up to the leader and his/her designee(s). Each member will be given every opportunity to make each summit.

While in Quito and villages participants will be free to sightsee, dine, shop, etc. on their own. However, it is assumed that each participant will act in such a way as to not disturb or delay other group members or the trip schedule. Acting in such a manner will be grounds for dismissal from the trip.

### **ECUADOR HISTORY**

Ecuador, compared to other Andean countries such as Peru and Colombia, is relatively stable in terms of politics and its economy. With Texaco/Gulf's discovery of oil in the late 1960's in the Amazon Basin there came a strong export commodity that secured the country a seat in OPEC. Today oil remains the main economic force but bananas, shrimp, and tourism are gaining momentum and will likely surpass oil in importance as reserves run low and pressures from both Ecuadorian and international conservation groups prompt a halt to further exploration and development.

Although the common problems of corrupt politicians and overwhelming national debts typical of Latin American countries are found in Ecuador, drug trafficking and terrorism do not figure prominently. But, Ecuador does have a rich, somewhat violent, history, one full of tales of conquerors and the conquered.

In the not so distant past, some 500 years or so ago, the Inca Empire began spreading its sphere of influence northward from its capital of Cuzco, in Peru, into what is known today as Ecuador. Conquered were various indigenous groups, most notably the Caras, whom were the dominant force in the region before the Inca invasion. The Incas made these groups subjects rather than killing them. Incorporated into the machinery of empire building these people worked on the complex irrigation systems the Incas are famous for, toiled in the fields, and helped build the transportation network that became known as the Inca Road and linked Cuzco to Quito. Ruins of the Inca Empire can still be found throughout Ecuador.

The most notable historical event however, one that irrevocably changed the face of Ecuador, was the conquest of the Inca Empire in the 1530's. Enter the Spanish conquistadors. Arriving at an opportune time when a weakened Inca Empire was in the throes of civil war, arising from the rivalry between the ruling brother Atahualpa and his half brother Huascar, the Spanish conquistador Pizarro and his men had a relatively easy time of usurping the once powerful Incas.

In the ensuing years the colonial influences of Spain were successfully imprinted on Ecuador and its people. Agricultural output was increased, largely with the work done by Indians, animals were domesticated, including cuy (guinea pig), which is considered a national delicacy, and urban centers grew in response to increased commerce and as cultural nurturing grounds. Spain of course reaped the bounty but unfortunately created in its wake an impoverished group of native people and what has become a long standing gap between the rich and the poor. Today indigenous uprisings occasionally occur with a call for revolution, though these have met with limited success.

Independence however never comes at a small price. Ecuador itself was able to secede from Spain only with much bloodshed. It was not achieved until 1822 at the famous Battle of Pichincha that the people, under the leadership of Mariscal Sucre, defeated the royalist forces. What emerged though after over 300 years of Spanish occupation was a unique blend of European traditions and some of the vestiges of the Inca Empire.

Today, for example, as you walk along the narrow cobblestone streets of the old part of Quito you can see Spanish baroque architecture built on the foundation of Inca stonework. Catholicism is the dominant religion but is interwoven with elements of Indian mythology. And across the country you will find a population consisting of roughly 40 % Indians, many who speak Quechua or one of the other local language stocks . The mestizos (mixed Spanish and Indian blood) also make up about 40% of the population and are Spanish speakers. This diversity remains intact and as you can imagine offers an interesting backdrop for traveling and climbing.

## **ALPINE NATURAL HISTORY**

In 1802 the German scientist Alexander von Humboldt visited Ecuador and found a multitude of volcanic peaks, some rising in almost perfect cone-shaped symmetry and covered with heavy mantels of ice. On either side of what became known as the Central Valley, wherein lies Quito, there is a Cordillera (mountain range) trending north to south along the approximately 250 mile long valley. These ranges are known simply as the Eastern and Western Cordilleras. Humboldt coined the name " Avenue of the Volcanoes" for this valley and it is where you will find mostly agricultural and ranching activities and the majority of Ecuador's population outside the densely populated port city of Guayaquil. It is also here that you will be spending most of your time between climbs.

Similar to other developing countries in Asia and Latin America where high mountains are found, many of the forests found on the foothills beneath Ecuador's volcanoes have been deforested. There is however a unique ecosystem found only in the equatorial regions of tropical America. Found roughly between 10 degrees north and south of the equator and at elevations starting at about 3000 meters the paramo is reminiscent of the Scottish highlands or Arctic tundra. It is the habitat of many highly specialized plants that began evolving about 60 million years ago when the Nazca plate collided with the Continental plate and resulted in the uplift of the Andes. These plants adapted to the often extreme conditions of the paramo, from the hot equatorial sun to the frequent strong winds , snow, and rains that lash out over the landscape.

There is a wide variety of birds found in Ecuador. With luck you will see the Andean condor soaring high above the paramo. You may also sight some of the large mammals, such as the three species of deer, pumas, foxes, or the highly threatened Andean spectacled bear that wander throughout the highlands. With a rapidly increasing population the people of Ecuador have out of necessity moved onto marginal lands for agricultural purposes. Fortunately, the soils of the paramo are not suitable for agriculture and only occasionally is it used for grazing. Much of the paramo then is still intact- but it remains a fragile place, so, we do our best to tread lightly and practice the ethics of "Leave No Trace."

## **CLIMBING**

Up until the 1820's Chimborazo was believed to be the highest point in the world. As a result it was the focal point for many expeditions of the time. The French, Italians, Germans, and the English went to conquer and even the famous Venezuelan liberator Simon Bolivar mounted an assault in 1822 that led him only to the snowline. However, in 1882 the renowned Englishman Edward Whymper reached the summit of Chimborazo during the same trip that he bagged Ecuador's second highest peak, the 19,340 foot Cotopaxi. Travelling overland by foot from the coast Whymper experienced great hardship to just reach the peaks! It took him weeks just to reach the Avenue of the Volcanoes and then many failed attempts. His adventures, and eventual success, can be read in his book, "Travels Amongst the Great Andes of the Equator."

These days ascents of Ecuador's three highest summits can be made in a mere two weeks with almost all the comforts of home. With more than a decade experience in the country Acadia Mountain Guides has created an ideal itinerary that incorporates a carefully developed acclimatization program, comfortable and unique lodging, excellent cuisine, and highly skilled guides.