

Mountains of ICE and FIRE

Get set to explore one of South America's most exciting sights – Ecuador's Avenue Of The Volcanoes...

Huge mountains dominate the landscape. As you approach on the rocky road, they loom ever larger. A sudden rumble stops you in your tracks. You look to the peaks and realise these aren't just ordinary mountains. You're travelling along a 400km valley flowing from the southern to the northern Andes mountain range – known as Ecuador's Avenue Of The Volcanoes!



Where in the world...

Ecuador is a South American country that borders with Colombia, Peru and the Pacific Ocean.



Volcano ace, Thor!

Top of the peaks



Cotopaxi – the world's highest volcano at 5,897m-tall – is just one of the many mega-high peaks in the Avenue Of The Volcanoes.

"Its name means 'smooth neck of the moon', perhaps because the icy glacier at the very top makes it look like it's holding up the moon!" says volcano expert, Thor Thordarson.

Down the Avenue is the Chimborazo volcano, which in the Indian language of the local Quechua people means 'mountain of snow'. And a bit further down is Quilotoa, which at first may look like any volcano, but at the summit you'll find a huge, 250m-deep lake in its crater!

"This emerald-green lake may look pretty, but you wouldn't want to swim in it, as the water is very c-c-cold!" says Thor.

Fiery family



The Ecuadorians tell fantastic tales about their magnificent volcanoes, and one of the legends involves a family of volcanoes, complete with mum, dad, a child and a grandparent...

According to folklore, two mountains – El Altar, which means 'Lord Of All The Mountains', and Carihuairazo, meaning 'Man Of Wind And Ice' – battled with Taita ('Father') Cotopaxi, who was protecting another volcano, Mama ('Mother') Tungurahua. Taita exploded – literally – with anger and destroyed El Altar and Carihuairazo, both of which now haven't erupted for centuries!

"Mama Tungurahua and Taita Cotopaxi's 'family' includes the two highest peaks on the Pichincha volcano – Guagua, meaning 'Child', and Rucu, 'Old Person,'" says Clive. "Like most families, they have had the odd eruption, but hopefully now, they'll live happily ever after!"

Where there's smoke, there's Ecuador's Mama Tungurahua!



Who's rumbling now?



Mama Tungurahua is also known as 'Throat Of Fire' – and has certainly lived up to this name! In the past 12 years, Mama has had four major volcanic eruptions, starting in 1999 when 25,000 people had to be evacuated from the nearby town of Baños and the surrounding area.

"Scientists are keeping a close eye on all the volcanoes in the Avenue, to make sure that if any of them do erupt, people are evacuated in plenty of time," says Thor. "In fact, they were put to the test as recently as December, when the volcano had a minor eruption. This Mama certainly has a habit of blowing her top!"



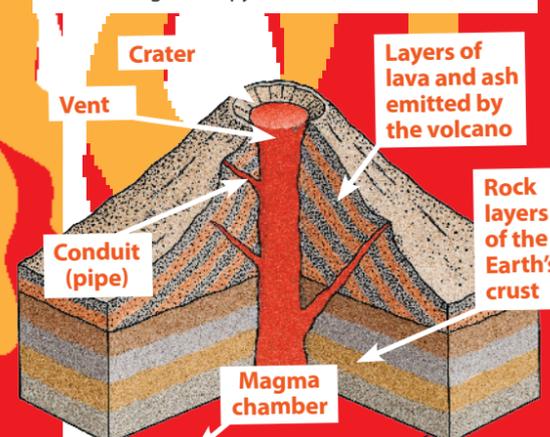
NG Kids travelled to Ecuador with Equator Trekking, which provides a wide range of adventure holidays across Ecuador. For more information, go to more at equatortrekking.com. Our trip included a stay at the Hacienda La Alegria, which offers horse riding trips in the Andes. Find out more at haciendalaalegria.com

DID YOU KNOW...?

The biggest volcano known to man is out of this world! Olympus Mons on the planet Mars is an incredible 24km high. Cosmic!

WHAT IS A VOLCANO?

A volcano opens downward, below the Earth's crust, to a chamber of magma (molten rock). When pressure below builds up, the magma erupts through the crater, either as lava or a mixture of gas and pyroclasts (broken rock). Wow!



Cotopaxi looks like the moon!



Chimborazo is Ecuador's highest peak



Quilotoa's crater is home to a huge lake

