

ECUADOR

November 2017

It wasn't for lack of ambition that the ride only lasted two days but the original intention had simply been to visit the Galapagos Islands. However, once I realised that this involved a stopover in Quito, I just couldn't resist the temptation of riding in the Andes and along the Pan American Highway.

I extended the original plan by two days to create enough time to ride the Quilotoa Loop. The highlight of which was a visit to the Quilotoa Crater Lake, two miles wide and 800ft deep. Standing on it's rim you're at a height of 12,500ft and at this altitude you need to be fully acclimatised if you're to have the strength to pick up your bike should you drop it in the sand as I did. I clearly wasn't acclimatised, so I employed the time honoured tactic of offering US Dollars to the locals for help. \$10 did the trick and my bike was soon up and pointing in the right direction again. I just needed another twenty minutes to get my breathing under control and have enough energy to ride on.

The villages up here in the Highlands had been indigenous settlements well before the early 1500's when the Spanish arrived and to this day there are still practices and evidence way back from the time of the Inca presence.

There were plenty of landslides, creating chicanes in the road, alerting me to the danger. The early warning signs of stones and small boulders trickling down the steep slope encouraged me to move into the middle of the road as behind me, in my mirrors, I saw the dark earth and rubble dump itself onto the tarmac. Close!

It's not often that you wake up with llamas roaming free outside your bedroom window but the B&B farmstead that I'd been recommended had them in abundance. The night before was the first time in almost 60 years that I'd been offered a hot water bottle for my bed. It was gratefully received and most welcome at this altitude, especially as there was no heating, except for the wood burning stove in the hallway.

Read more overleaf...



Quilotoa Crater Lake



Tigua



Contact Gordon

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ECUADOR (cont.)

The road climbed further still in the morning, topping out at 13,200ft in cloud before I descended through snow melt into the colourful town of Saquisilí. The women all wore hats, reminiscent of a trilby, shading dark faces and their shawls hid pitch black plaits hanging down their backs.

Leaving the Highlands behind I returned along the Avenue of Volcanoes but sadly Cotapaxi was shrouded in mist and obscured from view, before arriving back in Quito at a modest 9,000ft.

The Galapagos lived up to the hype. This isolated group of volcanic islands out in the Pacific is home to a variety of creatures, including marine iguanas, giant tortoises and blue footed boobys, found nowhere else in the world. Fortunately, human footprints are kept to a minimum.

I'd return to Ecuador and the Andes given the chance. I found it a fascinating place with real heritage.



Giant Galapagos Tortoise



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