

# Mountain Climbing in Ecuador Is Full of Challenges

Ecuador is one of the most popular spots for avid climbers because of its numerous volcanoes. Some are active, while others remain dormant and many of the most popular ones are over 5,000 meters above sea level. There are many climbs to choose from, but these are some of the most popular ones today.



**Cotopaxi** remains one of the most commonly traveled climbs in Ecuador probably since it is one of the highest and most active volcanoes today. At 5,987 meters, the climb is more of a walk although getting to the peak requires specialized equipment like gaiters, crampons, axes, helmets, and ropes. Typical hikes start at midnight and take up to seven hours while the return journey is about three. Many people do not end up making it all the way to the top as well. Travelers can take a bus to Machachi and organize a truck to make the final leg of the journey.

The highest mountain is actually **Chimborazo** and also a favorite at 6310 meters. Due to its height, the climb is tough and requires ice walking. Travelers can reach this destination from Riobamba which is about five hours from Quito. Transportation takes climbers the extra hour to the mountain's base.

For an easier climb, **Corazon** is more like a hike with just a little rock scrambling at the summit. Although fairly steep and an eleven-hour travel time round-trip, it's a reasonable climb for the fairly adventurous person. Climbers can take a bus south from Quito and then be dropped off at the turning point for Aloasi. They can then take a bus to the Aloasi railway station, the beginning point of the hike.

Two peaks that are fairly difficult are **Illiniza Sur and Norte**. After taking a bus from Quito south to El Chaupi, take a four-wheel truck to the base at Virgen for both climbs. Illiniza Norte is recommended for climbers with a guide and helmets. Difficult weather can make this climb challenging as well. Illiniza Sur is one of the most difficult climbs, taking up to eight hours with glacier climbing required to reach the peak. Not recommended for an inexperienced climber, it's well-worth the trip for the seasoned traveler.

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**Cotacachi** involves some technical climbing and there is a risk of both rockfall and climbing. Climbers

can reach the base by taking a bus to Otavalo and then another bus to Cotacachi. Travelers will have to hire a four-wheel drive truck that can reach the antennas at the bottom of the climb.

**El Altar** is recommended for either one very long day or two days of climbing while **Reventador**, an active volcano, takes anywhere from three to five days. The volcanic activity may not allow climbers, so it's important to check before traveling. **Cayambe** is only a single-day hike, but still requires travelers to start their climb around sunrise. A final multi-day hike is **Antisana** which may take up to three days. Climbers have to deal with ice, glaciers, and rock work to reach the top and the weather is frequently bad, making it a challenge. This hike should be attempted with a guide for best results.

**Imbabura** is a full day of hiking and the loose rock at the top makes it somewhat dangerous. A full day of traveling, this climb takes about eight hours. **Sincholagua** is right outside of Cotopaxi National Park and also takes a full day. It can be reached through the southern park entrance and also has loose rocks on the climb.

**Pichincha** has three peaks and climbers may decide which one to attempt based on hiking times. Both **Tungurahua and Sumaco** are currently or recently active. **Tungurahua**, the "Throat of Fire" has not been open to climbers since 1999 and has threatened the surrounding areas. **Sumaco** has been recently active and a four-day round trip is needed to get to the summit. A guide is recommended for this hike as well.

Whenever attempting any of these climbs, travelers should ensure that they have the right clothing, equipment, and take safety measures. Due to changing climbing routes, it's also important to check for updated information before attempting any of these climbs. Being prepared is the key to having a successful and enjoyable climb up any of these exotic locations in Ecuador.

Date: 2013-06-24

Article link:

<http://www.tourism-review.com/travel-tourism-magazine-mountain-climbing-ecuador-is-full-of-challenges-article2149>