

*A guide to  
hiking the*

# **QUILOTOA LOOP**



The Quilotoa loop trek is a wonderful way to explore Ecuador's highlands. Along this route, you will be able to observe rural indigenous life and enjoy stunning views of the surrounding mountainous landscape.

While this trek is relatively short, it can be quite demanding. Nonetheless, this hiking adventure is adequate for trekkers of all levels, from beginner to experienced.

# THE ROUTE

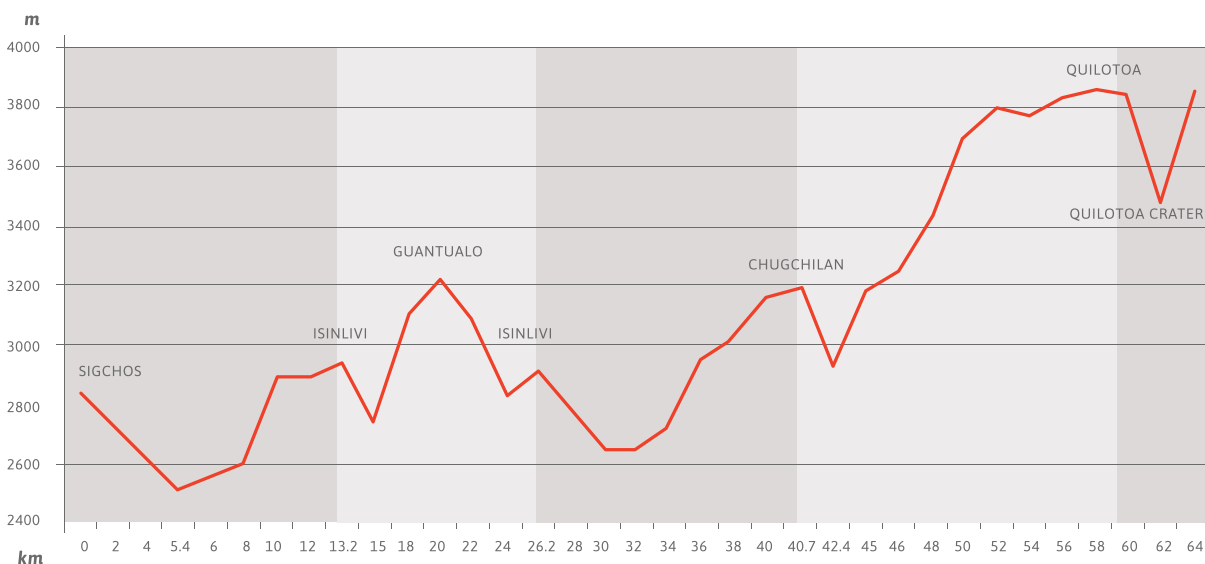
The Quilotoa Loop can be followed in numerous ways; there is no set route you must follow. The most popular hiking route passes through the following towns: Quilotoa, Chugchilan, Isinlivi and Sigchos. You can either go north to south (Sigchos-Quilotoa) or south to north (Quilotoa - Sigchos), the difference being starting and ending elevation.

The route beginning in Quilotoa - Sigchos is recommended for beginners that prefer to walk downhill whereas the second option, Sigchos – Quilotoa, is a more demanding uphill climb that rewards hikers with a spectacular view of Quilotoa lake. The total distance for the 3-day trek is 36.7km (22.8 miles).



## + LOCAL TIP

**A few of the hazards along the journey include altitude sickness and coming across bulls or dogs, which can be aggressive. Make sure you leave early enough to reach your destination before dark and if you're not sure about the directions, ask your hostel. Along the way, there will be plenty of opportunities to ask the locals for help too.**



# HOW TO GET THERE

The quickest way to access the Quilotoa Loop is through the town of Latacunga (located to the east, on the Panamerican Highway) and then by bus to the town where you decide to start your hike.

Below are the three main ways to get to the Quilotoa Loop:



## ■ **Public transportation**

By far the cheapest, but less convenient option is taking public transportation. From Quito, you'll need to first get to the Quitumbe bus terminal and take a bus to Latacunga. There are frequent departures, but, annoyingly, you can't book tickets in advance. Once in Latacunga, ask for the bus to Sigchos or Zumbahua.

If you decide to start the Quilotoa Loop from the Quilotoa lake, take the bus to Zumbahua (about 1.5 hours to Latacunga and then 2 hours to Zumbahua) and then ask for transportation to Quilotoa (e.g. a private car or pick-up truck). You will arrive at Quilotoa in the afternoon and can prepare to continue your journey the next day.

If you decide to start the Quilotoa loop from the town of Sigchos (to the northwest of the lake), the bus ride there from Latacunga takes around 3 hours. If you arrive during the afternoon, plan on spending the night since it's not recommended to hike the Quilotoa Loop after midday.

## ■ **Quilotoa Loop Tour**

There aren't many tours available for the Quilotoa Loop and most of the tour operators in Quito only offer the full-day Quilotoa trip starting at around \$60 per person. The few tour operators that do offer Quilotoa Loop tours charge between \$250 for 2 days and up to \$700 for a 4-day tour





### ■ **Wanderbus Ecuador**

Taking the Wanderbus lends itself perfectly to doing a 2+ day Quilotoa loop tour. As a travel option, it offers a more convenient way of getting to your destination. It's much safer than public transport and cheaper than traveling with a tour operator. With the Wanderbus, you can personalize your own journey, hop on and hop off at any one of our stops and get picked up again at convenient locations.

If you decide to travel with the Wanderbus, you'll also get the chance to visit the Cotopaxi National Park and the friendly town of Pujilí before arriving at Quilotoa. Once in Quilotoa, you can stay as long as you want, do the Quilotoa loop in 2 days, 4 days or even more, and then get picked up by the Wanderbus to continue southwards towards Baños.



## QUILOTOA CRATER

You might be dead set on doing the trek over several days, but there are also alternatives if you don't want to exert yourself too much but still enjoy the scenery!

Once at the village of Quilotoa, there are quite a few craft shops to check out. Many sell naïf paintings, developed by the nearby town of Tigua and now pretty much everywhere. The traditional way of painting them is on cow or sheep's hide.

On the crater rim's southwestern side, you can decide to hike down to the lake (under 2 km). There are kayaks available for rent which are a fun way to spend some time exploring.

The walk back is steep and tiring at altitude. You can hire a mule at the bottom to take you back up, but really, you won't look very cool...



You can also decide to hike the trail that runs around the rim of the crater. Depending on your fitness, this can take between 4 and 6 hours, so be prepared with plenty of water, food, appropriate clothing, etc.



### **Shalalá, Quilotoa lookout**

A more relaxing alternative is to take the trail eastwards from the village to the lookout (mirador) called Shalalá. This is an ingeniously-built wood and glass structure that juts out over the cliff. It takes about 30 minutes (3 km) to walk there along the rim trail.

Once you've got your selfie and done your panoramic shots, look for the trail downhill, away from the lake, which takes you to the community tourism project in the midst of a pine forest. There are places to eat and stock up on snacks, plus nicely designed cabins where you can stay the night. They have a restaurant nearby, too. For more information, see [Where to Stay](#), below.



## QUILOTOA - CHUGCHILAN



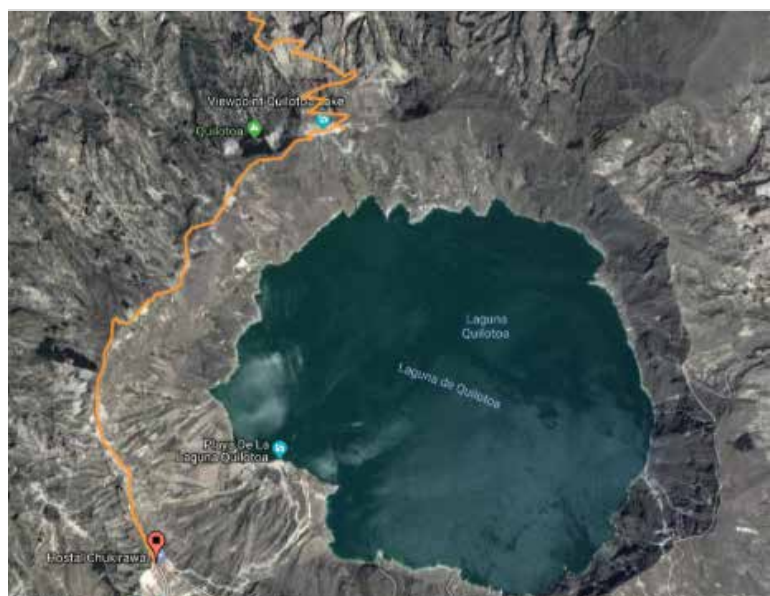
The trail that takes you between these two small towns (11.8 km / 7.33 miles) is one of the most beautiful day hikes in all of Ecuador. Depending on your fitness level, this hike takes between 5 to 6 hours.

At the beginning of the trail, you'll hike around the rim of Quilotoa's volcanic crater lake for about one hour. Then, you head down into the valley to arrive at the town of Guayama. During this part of the trail, you'll enter a canyon and cross the Shihui River at 2,800 mts (9,200 ft). The final stretch involves ascending the canyon for at least one hour until you arrive to Chugchilán. While this hike isn't extremely challenging, pay close attention to the route and, as always, the weather.

This hike is mostly downhill; however, the final stretch is steep and challenging. It also can be difficult to find the route, especially if the weather is cloudy. There aren't many signs along the trail, so if in doubt, ask for detailed instructions from your hostel and if they have a map, that's even better.

Make sure that you have enough time to complete the hike before the afternoon weather moves in; never leave from Quilotoa after 1:30 p.m. If you're hesitant about doing the hike yourself, hire a local guide for \$15-20.

- **Total hiking distance:**  
11.8 km (7.33 miles)
- **Hiking distance Quilotoa - Guayama San Pedro:**  
5.2 km (3.23 miles)
- **Hiking distance Guayama San Pedro - Chugchilan:**  
6.6 km (4 miles)
- **Hiking time (including stops):**  
5 - 6 hours
- **Altitude Lake Quilotoa:**  
3914 mts (12,841 ft)
- **Altitude Guayama San Pedro:**  
3,260 mts (10,800 ft)
- **Altitude canyon (lowest point):**  
2,800 mts (9,200 ft)
- **Altitude Chugchilán:**  
3,200 mts (10,500 ft)



**Please note that doing this hike in reverse (Chugchilán to Quilotoa) is far more challenging and mostly uphill, taking at least another couple of hours to complete.**

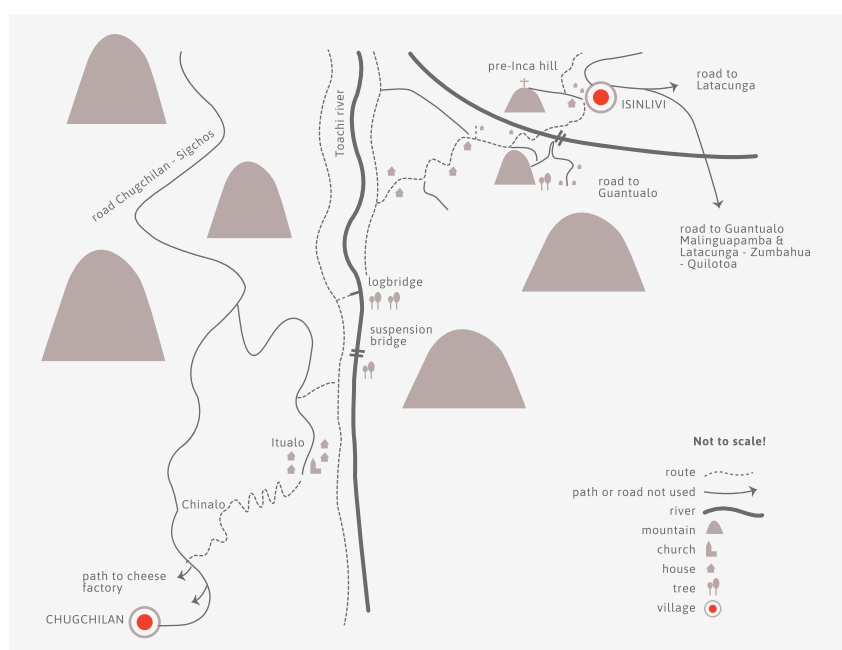




## CHUGCHILAN - ISINLIVI

The distance between these two small towns is 12km (7.46 miles), resulting in a hike of about 4 to 6 hours in duration. There aren't many signs along the trail, so ask your hostel for instructions or a map.

To start this trail, you'll need to head out of Chugchilan on the road going towards Sigchos. After about 30 minutes, you'll see a road on your left going past the cheese factory. Pass this and continue walking until you see a white house with a wooden sign. You'll see a grassy trail going down on the right. Follow this trail to the first houses of Chinalo. Remember you will have to pass the small villages of Chinalo, Itualo, and the Toachi River. From here, follow the trail onwards, following the instructions provided by your hostel. Never hesitate to ask the locals for directions as well!

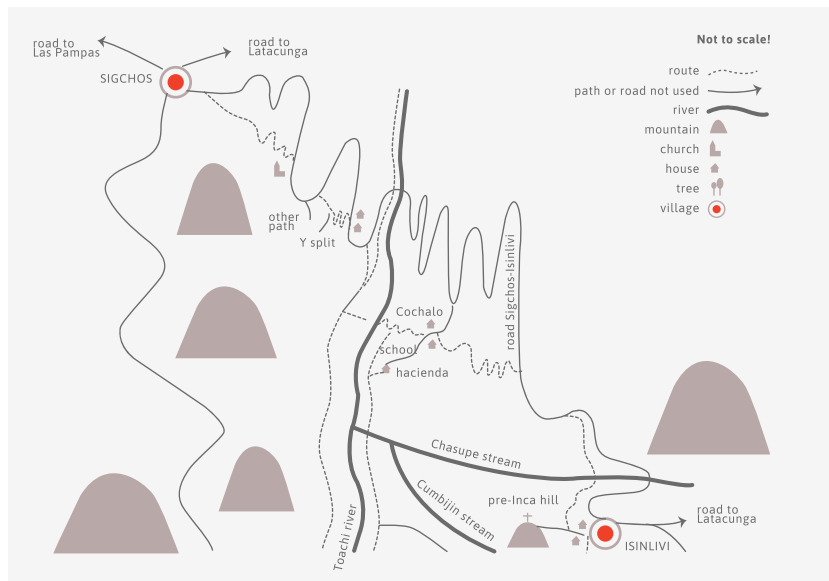




## ISINLIVI - SIGCHOS

The distance between these two towns is 14km (8.7 miles) and this route is relatively well-marked; there are numerous signposts and spray-painted colors. The trail remains flat, for the most part, and the complete hike takes around 3 to 4 hours.

On this trail, you'll descend 441 mts (1446 ft) and climb 497 mts (1632 ft). From Lullu Lama, head left and take the first big grassy trail going down to the right. Follow this trail going straight at the crossing → down to a little stream, cross it and follow track up to the road. Follow this road for about 10 minutes. Just before you come to some tall eucalyptus trees, take the grassy track heading down to the left, which leads to the small community of Cochalo de Isinlivi. From here you will have to follow the trail and, thanks to efforts by the Cloud Forest Hostel, it's possible to find yellow and red signs that indicate the way to Sigchos or Isinlivi.



Nonetheless, make sure to confirm the route regularly with the locals and follow the instructions that the hostel has given you. This is a windy trail that follow a road with very few vehicles.

There is a bus leaving Sigchos back to Latacunga at 2:30 pm each day. There are usually other buses at 1:30pm and 4:00pm.





# WHERE TO STAY

## on the Quilotoa Loop trek?



### QUILOTOA VILLAGE

There are quite a few options for staying in the village that has grown up around the crater's rim for the flow of tourists. The following have been recommended by travellers:

**Chukirawa:** private \$30  
**Runawasi:** private \$30  
**Alpaka:** private \$15

✦ At the Shalala Lookout, private cabins are around \$50 per night

### CHUGCHILAN

There are three main accommodation options with different price ranges. The most expensive is the Black Sheep Inn, followed by El Vaquero hostel and the Cloud Forest Hostel. Remember to book in advance and the best way to do this is by email or through booking.com.

✦ **The Black Sheep Inn**  
Single accommodation \$70  
- shared \$35

✦ **Vaquero hostel**  
Private accommodation \$40  
- shared \$15

✦ **Cloud Forest Hostel**  
Private accommodation \$20  
per person

### ISINLIVI

Stopping in in Isinlivi is a must while hiking the Quilotoa Loop. There are only two places to stay in Isinlivi: the Llullu Llama hostel and the Taita Cristóbal Hostel. If you want to relax after a long hiking day, the best option is the Llullu Llama, which is known for its relaxing environment and delicious meals. It even has a spa, available for an extra fee. The cheapest option is Taita Cristóbal Hostel.

✦ **Llullu Llama**  
Garden Cottages \$39,  
shared dorms \$20

✦ **Taita Cristóbal**  
Private room \$15

### SIGCHOS

Is easily the largest town on the Loop itself, and is often selected as the starting point for the hike. From here, it's possible to get public transportation to Quilotoa, Zumbahua and Latacunga. There aren't many hostel options around Sigchos but a good option for some real rest and relaxation at the end of the trip would be the Hosteria San José de Sigchos.

✦ **Hosteria San José de Sigchos**  
Private accommodation  
from \$50

✦ **Hostal Dinos**  
Private room \$15





## Quilotoa Loop PACKING LIST

- Hiking clothes, including a warm fleece and layers for the cold evenings. It also gets cold when the sun goes down during the day.
- It is important to take your hiking shoes, preferably waterproof footwear, and rain clothes as the weather in the mountains is unpredictable. Even during the dry season, you might encounter rain.
- Never forget sun protection (buff, hats, sunscreen, sunglasses)! Remember that you will be on the equator, where UV radiation is high throughout the year.
- Toilet paper isn't always available in public toilets. Make sure to have some handy!
- Head torch, whistle and a basic first aid kit will be very useful in case of an emergency.
- Snacks: trail mix, cookies, chips/crisps, tuna, wraps, chocolate, sandwiches, etc.
- Refillable water bottles. The hostels can fill you up for a small fee in the mornings and that should be enough to last you all day.
- Always carry enough cash (especially smaller bills and dollars) for all accommodations, snacks and any type of transportation that you require. Credit cards are not accepted in most of the hostels and even breaking a \$20 may be difficult.
- Other additional equipment includes trekking poles, hiking waterproof backpack and plastic bags to carry your trash.

## Quilotoa Loop

# WEATHER

The Ecuadorian Andes have two seasons: dry and wet. The dry season takes place between June, July, and August. During this time, mornings are usually clear and sunny, however you have to consider that the weather in the mountains can change quickly. Be prepared for all types of weather during the dry season! Due to the altitude of the Quilotoa Loop, the temperatures in most towns range from 0°(32F) to 16°(60F).



## Hiking recommendations

- The altitude along the trail will be between 2,800mts (9,186 ft) and 3,900 mts (12,795 ft) so if you're not acclimatized to the altitude, you will feel it! Take the time to let your body get used to the altitude before starting a steep hike. Drink enough fluids and if your schedule permits, take one day of "easier" hikes before setting off on a longer one.
- The Quilotoa Loop is not an easy hike. Most trails go down into a canyon and/or up to a ridge and some trails have several strenuous ascents and descents. Know your limits.
- Remember that highland mountain weather is unpredictable. It's wise to take rain gear, water and plenty of snacks for long waits and hikes, but leave your heavy luggage behind and hike with a day pack.
- Make sure you know when the sun sets and calculate your hiking hours so that you are back or arrive to your hostel before dark.
- Do not hike alone, always go with at least one other person, preferably more.
- A good map, great written directions or GPS will always be helpful.
- Take your time to acclimatize and to enjoy this beautiful place! For a more relaxed and convenient approach to planning your visit to the Quilotoa Loop, consider travelling with Wanderbus so that you can arrive and leave according to your personal schedule.







**ENJOY YOUR HIKE!**



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