



HEART OF DARKNESS:  
THE UNTOLD STORY OF CHOCOLATE  
AN IMMERSIVE JOURNEY TO ECUADOR  
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH TO'AK

22nd to 29th June 2019

BROWN & HUDSON

Archaeologists recently traced the origins of cacao to Ecuador. Here in the Amazon basin, some 1,500 years before the Mayans, cacao was first domesticated by the ancient Mayo-Chinchiipe culture.

This very special journey, created in partnership with To'ak - makers of the world's finest chocolate - affords a unique opportunity to trace the extraordinary story of cacao, as you travel through five thousand years of history from its first origins to its most rarefied modern expression.

Travelling by private jet from the treasures of Ecuador's colonial capital to pristine Andean cloudforests and the warm waters of the Pacific Ocean, you'll be immersed in a richly captivating tale, with privileged access to people and places that will bring this untold story to life.

Visionary conservationists, acclaimed chefs, scientists, cacao growers and some of the country's leading authorities in culture, archaeology, flora and fauna will all be on hand to provide insight and enrich your understanding. Along the way, you will also enjoy special tastings and receptions in a host of magnificent private venues, and take thrilling helicopter flights to spectacularly beautiful and seldom-visited parts of Ecuador.

While this journey will leave you with a new appreciation for this noble and treasured fruit, perhaps your fondest memories will be of the Ecuadorians themselves: kind-hearted, generous and proud of the great strides they've made in the last decade, they are in fact the nation's greatest treasure.



## THE THINKING BEHIND THE JOURNEY

### THE STORY OF CACAO: FROM ITS EARLIEST ORIGINS TO ITS FINEST EXPRESSION

Your journey begins in Quito, Ecuador's beautiful World-Heritage-listed capital. After VIP fast-track clearance through immigration and customs, you will be whisked into the heart of old Quito for two nights at the sumptuous Illa Experience hotel. That evening you will be guests of honour at a private welcome reception and grand dinner among the art and treasures of Villa Celia, the city's leading cultural centre.

The following morning you will be joined by acclaimed Ecuadorian chef Carlos Gallardo, who will personally guide you through Quito's food markets, showing you first how to select exotic ingredients such as lucuma and white shrimp and

then how to prepare them at his cutting-edge food laboratory Zero Lab.

After enjoying the fruits of your labours for lunch, you'll travel across town to the Guayasamin Museum for a very special tasting of To'ak chocolate. In the evening we have unlocked the doors of Quito's finest baroque church, La Compania, for a private visit and cocktail reception, followed by dinner at Quitu, one of the country's most exciting fine-dining restaurants.

Next day begins with a one-hour flight by private jet to the southern Ecuadorian city of Loja, where a fleet of 4x4s will be waiting to take you two-and-a-half-hours

to the pristine cloudforest reserve of Tapichalaca. Your accommodation for the next two nights is the spectacular forest lodge Casa Simpson, whose rustic charm has been enhanced by special touches to ensure your comfort and well-being. From this base we will visit the archaeological site of Santa Ana La Florida, where evidence was recently discovered of the world's first domestic use of cacao among the Mayo-Chinchiipe culture, dating back more than 5,000 years and pre-dating use in Mesoamerica by 1,500 years.

To help bring this story to life, you will be shown round by one of the world's leading experts on the Mayo-Chinchiipe culture.



We have also brought in a leading ornithologist and botanist to guide you as you explore the trails of Tapichalaca looking for its rare and brightly-coloured birds and orchids.

Returning to Loja, you'll then take a private flight to the Pacific coast where Ecuador's most exclusive ocean retreat Las Tanusas is your home for the next three nights. Owned by Alain-Ducasse-trained chef Rodrigo Pacheco, who recently starred in the Netflix hit *The Final Table*, Las Tanusas has an unbeatable beach location from where humpback whales can often be seen at this time of year. Las Tanusas is also home to Boca Valdivia, where chef Rodrigo brings to life his sustainable sea-and-land-to-table philosophy in exquisite and innovative ways. You'll spend time foraging and cooking with Rodrigo, learn to surf and relax with yoga sessions and spa treatments.



The journey culminates with a dawn pick-up on the beach in helicopters for your flight to To'ak's cacao plantation in the remote Valle Piedra de Plata. Here you'll be met by Jerry Toth, co-founder of To'ak, who will tell you the extraordinary tale of how he first managed to locate and then save the last pure nacional cacao trees in Ecuador, which had all but been wiped out by disease. You'll have a chance to learn how genetics is shaping the future of cacao conservation, and how the valley's terroir affects the chocolate's flavour profile. You will also meet key plantation staff to see first-hand how the pods are grown, harvested, dried, fermented and then turned into the world's finest chocolate using age-old artisanal methods.



After lunch on the estate, continue by helicopter to the little-known reserve of Jama-Coaque which – under the Third Millennium Alliance – protects one of the last existing fragments of Pacific coastal rainforest. It was here that Jerry first began cultivating cacao trees, making chocolate by hand in a thatched bamboo house in the middle of the forest, before teaming up with fellow co-founder Carl Schweizer and turning To'ak into the art form it is today. Carl will be on hand to show you round the research station and introduce you to the scientific team responsible for conserving this fragile patch of forest. Add to the legacy created by Jerry and Carl by planting your own cacao tree. In the late afternoon, fly back to Las Tanusas where we've created a private beach party for you to celebrate and sign off in style.

The following morning, you'll either return to Quito for your flight home or stay with us and explore more of Ecuador, whether it be the Galapagos Islands, the volcanic highlands or the wonders of the Amazon rainforest.

## HIGHLIGHTS

IMMERSE YOURSELF IN THE REMARKABLE STORY  
OF THE WORLD'S OLDEST AND FINEST CHOCOLATE

UNCOVER ECUADOR'S GASTRONOMIC RICHES THROUGH  
ITS FINEST CHEFS AND PRIVATE TASTINGS

MEET KEY STAKEHOLDERS WITH EXCLUSIVE ACCESS  
TO TO'AK'S CACAO PLANTATION AND  
THE THIRD MILLENNIUM ALLIANCE RESERVE AT JAMA-COAQUE

DISCOVER THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE WHERE  
CACAO'S EARLIEST ORIGINS WERE DISCOVERED

EXPLORE PRISTINE ANDEAN CLOUDFOREST IN SEARCH  
OF RARE BIRDS AND ORCHIDS

SPECIALLY HOSTED WELCOME AND FAREWELL DINNERS  
IN EXTRAORDINARY LOCATIONS

TRAVEL BY SPECIALLY CHARTERED PLANE AND HELICOPTER

## DAY BY DAY

### DAY 1: Saturday 22nd June

Arrive Quito + fast-track immigration and customs clearance + driven into Quito + check-in at hotel  
+ VIP reception and welcome dinner at Villa Celia

### DAY 2: Sunday 23rd June

Market visit, culinary masterclass and lunch with chef Carlos Gallardo  
+ afternoon To'ak chocolate tasting at Museo Guayasamin  
+ private after-hours visit to La Compania church + dinner at Quito

### DAY 3: Monday 24th June

Morning flight by private jet to Loja + drive to Tapichalaca Reserve + lunch en route  
+ arrival at Casa Simpson + afternoon birding with a top ornithologist  
+ dinner at lodge + evening talk / entertainment

### DAY 4: Tuesday 25th June

Morning visit to Santa Ana La Florida archaeological site + lunch at site  
+ afternoon botanising in Tapichalaca Reserve with a top botanist  
+ dinner at lodge + evening talk / entertainment

### DAY 5: Wednesday 26th June

Morning drive to Loja + flight by private jet to Manta + drive to Las Tanusas  
+ lunch in hotel + afternoon relaxing + dinner at hotel

### DAY 6: Thursday 27th June

Morning foraging and culinary masterclass with Rodrigo Pacheco  
+ lunch + afternoon free + dinner at hotel  
+ evening talk / entertainment

### DAY 7: Friday 28th June

Helicopter pick-up from hotel + fly to Valle Piedra de Plata + welcome and private tour + hosted lunch at Valle Piedra de Plata + fly to Jama-Coaque Reserve + welcome + plant a cacao tree + meet scientists + return flight to hotel + evening farewell dinner and beach party + entertainment

### DAY 8: Saturday 29th June

Drive to Manta airport + onward plans

## YOUR ACCOMMODATION



### ILLA EXPERIENCE HOTEL

Listed among Time Magazine's World's 100 Greatest Places in 2018, and set in a charming artistic neighbourhood in the historic core of Quito, luxury boutique hotel Illa Experience is a microcosm of the city. Dating to the 18th century and carefully restored, each of the mansion's three floors represent an era in Ecuador's history. Everything from the lobby to the rooftop bar and its ten elegant bedrooms has wow-factor, and while there are modern touches throughout, Illa Experience Hotel remains true to its colonial roots.

Superb Ecuadorian fusion cuisine is served at signature restaurant Nuema, while an on-site spa and wine cellar provide the requisite pampering. The hotel offers innovative experiences to its guests, including water-colour painting with a local artist to traditional sweet-making.

## YOUR ACCOMMODATION



### CASA SIMPSON

Set at 8,000 feet among pristine Andean cloudforest in Ecuador's southern Andes, Casa Simpson is a simple birding lodge that we have specially upgraded for your visit. The lodge provides breathtaking views as well as access to some of Ecuador's best birdwatching, including the critically rare Jocotoco antpitta, and countless orchid species.

The lodge is built from local sustainable materials and is simple but well fitted out with seven en-suite rooms, a spacious restaurant and a relaxation area around a warming fireplace. The lodge also has Wi-Fi, hot water and electricity and an extensive trail network for exploring.

## YOUR ACCOMMODATION



### TANUSAS RETREAT & SPA

Unquestionably Ecuador's finest beach hideaway, Tanusas Retreat & Spa is an exclusive 10-room eco-friendly boutique resort on the unspoiled coast of Manabi Province. Run by Alain Ducasse-trained Rodrigo Pacheco, whose buzz-generating kitchen is a hothouse of culinary creativity, Tanusas' Pacific coast setting, chic tropical decor, and palm-tree-filled grounds are equally alluring.

Work up an appetite by learning to surf, taking a horseback ride through the mangroves, visiting a local Panama hat-maker or joining Rodrigo Pacheco on a trip foraging local ingredients from the ocean and forest. If that's all too much work, then relax on the beach or succumb to a heavenly essential-oil massage in the spa.

# THE NITTY GRITTY

## Start & Finish, Inclusions, Exclusions, Costs

### START AND FINISH

Start of the trip: Quito, 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2019

End of the trip: Manta, 29<sup>th</sup> June 2019

Duration: 8 days, 7 nights

### WHAT IS INCLUDED?

- 7 nights' accommodation as specified in the itinerary
- All meals from dinner on the first evening until breakfast on the last morning, as well as special private tastings and receptions
- Flights by specially chartered private jet from Quito to Loja and Loja to Manta
- All land transportation and logistics within Ecuador in comfortable vehicles
- Helicopter flights from Las Tanusas to Valle Piedra de Plata to Jama-Coaque Reserve to Las Tanusas
- Privileged access to key stakeholders within To'ak Chocolate and the Third Millennium Alliance
- A team of expert guides and hosts from acclaimed chefs to experts in culture, archaeology and wildlife
- Various private presentations and informal chats
- After-hours private access to La Compania church in Quito
- Farewell beach party with entertainment

### WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED?

- International flights to/from Quito (we are however able to arrange flights for those who wish)
- Meals other than those stated above
- Any activities or inclusions not expressly stated
- Insurance
- Tips and incidental expenses

### TRIP COST

GBP £19,950 per person

A maximum of 12 places is available. Please also note that we require a minimum of 8 people in order to operate this trip. Should fewer than 8 people confirm their participation, we are able to offer a modified programme.

### BOOKING CONDITIONS

An initial deposit of £8,000 per person will secure your place on this trip, with the balance due by April 5th, 2019.



Exquisitely crafted, richer travel stories

7