There are more than 4,000 documented species of orchids in Ecuador, with a number of species still not classified. In fact, Ecuador boasts the highest orchid diversity of any country in the world, even with its small size. Orchids can be found in all of Ecuador’s ecosystems, but the majority of the species thrive in humid cloud forest and rainforest habitats. This trip is designed to provide ample opportunity to observe a wide variety of orchids at peak bloom time. **Join Nick Snakenberg from Denver Botanic Gardens and Alexander Hirtz from Ecuador for a one-of-a-kind, insider’s looks at Ecuador’s rich biodiversity.**

**Nick Snakenberg** has been working at Denver Botanic Gardens since 1993 in a variety of capacities. A graduate of Iowa State University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Horticulture, Nick currently curates the Gardens’ orchid collection and helps manage the Boettcher Memorial Tropical Conservatory and its associated tropical collections. His affiliations with professional organizations add to his expertise and include membership in the Orchid Digest Corporation, the American Orchid Society, and former president of the Denver Orchid Society.

**Alexander Hirtz**, one of Ecuador’s top orchid specialists will be guiding the group for the first half of the trip. With complementary knowledge gained from his father, Charles Hirtz, in anthropology and archaeology, Alexander Hirtz decided to study geology and paleontology at the Colorado School of Mines in order to broaden his background in all aspects of the natural sciences. In recent years, he has dedicated himself to the conservation of species in danger of extinction. Currently, he is President and co-founder of the Botanical Garden of Quito, President of the Botanic Foundation of the Andes and Fundacion Tropica 2000, and vice-president of the Network of Botanic Gardens of Ecuador. With the co-discovery of more than 1000 species of orchids, bromeliads and gesneriads and the co-authorship of the description of over 600 new species, Mr. Hirtz has contributed to science through the information he has provided in lectures as well as his photographs published in various documents, books and articles.
Detailed Itinerary
Day 1 (Sat, April 9): Arrival to Quito
Upon arrival to Mariscal Sucre International Airport (UIO), you’ll be met and transferred to Quito. Your hotel this evening is a 10-room boutique property located in “La Floresta”, a beautiful residential area in northern Quito surrounded by grand trees and mansions. Overnight at Casa Aliso. ([http://www.casaaliso.com](http://www.casaaliso.com))

Day 2 (Sun, April 10): Quito Botanical Garden/ Mindo Cloud Forest
This morning, you'll visit Quito Botanical Garden located in La Carolina Park. The garden was created to conserve and exhibit native flora from the Ecuadorean Highlands. There is also a large orchidarium with more than 1,200 species on display. Alexander Hirtz will give a talk to the group this morning about Ecuador’s orchids. After lunch in Quito, head north to the cloud forest of Mindo where you’ll spend the next two nights. Mindo is one of the world’s most biodiverse regions. There are a variety of trails in the area to explore in search of blooming orchids, birds, butterflies and more. Overnight at Sachatamia Lodge. ([http://www.sachatamia.com](http://www.sachatamia.com)) (B,L,D)

Day 3 (Mon, April 11) – Mindo Cloud Forest
You have the entire day to explore the area with your expert guides. A visit to a local butterfly farm is included. Overnight at Sachatamia Lodge. (B,L,D)

Day 4 (Tues, April 12) – Mindo Cloud Forest/ Quito
After a final morning at Mindo, transfer back to Quito with a stop at El Pahuma Orchid Reserve en route. El Pahuma is a privately owned reserve that protects more than 1500 acres of tropical montane
forest. Over 170 species of orchids have been identified in the reserve. Enjoy a guided hike to admire the epiphyte-laden cloud forest and the 165-ft Pacaya Waterfall. Late afternoon arrival to Quito. Overnight at Casa Aliso. (B,L,D)

Day 5 (Wed, April 13) – Quito/ Baños/ Hacienda Manteles
Today, you'll head south of Quito to the central Andes near the valley of Patate and the city of Baños. Hacienda Manteles, your destination today is nestled between Sangay and Llanganati National Parks at an altitude of 2650 m (8268 ft). Hacienda Manteles' location makes it the perfect place to explore the surrounding area and to view active Tungurahua Volcano from a safe distance. Overnight at Hacienda Manteles. (http://haciendamanteles.com) (B,L,D)

Day 6 (Thurs, April 14) – Hacienda Manteles/ La Cienega
Continue north today to Cotopaxi National Park, Ecuador's most popular nature reserve. The park may be most well known for the four volcanoes located within its boundaries, but it also offers incredible opportunities to observe paramo vegetation (above 12,000 ft). In addition to some 200 plant species, Cotopaxi National Park is also home to puma, Andean wolf, marsupial mice, llama and a diversity of bird species. After a visit to the park, continue to La Cienega, one of Ecuador's oldest colonial haciendas. Overnight at La Cienega. (http://www.ecuadorboutiquehotels.com/hosterialacienega) (B,L,D)

Day 7 (Fri, April 15) – Quito/ Amazon Rainforest and Napo Wildlife Center
Transfer to the airport in time for your morning flight to Coca. There, you’ll set out on a 2-hr boat ride down the Napo River to Napo Wildlife Center (NWC), your base for the next three nights. Located on the banks of Anangucoha Lake, NWC Amazon Lodge is an ecotourism project that protects and preserves over 82 square miles of pristine Amazon rainforest within Yasuni National Park, declared a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. Yasuní National Park, considered the largest region of tropical forest in Ecuador, is one of the most diverse areas in the world, so its conservation is vital not only for Ecuador but for the planet. Overnight at Napo Wildlife Center’s Amazon Lodge. (http://www.napowildlifecenter.com) (B,L,D)
Days 8-9 (Sat, April 16 – Sun, April 17) – Amazon Rainforest and Napo Wildlife Center
You have these two days to immerse yourself in the Amazon Basin’s biodiversity. Daily guided orchid expeditions are included. You’ll also have the opportunity to visit a local Kichwa Añangu community nearby to share time with community members while learning about their daily way of life and ancestral customs and traditions. Overnights at Napo Wildlife Center's Amazon Lodge. (B,L,D)

Day 10 (Mon, April 18) – Amazon/ Quito/ Departure
After a final morning at NWC, transfer back to Coca by boat and flight to Quito. You'll have use of a day room at Hosteria Rincón de Puembo to relax and freshen up before your flight this evening. Connect to flight home. (B)

**MEALS:** B=Breakfast; L=Lunch; D=Dinner

**Price:** $4665* per person based on double occupancy. Single supplement: $950 (subject to availability).

Package **includes** accommodations, private services with trip host/naturalist guide from April 10-18, guided service by Alexander Hirtz from April 10-14, private ground transportation from Day 1-6 and on Day 10, boat transfers and guided excursions at NWC may be on shared basis, domestic flights, meals, entrance fees, basic no-trip cost travel insurance policy, and sales taxes.

**Exclusions:** international airfare, passport/visa fees, alcohol, optional activities not included in itinerary, gratuities, items of a personal nature, and upgraded travel insurance policy.

*A 3% discount will be applied to payments by check.*