

TASTE THE HIGH LIFE

In Ecuador's capital the food is fab and the altitude will make you lighter

HOLIDAYING at high altitude has some handy side-effects. You will weigh less and your metabolism picks up speed.

So in Quito, Ecuador, at more than 9,000ft above sea level officially the world's highest capital city, you can really go to town on the food.

The old-time delicacy *cuy* (guinea pig) is still going strong, and at a farmers' market in Plaza San Francisco, a 15th-century square in Quito's historic centre, you can bargain for the Latino cousin of my childhood pet, Squeak. But do you want to eat gargantuan portions of guinea pig? Possibly not.

Thankfully, it's not all *cuy* in Quito. A foodie revolution is under way, and Casa Gangotena Hotel, a newly restored historic mansion on a cobbled corner of Plaza San Francisco, in the city centre, is my first stop on a culinary tour.

Both breakfast and Cafe Quiteno (afternoon tea) are included in the room rate, which starts from £280 a night. The latter is a feast of pork sandwiches, sweetcorn *tamales* (corn wrapped in corn husks),

quesadillas (cheese in a dough blanket) and scone, washed down with a choice of Ecuadorian coffee, signature Gangotena hot chocolate, or tea made from Andean herbs.

Tea is as medicinal here as it is traditional at home, because the altitude can bring on headaches and dizzy spells. So executive chef Andres Davila takes guests to the market where stallholder and fourth-generation homeopath, Senora Rosa Lagla, will prescribe a brew.

I am given a selection of exotic

Andean herbs to boost my energy levels and a red bracelet to 'ward away bad people'. Perhaps Julian Assange, the Wikileaks founder seeking asylum in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London, could do with one of those.

Suitably refreshed, I return to Casa Gangotena for a cookery class. Andres shows me how to deal with langoustines fresh from the coast. These are followed by steak and fig cheesecake — a traditional Ecuadorian pudding.

In La Ronda, a street lined with

bars and galleries which come to life after dark, the feasting continues. Here you can eat giant *empanadas* and hot chocolate in Khipus Chocolate Shop.

One of the best things about Quito — in 1978, with Krakow, it became the first city to be listed as a Unesco World Heritage Site — is its historic centre alive with trade, chatter and tempting restaurants. Here, Peruvian chefs are leading the way.

'There are similar ingredients in Peru and Ecuador,' says Jan Niedrau, general

manager at Zazu (zazuquito.com), a popular restaurant, in the north of the city, 'but Peru had a foodie movement some time ago and is way ahead.' Quito is hot on its heels. The Quiteno sweet tooth is a serious business and chocolate cafes are dotted all over the city. After all, *theobroma cacao*, the tree that sprouts cocoa beans, is native to South America.

Fine-grade cocoa is one of Ecuador's largest exports, along with petroleum, bananas, shrimps, tuna and coffee, and much of it is grown and produced in the low-lying coastal areas.

An hour east of Quito, past the snow-capped Antisana volcano, in Termas de Papallacta (termaspapallacta.com) you can even bathe in chocolate. Back in the capital, I can't resist one more sweet stop — a cookery class at Gianduja chocolate factory (giandujachocolate.com), only ten minutes from the airport.

Chocolatier Jeffrey Stern uses local ingredients such as coconut cinnamon caramel and passion-fruit with lemongrass to concoct unusual delights. I make ganash, truffles and all sorts of cocoa delights to take home. Sadly, that miraculous weight loss doesn't last long.

TRAVEL FACTS

ORIGINAL Travel (020 7978 7333, originaltravel.co.uk) offers a seven-night trip taking in Quito, the Avenue of the Volcanoes and the Highlands costs from £2,950pp including B&B in Quito at Casa Gangotena (casagangotena.com), full-board outside the city and international and domestic flights. For more information visit: quito.com.ec

GABRIEL O'RORKE



Sparkly city: Quito's historic old town and Gothic Basilic church

Picture: GETTY

The World's Greatest Train has a Special Offer

Stay & Play FREE*



Winner of Eight World Travel Awards

Journey into the heart of the Canadian Rockies on the award-winning Rocky Mountaineer train. All-daylight travel allows you to enjoy breathtaking scenery while experiencing impeccable service, dining on delicious cuisine and making new friends from around the world.

UP TO €500* value per couple in holiday extras

STAY & PLAY FREE OFFER—For a limited time, book a qualifying Rocky Mountaineer rail holiday and take advantage of **up to £500*** per couple in holiday extras! Enhance your holiday with a choice of FREE add-ons including:

- extra hotel nights
- exciting activities
- spectacular tours
- credit towards cruise price

THIS OFFER WON'T LAST LONG. BOOK NOW!

To book, contact your ABTA travel agent, call free on 00 800 0606 7372 or visit rockymountaineer.com

Book with confidence! All of our holiday packages are bonded, giving you that 100% peace of mind that your money is safe with us.



ABTA No. Y5346



*Offer valid on new, qualifying 2013 bookings made by March 28, 2013. Deposits are required at the time of booking. This offer is applicable to qualifying 2013 Rocky Mountaineer holidays with a land tour portion of four or more nights. Cruise is not included in the number of qualifying nights. Maximum offer value of £250 per adult (£500 bonus per couple) is with qualifying holidays of seven nights or more in GoldLeaf Service. Bonus credit amount varies by class of service and duration of holiday. Travel between April and October, 2013. Credits can only be used toward the purchase of additional services offered by Rocky Mountaineer. The credit cannot be used to upgrade rail service or accommodation and cannot be used against the price of the core package. Offer has no cash value and is non-transferable. Price shown for Canadian Rockies Highlights and Coastal Passage with Post-Tour Alaskan Cruise package is for the August 18, 2013 start date from Calgary, GoldLeaf Service, subject to availability. Price shown for Western Explorer with Post-Tour Alaskan Cruise package is for the May 4, 2013 start date from Calgary, GoldLeaf Service, subject to availability. Cruise accommodation is based on Verandah Stateroom (GoldLeaf Service) or Ocean-View Stateroom (RedLeaf and SilverLeaf Service). Prices are per person in GBP and include Canadian tax and port taxes. Based on two sharing, excluding flights. Offer values and prices are expressed in GBP as a guideline only and may vary at the time of booking due to changes in exchange rate with the CAD. Additional conditions apply. †Additional added value of up to £425 per adult (£850 per couple) is only with select qualifying holiday packages featuring Rocky Mountaineer's new Coastal Passage route.

Canadian Rockies Highlights and Coastal Passage with Post-Tour Alaskan Cruise

CALGARY-LAKE LOUISE-BANFF-KAMLOOPS-VANCOUVER-SEATTLE-ALASKAN CRUISE-SEATTLE

Package Inclusions:

- 3 days onboard the Rocky Mountaineer
- 7 night Alaskan Cruise on Holland America's *ms Oosterdam*
- 10 breakfasts, 8 lunches, 7 dinners
- 7 nights hotel
- Calgary Tower & Banff Gondola
- Helicopter Flightseeing
- Yoho National Park Tour
- Tour of Vancouver's North Shore
- Vancouver Lookout
- National Parks Pass
- Rail station transfers & luggage handling

COASTAL PASSAGE EXTRA BONUS!

New for 2013—Coastal Passage route, connecting Seattle, USA to the Canadian Rockies.



15 Days / 14 Nights

PLUS holiday extras valued at £850 per couple†

FROM **£4,698** per person, GoldLeaf Service

Western Explorer with Post-Tour Alaskan Cruise

CALGARY-BANFF-LAKE LOUISE-JASPER-KAMLOOPS-VANCOUVER-ALASKA-VANCOUVER

Package Inclusions:

- 2 days onboard the Rocky Mountaineer
- 7 night Glacier Bay Inside Passage Cruise on Holland America's *ms Zuiderdam*
- 9 breakfasts, 8 lunches, 7 dinners
- 7 nights hotel
- Calgary Tower & Banff Gondola
- Helicopter Flightseeing
- Yoho National Park Tour
- Icefields Parkway Tour, including Ice Explorer
- Jasper Highlights Tour
- Vancouver Lookout
- National Parks Pass
- Rail station transfers & luggage handling



15 Days / 14 Nights

PLUS holiday extras valued at £500 per couple

FROM **£4,270** per person, GoldLeaf Service