_____ travelmail _____ TASTE THE HIGH LIFE

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

Page 56

OLIDAYING 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),



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

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

tratidional 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, *theobrama 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 energiest largest coastal areas.

An hour east of Quito, past the snow-capped Antisana volcano, in Termas de Papallacta (*terma-spapallacta.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 sevennight 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: auito.com.ec

GABRIEL O'RORKE





- 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

PLUS holiday extras valued at £850 per couple[†]

ecting Seattle. USA to the Canadian Rocki Lake Louise Calgary 7 nights hotel Banff 15 Days / 14 Nights _{FROM} [£]**4,698**

PLUS holiday extras valued at £500 per couple

2 Jasper Lake Louise Calgary Banff 9D Kamloons

/ancouver

15 Days / 14 Nights FROM [£]4,270 per person, GoldLeaf Service



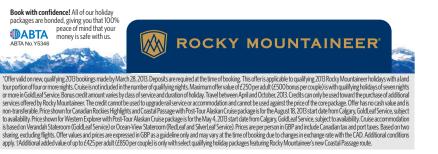
ourney into the heart of the Canadian Rockies on the awardwinning Rocky Mountaineer train. All-daylight travel allows you to enjoy breathtaking scenery while experiencing impeccable service, dining on delicious cuisine and making new friends from around the world.



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:

- exciting activities extra hotel nights 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



• 7 night Glacier Bay Inside Passage Cruise

on Holland America's ms Zuiderdam 9 breakfasts, 8 lunches, 7 dinners 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