

Summiting Cotopaxi Volcano

(all heights, times, itineraries etc are approximate)

Cotopaxi, with a summit of 5,897m (nearly 20,000ft) is regarded as the world's highest active volcano. Climbing such a spectacular mountain, and standing on the summit at sunrise, is an amazing experience that you'll remember for the rest of your life.

The Secret Garden Cotopaxi organises trips for our guests to climb Cotopaxi. The trips are run by highly experienced, professionally certified guides. These guides have the technical skills to lead you safely on high-altitude glaciers, over ice and snow, using ropes, crampons, ice picks etc. Foreigners are not permitted to climb to Cotopaxi summit without a certified high-altitude mountaineering guide.

Itinerary

We strongly recommend spending at least 2 or 3 nights at Secret Garden Cotopaxi before attempting the summit – you'll read more about that under "acclimatisation" below.

After your last night at Secret Garden Cotopaxi you will need to check out by about 10am. You then rest and relax in the hostel, eating lots of banana bread, drinking plenty of fluids. Do not get sunburned!

Your summit guide arrives around midday. They will bring all the equipment you need (see below) but you will spend time with them trying things on and deciding which of your things to take (eg use your jacket or theirs, or both?). You will sign to accept responsibility for all the equipment you borrow. It can be expensive to replace, so be careful to not lose anything. Be particularly careful in the refuge – there are often a lot of climbers, with equipment everywhere, and things can get misplaced. Try to keep everything in your bag at all times.

You'll have lunch in the hostel before heading off into the National Park and up the mountain to the parking area at 4500m. From there it is approx. 45 min trek up to the refuge. You'll settle in to the refuge, eat some more, and then head back outside with your guide to practice using the equipment and to learn the basic techniques you need for trekking over ice. After an early dinner, you'll be in bed by 7pm, try to sleep for a few hours, and then be woken by your guide at 11pm. You'll eat more, put all your equipment on, and head out into the night at about midnight.

The first section of the climb, about an hour, is over rock/scree to the start of the glacier, where you put your crampons on. This is the point where you rope up – you'll be secured to your guide for the entire climb. The total ascent will take approx. 6 hours, to reach the summit at sunrise. These [PHOTOS](#) on our website give you an idea of the conditions. It is not technically difficult, but there are plenty of nice steep bits! Your guide will set the pace, and ensure you take sufficient rest/drink/snack breaks. There's some great footage in [OUR VIDEO](#) showing guys on a summit trip, and their celebrations on the summit at sunrise. The trip back down to the refuge usually takes about 2 hours and also offers some great views (now that you have light!)

After a light breakfast back at the refuge, you'll pack up (carefully) and head back to The Secret Garden. Guests often spend another night at the hostel – resting, relaxing and celebrating. You also have the option of returning to Machachi with your guide and catching a bus to your next destination.

What do you need?

Equipment

The guides provide all technical equipment, including climbing boots (you can't wear normal trekking boots, you need special boots to attach the crampons to), crampons, ropes, helmet, goggles/sunnies, headlamp, ice pick etc, warm clothing (under layers and jackets, pants, gaiters etc) sleeping bags for the refuge and more. All you really need are socks and underwear! Before leaving Secret Garden, the guides will check what personal kit you have (jackets etc) and you decide how much of your gear, how much of their gear to take. Your sunnies are probably better than the ones they provide – take them (:

Fitness

You'll need to have a reasonable level of fitness, but this is not as important as your acclimatisation. If you're not sure, talk to us over your first day or two at the hostel. We can talk about how you feel doing some of our easier treks to assess how you might feel attempting the summit.

Technical Skills

You do not need any prior technical experience to climb Cotopaxi. The guide will explain everything you need to know on your first afternoon on the mountain, and during the climb.

Acclimatisation

This is the most important part of your preparation. We cannot stress enough how important your acclimatisation is, but fortunately it is something you can improve a lot in just a few days. Spending time at high altitude in the days before your summit trip is critical, and the more the better. It is essential that you are sleeping at a high altitude (over 3,000m) and spending the days trekking up to even higher altitudes (ideally 4,500m to 5,000m+). Any time spent at altitude in the 3 weeks prior will help, but the last few days before summiting are the most important.

Before coming out here, are you able to spend time trekking/climbing in other nearby mountain areas? At a minimum we'd recommend spending a few days in Quito (2800m) and while you are there taking the "Teleferico" cable car and trekking to the summit of Rucu Pichincha (4,800m). This is a beautiful trek, great acclimatisation, and you can do it on your own – no cost of guide, tour etc. The guys at [THE SECRET GARDEN QUITO](#) can give you more info – we have guests doing this trek pretty much every day.

Once at Secret Garden Cotopaxi, your acclimatisation will start with a nice, easy 2 hr forest/waterfall walk on your first afternoon. If you do our [3 DAY/2 NIGHT PACKAGE DEAL](#) plus one extra night, then you could spend your second day trekking to the summit of

[PASOCHOA](#) (only about 4220m, but a good 5 hr trek), then on your 3rd day our [RUMINAHUI](#) day trek (more challenging conditions, 4700m, \$30pp). We run Pasochoa every day, but for Ruminahui we need min 2 pax, so you could switch days 2 and 3 if necessary. Your 4th day would be spent resting in the morning before the guide collects you at midday to head off on your summit trip.

Altitude effects everyone differently. The above is what we recommend as a minimum. Guests have made the summit with less acclimatisation than this, but the guides will nearly always recommend more! It's your decision.

Price

The Secret Garden Cotopaxi helps arrange summit trips, but they are not run by us. Your trip will be organised and operated by a specialist technical climbing agency based in Machachi. You pay them, not us. You do not need to pay for a night at The Secret Garden Cotopaxi on the night you climb the summit - you will be staying in the refuge. The price includes all equipment (as mentioned previously), transport, meals & snacks, accommodation in the refuge, licenced guides and permits etc. The price does not include tips for your guide **nor insurance of any kind.**

The price for 2 climbers with one guide is \$310 per person. The price for 1 climber with their own private guide is \$410. Payments are cash only, directly to the climbing agency.

We have a deal with the climbing agencies whereby if there are 2 or more climbers, then the price stays at \$310pp. Why is this so good?? There will never be more than 2 climbers per guide, so if we have a group of 3 climbers, then you will have 2 guides. This is a great little "insurance policy" – it means that if one of the climbers needs to slow down, or turn back, then the other 2 can keep going. If you only have 2 climbers with one guide, and one climber needs to turn back, then the guide will need to take both climbers back. The guide will never leave a climber unattended at any place on the mountain for any length of time. We try to organise our guests into groups of 3 or more to save money and to have this "insurance", but we will not be sure until the day before. Single climbers might need to be flexible, to wait a day or two to join others.

Weather

We've left this til last because it should never be a major consideration. There is nothing you can do about it and high up in the Andes it is very unpredictable. Ignore any online weather forecast – they are not accurate. It is very rare that climbers do not make the summit due to weather conditions, but this is obviously a risk anywhere in the world. The view from the summit is not always clear at sunrise, but guests never rate the view as the main reason they did this, or as the highlight of the experience.

Guests who have done both, rate summitting Cotopaxi as challenging and rewarding as running a marathon. It is a once-in-a-lifetime experience – go for it!