Day 1: Sigchos to Insilivi // 14 km // 3 - 4 hours of active trekking time
Generally flat road conditions with one challenging ascent towards the end of the day. The route is marked with signposts and spray painted colors.

1. The trailhead can be challenging to find, as there is no trekking marker that is clearly visible in the town. First, you will want to identify a large sign that shows the direction for Chugchilan (25 km ahead) and Parroquia Insilivi (14 km to the left). This sign is located on the “open” edge of town. As Sichos is surrounded by hills on three sides, look for the only side that does not have a hill, where the sign is located.

2. Once you have found the large sign, walk left towards Insilivi where the paved road becomes dirt and descends. After a few minutes of walking on this road, you will see several signs clustered for Hostal Llulu llama, Hostal Taita Cristobal, and even one for Hostal Cloud Forest pointing to the path on the right.

3. Continue to follow the road where you will pass a white church painted with red trim and two red crosses on top. Keep trekking, passing the first side path (unmarked) on the right until you see another trail on your right-hand side that is marked with a smaller cluster of signs for Hostal Llulu llama and Hostal Cloud Forest, where you will turn right. After 7-10 minutes on this path, you will need to look on your left for a small footpath in the grass that is unmarked. Some people have stacked a small pile of stones to indicate the path, but it is entirely easy to miss, so be vigilant. This small path descends into the valley and will eventually take you to a road.

4. Upon reaching the road, turn right. You will continue down the road following a slight left-hand curve, then right curve, until you see another left hand curve with a small path jutting off of it. The path has a barbed wire fence alongside it, and you can also confirm this is the correct path because just a few steps into it, you will see a fence post (thin tree trunk) that has been spray-painted green, orange, and white.

5. Continue along this path until you reach a road and turn right. Continue trekking for about 30-minutes with the river on your left-hand side until you reach two small homes; one with brown walls and the other (slightly smaller) with grey cinder block walls and a small white shack attached to it. Near these homes, you will also see a red and yellow trail post pointing to Insilivi.

6. Take the small descending grassy footpath that’s located directly to the right of the two homes. This path will take you down to a river and a concrete bridge. **There’s a chance there may be a person standing at this intersection demanding some money to use the path (this happened to us). It does not cost any money to trek the Quilotoa trail, so politely refuse their request and keep on the path.

7. Walk across the concrete bridge, turn right, and then just 20-30 meters after that you will see a footpath on the left marked with several spray painted rocks along the way. This path will take you into a steep ascent up a muddy (depending on the season) path until you reach a dirt road, which you will turn left on.

8. Follow the road for another 20-30 meters where you should see a small intersection with several houses and farms. There will be a spray-painted marker indicating that you should turn left here (although if you go right you’ll quickly realize you’re walking into someone’s farm).
9. Continue on the path that is marked with red and yellow spray paint until you reach a small school with a basketball court and white building with metal bars over the windows. Turn right at this intersection, and about 20 meters after this, you'll see a small trail to your right with a concrete column that has been spray painted with the number 7, a llama, and a star. Take this trail to your right and you will begin ascending with switchbacks.

10. This ascent is the most challenging part of the day and can take anywhere between 40 minutes to an hour depending on your trekking speed. The path is straightforward and marked with spray painted rocks along the way. You will encounter two smaller paths shooting off on the right hand side, but just ignore these and continue along the main route until you get to the top of the hill and reach a large road.

11. Turn right onto the large road and pat yourself on the back. The hardest part of your first day is now over! Continue walking on the road for another 45-minutes until you reach the tiny town of Insilivi. As soon as you enter the town (easily identifiable by the large brick church straight ahead), take the first road on your right. If you walk up to the church doors, you’ve already gone too far. You will see Hostal Taita Cristobal at the T intersection (and Llulu Llama if you turn right at the intersection). The two accommodation choices are just steps away from each other.

**Day 2: Insilivi to Chugchilan // 12.4 km // 4 - 6 hours of active trekking time**

Steep descent the first part of the day, undulations, one challenging ascent, then the day ends with a walk on asphalt into the town of Chugchilan. Route is marked mostly with spray painted colors and few signs.

1. The trailhead begins adjacent to Hostal Llulu Llama’s kitchen. Descend down this path and then turn right onto the road after 20 meters. Keep descending until you begin to see a concrete bridge at the bottom of the valley on your left-hand side.

2. Go across the concrete bridge and continue walking 200 meters where you will see a trail on your right-hand side that is ascending. Take this path until you reach a dirt road, where you will turn right. Continue for 2km until you see a red and yellow trail sign pointing to Chugchilan where you will turn right. **It should take about 20 minutes from the time you cross the concrete bridge to the time it takes you to get to the Chugchilan sign.**

3. Continue trekking along this path for about 15 minutes until you get to an interesting section where white cliffs flank both sides and the trail is wide and dusty. Continue walking through the “white cliff walls” for 5 minutes and you will see a house and a red and yellow signpost directing you to turn right towards Chugchilan. Take that path which will be narrow and begin to descend.

4. The trail begins to reveal more adventurous sections with muddy terrain, narrow passageways, and also massive plants. After walking about 15 minutes along this path, you should see another red and yellow signpost directing you to Chugchilan. Continue this way until you reach the base of the mountain.

5. At the mountain base, the path appears to fork in several directions. Simply go straight across the small muddy ditch (go off the trail to do this if needed) where you should see the path converge again. Walk several steps until you see another fork
with marker indications (spray painted trees) to go right. The correct path will descend slightly while the incorrect path on the left will ascend.

6. After 25-30 minutes of continuing along the trail, you will encounter a wooden gate. Pass through this gate and continue along the path where a large farm will be on your right-hand side. You’ll pass through another “gate” made of barbed wire (the wire has since been trampled and is on the ground so it may not look like a real gate per say).

7. Keep going on the trail for 1.1 km, where you will see a tall boulder (about 7 feet high) on your left-hand side. During the majority of this time, the Rio Toachi river will run on your right-hand side. Continue along the trail until you see a small grove of eucalyptus trees which you will walk through until you reach a log bridge which spans across the Rio Toachi river.

8. The log bridge is highly noticeable with multiple signs for Hostal Cloud Forest on it. Carefully cross the log bridge. Immediately after crossing, you should see a sign for Hostal Cloud Forest which has been nailed to a tree. Follow the sign and take the path to your left towards Chugchilan. The Rio Toachi should now be situated on your left-hand side.

9. Continue straight on the trail past the suspension bridge on your left (do not cross) and the path will begin a gradual ascent for the next kilometer. At this point, you will see a wooden shack with a small sign selling snacks and drinks on the outside of it. Turn left on the road in front of the store and head towards the small town of Itualo which is easily recognizable by a beige and red church and cattle area next to it. As you come closer, you will also see other small buildings, stables, and a school.

10. Walk past the church and you will see a path leading up towards the mountain with a wooden sign for Hostal Cloud Forest and Chugchilan on your right-hand side. This trail will take you all the way up and over the mountain, making this ascent the most challenging of the day. The ascent will take anywhere between 35-45 minutes with a distance of 750 meters.

11. At the top of the mountain, you will face an intersection with a few sparse buildings and several signs pointing in various directions. Turn left and continue on the path (if you turn around 180 degrees, you will also see a sign behind you pointing to Chugchilan). The trail flattens out and you will continue walking for 1.3km, past a U-shaped cliff of white rock and a beautiful view behind it. This is a great photo opportunity and snack spot.

12. Continue along the trail which is marked with spray painted rocks, go past a wire fence area on your left-hand side until you reach asphalt road where you will turn left. At this point, the rest of the day’s walk will be on asphalt. You will see a large official welcome sign for Chugchilan directing you to continue forward into the town. Most of the accommodations in Chugchilan are located directly off of the main road, so as you keep walking in (with a gradual ascent), you’ll come across Black Sheep Inn first, then Hostal Cloud Forest, then Mama Hilda’s, and so on. Hostal El Vaquero is located at the very end of the town (which is also the starting point for the next day’s trek).
Day 3: Chugchilan to Quilotoa // 10.3km // 5.5 - 6.5 hours of active trekking time

Steep descent from the town of Chugchilan down to the river with interesting scenery and diverse terrain. Challenging ascent on a narrow path with slight scrambling over landslide areas. Pass through Guayama San Pedro, with more ascents towards the crater and into Quilotoa town. The route is sparsely marked with the exception of general signs for Quilotoa. If you are traveling during rainy weather, be sure to check with other trekkers or people at your accommodation for trail conditions beforehand, as there are several steep areas which are prone to landslides.

1. The trailhead begins near Hostal El Vaquero, which is located on the other end of town (from where you entered Chugchilan the day before). If you are beginning from Black Sheep Inn or Hostal Cloud Forest, it is approximately a 15-minute walk to El Vaquero. Continue along the main road through town. You will see various signs pointing to the left for the hostal near the biblioteca (library). Once you reach Hostal El Vaquero, walk a few steps past it towards the large blue sign that says "Quilotoa - 10.24km".

2. Follow the Quilotoa sign and take the path on your left-hand side. For the majority of the day, you will continue to follow signs for Quilotoa, as there will be relatively few trail markers similar to the ones you had seen from day 1 and 2.

3. Continue on this road until you see a yellow wooden sign that says “La Moya, Cascada, and Quilotoa - 11km”. At this point, take the small trail on your left-hand side, veering off of the main road you were just walking on. This narrow trail will take you on a descent through tall grass and then up to a yellow farmhouse. Just a few steps past the yellow farmhouse, the path will curve slightly to the left and you will see a wooden sign on your right-hand side that says Hostal Cloud Forest directing you to turn right towards Quilotoa.

4. This path will continue to descend until you eventually reach the river at the bottom of the valley. As you get closer to the river (which should be on your right-hand side), the terrain will drastically change from a trail to a sharp, switchback descent on loose sand and dirt. Trekking poles are especially useful here to maintain some balance as the footing is tough (also try sidestepping if you are slipping). This narrow path will take you all the way down to the river and directly to the makeshift wooden bridge that you will cross.

5. After you cross the river, follow the trail for a few minutes which veers to the left until you see a green sign that says “Quilotoa - 8.2km”. From here, you will begin ascending for the next 40 - 50 minutes until you summit the mountain ahead. About one-third of the way along the trail, there is a cluster of picnic benches and a trash can which is a good location for a rest stop.

6. There is only one trail in this section, so continue climbing up with special caution for your footing in areas where there have been landslides. You may need to do slight scrambling over rocks depending on the trail conditions. At the summit (woohoo) there is a bench overlooking the area that you’ve just trekked through. This is another great spot for a water break or snack. You’ll see another green sign which states “Quilotoa - 7.7km” pointing to the left.

7. Follow the Quilotoa sign to the left, which is headed for the town of Guayama (pronounced Waima) San Pedro. While this shouldn’t be an issue as long as you are
Complete Guide for Traditional Quilotoa Loop Trek (beginning in Sigchos) created by Crystal Le of www.thepetiteadventurer.com

on the correct path, you may want to be aware that there is another town nearby also called Guayama Grande. Continue on the trail towards the town and the road will gradually curve left. As you get closer, you should be able to see a giant blue awning in the town. Hike to the large blue awning in town, ignore the first right-hand turn, and walk a bit further until you see the basketball court and make the second right.

8. Continue to walk through the town of Guayama San Pedro, passing through the first intersection until the road begins to gradually ascend. When you reach the second intersection, you should see a green building with red trim and a brown sign that points to Chugchilan towards the right. You will turn left here and walk until you see a sign stating “Quilotoa - 4.75km”.

9. Shortly after the sign, take the first trail on your right. As the road continues uphill and out of Guayama San Pedro, you will be able to see a hostal on your left. At this point, the trail becomes uneven and passes several farms on both sides. This next ascending section takes 30-40 minutes until you reach the dirt road. Along this route, you will encounter a fork with three paths. I recommend taking the left path (the middle path gets you to the same trail but makes you ascend a bit more). Continue on until you reach a large dirt road and then turn left.

10. Keep on the trail for about 15 minutes where you will see a small unmarked footpath on your right-hand side going up the hill. Ignore this path and walk another 5 minutes until you see another small unmarked footpath on your right-hand side that also leads uphill on a grassy area. This turn is very easy to miss and is unmarked, so be on the lookout! From here, it will take approximately 40 minutes to the next sign.

11. As you continue to ascend on this trail, you'll pass farms and a garden on your right-hand side with barbed wire fencing. Keep trekking uphill until you reach the fork before the trail flattens out. Take the path on the right and it should lead you to a large sign that states “Quilotoa - 2.9km”. The trail should now be made of white grainy sand.

12. Follow the sandy trail which will eventually begin to veer left. At this point, know that you are very close to the crater lake (drumroll please). You will go on another small ascent which takes you right up to a breathtaking view of the Quilotoa crater. This is a great spot to let out a huge sigh of relief and take a smiling selfie!

13. If you are facing the crater, the town of Quilotoa is located diagonally ahead on your right. You will want to turn right and take the path that circumvents the top of the crater lake all the way to Quilotoa. This route will continue to yield stunning views of the caldera, so you will have plenty of opportunities to take photos at different angles. As you exit the crater lake area, there are a few smaller ascents and one particular area affectionately called the “path of death” (coined by a tour guide we met along the way) where the trail is extremely narrow. Traverse this section carefully.

14. Once you reach the town of Quilotoa, treat yourself to a congratulatory drink or meal! If you are wiped out from the trek, there are plenty of places accommodations to choose from. Quilotoa is also a great place to buy souvenirs, as there are many vendors selling blankets, ponchos, and other handmade goods. Great job on finishing the 3-day Quilotoa Loop trek. It's time to #treatyoself.

15. Buses heading back to Latacunga or the town of Zumbahua (where you can take a connecting bus to Latacunga) run regularly until the evening. It’s worth noting the buses to Latacunga run less frequently, so you may need to connect through
Zumbahua depending on your departure time (which is what we ended up doing and was easy enough). The direct bus from Quilotoa to Latacunga should cost about $2.00, Quilotoa to Zumbahua should cost about $1.00, and Zumbahua to Latacunga should cost about $1.50.

Quilotoa Loop Map
[Google map link]