The Ecuadorians tell fantastic tales about their magnificent volcanoes, and one of the legends involves a family of volcanoes, complete with mum, dad, a child and a grandparent…

According to folklore, two mountains – El Altar, which means ‘Lord Of All The Mountains’, and Carihuairazo, meaning ‘Man Of Wind And Ice’ – battled with Taita (‘Father’) Cotopaxi, who was protecting another volcano, Mama (‘Mother’) Tungurahua. Taita exploded – literally – with anger and destroyed El Altar and Carihuairazo, both of which now haven’t erupted for centuries!

“Mama Tungurahua and Taita Cotopaxi’s ‘family’ includes the two highest peaks on the Pichincha volcano – Guagua, meaning ‘Child’, and Rucu, ‘Old Person’, ” says Clive. “Like most families, they have had the odd eruption, but hopefully now, they’ll live happily ever after!”

Cotopaxi – the world’s highest volcano at 5,897m-tall – is just one of the many mega-high peaks in the Avenue Of The Volcanoes. Its name means ‘smooth neck of the moon’, perhaps because the icy glacier at the very top makes it look like it’s holding up the moon!” says volcano expert, Thor Thordarson.

Down the Avenue is the Chimborazo volcano, which in the Indian language of the local Quechua people means ‘mountain of snow’. And a bit further down is Quilotoa, which at first may look like any volcano, but at the summit you’ll find a huge, 250m-deep lake in its crater! “This emerald-green lake may look pretty, but you wouldn’t want to swim in it, as the water is very c-c-cold!” says Thor.

WHERE IS A VOLCANO?
A volcano opens downward, below the Earth’s crust, to a chamber of magma (molten rock). When pressure below builds up, the magma erupts through the crater, either as lava or a mixture of gas and pyroclasts (broken rock). Wow!

Volcano ace, Thor!