

ECUADOR: ANDES & GALAPAGOS

DAY 1, MAY 07 TUE: ARRIVAL IN QUITO

Welcome to Ecuador! Our guide will meet and transfer you to the hotel.

Quito lies at an elevation of about 9,000 feet above sea level in the province of Pichincha and is home to an array of beautiful cathedrals, elegant old mansions, interesting museums, squares and parks. Full of street markets selling a wealth of Ecuadorian jewels, arts and crafts, Quito's wonderful spring-like climate is dominated by mountains, with several snow-capped volcanoes standing majestically in the distance. In 1978, Quito became the first city to be declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, together with Krakow, Poland.

Accommodations: Hotel Río Amazonas

Meals included today: None

DAY 2, MAY 08 WED: QUITO CITY TOUR

09h00: Introductory meeting with Dr. Charles Bergman.

The rest of the morning is free for you to explore on your own or enjoy one of these culinary experiences:

Optional culinary experiences

Chapolate (30-40 minutes) \$15 per person

Enjoy something for kids of all ages: an informal hot chocolate making class! You first get an eye-opening briefing on the history and origins of cacao, the beans from where chocolate is made from. This goes back thousands of years ago when the beans were so valuable that they were used as currency, up to our present times, where Ecuador has become the No. 1 producer and exporter of the finest aroma chocolate in the world. We will use award-winning *Pacari Ecuadorian chocolate* to make your own cup of grandma's style hot chocolate, aromatized with cinnamon, orange peel and lemongrass. We also add a special ingredient, "máchica" or toasted barley flour to make our drink thicker and resemble the traditional "chapo" that Andean people eat on a regular basis. Hence, this creation is called *chapolate*.

Traditional corn tortillas (45-60 minutes) \$25 per person

We will use kitchen utensils from 18th century Quito to prepare your own traditional corn tortillas. Fill your delectable tortillas with cheese, onions and annatto (a rare spice from the Amazon used to give food a special color and tang), and cook them on a "tiesto" or adobe hot plate. Next, we will grind organic roasted coffee beans and learn how to make a delicious cup of this aromatic brew using a "chuspa" or cloth filter. And to accent your tortillas, we will prepare a special chili sauce using a volcanic stone grinder to mix all of the ingredients – an ancient-old method still used by the more traditional Quiteño families. Finally, enjoy a healthy Ecuadorian snack!

14h00: Enjoy a half day guided tour of Quito that is sure to impress! This interesting tour starts in old colonial Quito in the main square where the *Presidential Palace*, the main *Cathedral* and some other important buildings can be seen. Continue to *Plaza Santo Domingo* and walk through "La Ronda", one of the oldest streets in town, with colonial homes and shops of the early 1600s. Your walk continues to the *City Museum* and *San Francisco Plaza*, with a quick stop to try typical sweets of Quito. San Francisco is the oldest church in Quito, packed with history, legends and wonderful photo opportunities. We then visit *La*

Merced Church with arabesque and baroque style interiors. *La Compañía de Jesús* church is one of the most beautiful temples in South America or perhaps the world. Finally, it's up Panecillo Hill for a bird's eye view of the city.

Optional dance show

This evening, we suggest that you attend the dance show by *Jacchigua National Folkloric Ballet*, a colorful performance comprised of over 80 dancers, musicians and stage support that highlight the culture and traditions of Ecuador. This 2-hour presentation features 6,160 pounds (2,800 kilograms) of costumes and ethnic elements in various regional dances from around the country. Under the direction of choreographer and founder Rafael Camino, some of the most popular dances are: Saraguro, Deer Hunt, Corpus Christi, and Andean Sensitivity. Starts at 7:30 pm and costs USD 30 per person. More info here: www.jacchiguaesecuador.com.

Accommodations: Hotel Río Amazonas

Meals included today: Breakfast

DAY 3, MAY 09 THU: QUITO / EL ÁNGEL

08h00: Today, we travel northwards and our first stop is the Quitsato Equatorial Marker where guests can straddle latitude zero “all to themselves”, away from major tourist crowds. Moreover, here you will learn about the “correct” way to view Planet Earth and the constellations, with the Big Dipper and Southern Cross visibly opposite one another at the same time. Additionally, some interactive experiments will prove you are indeed at latitude zero. We then continue overland and up to the cool “páramo” life zone in the region of El Ángel and the Polylepis Lodge. For the past 20 years, this lodge has earned its reputation as a landmark for environmental research within a forest that is comparable to the uniqueness of the Galapagos Islands, harboring plants and animals endemic to this part of the world. Here is where Dr. William Teska conducted his research for more than 10 years together with an Ecuadorian biologist, Jorge Brito.

Accommodations: Polylepis Lodge

Meals included today: Breakfast, lunch & dinner

DAY 4, MAY 10 FRI: EL ÁNGEL RESERVE & POLYLEPIS FOREST

09h00: We have an entire day to explore this amazing ecosystem, ideal for birders, plant enthusiasts, zoologists, photographers and nature lovers in general. Treks take you through a network of trails that may be covered in 2 to 6 hours, depending on personal interests. One of the amazing highlights is the Polylepis forest, with its unusually flaky bark, as well as a most rare tree-like plant, endemic to this region, known as the “frailejón” with rabbit-like leaves that glisten in the sun. And in the understory is even more life to discover – perhaps more species that remain unidentified by the scientific community. At the end of the day, you may review what you saw at the on-site museum, in addition to a comprehensive display of archaeological artifacts of the region, and/or enjoy the spa facilities. After dinner, it is a most unusual torch-lit night walk through the forest with your trusty guide, where many indigenous stories come to life amongst the dense vegetation – a truly fun experience.

Accommodations: Polylepis Lodge

Meals included today: Breakfast, lunch & dinner

DAY 5, MAY 11 SAT: EL ÁNGEL / QUITO

08h00: Today it's a gradual backtrack journey to Quito, enjoying en route a number of sites not to be missed, like the town of Mascarilla where the natives craft masks depicting their culture and traditions, as well as the breath-taking landscapes at every turn of the road. Also, we can stop at the Otavalo handicraft market or make a quick visit to the artisans in Peguche. Late afternoon arrival to Quito.

Accommodations: Hotel Río Amazonas

Meals included today: Breakfast & lunch

DAY 6, MAY 12 SUN: QUITO / GALAPAGOS

Transfer to the airport for your flight to Baltra, Galapagos.

AM – Baltra Airport

Upon arrival in the Galapagos, passengers are picked up at the airport by our naturist guides and taken on a ten-minute bus drive to the pier to board the ^{M/Y} Coral II.

PM – Charles Darwin Research Station & Fausto Llerena Breeding Center (Santa Cruz Island)

Dry landing. Once home to the famous Lonesome George, the last tortoise of the Pinta race, the breeding and relocation center is named in honor of his long-time guardian. The center is set in the Galapagos National Park Service where various interpretative buildings are available to visit. The grounds, with large stands of native vegetation, are one of the better places to spot some of the seldom seen Darwin's finches such as the woodpecker, cactus and vegetarian finches.

Difficulty level: easy

Type of terrain: flat

Duration: 1 ½-hour visit

Accommodations: M/Y Coral II

Meals included today: Breakfast, lunch & dinner

DAY 7, MAY 13 MON: GALAPAGOS

AM – Dragon Hill (Santa Cruz Island)

Dry or wet landing. Arriving to a small lava dock our first encounters are with marine iguanas that blend-in perfectly to the dark rock. As we walk past large prickly pear cacti, we arrive to one end of a long, sickle-shaped, beach with Dragon Hill standing in the distance. Our walk takes us on a circular path, past a shallow lake where flamingoes frequently come to feed. Waders such as stilts, turnstones and sandpipers work the muddy edges frenetically looking for food as we continue inland to a dry, forested habitat where land iguanas nest and burrow.

Difficulty level: moderate

Type of terrain: rocky

Duration: 2-hour walk

PM – Bartholomew Island

Dry or wet landing. Considered the most iconic landscape of the entire archipelago, the view from the top of Bartholomew Island, overlooking the famous Pinnacle Rock and the austere Santiago Island beyond, is well worth the climb up the wooden boardwalk. This volcanic scene has often been likened

to a lunar landscape. Our subsequent snorkel here might put us face to face with Galapagos penguins, white-tipped reef sharks and playful sea lions.

Difficulty level: intermediate

Type of terrain: trail made of 372 steps.

Duration: 1 ½-hour walk / 1-hour snorkeling

Accommodations: M/Y Coral II

Meals included today: Breakfast, lunch & dinner

DAY 8, MAY 14 TUE: GALAPAGOS

AM– Rabida Island

Lying at the heart of the archipelago this dramatic island, with its distinctive red-sand beach, is home to sea lions, mockingbirds, finches, endemic Galapagos doves and vermilion flycatchers. A walk takes us through a forest of *palo santo* and cacti to a beautiful overview of the bay. Snorkeling here can be excellent, often with large schools of black-striped salemas, sea lions and the ubiquitous turtles.

Difficulty level: easy

Type of terrain: sandy

Duration: 1 ½-hour walk / 1-hour snorkeling / 1-hour dinghy ride

PM – Buccaneers Cove / Espumilla Beach (Santiago Island)

This is an amazing location, featuring the remains of an eroded shoreline that is home to seabirds, fur seals and the playful sea lions. Its different shapes have been made throughout a process caused by erosion of the waves and the wind. Espumilla Beach is a white-sandy beach in James Bay and is a popular place among visitors. There are mangroves and a small palo santo forest that lead to salty-water lagoons that are home to wading birds like flamingos. In the upper dunes are a nesting site for sea turtles. A good place to snorkel to see rays.

Difficulty level: easy

Type of terrain: white sand

Duration: 1-hour walk / 1-hour snorkeling / beach time

Accommodations: M/Y Coral II

Meals included today: Breakfast, lunch & dinner

DAY 9, MAY 15 WED: GALAPAGOS

AM – Black Turtle Cove (Santa Cruz Island)

Here, we can find four species of mangrove in the extensive tidal lagoon system that stretches for almost a mile inland. During our panga ride through the labyrinth, we will spot many turtles, herons of several species, sharks and rays. The experience is otherworldly and seems to transport us back to the beginning of time.

Difficulty level: easy

Type of terrain: none

Duration: 1-hour panga ride

PM – Highland Tortoise Reserve & Twin Craters (Santa Cruz Island)

Dry landing. In the central highlands of Santa Cruz Island, we have our best opportunity to interact at close quarters with wild, Galapagos giant tortoises. A short walk among these huge, 600lb, reptiles will also offer the chance for more highland species, especially several species of the famed finches. A visit to the collapsed, twin sinkholes (Gemelos) puts us in a stunning forest of the endemic tree-forming *Scalesia*. Apart from the dramatic scenery, this area is well known for its diversity of passerine bird species.

Difficulty level: easy

Type of terrain: flat & muddy (depending on season)

Duration: 45-minute drive / 1 ½-hour walk

Accommodations: M/Y Coral II

Meals included today: Breakfast, lunch & dinner

DAY 10, MAY 16 THU: GALAPAGOS

AM – Punta Vicente Roca (Isabela Island)

This is a spectacular visitor site, surrounded by immense cliffs of the eroded volcano. Studded with resting seabirds such as brown noddies and Nazca boobies, we will enjoy them in close proximity from our dinghies. Snorkeling here is superb, with certain species of fish only found in the west of the archipelago. We also have a very real chance of swimming with penguins and potentially a plethora of green turtles.

Difficulty level: moderate

Type of terrain: water

Duration: 1-hour snorkeling / 1-hour panga ride

PM – Punta Espinosa (Fernandina Island)

Dry landing. The youngest island of Galapagos and one of the most pristine in the world. Fernandina is simply the marine iguana capital of the world. This desolate volcanic backdrop is home to a huge concentration of these enigmatic reptiles. Incongruously, sharing the same shoreline, we can find the diminutive Galapagos penguins. Here we also have the exciting opportunity to snorkel with marine iguanas feeding underwater, penguins, turtles and the bizarre, endemic, flightless cormorants.

Difficulty level: moderate

Type of terrain: rocky

Duration: 2-hour walk / 1-hour snorkeling

Accommodations: M/Y Coral II

Meals included today: Breakfast, lunch & dinner

DAY 11, MAY 17 FRI: GALAPAGOS

AM – Urbina Bay (Isabela Island)

Wet landing. At the far end of a long, level hike we arrive at a strange phenomenon where large blocks of coral lie completely exposed after a dramatic geological uplift in 1954. Located at the western base of Alcedo Volcano, we hope to run into a few very impressive land iguanas as well as some of the volcano's endemic Galapagos giant tortoises during the wet season.

Difficulty level: moderate
Type of terrain: flat & rocky
Duration: 1 ½-hour walk / 1-hour snorkeling

PM – Tagus Cove (Isabela)

Dry landing. A well-known hideout and deep water anchorage in the days of pirates, Tagus Cove was also one of the few sites visited by Charles Darwin and the HMS Beagle in 1835. A beautiful hike leads us past an overview of Darwin Lake and on to a stunning volcanic landscape revealing Isabela Island's dramatic northern volcanoes. Once back at sea level the perfect activity is to snorkel along a submerged wall with turtles, lots of fish, penguins and potentially flightless cormorants. You might even be tempted by a *panga* ride or kayak!

Difficulty level: moderate/demanding
Type of terrain: steep
Duration: 2-hour walk / 40-minute panga ride / 1-hour deep water snorkeling

Accommodations: M/Y Coral II
Meals included today: Breakfast, lunch & dinner

DAY 12, MAY 18 SAT: GALAPAGOS

AM – Egas Port (Santiago Island)

Wet landing. The black volcanic sand sets this landing apart from most. It is best known for the dramatic shoreline where we meet a host of species that chose to live between land and sea. Particular among these are the endemic Galapagos fur seals which maintain a small colony at the end of our walk. Other species of note include American oystercatchers, sea lions, waders, herons, lava lizards and even Galapagos hawks. An optional visit takes us to an abandoned salt mine famous in its day for supplying salt to mainland Ecuador.

Difficulty level: moderate
Type of terrain: flat & semi-rocky
Duration: 1½-hour walk / 1-hour snorkeling

PM – Sullivan Bay (Santiago Island)

Wet landing. Although, when viewed from the sea, the site does not look especially interesting visitors are always totally enthralled by the amazing beds of pahoehoe lava from the recent flow on the island. It is a landscape and macro photographer's dream. The importance of pioneer plants such as the tiny *Mollugo* will be discussed as we hike over the lava. After our land visit we can enjoy a refreshing snorkel in the company of sea lions, turtles and rays.

Difficulty level: difficult
Type of terrain: flat volcanic lava
Duration: 1½-hour walk / 1-hour snorkeling/beach time

Accommodations: M/Y Coral II
Meals included today: Breakfast, lunch & dinner

DAY 13, MAY 19 SUN: GALAPAGOS / DEPARTURE OR PERU EXTENSION

AM – Bachas Beach (Santa Cruz Island)

Wet landing. Named for some wrecked World War II barges whose ribs are still visible in the sand this visitor site offers great swimming, a lovely walk along the shore and a visit to a lagoon behind the high tide line with wading birds, marine iguanas and sometimes even flamingoes. The two beaches are also favorite nesting sites for green turtles which often leave tractor-like tracks in the sand.

Difficulty level: easy

Type of terrain: sandy

Duration: 1-hour walk

Baltra Airport

After the visit, passengers will be transferred to the airport for their return flight to Guayaquil or Quito.

Meals included today: Breakfast

Includes:

- All airport transfers
- Accommodations in double occupancy
- Indicate meals (B breakfast, L lunch, D dinner)
- Certified English-speaking guides
- Entry fees to museums
- Galapagos park fee
- Galapagos transit card
- Snorkeling equipment (mask & fins)
- Airfare to Galapagos UIO-GPS-UIO

Does not include:

- International flights
- Soft & alcoholic drinks
- Wetsuit or kayak rental in Galapagos
- Travel insurance
- Tips