

Ecuador & The Galápagos



Day 1

Quito

Depart London Heathrow for Quito flying with Iberia Airlines in economy class (via Madrid). Private transfer on arrival in Quito to the Hotel Patio Andaluz. Located right in the heart of the old town, the Patio Andaluz is a new hotel inside a lovely old colonial building. The 31 charming, comfortable and luxurious rooms are situated around two indoor, glass roofed courtyards.

Day 2

Quito

Full day private city tour of Quito, (including the 'middle of the world' monument). A UNESCO World Heritage Site, Quito the capital of Ecuador has retained much of its colonial past. Steep cobbled stone streets, ornate churches, and fine plazas are all to be found in the old district of town. The modern new town is the business district and this tends to be where you find the best shopping and restaurants. The city was founded in 1534 and has a wonderful setting at the base of the Pichincha Volcano. Lying just south of the equator, it is possible to visit the Mitad del Mundo through where the imaginary line passes. In the distance the snow capped peak of Cotopaxi and its surrounding national park can easily be seen in a day. The Cotopaxi Volcano is nearly 6000 metres high; it's perfect conical shape dominating the horizon.

Day 3

Amazon



Private transfer from the Patio Andaluz to Quito Airport for internal flight to Coca (30 mins). As you fly east from Quito the mountain ranges give way to lowland primary rainforest. Viewed from the air, the landscape is a carpet of green with the occasional blue ribbon of water flowing through it. Covering much of Ecuador's eastern territory, the Amazon Rainforest is the world's most impressive jungle system.

On arrival in Coca, you will be transferred to the motorised canoe for your transfer to Sacha Lodge for 3-nights accommodation. Sacha Lodge is set amongst a 5000 acre private reserve, deep in the Ecuadorian Amazon Rainforest. All of the lodge's 26 cabins have been constructed using traditional materials. The recently opened 940 foot long canopy walkway takes you right up close to, otherwise hard to spot, bird and animal life. Afternoon introductory Rainforest tour.

Day 4 – Day 5

Amazon

Guided activities from Sacha Lodge. A typical day at Sacha begins at sunrise or earlier, in order to take advantage of the cool morning hours when the rainforest's animals are most active. Each group may decide on its own wake-up and breakfast time, as well as the difficulty and duration of their morning outings. In the afternoon, visits begin at around 3:00 and often continue into the evening, when the nocturnal insect and frog chorus begins. Activities are spread out over a wide area and allow visitors to explore several distinct but equally fascinating habitats. Trails lead through pristine forest, where 150 foot kapok trees tower above and roots form huge buttresses to give trees support. Others follow strategically raised boardwalks in seasonally flooded forests, where walking on the ground would be nearly impossible during most of the year due to groundwater.



A favourite activity is to paddle dugout canoes along tannin-rich black-water creeks and lakes, where luxuriant lianas, orchids, bromeliads and palm trees thrive. And wherever an outing may lead the possibilities of spotting animals, from the tiny pygmy marmoset to the feared ocelot or puma are endless. During free time at the lodge, swimming and piranha fishing are also activities not to be missed. In the evening night walks and canoe trips are on offer with the aid of flashlights, which often reveal creatures seldom seen during daylight, such as Caimans (of the alligator family) and giant insects.

Day 6

Otavalo

Morning guided activity from Sacha Lodge. Transfer by motorised canoe and road to Coca Airport to meet your internal flight to Quito. Full day excursion to Otavalo market and the surrounding villages, and an opportunity to hike around the volcanic crater of Cuicocha. The Andean market town of Otavalo is the place to visit if you are looking for a set of pan pipes, a Panama hat, or an alpaca poncho. To the north of Quito, Otavalo comes alive every Saturday when the town is transformed into South America's largest open air market. Fresh fruit and vegetables are traded alongside Indian art,



hammocks, carvings and musical instruments. Artisans from across the continent pack the streets, and the town has a carnival feel to it.

Overnight accommodation at the Hacienda Pinsaqui. One of Ecuador's oldest properties, Hacienda Pinsaqui, oozes charm with its individual and atmospheric rooms and communal areas. Frequented by Simón Bolívar, (the liberator of Ecuador from the Spanish), the property is a living, breathing throwback to a time forgotten and makes for a unique and special stay.

Day 7

Quito

Morning at leisure from the Hacienda Pinsaqui. Afternoon return transfer to the Hotel Patio Andaluz for overnight accommodation.

Day 8

Galápagos

Private transfer from the Hotel Patio Andaluz to Quito Airport for your onward flight to the Galápagos. Transfer on arrival to your Galapagos vessel the MY Beluga. Re-built in 1994 the Beluga is a popular first class motor vessel which offers week long expeditions departing on Fridays. The 110 foot, fully air-conditioned vessel accommodates 16 passengers in double staterooms, each with private bathroom and shower. The Beluga is spacious and comfortable with plenty of deck space, and the friendly experienced



crew of 7 help retain a relaxed atmosphere both on aboard and ashore.

Afternoon excursion to North Seymour, one of the uplifted islands in the Galápagos Archipelago. The trail leads guests to the largest colony of Magnificent Frigate birds on Galapagos, as well as nesting Blue footed Boobies and Swallow Tailed Gulls. The sandy shore teems with Galápagos sea lions and marine iguanas. Vegetation is made up of cacti, Palo Santo trees and Salt Bushes.

Day 9

Española

Morning excursion to Punta Suarez on Española. One of the oldest islands in the archipelago, Espanola has one of the densest and most diverse concentrations of wildlife in the world. The area is famous for its Marine Iguanas with their unique copper-red patches, Sea Lions, Lava Lizards, Masked- and Blue-footed Boobies, Finches, Swallow Tailed Gulls and the endemic Long Billed Mocking Bird. When heavy swells are running, Punta Suarez is also the site of a spectacular blowhole, where thundering spray shoots thirty yards into the air. Back on board for lunch.



Afternoon excursion to Gardner Bay, located on the eastern shore, which has a magnificent beach frequented by a transient colony of Sea Lions and is a major nesting site for Marine Turtles. Around the small islets nearby, snorkellers will find many fish and possibly turtles and sharks. On a trail leading to the western tip of the island, you will pass the only nesting sites of Waved Albatross in the Galápagos. These huge birds nest here from April to December and represent the majority of the world's population.

Day 10

Floreana

Morning excursion to Punta Cormoran on Floreana, a peaceful, rolling island dotted with numerous extinct volcanic cones amidst a variety of scrubby vegetation. Its colourful human history goes back almost two centuries from marooned whalers to prisoners and colonists. There is an easy walk to see the flamingos that inhabit a brackish-water lagoon, as well as other birds such as ducks, stilts and sandpipers. There is great snorkelling from the beach, or nearby at the Devil's Crown, a submerged volcanic cone.



Afternoon excursion to Post Office Bay where you can keep alive an old tradition that goes back to whaling days, by leaving mail in a wooden barrel which is used as an improvised post box.

Day 11

Santa Cruz



Full day excursion to Santa Cruz, the second largest Island in the Galápagos and something of a hub for the archipelago. The small town of Puerto Ayora in the southwest of this large, round volcanic island is the economic center of the Islands, with the largest population of the four inhabited islands (approx. 10,000). Puerto Ayora is home to both the Galapagos National Park (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) and the Charles Darwin Research Station which is the centre of the great conservation efforts taking place in the park.

Morning excursion to the Giant Tortoise Breeding and Rearing Program run by the research station. Begun in Española in the 1970s the program has restored the population from just 16 tortosies to over 1000. There are hatchlings, juveniles and large, distinguished individuals such as Lonesome George, the last of his particular race, who may be 150 years old! Afternoon excursion to the Santa Cruz Highlands, where the sparse, dry coastal vegetation transitions to lush wet fields and forests overgrown with moss and lichens. At the Tortoise Reserve, you will have the chance to track and view these ancient creatures in their natural setting. The best times to see them here is during the cool wet season from June through December.

Day 12

Isabela



Full day excursion to Isabela. One of the youngest islands, Isabela is located on the western edge of the archipelago near the Galapagos Hot Spot. Approximately 1 million years old, the island was formed by the merger of 6 shield volcanoes 5 of which are still active, making it one of the most volcanically active places on earth. The Island's rich animal, bird, and marine life are incomparable and it is home to more wild tortoises than all the other islands. The nutrient rich Cromwell Current wells up on the west coast of the island, creating a feeding ground for fish, whales, dolphin and birds and these waters have long been known as the best place to see whales in the Galápagos.

Morning marine excursion to Elizabeth Bay on the west coast where Galápagos Hawks soar overhead, schools of Pompanos and Dorados swim by and you will see the largest concentration of Galápagos Penguins living in the islands. The cruise continues on to a red mangrove cove where Brown Pelicans, Flightless Cormorants, Spotted Eagle Rays, Golden Rays and Sea Lions are often seen. Afternoon excursion to Punta Moreno. Cruise along the beautiful rocky shores where Galápagos Penguins and shore birds are frequently seen. Disembark on the beach to walk a path which traverses the jagged black lava rock to crystal tide pools, some surrounded by mangroves, where you can see Pink Flamingos, Blue Herons, and Bahama Pintails. Brown Pelican can be seen nesting in the green leaves of the mangroves.



Day 13

Fernandina/Isabela



Morning excursion to Fernandina. The youngest of the islands at 700,000 years old, Fernandina is one of the most volcanically active and is also a pristine island, containing no introduced species. Morning excursion to Punta Espinosa on the north coast, a must-see due to the huge number of marine iguanas found on its volcanic shores. Galápagos Penguins and Flightless Cormorants are also frequently seen, as well as Pelicans, Sea Lions and Sally Light Foot Crabs.

Afternoon excursion to Urvína Bay on Isabela. Lying at the foot of Alcedo Volcano, Urvína Bay is one of the best and the most recent examples of Geological Uplift in the Galápagos. In 1954 the shoreline was uplifted nearly 15 feet and the coastline was driven 3/4 of a mile further out to sea, exposing giant coral heads and stranding marine life on the new shore. Wildlife in the bay includes Penguins, Noddy Terns and Marine Iguanas, as well as some of the largest Land Iguanas in the islands.



Day 14



Morning excursion to Santiago. A favourite island for pirates and whalers, Santiago has a long human history as well as some outstanding wildlife viewing. Disembark at Puerto Egas where Galápagos Fur Seals can be seen lying in pools cut into the lava cliffs. There is also a good chance of spotting the Galapagos Hawk, the Galapagos Dove and Vermillion Flycatchers. Tucked behind Espumilla Beach are salt water lagoons where Flamingos and White Cheeked Pintail Ducks can be found.

Santiago/Bartolomé

Afternoon excursion to Bartolomé. A desolate island with few plants, Bartolomé is the most visited and most photographed island in the Galápagos. The island consists of an extinct volcano and a variety of red, orange, green and glistening black volcanic formations. The best known of the island's features is Pinnacle Rock which has become one of the most photographed sights in the islands. Lying beside it are twin crescent shaped beaches. The northern one is a popular snorkelling site where you can swim with fish, Sea Lions and Galápagos penguins, whereas much larger animals can be found near the southern beach including Stingrays, Spotted Eagle Rays and sharks.

Day 15

Quito

Morning excursion to Black Turtle Cove on Santa Cruz. A red mangrove lagoon, Black Turtle Cove is a nursery for many White-tip, Reef, Black-tip and Scalloped Hammerhead sharks, as well as schools of both Golden and Spotted Eagle Rays. As its name suggests it is also a great location to observe Black Sea Turtles mating in the mirror calm waters. Group transfer to Baltra Airport to meet your return flight to Quito. Private transfer on arrival to the Hotel Patio Andaluz for overnight accommodation. Located in

Day 16

Depart

Private transfer from the Hotel Patio Andaluz to Quito airport. Depart Quito for Heathrow, flying with Iberia airlines (via Madrid)

Day 17

Arrive back in the UK.

Prices on request – this would vary according to the seasons and flight availability