

ECUADOR & GALAPAGOS FAMILY TOUR

Otavalo & the Avenue of the Volcanoes

13 days

Created on: 25 Apr, 2024

Day 1 Arrive in Quito

Arrive in Quito and transfer to our hotel. Quito (2788 m/9,200 feet) is Ecuador's lovely capital city, nestled against Pichincha Volcano high in the Andes.

Overnight in Quito.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Quito - Otavalo Valley - Ibarra

Today we journey north to the Otavalo Valley region.

In early years the Otavalo Valley was filled with farmers who raised crops in fertile lands where they lived. In the 14th century the Inca expansion reached north into the Otavalo area. The Caraquis who inhabited the area resisted the invaders. For 17 long years fierce fighting continued as the defiant Caraquis refused to be subjugated by the Incas. The Spanish arrived a few years after the Incas. They established a Hacienda system of workshops where Otavalenos were forced to work 15 hour days weaving fabrics.

Today this weaving tradition forms the basis of a lucrative industry that has allowed the Otavaleno indigenous peoples to join the world economy while retaining their traditional values and skills. During our time in the valley we will have a chance to visit with the local Otavalenos and see them working their craft. We visit a traditional home with adobe walls and visit with the owners who raise guinea pigs, a local delicacy.

Our hosteria is located nearby the colonial town of Ibarra (2121 m/7,000 feet), known as the "White City" since many of its houses are colonial style, red-tiled and whitewashed.

Overnight in Ibarra.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Ibarra - Avenue of Volcanoes - La Cienega

This morning we visit Otavalo to experience the market. This market is centred around 'Poncho Plaza'. All day long, the whirl of cotton candy machines, Andean pipe music, and Quichua, the native tongue derived from the Incan tongue, drift across the square. A blinding maze of coloured textiles spills from the square across the town.

We depart Otavalo to follow in the footsteps of the German scientist, Alexander von Humboldt, and rediscover what in 1802 he called the "Avenue of Volcanoes," a 325 km (202 mi) long valley between the major cordillera ranges. Massive and standing alone, the volcanoes provide brooding, snow-covered contrast to the green equatorial lushness. We see snow-capped summits, mystical brooks and rivers, terraced farmlands, small villages and fascinating cultures.

We'll take the Pan-American Highway southwards and take a side road to discover the impressive volcanism, flora, and birdlife that this national park protects. A visit to the Interpretation Center and the Limpiopungo Lake as well as a short easy hike will let us enjoy this natural wonder.

The area is also home to a number of exceptional haciendas, some of which date back to the 16th century. La Cienega Hacienda is located near the village of Lasso near the foot of Cotopaxi and has been witness to centuries of important events in the history of Ecuador.

Overnight at Hosteria La Cienega (Lasso area).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 La Cienega - Devil's Bowl - Banos

Today we continue our journey to Banos. This small town's elevation gives it an extremely agreeable climate and the surrounding mountainsides are brilliant green against the white summit of the Volcano Tungurahua. En route we have a short walk to view one of the most impressive waterfalls in South America, the Devil's Bowl.

The word Banos means "baths" and, as the name indicates, the highlight is the numerous hot spring baths in the area. Today we have opportunity to visit the hot springs as well as wander the streets and market of this picturesque town. You can also hike into the nearby hillsides, along farmers' donkey trails through fields of corn, passion-fruit, and various other local products. A must-see is the Basilica dedicated to the Virgin of the Holy Water, credited with performing many miracles in the Banos area.

Overnight in Banos.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Banos - Riobamba

After lunch in Banos we travel through open farmland flowing over the high ridges of the Western Andes. On arrival in Riobamba we will have a walking tour including the cathedral and the restored 1920's era Post Office, with free time for independent wanderings.

Overnight in Riobamba.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Riobamba - Chimborazo Reserve - Quito

We depart Riobamba and head for Chimborazo Reserve for a scenic drive around the base of this almost perfectly-conical dormant volcano. Chimborazo (6310m/20,833 ft), the highest summit in Ecuador, is the gem of the reserve along with the neighbouring Carihuairazo Volcano. In the Indian language, Chimborazo means "mountain of snow". It is an enormous mass of overwhelming scale. Alexander Von Humboldt made an unsuccessful attempt to climb the mountain in 1802, and believed it to be the highest mountain in the world. This distinction lasted until the discovery of Mt. Everest fifty years later. Chimborazo was finally climbed by Edward Whimper in 1880. The Reserve of Chimborazo was created in October of 1987 to protect the extensive moors, the flora and the fauna of the region.

We will make several photo stops on our drive, and enjoy this starkly beautiful volcanic landscape. We have a chance to see a vicuna, an endangered species. Vicuna are the smallest of the Camelid family standing at just 2ft 8"-3ft 7" at the shoulder. They are extremely refined and delicate to look at, cinnamon in colour with an apron of long white hair on their chest. The vicuna produces one of the finest fibres of any animal in the world. We also visit an interesting indigenous community at the foot of the mountain where they have been successful in creating a responsible travel and tourism industry.

We continue north to Quito for our overnight.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Quito: City Tour

Today we tour old Spanish Colonial Quito, preserved by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. As we enter the streets of Old Quito we step into the past, surrounded by centuries-old architecture. We stop at the commanding Legislative Palace, whose murals record Ecuador's history.

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We will see Quito's most beautiful religious buildings, including the cathedral, the Independence Plaza, San Francisco Church, and visit one of Quito's most impressive religious buildings, La Compania church, whose ornate facade and solid gold altars make it one of the most famous of South American churches. We visit the famous Panecillo Hill with its towering winged statue of the Virgin of the Apocalypse with views of north and south of Quito and the surrounding mountains.

This afternoon we travel 22 km (14 miles) north of Quito to the Equator line monument, known as the "middle of the world," where you can stand with one foot in the Northern and the other in the Southern Hemisphere. We also visit the excellent on-site ethnographic museum with exhibits pertaining to the many indigenous peoples of Ecuador.

PLEASE NOTE: Due to logistical reasons, this is a "floating day" that may occur at a different point of our program.

Overnight in Quito.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Quito: City Tour

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 9 Quito - The Galapagos / San Cristobal

This morning we fly from Quito to San Cristobal Island and board our cruise vessel for our exploration of the unique and beautiful Galapagos Islands.*

An archipelago of 12 large and several hundred smaller volcanic islands occupying a 4800 sq km (3,000 sq mile) area about 1000 km (620 miles) west of Ecuador, the Galapagos Islands have become one of the world's premier adventure travel destinations. Over the course of your visit, you'll enjoy up-close views of unusual, specially-adapted animals, plants and terrains including sea lions, tortoises, iguanas, land and sea birds, volcanic landscapes, unusual cacti and vegetation. Little has changed about the islands since Charles Darwin's visit in 1835 to "this little world within itself" inspired his first theories of evolution. Nearly the entire archipelago is a natural sanctuary where you'll have thrilling encounters with some of the world's last completely untamed wildlife that has never learned to fear the presence of humans.

We will be navigating the Galapagos on board the M/V Galapagos Legend, a 110-passenger luxury expedition ship totally converted in 2001 and recently renovated. The M/V Galapagos Legend has all-new passenger accommodations with 1800 sq m of social areas and was built with marine certified materials qualifying with Safety of Life at Sea specifications. All cabins are booked in "outside" Junior Suite cabins with plenty of space for luggage in the wardrobe closet. Private bathrooms feature hot and cold water, shower, and a hair dryer. Also aboard, a highly-trained crew, 24 hour physician, and naturalist multilingual guides. An auditorium for conferences, spacious social areas, dining room, 24 hour coffee bar, swimming pool and sun decks, observation platforms, cocktail bars, long distance calls, fully air-conditioned.

Upon arrival on San Cristobal, you will transfer to the ship, have lunch, and embark immediately for the Interpretation Center & Tijeretas Hill on San Cristobal (dry landing).

Dry landing in Puerto Baquerizo Moreno, capital of the Galapagos Islands. Passengers visit the Interpretation Centre, an excellent place to learn about Natural History in the Galapagos. The Museum of Natural History displays information on the volcanic origins of the islands, their remoteness from the continent, ocean currents, climate, the arrival of the different species and their colonization, among other points of interest. The human history is also showcased, chronologically narrating the most significant events related to the discovery and colonization of the islands.

The Tijeretas Hill optional activity involves a high intensity walk amidst beautiful landscapes and a magnificent view at the foot of a frigate-bird nesting colony.

Return to ship for passenger welcome and briefing; there is a presentation of the crew. At this time a safety drill is practised.

Free time on board. After dinner a guide's briefing on next day activities in the auditorium.

PLEASE NOTE: Most of our dates will operate itinerary "D" (shown in the version), except for January and the earlier October dates, which

will operate on itinerary "B". Due to annual maintenance, the Legend will be replaced by the MV Coral (same ownership) for our January 2019 date. You may visit www.galapagos.com for more information on the itineraries and vessels.

* The cruise portion of this itinerary has been provided provided by the cruise operator and should be taken as guidance only. Last minute operation considerations and national park policies can result in alterations and deviations from this schedule, sometimes at late notice. Such changes are the prerogative of the cruise operator over which Adventures Abroad has no control.

Overnight Galapagos Cruise.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 10 Galapagos Cruise / Gardner Bay, Gardner & Osborn Islets (Española)

Wet landing on a beautiful white coral sand beach guarded by a colony of sea lions. There are no trails, so we stay along the shore where we can spot Galapagos hawks, American Oystercatchers, Galapagos Ground Doves, Hood mockingbirds, Yellow Warblers, lava lizards, marine iguanas, and three species of Darwin's finches: a subspecies of the Large Cactus Finch, which is similar to the large ground finch, the Small Ground Finch and the Warbler Finch, another endemic subspecies. Swimming and snorkeling offer a great variety of Galapagos marine wildlife: king angelfish, Creole fish, damsel fish, parrot-fish, manta rays, and white-tipped reef sharks.

Return to ship; the crew will welcome you with canapes followed by lunch.

PM - Dry landing. An island of geological interest, we explore volcanic formations and a riveting wildlife: large sea lion colonies and seabirds including Espanola mockingbird, Nazca Boobies and the spectacular Red-billed Tropic-bird. You will also encounter marine iguanas, lava lizards, and the colourful Sally Lightfoot Crabs.

A somewhat lengthy hike will bring you among Nazca and Blue-footed Boobies, right up to nesting grounds that sometimes overlap the trail. Other birding favourites include Galapagos Dove, Galapagos Hawk, Swallow-tailed Gulls and the world's largest colony of Waved Albatross, an unequivocal highlight during mating season (May-December). Admire the island's dramatic backdrop, featuring the famous Soplador, a seaward blowhole that shoots water some 23 m (75 ft) in the air.

Return to ship; the crew will welcome you with canapes. Free time on board. Guides briefing on next day activities.

Overnight Galapagos cruise.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 11 Galapagos Cruise / Post Office & Cormorant Point (Floreana)

Wet landing on a beautiful white coral sand beach guarded by a colony of sea lions. There are no trails, so we stay along the shore where we can spot Galapagos hawks, American Oystercatchers, Galapagos Ground Doves, Hood mockingbirds, Yellow Warblers, lava lizards, marine iguanas, and three species of Darwin's finches: a subspecies of the Large Cactus Finch, which is similar to the large ground finch, the Small Ground Finch and the Warbler Finch, another endemic subspecies. Swimming and snorkeling offer a great variety of Galapagos marine wildlife: king angelfish, Creole fish, damsel fish, parrot-fish, manta rays, and white-tipped reef sharks.

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Return to ship; the crew will welcome you with canapes. Free time on board. Guides briefing on next day activities.

Overnight Galapagos cruise.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 12 Galapagos / Daphne - Quito

We circumnavigate the islet of Daphne, an eroded tuff cone formation that was created by successive volcanic activity, for an opportunity to see Darwin's finches, Blue-footed Boobies, Nazca Boobies, Red-billed Tropicbirds, Swallow-tailed Gulls, Brown Noddies.

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Return to the M/V Galapagos Legend, check out* and depart to the airport for our flight to Quito (via a stop in Guayaquil).

* PLEASE NOTE: As an exception to our general policy regarding the inclusion of tips in our tour pricing, gratuities for the ship's crew are NOT included in tour price. (We have found that trying to pre-pay tips on your behalf is not practical, for a number of reasons). Accordingly, we suggest that you allow approximately USD 90-100 total per passenger for satisfactory service.

Overnight in Quito.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 13 Departure

Departure from Quito.

BUEN VIAJE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast