

ECUADOR

Andes & the Galapagos

15 days

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Day 1 Arrival in Quito

Arrive in Quito and transfer to our hotel. Welcome to Ecuador!

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: 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. 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.

Overnight in Quito.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 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. In Otavalo city, we'll have a chance to wander through the colourful handicraft stalls.

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 4 Ibarra - Avenue of Volcanoes - La Cienega

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 bird-life 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 5 La Cienega - Cotopaxi - Pillaro - Banos

Today we continue our journey to Banos. En route we will visit Cotopaxi volcano, where we can have an interesting walk in the Paramo (moorlands), enjoy beautiful views, and learn more about the flora and fauna or the area.

We continue our journey, stopping in Pillaro where we will visit a traditional workshop of masks that are used in the Pillaro Devil parade, an important cultural expression of the local indigenous people.

We arrive in Banos, a small town whose elevation gives it an extremely agreeable climate and the surrounding mountainsides are brilliant green against the white summit of the Volcano Tungurahua. 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 6 Banos - Devil's Bowl - Riobamba

Before departing Banos, we'll have a short walk to view one of the most impressive waterfalls in South America, the Devil's Bowl. At El Manto de la Novia we can experience a cable car ride over the Pastaza River Canyon.

After lunch we'll travel through open farmland flowing over the high ridges of the Western Andes to Riobamba (2750m/9,035 ft).

Riobamba is a small, charming Andean city with colonial architecture, cobble-stone streets, impressive plazas, and a fascinating market. The Monasterio de las Conceptas, Parq The very heart of Riobamba has a small-town feel, and the feeling is even intensified by a large number of indigenous people strolling around Riobamba dressed in their traditional clothes.

Overnight in Riobamba.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Riobamba - Ingapirca - Cuenca

Today our journey continues by road to Cuenca, detouring to visit the Archaeological Complex of Ingapirca, the best-preserved and most important Inca site in Ecuador. Though not on the same scale as, say, Machu Picchu, the ruins include a large oval construction once used for ritual and astronomical purposes. Just outside the ruins, the Museo Sitio de Ingapirca displays a skeleton, tools, and other artifacts recovered from the area. We'll also visit a local market, see the first church established in Ecuador, tour the historic town of Alausi, and enjoy views of Devils Nose Mountain.

Once the site of an Inca settlement, Cuenca today is considered Ecuador's most beautiful city. Its historical connection with Spain is marked by narrow cobblestone streets, quaint parks, and romantic plazas. Charming adobe houses, wrought iron balconies, and religious art treasures capture the spirit of centuries long past. Cuenca, almost hidden away in a southern valley, was isolated until recent times; it wasn't until 1960 that paved roads were built to Quito and Guayaquil. Today's Cuenca is surrounded by small villages whose citizens create intricately detailed jewelry, beautiful ceramics, and masterfully-designed hand-woven shawls.

You'll have time to wander the quaint streets in the compact centre of this charming town before reconvening for our evening meal.

Overnight in Cuenca.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Cuenca: Walking Tour & Museo del Banco Central

This morning we have a leisurely walking tour of Cuenca along the main plaza, Parque Calderon, and enter the old Cathedral, renovated for the visit of Pope John Paul in 1985. We also see the Monastery of El Carmen and visit La Inmaculada Concepcion while strolling the cobbled streets.

This afternoon we visit the Museo del Banco Central, which contains a permanent collection of black and white photos of 19th and early 20th century Cuenca, as well as displays of art and archaeological pieces, and ethnographic dioramas.

□□ We also visit a Panama hat factory. In 1835 Manuel Alfaro, a Spanish entrepreneur, arrived in the port of Guayaquil in the province of Guayas. He settled in nearby Montecristi and quickly realized the economic potential of the toquilla hat, setting up his own chain of production from the straw plantations to circuits of weavers. His hats were soon being exported from the ports of Guayaquil and Manta to Panama, which was quickly becoming an important centre and staging post for international trade and travel. Here Alfaro opened a commercial centre selling his hats, cacao and pearls, thus beginning the association of the Ecuadorian toquilla hat with Panama.

Overnight in Cuenca.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Cuenca: At Leisure

Today is yours to explore and experience this charming town on your own.

□ This city, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, has once been named the best city in which to retire by Travel and Leisure magazine; indeed, these days more than 8,000 US and Canadian citizens make Cuenca their home.

□ Overnight in Cuenca (due to the informal nature of the day, and for a break from the group meal dynamic, we don't include your evening meal today).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast

Day 10 Cuenca - Cajas National Park - Guayaquil

Today we travel by road to Guayaquil via Cajas National Park.

The park contains hundreds of clear, cold lakes, streams, and rivers. Weather-permitting (which can be highly changeable at this altitude), the park can provide an excellent opportunity for us to hike the grassland of Paramo Region or visit a forest of poleypsis trees, the highest altitude tree in the world. Recently the park's management introduced llamas and alpacas as part of a breeding program to re-introduce these animals to the southern highlands. Keep your eyes peeled for the many bird species that make the park their home, especially for the silhouette of a soaring (and extremely rare) Andean Condor, which can sometimes be spotted here riding the thermal up-drafts.

We continue to the coast with a stop at a cocoa plantation to learn about its cultivation and the production of Ecuadorian chocolate.

Our destination is the main port city of Ecuador, known as a gateway to Pacific beaches and the Galapagos Islands. Stretching along the Guayas River is the waterfront Simón Bolívar promenade, home to La Rotonda monument.

Overnight in Guayaquil.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Guayaquil - Fly to the Galapagos / San Cristobal Airport

Departure from Guayaquil to San Cristobal in a 2-hour flight. Upon arrival, passengers are picked up at the airport by our naturalist guides and taken on a ten-minute bus drive to the pier to board the M/V Galapagos Legend.

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.

AFTERNOON - Interpretation Center & Tijeretas Hill (San Cristobal Island)

Dry landing (no need to step into water upon landing). The interpretation center is full of interesting information and offers the perfect overview to the formation of Galapagos, its significance in the world, threats and conservation efforts. Followed by a hike to Frigatebird Hill (Cerro Tijeretas) we will have great looks at both species of frigatebird, with the bonus of a beautiful view of the bay below.

Difficulty level: easy /moderate
Type of terrain: flat/stairs/rocky
Duration: 1-hour visit/1-hour walk

Return to ship for passenger welcome and briefing; there is a presentation of the crew. At this time a safety drill is practiced. Free time on board. After dinner a guide's briefing on next day activities in the auditorium.

* 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 12 Galapagos Cruise / Gardner Bay, Gardner & Osborn Islets (Española Island)

Wet landing (you will have to step into shallow water and walk to shore - see your pre-trip notes for suggestions re footwear). One of the most stunning beaches in all of Galapagos, the long, white, sandy beach, lapped by turquoise waters is home to a colony of Galapagos sea lions, indifferent to the humans that walk amongst them. The Hood mockingbirds, endemic to this particular island, will be eager to inspect the visitors and satisfy their innate curiosity. Darwin's finches may also join the throng including the reclusive warbler finch. We can also snorkel here from the beach, in the shallows of the bay.

Difficulty level: easy

Type of terrain: sandy

Duration: 1-hour walk / 1-hour snorkeling

□

Return to ship; lunch.

PM – Suarez Point (Española Island)

Dry landing. One of the highlight visits of the trip. Punta Suarez seems to have everything – a naturalist's paradise. A slew of marine iguanas and sea lions greet us at the landing site from where our walk continues with close encounters of boobies, endemic lizards, gulls and even a dramatic blow hole. The oldest extant island in the archipelago it is our only opportunity to commune with the endemic waved albatross during their breeding season between April and December. With luck, we can watch their complex courtship display.

Difficulty level: demanding

Type of terrain: rocky

Duration: 2½-hour walk

Return to ship; Free time on board. Guides briefing on next day activities.

□

Overnight Galapagos cruise.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 13 Galapagos Cruise / Floreana Island

Wet landing. A very short walk from the beach leads us to the famous Post Office Barrel. Claimed to have been first setup in 1793 by Captain James Colnett it remains the oldest functioning "post office" in the Pacific. The system was that whalers and fur sealers would leave addressed letters in the barrel to be picked up by homeward bound colleagues. In the spirit of maintaining tradition visitors today will often take letters and hand-deliver them in their home countries.

Difficulty level: easy

Type of terrain: sandy

Duration: 30-minute walk / 1-hour snorkeling

□

Return on board, lunch.

PM – Cormorant Point / Devil's Crown / Champion (Floreana Island)

Wet landing. On arriving, the observant visitor will notice that olivine, a volcanic crystal, has proffered a subtle green hue on the dark beach. Our walk takes us past island-endemic Scalesia plants to a large, shallow, lagoon often inhabited by a variable number of shockingly pink greater flamingoes. We continue through a forest of palo santo trees to arrive at a powdery white beach, a nesting area of green turtles. As we paddle barefoot in the shallow water we will spot diamond stingrays and white-tipped reef sharks. This coral-sand beach marks the end of our trail, and we head back to the olivine beach we landed on, to swim or snorkel amongst sea turtles, reef fish, sea lions and, on a good day, white-tipped reef sharks. A small colony of penguins resides on Floreana and can sometimes be observed as well.

One of the favorite snorkeling sites in the islands. Devil's Crown, an eroded volcanic cone, is home to an abundance of fish and marine animals. We will swim with big schools of yellow-tailed surgeonfish, salemas and creole fish and with luck may spot turtles, spotted eagle rays, parrotfish, and even hammerhead sharks! The jagged écrowní is a roosting area for boobies, noddies, tropicbirds, and frigates.

A truly magical place to snorkel. We would expect to see here green turtles, harmless white-tipped reef sharks, an impressive diversity and abundance of fish as well as some playful sea lions often approaching very close, itching to show off their prowess in the water. Champion

Islet also happens to be the last remaining home of the island-endemic Floreana mockingbird which we may be lucky enough to see from our pangas.

Difficulty level: easy

Type of terrain: sandy & flat

Duration: 1-hour walk / 1-hour snorkeling

□

Overnight Galapagos cruise.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 14 Galapagos Cruise / Dragon Hill & Punta Bowditch (Santa Cruz Island)

AM Dragon Hill

Arriving to a small lava dock our first encounters are with marine iguanas that blend in with the dark rock. As we walk past large prickly pear cacti we arrive at one end of a long sickle-shaped beach with Dragon Hill standing in the distance. Our walk takes up on a circular path, past a shallow lake where flamigos come to drink. 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 iguanas rest and burrow.

Difficulty level: moderate

Type of terrain: rocky

Duration: 2-hour walk

PM Punta Bowditch

Feel the indescribable feeling of being where no one else has. Relax on a powdery beach, snorkel around turquoise water islets and hike beside salt pools and dried white corals.

Difficulty level: easy

Type of terrain: sandy

Duration: 30-min walk/one hour snorkelling

□

Overnight Galapagos cruise.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 15 Galapagos / Highlands Tortoise Reserve (Santa Cruz Island) - Fly to Quito - Departure

Highlands Tortoise Reserve (Santa Cruz Island)

In the central highlands of Santa Cruz Island we have our best opportunity to interact at close quarters with totally 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.

Difficulty level: easy

Type of terrain: flat & sometimes muddy

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

Baltra Airport:

After the visit, passengers will be transferred to the airport for their return flight to the mainland.

□

Departure from Quito (if you are booking your own flights, please do not book anything from Quito that departs any earlier than 8pm).

BUEN VIAJE!

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* 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast