TOUR CODE

EQ7

ADVENTURESABROAD

ECUADOR & GALAPAGOS

Otavalo, the Avenue of the Volcanoes & Cuenca

18 days

Updated 01/11/2013

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. Meal plan: 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 it houses are colonial style, red-tiled and whitewashed.

Overnight in Ibarra. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 ***Ibarra - Otavalo Market - Avenue of Volcanoes - La Cienega***

This morning we visit Otavalo to experience the market. This market is centered around 'Poncho Plaza'. All day long, the whir 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.

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. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 ***La Cienega - 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. Meal plan: 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. Meal plan: 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 neighboring 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.

Overnight in Quito. Meal plan: 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. 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 programme.

Overnight in Quito. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *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 December 2001. 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 'superior' class with plenty of space for luggage in the wardrobe closet (Junior Suite cabin upgrades available; view cabins on www.gogalapagos.com). 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 Center, 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 frigatebird nesting colony.

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.

PLEASE NOTE: You may visit www.gogalapagos.com for more information on the cruise and vessel. Most of our trips will be doing itinerary "D" -- exceptions are P29 & P30 in Sept/Oct 2013, and tour codes EQ, EP & PQ in early October 2013 only, when the cruise will do itinerary "B."

Overnight Galapagos cruise. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 9 *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 (Geospiza fuliginosa) of the Large Cactus Finch, which is similar to the large ground finch, the Small Ground Finch (Geospiza fuliginosa) and the Warbler Finch (Certhidea Olivacea), another endemic subspecies. Swimming and snorkeling offer a great variety of Galapagos marine wildlife: king angelfish, Creole fish, damsel fish, parrotfish, 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 Tropicbird. You will also encounter marine iguanas, lava lizards, and the colorful 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 favorites 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. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 10 *Galapagos Cruise / Post Office & Cormorant Point (Floreana)*

Wet landing. Located on the north side of Floreana, the bay is so-named because in 1793 Captain James Colnett installed a wooden barrel which served as an informal post office for sailors passing through, who would take letters with them to their destinations. Today, our visitors continue the tradition by placing unstamped postcards inside the barrel that should reach their
destinations for free. It can take weeks, months, even years, not arrive at all, or even arrive before you!

We may also encounter Darwin's finches, Yellow Warbler and lava lizards. Great snorkeling opportunities with Green Pacific Sea Turtles as well, this island is best known for its endemic vegetation: Scalesia villosa, Lecocarpus pinnatifidus, and Galapagos milkwort. Snorkelers can practice on the main beach among playful sea lions.

Return on board, the crew will welcome you with canapes. Lunch.

PM – Cormorant Point (Floreana). Wet landing on an olivine green sand beach. We hike from the black mangrove beds to a brackish lagoon, which usually holds one of the largest flamingo populations in the Galapagos. This island features some endemic plants such as Scalesia villosa, white and black mangrove, and holy stick. The trail continues to a beautiful white-sand beach, one of the most important nesting sites of Green Pacific Sea Turtles. It is important to avoid walking in the water due to the Sting Rays that may be hiding in the sand, which can be
dangerous if accidentally stepped on. From the beach one can spot sea turtles, Blue-footed Boobies plunging into the water, and small reef sharks floating along the shoreline in search of food.

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.

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

Overnight Galapagos cruise. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 11 *Galapagos Cruise / El Garrapatero & Charles Darwin Research Station (Santa Cruz)*

El Garrapatero is a wide bay with multiple sandy beaches. Behind the beach is an area with a fresh water lake where you can come across pink flamingos, herons, mockingbirds, White-cheeked Pintail ducks, sally lightfoot crabs, oystercatchers and occasionally marine iguanas can be found.

PM - Dry landing. We visit the Station where the Galapagos giant tortoise breeding program takes place and you will have the opportunity to meet Lonesome George, the last surviving specimen of his species and symbol of our efforts to preserve the fragile Galapagos environment. It is an excellent place for visitors to be photographed with them. Admire a prickly-pear cactus forest and
a variety Darwin's finches and other land birds. The Darwin Station also works providing environmental education to communities and schools within the islands, and to tourists visiting the Galapagos Islands. You will also have some free time to visit the town and shop for souvenirs.

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

Overnight Galapagos cruise. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 12 *Galapagos / Daphne - Guayaquil*

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.

Return to the M/V Galapagos Legend, check out* and depart to the airport for our flight to Guayaquil.

Upon arrival at Guayaquil, we have a sightseeing tour of this busy, vibrant port city. Guayaquil is Ecuador's largest city and is the focus of the nation's economy. Its economic power is due in large part to its location at the convergence of the Daule and Babahoyo rivers, just 70 kilometers from the Pacific Ocean. After suffering years of neglect from bureaucrats and corrupt officials, Guayaquil has taken its future into its own hands. Fueled by a newly discovered

interest in attracting tourists and a greater commitment to small enterprise and entrepreneurs, Guayaquil is realizing its historically proven potential. Guayaquil renaissance isn't complete but signs of improvement are everywhere.

We visit the downtown of Guayaquil where we will see the Hemiciclo de la Rotonda where a great marble and bronze statue is erected, commemorating the meeting between two great liberators in America: Simon Boliivar and Jose de San Martin. A walk through the historic district of Las Penas gives one a glimpse into Guayaquil's past. We also visit El Malecon, one of the most important civic-touristic-commercial center of South America. We finish with a view of the Guayas River.

* 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 does NOT work, for a number of practical reasons). Accordingly, we suggest that you allow approximately USD 100 per person for satisfactory service.

Overnight in Guayaquil. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 13 *Guayaquil - Cajas National Park - Cuenca*

This morning we travel by private coach to Cuenca, over the continental divide and via Cajas National Park. En route we stop at a cocoa plantation and learn about its cultivation and the production of Ecuadorian chocolate.

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 polelypsis trees, the highest altitude tree in the world. Recently the park's management have brought in 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 updrafts.

Continue to Cuenca.

Overnight in Cuenca. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 14 *Cuenca: Walking Tour & Museo del Banco Central*

Once the site of an Inca settlement, Cuenca (2648 m / 8,738 feet) 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 Cuenca, Ecuador's third largest city, is surrounded by small villages whose citizens create intricately detailed jewelry, beautiful ceramics, and masterfully designed hand-woven shawls.

This morning we have a leisurely walking tour 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 realised 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. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 15 *Cuenca - Ingapirca - Cuenca*

A scenic mountain drive brings us to Ecuador's most important Inca site, Ingapirca, located in the Canar Valley, but still at 3165 m (10,445 feet). En route we travel through the beautiful countryside worked by the Canari indigenous people for centuries.

On arrival we visit the site museum and the site itself, where we can admire the Inca's superb mortarless stonework of the Temple of the Sun. Ingapirca is a monumental complex, built up on top of other Canari ruins some 500 years ago by the Inca empire. On top of the elliptical platform was built a structure made of well finished stones. The temple is surrounded by a labyrinth on one side, other walls, terraces and chambers in ruins, and a cliff.

Return to Cuenca.

Overnight in Cuenca. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 16 *Cuenca - Quito*

Today we fly from Cuenca back to Quito.

Overnight in Quito. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 17 *Quito - Mindo Cloud Forest - Quito*

Today we have an excursion to Mindo, located on the west side of Quito in a deep valley surrounded by native Andean forest, represents vegetation of three different life zones, from the low subtropical forest to the cloud mountain forest and the high paramo. The drive from Quito takes approximately 2 hours. Due to the difficult access, the ridges around the valley of Mindo have not been used for agricultural purposes and the forest remains almost untouched.

We arrive at a local hosteria, where you will have the opportunity to enjoy easy walks through an ecosystem that contains one of the largest varieties of birds and plant life in the world.

Return to Quito.

Overnight in Quito. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 18 *Departure*

Departure from Quito.

BUEN VIAJE! Meal plan: Breakfast.