

ECUADOR & THE GALAPAGOS

An 'Experiential Adventure'

11 days

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Day 1 Arrival in Quito

Arrival in Quito - 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 - Transfer to Hacienda

After breakfast, we walk through the landmarks of Quito's colonial, historical downtown, a UNESCO World Heritage site. We meet local artisans and immerse ourselves in the city's vibe. The walk begins at the San Francisco market, where the chef of Restaurant La Purisima will be joining us. A very good story teller about local Andean products, unique Ecuadorian condiments, colonial time granny recipes, Chef enjoys sharing his passion. At the market, we'll also discover traditional Andean healing techniques.

We continue our exploration of the city's historical center as we walk towards La Ronda, full of art and ancestral trades, handcrafts, tin sculptures, ceramics, jewelry, Escuela Quiteña paintings and sweets shops. La Ronda is your opportunity to live and shop like a local.

The group will have lunch at Restaurant La Purisima, located at the entrance of one of the first theaters in Quito. Bolivar Theater has been an emblematic piece of art due to its architecture and recently reopened after refurbishing jobs. Lunch will be arranged in a private area where we will get an Andean cocktail demo and our chef will delight us with dishes that feature traditional cuisine with a fusion of contemporary techniques.

We continue our journey directly to the highlands for our hacienda stay.

Please note that we tend to alternate between two hacienda properties on this tour due to considerations related to ultimate group make-up and size and room availability at the time that our tour is confirmed. We may be accommodated at Hacienda Zuleta or Hacienda Mirage, both of which offer the same level of accommodation quality and a similar highlands experience.

Hacienda Zuleta is an impressive 4,000 acre (2000 hectare) colonial working farm belonging to the family of the late Galo Plaza Lasso, former president of Ecuador, for over 100 years.

Hacienda Mirage is perched on a hillside, where you will discover a hidden corner of Ecuador and a hotel imbued with the native flavour of the Andes. The property has stunning gardens and beautiful views of the mountains.

For full information on both options, please refer to our website.

Overnight at a Hacienda.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 3 Andean Hacienda

This morning we tour our hotel property and learn about its history and about the flora and fauna of the region. After this informative orientation, the day is yours with an array of possibilities and optional activities -- or just relaxing and soaking in the atmosphere.

Hikers/walkers may choose to explore a variety of routes through idyllic pastures, aromatic woods, and winding mountain trails, where soaring condors and Andean bears make their home and volcanoes rise on every side.

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Fully-outfitted horesback riding is also an option, as is a carriage ride, bird watching, cycling, or just simply exploring the grounds with their attractive gardens and observing the daily activities of a colonial-era working farm.

As you might expect, the hacienda also offers a unique gastronomical experience, with mouth-watering, authentic Ecuadorean cuisine, sourced from the farm and made from family recipes.

Specially prepared three-course meals, full of ingredients sourced mainly from the Hacienda itself: freshly caught rainbow trout, melt-in-your-mouth cheese, and organic produce from the gardens (vegetarian, vegan, gluten free, and lactose intolerant menu options are also offered).

Overnight at Hacienda.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 4 Hacienda - Otavalo Market - Quito (Airport Area)

Today we check-out and proceed to visit the indigenous market of Otavalo, famous around the world for their quality weaving. 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 and 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.

Due to our early morning flight to the Galapagos tomorrow, we return to the Quito for dinner and overnight (airport area hotel).

Overnight in Quito.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 5 Quito Airport - Fly to San Cristobal, Galapagos Islands

Early this morning we transfer to the Quito Airport; flight to the Galapagos Islands (possibly via Guayaquil).

After a morning flight to San Cristobal Island, we'll be greeted at the airport and head to our hotel. After lunch and a quick introduction, we begin our journey at the Galapagos Interpretation Center to learn about the unique wildlife, geology, history, and social dynamics of the Galapagos.

After our visit, we hike to Tijeretas along naturally formed trails of lava rocks. The path is surrounded by native plants such as Galapagos cotton, palo santo, acacia, and cacti. Along the way your guide will help you spot and identify blue footed boobies, frigate birds, pelicans, herons, gulls, warblers, mockingbirds, and finches in the vegetation and sea cliffs. Our guides interpret this amazing flora and fauna in the context of the island's natural history. We also enjoy scenic views of the rugged coastline and the tranquil town of Puerto Baquerizo Moreno.

We cool off from our hike with a refreshing snorkeling session at postcard-worthy Carola Beach, surrounded by sea turtles, sea lions, and marine iguanas, as we bask in the setting sun.

After dinner, we'll explore the friendly, laid-back beach town and stroll down the boardwalk to visit the neighboring colony of Galapagos sea lions.

Overnight on San Cristobal Island.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 6 San Cristobal: Northern Coast

Today we explore the northern coast by boat. We visit either Leon Dormido (Kicker Rock), Punta Pitt or Cerro Brujo (the visiting site depends on the week day and the Galapagos National Park regulations). On our exploration trip we make sure to search the nearby coves and cliffs for sea turtles, sea lions, frigate birds, blue-footed boobies, and Nazca boobies. Here we have the chance to get up close and personal with sea lions in their favorite playground. If you choose to snorkel, we might see eagle rays, golden rays, Galapagos sharks, starfish, clams, and thousands of tropical fish. If we're lucky, we may even come across hammerhead sharks.

Our hosts on board will prepare a delicious "Ceviche", a typical Ecuadorian lunch. After a full day spent exploring the seas, we head back to the hotel for dinner and a well-earned rest.

Overnight on San Cristobal.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 7 San Cristobal - Isabela

After breakfast, we say goodbye to San Cristobal with a quick small plane ride to Isabela Island.*

Isabela is the largest island in the Galapagos and is still being formed by six active shield volcanoes. Isabela remains one of the most volcanically active spots on the planet. Upon arrival, we take short boat ride from town to Tintoreras, where we'll walk and have a chance to snorkel. These calm waters are the home of sea lions, sea turtles, marine iguanas, rays and penguins. Tintoreras offers a high concentration of wildlife that will amaze you.

After going around on the boat and walking on Tintoreras itself, we can snorkel for a chance to marine life abundant in this bay. Enjoy lunch at a local restaurant in town.

We then set out on one of the most scenic walks in the Galapagos. Our hike takes us along immaculate beaches, into an alluring poison apple forest and a lava tube cave, and through brooding mangroves and brackish lagoons.

* There is a strict 12kg / 25 lb per person checked luggage limit, plus carry-on. Excess luggage can be securely stored in Quito.

Overnight on Isabela.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 8 Isabela: Concha Perla & Flamingo Lagoon

This site is in Puerto Villamil, only a few meters from the El Embarcadero Port. A natural rock wall forms a circular concave bay-like structure that fills with ocean water according to the tides. It is a beautiful place in the bay of crystalline waters that is perfect for snorkeling. Dive in and explore these gorgeous waters while swimming with a variety of fish, sea turtles, penguins, and more. You can do snorkeling, diving or hiking in this area.

Our guide will take us to visit the Famingos' Lagoon. This is a approx. 2km trail where we will have explanation of the vegetation and geology of this young Island, Isabela Island. Arriving to the Flamingo lagoon we might be able to see flamingos feeding in this lake. This is an artificial lake, due to the excavation for construction the lake was made up by the rain.

Overnight on Isabela.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 9 Isabela: The Tunnels & Tortoise Breeding Centre

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After breakfast, we will visit a unique place in the islands, “Los Tuneles”. Our path starts on board our speed boat on a 45 minutes trip. Our experienced captain will securely lead us across the waves that normally hide this treasure. The Tunnels were formed millions year ago when rivers of liquid lava ran across the island reaching the coast shore. The cold water froze their superficial layer isolating the interior while liquid lava kept flowing into the sea. When the eruption finished, a hollow structure was formed and its wall later broke allowing water to come inside and creating a tunnel.

Our guide will join us along hundreds of tunnels while we snorkel and discover the marine life such as sharks, lobsters, penguins, sea lions, boobies, marine turtles among other endemic species from Galapagos. A snack will be served on board our boat. If lucky enough, we will have the chance to witness giant mantarays feeding in open waters. Afternoon return to Isabella.

Along the way to the Tortoise Center, we pass through a manzanillo forest surrounded by wetlands, home to the famous giant pink flamingos a delightful and unexpected sight for Galapagos. After a delicious lunch made with local and organic products, we head to one of the favourite local hangouts, Concha y Perla, for a fantastic swim and optional snorkel.

Overnight on Isabela.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 10 Isabela - Boat to Santa Cruz

Wake up with the sea breeze as we travel by speedboat to Santa Cruz Island. After checking in at the hotel we head to El Chato in the Santa Cruz highlands to find the famous giant tortoise in their natural habitat. It is truly an honour to walk in the stately presence of these gentle giants, who can live to be more than 175 years old. We will also see pintail ducks, Darwin’s finches, frigate birds, egrets, and the vermilion flycatcher.

Our next stop is an organic farm dedicating their efforts to conservation and sustainable, organic permaculture. Their famed grown coffee has gained international attention and sold to exclusive buyers worldwide. We learn about growing coffee, organic farming, and why many farms in Galapagos are in need of restoration. We finish up on a beautiful platform overlooking the slopes of Santa Cruz while enjoying freshly-brewed coffee and fruit from the farm.

Overnight on Santa Cruz.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 11 Santa Cruz - Baltra - Quito - Departure

We transfer to Baltra Island for our return flight to the mainland and bid a fond farewell to the Galapagos and each other. Connect with homeward flights.

PLEASE NOTE: If you are booking your own flights, please ensure that your departure time from Quito is no earlier than 9:00pm to allow for our incoming flight from the islands (most northward flights depart around midnight; an extra night can be added if you cannot find a suitable onward option).

BUEN VIAJE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast