

Ecuador: Galapagos Islands & Andean Highlands

July 19 - 28, 2008
10 Days / 11 Nights



You and your children will experience the rich culture of the Andes and the amazing natural history of the Galapagos on this thrilling family adventure. Our journey begins in Quito, capital of Ecuador. Here we will tour the colonial sites of this old city, including Independence Plaza and Plaza San Francisco. Then we fly west of the mainland and board ship for a four-day, three-night nature cruise among the Galapagos Islands, one of the planet's most fascinating ecosystems. Teeming with wildlife, including blue-footed boobies, flightless cormorants, giant tortoises, and the only penguin species north of the Equator, the Galapagos Islands are one of the world's great treasures, protected both as a wildlife sanctuary and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Each day we disembark on a different island to explore, hike, swim, snorkel, and view the remarkable wildlife.

We return to Quito and head north into the Highlands of the Ecuadorian Andes. Here we stay in a hacienda that dates back to the early seventeenth century. Nestled in the scenic surrounds of the Andean Highlands, we will have plenty of time to soak in the breathtaking natural beauty of this area. Included is a hike around scenic Cuicocha Lake. We visit a local women's cooperative as well as local villagers and artisans, learning about their ancient culture and shopping for crafts in colorful markets. Also included is the opportunity for your children to write to a pen pal ahead of time, and then meet his or her new friend when we visit Hacienda Zuleta – a working hacienda that still produces crops and local cheeses. Return to Quito for our final night in Ecuador, and say good-bye to new found friends.

Day 1, July 19 Depart U.S. / Arrive Quito, Ecuador

Upon arrival in Ecuador, one of our local staff members will meet you at the airport and assist you with your luggage and your transfer to the hotel.

Overnight: Swissôtel

Day 2, July 20 Quito

Colonial Quito City Tour

After a morning welcome orientation, we will start our adventure with a city tour of Quito. We will take Trole Bus (the municipal bus) to the old town because the colonial city is closed to regular traffic on Sundays,. Our first stop is at the Grand or Independence Plaza, where we will see the presidential palace with its wrought iron balconies purchased from the French Crown two centuries ago. We will see the archbishop's palace, the independence monument and the Cathedral. Our next stop along the Street of the 7 Crosses is La Compañía, built by the Jesuits as a replica of Il Bessu in Rome. We'll continue to the Plaza San Francisco, which in pre-Inca days was the main Tianguéz (market) in the Americas.



Overnight: Swissôtel (B, L, D)

Day 3, July 21 Quito – Galápagos

Baltra Island, Chinese Hat

This morning we'll fly from Quito to Baltra on a two hour flight. Passengers will be picked up at the airport by the *M/V Legend* guides and taken to the pier to board ship. We'll have the chance to settle into our cabins before our welcome orientation. This afternoon we'll set out on our first excursion: a wet landing at Chinese Hat. Here we will have a short walk along the volcanic landscape – keep your eyes out for playful sea lions along the way. We'll have a brief opportunity for snorkeling before we return to our ship.

Overnight: M/V Galapagos Legend (B, L, D)

Day 4, July 22 Galápagos

Bartolome, James Island

This morning we visit Santa Cruz Island, where we will hike to a saltwater lagoon behind the beach. This trail leads up to Dragon Hill, which offers a lovely view of the bay and is a nesting site for reintroduced land iguanas. Or, you may opt to take a dinghy to Venice Islet and observe the vegetation and marine animals there, like spotted eagle rays, golden rays, mullets, sharks, and sea turtles.



After lunch we'll have a wet landing on a greenish-colored sand beach on Floreana Island. We will hike from the black mangrove beds to a large brackish lagoon that holds one of the largest flamingo populations in the Galapagos. The island is best known for its endemic plants, like the Galapagos millwork, passion flower, and button mangrove. Novice snorkelers can practice on the main beach with the playful sea lions nearby; experienced snorkelers can roam around Devils Crown.

Overnight: M/V Galapagos Legend (B, L, D)

Day 5, July 23 Galápagos

Española Island, San Cristóbal

This morning we will learn more about the lava terrain as we cross inactive lava fields on Española Island. In addition to the sea lion colonies, this is a very important site for bird watching. Many species, such as the hooded mocking bird and red billed tropic bird can be spotted and observed closely here. You will also see a large colony of marine iguanas, lava lizards, and sally light foot crabs. After a short trek, we'll also encounter colonies of masked and blue-footed boobies. These nesting grounds sometimes overlap the trails, so watch where you step! You may also encounter Galapagos doves, hawks, and swallow-tailed gulls before we reach the world's largest colony of waved albatross. (December is the tail end of their mating season.) A final highlight of the morning is the famous blowhole, where water shoots more than 75 feet up into the air!



After lunch, we'll have a dry landing at Puerto Baquerizo Moreno, where we will visit the San Cristóbal breeding center and learn about the National Park's breeding program for the endangered giant tortoise. At the breeding center, tortoise

eggs are protected until they hatch, and are kept until they are 4 or 5 years old and are safe from predators. Afterwards they are returned to the wild on their islands of origin.

Overnight: M/V Galapagos Legend (B, L, D)

Day 6, July 24 Otavalo

Depending upon flight schedules, weather conditions and National Park Regulations, there are several possibilities for our last morning in the Galapagos, including the La Loberia (where we can take a last look at a sea lion colony, marine iguanas, and finches); snorkeling at Isla Lobos; El Junco Lake, or the Interpretation Center. Donated by the Spanish Government in 1998, this state of the art facility offers a complete education on the Islands.

Upon our return to Quito, we will be met and transferred north into Ecuador's Andean Highlands. We head to our accommodations at Hacienda Cusin, a restored 16th-century estate surrounded by seven acres of beautiful gardens and fountain courtyards. Here we can get settled into our rooms, relax, and enjoy the picturesque surroundings for the remainder of the afternoon.

Overnight: Hacienda Cusin (B, L, D)

Day 7, July 25 Otavalo

Hacienda Zuleta, Pen Pal meeting



Today we head to Hacienda Zuleta, where unexcavated pre-Incan burial mounds and step pyramids dot the surrounding fields. There is an optional hike to Zuleta along a dirt road through the beautiful countryside. Each bend in the road brings small villages, rolling fields, and snow-capped peaks in the distance. Zuleta is a working hacienda that still produces cheese and plants crops, as well as produces typical embroidery products. After a tour of the lovely house, we head to the Condor HUASI project, which has been created to reintroduce captive condors to the wild. Wild condors have been known to visit the grounds, and we may be lucky enough to see the largest flying bird on Earth in its natural surroundings. After lunch, children will have the opportunity to meet their pen pals in the library of Zuleta village. Time

permitting, the children will get to play a game of soccer. This afternoon we return to Hacienda Cusin for dinner and an optional bonfire.

Overnight: Hacienda Cusin (B, L, D)

Day 8, July 26 Otavalo

Cuicocha Lake, Peguche village

After breakfast, we'll drive to nearby Cotacachi-Cayapas ecological reserve to visit Cuicocha Lake, an impressive landscape of deep blue waters surrounded by hills. We'll be able to enjoy views of several nearby volcanoes, including Imbabura, Cayambe, and Cotacachi. At the lake we will go for a hike while learning about the orchids, hummingbirds, and other exotic birds of the region.

After this visit we will continue on to the village of Peguche to visit the Huarmi Maqui organization, a cooperative of women that an indigenous leader has organized to support the education and health of the members' children. Here we will have the opportunity to see some locally made handicrafts and typical Andean products such as corn, peas, beans, potatoes, and more.

Overnight: Hacienda Cusin (B, L, D)

Day 9, July 27

Otavalo – Quito

Poncho Plaza Market, Return to Quito

We'll spend the morning at the famous Indian crafts market at Otavalo, the most important market in Ecuador and Latin America's second largest indigenous market. Many items are for sale here; Otavaleños are most famous for their weavings, and woolen goods include sweaters, blankets, gloves, and ponchos. Panama hats are also a good buy, as are jewelry and colorfully embroidered blouses and shirts. We'll have a chance to do some good-natured bargaining (it's expected) for some terrific souvenirs. After the excitement of the market, we'll have a lunch at the beautiful Hacienda Pinsaqui before returning to Quito. Rest and relax before meeting up again for our farewell dinner.

Overnight: Swissôtel (B, L, D)



Day 10, July 28 Depart Quito / Arrive U.S.