

Trip Dossier for Ecuador – Galapagos Islands

Trip Code: FEGA Issue date: 15 Dec 2009 Valid from: 1 Jan 2010

Ecuador is a wonderfully varied country and the undoubted highlight is the Galapagos Islands, 1,000 kilometres out in the Pacific: here you and your family will star in your own amazing wildlife documentary. The Galapagos Islands are unsurpassed as a wildlife destination - a riot of colourful marine birds and animals will keep everyone thrilled as the story of evolution unfolds before you. Nothing can prepare you for the sheer drama of watching nature in action, and numbers of visitors are limited to preserve the habitat. You divide your time between three islands, seeing the highlights of each. Scientists are still puzzling over the question of how such rich diversity of species could have evolved in such a remote location. You will stay on land and explore by boat and as well as seeing amazing marine life you will also visit the world famous Charles Darwin centre.

Day 1 Fly to Quito via Madrid

Depart from London to Quito via Madrid. On arrival in Quito in the early evening you'll be met and transferred to your hotel in the city. **Hotel (breakfast)**

Day 2 Fly to San Cristobal Island

You will be picked up from your hotel and taken back to the airport for your flight to Puerto Baquerizo, the eastern-most island of the Galapagos. Having checked into your hotel, your first stop is to visit the Galapagos Interpretation Centre. Here you will learn all about the islands, their history and people and most importantly get a very good overview of the marine and wildlife you can expect to see. From here you can follow a trail up to Cerro Tijeretas (30 minutes) that overlooks the town and where you will be able to see a colony of nesting frigate birds, easily identifiable by their bright red chests. This afternoon you can head to the beach at Playa Mann to unwind and enjoy the ocean. **Hotel for 2 nights (breakfast & dinner)**

Day 3 San Cristobal Island

You'll board a boat today and will head north along the coast. First stop is Puerto Grand, opposite Kicker Rock (Leon Dormido) – this impressive geological formation is shaped like a sleeping sea lion, and from the cliffs you'll be able to observe lots of marine birds including blue-footed boobies, masked boobies and pelicans. Then you'll take a panga (like a rib) and navigate to Isla Lobos, a small islet, located only an hour by boat from Pto. Baquerizo Moreno. We are not permitted to land on the island but passing along its rocky shores you can spot blue-footed boobies nest and watch sea lions frolic. This is a typical Galapagos setting, one of utter tranquility and primitive beauty, and you will have a chance to snorkel with the sea lions. Return to Puerto Baquerizo and visit the highlands of Cerro Colorado and see giant tortoises. **(breakfast & lunch)**

Day 4 Fly to Isabella Island; visit Galapagos Turtle Rearing Centre & the Wall of Tears

This morning is free before you return to the airport for your flight to Isabella. This is the largest island in the Galápagos archipelago, which accounts for well over half the total land mass and includes the highest point in the islands, Volcán Wolf (1707 metres). On reaching Puerto Villamil, where most of Isabella's 1500 or so inhabitants live, you'll be transferred to your hotel and have some free time so you can grab lunch. In the afternoon you'll visit the Galápagos Tortoise Rearing Centre to learn about the efforts of the national park authorities to preserve this unique species that gave its name to the islands - the Spanish thought the shape of the tortoises' shells resembled their high-fronted saddles (or *galápagos*). You'll continue to the so-called Wall of Tears that was built by the island's original inhabitants - prisoners at the penal colony that existed in here from 1944 until 1954. Finally you'll have some time to relax and enjoy the beach. **Hotel for 2 nights (breakfast, lunch)**

Day 5 On Isabella

Early this morning you will be transported to the highlands of Isabella Island. Once in the National Park you make an easy hike up to the rim of the Sierra Negra volcano. This crater is considered the 2nd largest in the world (approx 6 miles in diameter!) and it is one of the most impressive examples of volcanic activity in the islands. A short distance from Puerto Villamil is the small island known as Las Tintoreras. It's one of the main breeding sites for marine iguanas and there are hundreds roaming about. Here too a colony of white tip sharks can often be seen resting in a lava canal. You can snorkel or swim in the unique habitat of these animals. On the nearby sandy beaches, sea lions play and relax in the sun. On return to Puerto Villamil, you have a free afternoon to enjoy the beach. **(breakfast, lunch box)**

Day 6 Sail to Puerto Ayora, Santa Cruz; visit Charles Darwin Research Station

After breakfast you sail (approximately 3 hours) to Puerto Ayora. Look out for dolphins swimming around your boat. On arrival, check in to your hotel. After lunch (not included) you'll visit the national park's visitor centre, at the world-renowned Charles Darwin Research Station, to learn about the conservation programme that is being implemented to protect these fabulous islands. You'll see tortoises at all stages of their development - from hatchlings to mature individuals (they can live for over 150 years!) and no doubt meet the world-famous Lonesome George, the sole remaining member of the tortoise sub-species that originates from Isla Pinta. Although the research station is a major success - over 2000 tortoises have been reared and released into the wild - but when Lonesome George dies his sub-species will become extinct. **Hotel for 2 nights (breakfast, lunch)**

Day 7 On Santa Cruz - walk to Tortuga Bay;

Today you'll be driven to El Chato Tortoise Reserve. In this lush highland area you should see several bird species - most notably short-eared owls, Galápagos finches, and yellow warblers. You should also see the giant Galapagos tortoise in the wild! Later on you'll walk inside into one of the tunnels that was created when a lava flow cooled and solidified on the outside, while a core of molten lava flowed through its centre. In the afternoon you'll return by road to Puerto Ayora. This afternoon you'll set out on a three kilometre (around 45 minutes) walk on a trail and boardwalk that leads across an area of sand dunes and red mangroves to Tortuga (Turtle) Bay, which has one of the most beautiful beaches in the Galápagos. The long beach of fine white sand is sheltered by a spit and backed by an extensive area of sand dunes. Here you'll see a colony of marine iguanas and maybe some sharks, as well as pelicans, gulls and the occasional flamingo. You'll also see an interesting forest of cacti. There's plenty of time to enjoy the beach before retracing your steps back to the hotel in Puerto Ayora. **(breakfast & lunch box)**

Day 8 Transfer to Baltra Island & fly to Quito

In the morning you will be transferred by bus and ferry back across the strait to the airport on Baltra Island in time for your flight back to Quito on the mainland. On the way to the airport you'll stop to see an interesting geological formation - two craters known as Los Gemelos (The Twins) that are sinkholes formed by the collapse of lava flows. The site is surrounded by typical forest - making it an excellent place to spot vermilion flycatchers. Once back in Quito you'll be met and transferred to your hotel in the city. **Hotel (breakfast)**

Day 9 Fly to London

There may be time for some last-minute shopping before your transfer to Quito airport for your international overnight return flight back to London (via Madrid).

Day 10 Arrive London

Your flight arrives in London

Amazon Extension

You may like to extend your wildlife adventure by contrasting the marine life of the Galapagos with a trip to the jungle.

Days 1 to 8 As above

Day 9 Private bus transfer to Tena/Amazon (5 hrs drive)

Starting from Quito you'll be driven in a private bus to the city of Tena where your guide will be waiting to transport you to the small Indigenous village of San Pedro deep in the Amazon. You'll board a canoe and navigate about 30 minutes downstream along the Napo River, arriving at Yacuma Lodge in the early afternoon. Here you will be welcomed with a typical cold drink and there will be time to settle into the lodge's typical Quechua bungalows. After lunch and a short rest, accompanied by one of the expert Indian guides, you'll go by canoe to Birds Island; here you will be able to walk in the forest around the Laguna Escondida (Hidden Lagoon), and observe different species of jungle birds: river Garzas (great egret), Great Blue Herons, Kingfishers, Garrapatero, and Oropendolas. One of the most interesting birds is the Hoatzin, one of the Amazon's weirdest birds; it's rather shy except in breeding season and has a punk hair-do and a bright blue face. On top of it all, it smells horrible, so it's also called the "Stink-bird." As it only eats leaves it's rather heavy and consequently is a clumsy flyer. Later on you'll return to the lodge by canoe for a well deserved dinner. This evening, weather permitting, you will go for a night canoe ride on the nearby lagoon looking for wildlife. **Lodge for 3 nights (breakfast, lunch & dinner)**

Day 10 Walk through rainforest; visit an indigenous community

After breakfast in the lodge, we'll set out on a 3-4 hour walk through the deep primary rainforest. Along the way an indigenous guide will show you the many species of plants and trees and describe their medicinal uses. With

any luck you will see monkeys and birds such as oropendolas and parrots. Lunch will be served back at the lodge, and after a short siesta you'll return to the forest, this time looking at the different kind of trees cultivated by the locals, such as bananas, papaya trees, pineapple and orange trees, and sugar cane. Then you'll continue to a small settlement where you can observe pottery being made by the locals and there will be an opportunity to buy some if you wish. From here you'll carry on to visit to the Quechua indigenous community of Chontayacu, where you will be able to learn about local customs and the way of life of the native people of the jungle. Later in the afternoon return to the lodge for dinner. **(breakfast, lunch & dinner)**

Day 11 Walk in primary forest; gold panning in river

This morning, your walk will take you deep into the primary rainforest. Crossing small streams and different kinds of terrain observing several species of trees and plants along the way, we will arrive at la Cueva de los Tutapishco (Amazon Bat Cave). This is a special place and considered by the locals as a sacred spot where the shamans (medicine men) come to enter into contact with the spirits. You'll carry on with the walk for about another two hours until you meet up with your canoes on the shores of the Napo River. Canoe back to the lodge for lunch and a siesta. This afternoon you'll navigate up the Napo River where you can try your hand panning for gold on the shores of the river – perhaps you will be the one to find that precious nugget! You can then cool off with a swim in a perfect spot for bathing beside one of the sandy shores of the Napo or Chontayacu Rivers. You'll return to the lodge late in the afternoon, and after dinner there is an informal farewell party. **(breakfast, lunch & dinner)**

Day 12 Private bus back to Quito

After breakfast you say goodbye to your Indian friends and then you'll begin your return journey in the canoes along the Napo River to San Pedro Village from where you travel back to Tena and from there back to Quito. **Hotel (breakfast)**

Day 13 Fly to London

There may be time for some last-minute shopping before your transfer to Quito airport for your international overnight return flight back to London (via Madrid).

Day 14 Arrive London

Your flight arrives in London

This itinerary includes our group flights from London. If you are making other flight arrangements, please refer to your Confirmation Invoice and Joining Instructions for details of the start or end of the trip. Please remember international flights and trip dates do occasionally change, so please always purchase flexible tickets.

Each itinerary is planned many months in advance and although it is our intention to operate the itinerary as printed in the brochure and detailed here, it may be necessary to make some changes as a result of alterations to flight schedules, climatic conditions, limitations of infrastructure or other operational factors which are beyond our control. As a consequence, the order or location of overnight stops may vary from those outlined but we will always endeavour to keep you informed of any such changes. Included meals are indicated in the daily itinerary.

Climate Ecuador lies on the Equator, so temperature depends largely on altitude but remains fairly constant year round. In the highlands the dry season lasts from June to September, and again from mid-December to mid-January, the rest of the year it can rain at almost any time. The Galápagos Islands are influenced by ocean currents; it's generally hot, rainy and humid from January to April, whereas between May and December it's cool, cloudy and grey most of the time, although it rarely rains.

The average monthly climate in the Galapagos.

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Max °C	30	30	31	31	28	26	26	26	26	26	26	27
Min °C	22	24	24	24	22	21	20	19	19	20	21	22
Rainfall (mm)	68	91	94	72	34	23	14	6	6	6	7	30

Is this right for your family? The Galapagos Islands make a fascinating introduction to the history of natural selection. You stay in hotels on three of the islands, travelling between them by boat and light aircraft. Two nights in Quito on the way out and back break the long flights. There is also an opportunity to extend the trip with an excursion to the Amazon – all facets of wildlife will be covered!



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Lone Parents

Single parents or other adults travelling alone with children should be aware that some countries, including the UK, require documentation confirming that the individual has authority to travel with the minor. It is crucial that you contact the relevant country embassy for further information on exactly what may be required. These details can be found on the Foreign & Commonwealth Website under the appropriate country www.fco.gov.uk/travel

Accommodation The hotels are 3 star standard. All hotels have private facilities and are on twin share basis; most of them are air-conditioned; they are modern, clean and comfortable and provide a friendly service. The indication of a swimming pool at a hotel should not be taken as a guarantee but rather an indication. You should also be aware that swimming pools at the hotels are often unheated and so can be cold in the winter months or even closed.

Food and Drink Food in the Galapagos is very similar to mainland Ecuador but of course with masses of sea food and even sea cucumber! Ecuadorian food tends not to be too spicy; however the meals are often accompanied with a small bowl of *aji* (hot pepper sauce). The most economical way to eat is to order the set menu in restaurants. This is called *almuerzo* at lunch time and *merienda* in the evening. Please remember to drink plenty of bottled water during your trip.

Local Costs

A small bottle of mineral water (500ml)	£0.85
A large bottle of mineral water (1 litre)	£1.50
A can of coke (soft drinks)	£0.85
A carton or bottle of fruit juice	£1.15
A bottle of beer	£2.30
A light lunch time snack – sandwich for example	£1.75
A two course meal* - excluding drinks	£2.50
A three course meal* - excluding drinks	£3.50

*Based on a mid range tourist restaurant.

Currency The unit of currency is the US Dollar (Ecuador no longer has its own currency but started using US dollars in late 2000). At the time of writing UK £1 = US\$1.65 (Nov 2009). US Dollar Travellers' Cheques are still accepted in banks, large hotels and some upmarket souvenir shops however we increasingly recommend that you use ATMs and credit cards. We also recommend that you take US dollars from the UK.

Local Payments US\$110 payable in US dollars, cash only to your Tour Leader at the start of the holiday. This is required to cover the entrance fee to Galapagos NP (US\$100) and the Transit Control Card (US\$10) which is required for entry to the Galapagos Islands. These fees are currently correct at the date of issue but are subject to increase.

Tippling is a recognised part of life and although at your discretion you will be expected to reward service. It should be remembered, however, that over-generosity could lead to jealousies in poor countries. Please remember that all tips should be a way for individuals to thank staff for good service.

Please also remember that your tour leader works hard and for long hours to make your holiday run smoothly, a suitable reward for good service would be £1-£2 from each person, per day. It is usual to collect this between yourselves as a group and present it to the leader on completion of the tour.

Language The official language in the Galapagos and Ecuador is Spanish, although English is widely spoken in tourist areas.

Security Whilst the vast majority of travellers never experience anything untoward it is worth taking precautions particularly in urban areas. You should take sensible precautions in crowded areas such as street markets and airports, where pick-pocketing is common, and keep clear of any street disturbances. Don't wear jewellery, never leave your bags unattended, keep large amounts of money, cameras and cell phones out of sight when walking in town centres, and avoid walking in city centres after dark. Keep copies of important documents, including passports, in a separate place to the documents themselves, together with details of credit cards. Leave copies at home with a friend too. Safeguard valuables, important documents and cash and deposit them in hotel safes, where practicable.

Time Mainland Ecuador is GMT -5 hours; the Galápagos Islands are GMT -6 hours. There is no daylight saving time.

Visa/Passports

A visa is not required for British Nationals to enter Ecuador as a tourist. Other nationalities should check with their embassy for current requirements. Your passport should be valid for at least 6 months after your arrival in Ecuador. If you are travelling via the U.S. please see the separate US Visa Waiver information sheet.

Departure tax There is a departure tax payable locally in cash for international departures from Quito Airport – currently US\$ 40.80 per person.

Clothing & Equipment List for Galapagos Islands

Light-weight cotton clothing is recommended in this climate with a wrap or sweater for the cooler evenings

The following list of clothing and equipment is intended to be fairly comprehensive and experienced travellers may well take a good deal less luggage than we recommend.

CLOTHING	NUMBER PER PERSON	Check	EQUIPMENT	Check
Walking Shoes	1 pair		Soft-sided bag 50 – 80 litres	
Trainers or Strong Sandals	1 pair – all purpose wear		Lightweight Daypack – 25 litres	
Socks	4+		A variety of plastic bags	
Waterproof Jacket	1 lightweight		Sunglasses	
T-Shirts	3 +		Personal First Aid Kit	
Long Trousers or Skirt	2 +		Insect Repellent	
Short Trousers	2		Torch and Batteries	
Long Sleeve Shirt	2+		Camera, Memory cards and Accessories	
Track Suit Bottoms or Similar	Optional		Washing & Shaving Kit - wet wipes are refreshing	
Sunhat / Baseball cap	Essential (styled to shade face, ears and neck)			
Warm jacket	1			
Thin Fleece or Sweatshirt	1			
Warm hat, scarf and gloves	Woolly or fleece (winter)			
Swim Wear	1			
Towel or Sarong	1			

ITEM	Check	ITEM	Check
Passport/ Visa		Universal travelling adapter	
Air Tickets		Binoculars – optional	
Money/Travellers Cheques		Sunscreen – lots of it	
Cash Cards/Visa		Guide Book & map	
Insurance Documents		Snorkelling gear if you have it (or can be hired locally)	
Trip Information and Itinerary			
Money Security Belt/Pouch			

For details regarding **hand luggage restrictions** please visit www.baa.com

