

Ecuador & the Galapagos Islands ~ a Journey across the Equator

<http://www.kudutravel.com/tours/galapagos-islands-walking-tour>

19 November – 5 December 2017

Ecuador – the name is, of course, Spanish for ‘equator’ – straddles the zero meridian and our journey explores many facets of this land: volcanoes; exuberant baroque churches; the fascinating Andean Indian culture; coffee and rose farms and the Galapagos islands. ‘Islands Lost in Time’; ‘The Laboratory of Evolution’; and ‘The Bewitched Islands’ are just some of the epithets bestowed upon this remote Pacific archipelago, world famous for its unique bio-diversity and the role it played in shaping Darwin’s ideas for his momentous book, *The Origin of Species*.

We begin in the cobble-stoned streets of colonial Quito, a UNESCO World heritage site right on the equator and then take a 4-day heritage ‘slow train’ ride that winds its way spectacularly down the Andes to Guayaquil. Excursions from the train take us into the Avenue of the Volcanoes, to Indian traditional markets and to a cocoa estate, each night staying in comfortable *haciendas*.

In the Galapagos, we have chartered a fully crewed and equipped yacht for our explorations – a steel-hulled brigantine with teak interiors, 31 m/105 ft. overall, with 6 double/twin cabins for guests, all with modern en suite facilities. ‘Pangas’ (zodiacs) take us ashore for daily walks on the different islands and there are plenty of opportunities to swim from sandy beaches and snorkel with turtles, sea lions, fur seals and Galapagos penguins.

HIGHLIGHTS of our Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands walking tour include:

- Exploring the colonial architecture of Quito, UNESCO listed for its heritage of gold - decorated Andean Baroque churches
- 4 days ‘slow train’ journey on the award-winning Tren Crucero, with excursions to see the Avenue of the Volcanoes and discover Andean Indian culture
- Close encounters with endemic giant tortoises and nesting colonies of Red & Blue footed Boobies and Magnificent frigatebirds
- Swimming and snorkelling with sea lion pups, turtles, eagle rays, Galapagos penguins and shoals of brilliantly colourful tropical fish

Guests’ comments on this trip:

‘An unforgettable holiday. Brilliant organisation. Wonderful wild life. Fantastic people running the boat. Good company.’

‘Wonderful ... Be prepared for everything to be even more extraordinary than you thought it would be!’

‘This was actually two trips in one. We were able to get a feel of both the Ecuadorian culture and countryside and then we got to experience the evolutionary wonder of the Galápagos Islands.’

Itinerary

DAY 1

D included

After arriving at Quito airport in the afternoon, we have a short transfer by road to our 4-star historic hotel, a restored 16th century building located in the heart of the colonial city.

DAY 2

B, L, D included

We set off on foot from our hotel for a guided tour of the principal historic monuments, including the Cathedral; the Archbishop's Palace and la Compania church, one of the most astonishingly gold-adorned in South America. After watching the picturesque 'changing of the guard', we visit the Museum of the Equator Line, 30 minutes north of the city.

DAY 3

B, L, D included

We start our 4-day award-winning Tren Crucero journey with a drive (1.5 hrs) to the market town of Otavalo in the Northern Andes. Here we board the steam engine train for a slow journey through the countryside to the provincial capital, Ibarra, stopping en route to hear indigenous music or peruse traditional handmade textiles and woodcarving. After a guided visit to a rose farm, we drive to our rural hotel for the night.

DAY 4

B, L, D included

We set off early to start our descent towards the Pacific coast. We pass the Avenue of the Volcanoes hoping to count up to twenty volcanoes visible from the train (weather-permitting) and alight for a 1.5-hour gentle walk in high altitude cloud forest. After lunch, we stop in Urbina (3,609 m/11,840 feet) to meet the last surviving ice merchant, who climbs the Chimborazo mountain daily to collect fresh ice. Our overnight stay is in an historic *hacienda* in the countryside near Riobamba.

DAY 5

B, L, D included

A steam locomotive is attached to the train for the journey to Colta, where we disembark to visit the Guamote indigenous tribal market – totally authentic and colourful. This afternoon the train descends through the Devil's Nose, an engineering marvel and a photographer's delight, all the way down to the tropical town of Bucay where we spend the night in a simple but properly equipped hotel, set in extensive gardens alive with tropical birdsong.

DAY 6

B, L, D included

Travelling through a tropical rainforest landscape, we pause to visit a cocoa plantation and have an informative walk and an excellent lunch, then continue to disembark at Duran station, virtually at sea level. Private transport takes us into Guayaquil, Ecuador's major seaport, where our modern 4-star hotel has an inviting waterfall pool.

DAY 7

B, L, D included

In the cooler early morning, we walk in search of roseate tern roosts, Pacific parrotlets and patrolling snail kites, then take a boat ride into the Churute Mangroves Ecological Reserve, looking out for Howler monkeys, American crocodiles and Pacific Royal flycatchers. There is time to visit the Cathedral and stroll round the lively principal *plaza* before dinner.

DAY 8

B, L, D included

An internal flight of 2 hours delivers us to Baltra airport in the Galapagos where we meet our naturalist guide and take a short ferry ride, then a bus, up into the lushly vegetated hills of Santa Cruz island. We visit a highland farm where wild giant tortoises roam before continuing to our first-class hotel in Puerto Ayora (all rooms with balconies and sea views).

DAY 9

B, L, D included

On a day trip, a local motor boat takes us to the Plaza islets (east of Santa Cruz) to anchor off South Plaza. Land iguana nests are scattered across the hillsides and the sheer cliffs on the southern coast are the perfect place to observe swallow-tailed gulls, Galapagos shearwaters and the beautiful red-billed tropicbirds with their long tail streamers.

DAY 10

B, L, D included

This morning we transfer to the north harbour to board our boat, The Beagle. Once we have settled into our cabins and had a light lunch on deck, the crew weigh the anchor and we set off for Las Bachas on the north shore of Santa Cruz island. This white sand beach is a major nesting site for green sea turtles and there are also marine iguanas on the shoreline and flamingos in the lagoon. Time for our first swim in the Pacific!

DAY 11

B, L, D included

After sailing northeast overnight, we go ashore (a dry landing) on Genovesa island (aka Tower island) and climb Prince Philip's Steps to reach a lava rock trail through Palo Santo (*bursera graveolens*) forest. Galapagos shearwaters, Darwin's finches and the endemic short-eared owl all occur in this classic dry zone habitat. We snorkel along the cliffs before lunch, then visit the coral beach at Darwin Bay, formed by a collapsed *caldera* – red-footed, blue-footed & Nazca boobies, lava gulls, the piratical frigatebirds and sea lions are all found here.

DAY 12

B, L, D included

This morning we have a wet landing onto the black sand beach of James Bay, on the west coast of Isla San Salvador (aka Santiago/James island), then stroll gently past a series of tidal pools on the lookout for lava and Great Blue herons, White-cheeked (Bahama) pintail duck, Black-necked stilts and American oystercatchers. Galapagos hawks are often in the area and our trail ends at the fur sea lion grottoes where we can watch them haul themselves out of the water to sleep. Back at the beach we swim or snorkel with turtles before lunch, then set sail (crossing the equator) for the west coast of Isabela (aka Albemarle), the largest island of the archipelago.

DAY 13

B, L, D included

Off Punta Vicente Roca we take a panga trip to snorkel where the nutrient-rich Cromwell current encourages a range of colourful fish – parrotfish, groupers, bonito, tuna and angelfish are common and sharks (black-tipped and hammerheads) can also be seen. Going ashore after lunch at Tagus Cove on Isabela (historically an anchorage used by pirates and whalers), a half hour hike uphill takes us to the clifftop, with fine views over the volcanic landscapes of Darwin Volcano and Darwin Lake, an uplifted ultra-saline lake saltier than the sea – a very good area for Galapagos finches.

DAY 14

B, L, D included

Crossing the Bolivar channel (good for whale spotting) to Fernandina (Narborough), the youngest island of the archipelago, we go ashore at Punta Espinoza where the mangroves have large numbers of marine iguanas, sea lions, the scarlet Sally light-foot crabs, Galapagos penguins & the endemic flightless cormorant (which occurs only on Fernandina and Isabela islands). Further south, at Urbina Bay, we see uplifted coral from the 1954 eruption of the Alcedo volcano, a large colony of land iguanas and the wild Alcedo giant land tortoises in their natural habitat.

DAY 15

B, L, D included

We travel by panga to the marine reserve around Mariela Rocks in Elizabeth Bay, with an important Galapagos penguin colony, then into a quiet cove surrounded by red mangrove where spotted eagle rays and golden rays can be seen, along with small sharks, green turtles and brown pelicans. We walk across lava to a series of lagoons with blue-footed booby colonies and explore Punta Moreno, a desolate landscape of black lava flows, with good views of the Alcedo and Sierra Azul volcanoes.

DAY 16

B, L, D included

After a dry landing in Puerto Villamil, local transport takes us up onto the flanks of the huge Sierra Negro volcano for a walk on country tracks to learn about farming on the islands – sugar cane, maize, cattle and tropical fruit plantations – we also find epiphytic orchids high in the moss-covered trees. We visit the Arnaldo Tupiza breeding centre for giant tortoises before a swim from the white sand beach. After lunch on board, we set sail for Puerto Ayora on Santa Cruz island (Indefatigable), the largest inhabited island of the archipelago.

DAY 17

B included

Bidding farewell to the Beagle and her crew, we transfer by road and boat to Baltra airport for the flight to Quito and connections home.

Activity Level

Standard

Short walks (1 – 2.5 hours) every day, with cobblestones in cities, uneven stony, lava or sandy ground, some steep steps, both wet and dry landings from *pangas* (zodiac/dinghy). Tough trainers (with a gripping sole) plus 'Keen' shoes for wet landings are appropriate. Swimming and snorkelling every day, both from the boat and from beaches.

Temperatures

Late November/early December are in the dry season, with temperatures ranging between 23 and 26°C daily, blue skies and some early morning fog. The sea temperature is normally 22°C - 24°C.

Accommodation

- 3 nights in Quito - first 2 in a 4-star historic hotel (a beautifully appointed 16C building) located in the heart of the colonial city, the 3rd night's accommodation is organised by the Tren Crucero company
- 1 night in a hotel in Riobamba
- 1 night in a hotel in Bucay
- 2 nights in Guayaquil, in a 4-star Superior hotel dating from 1920

- 2 nights in Puerto Ayora in the Galapagos, in a first-class hotel with sea views
- 7 nights on the yacht - a steel-hulled brigantine with teak interiors, 31 m/105 ft overall, with 6 double/twin cabins for guests, all with modern en suite facilities

Trip Price

£8,390 per person based on 2 people sharing

£580 single room supplement

£2,000 deposit per person

Please note that single use rooms are only available in the hotels in the first part of the tour and not on the yacht. We shall endeavour to obtain double rooms for single occupancy whenever possible.

Price includes

- All accommodation for Days 1 through 17, on a twin shared basis
- All meals with local beer/soft drinks at lunch and wine at dinner
- Internal flights Guayaquil/Baltra/Quito
- Galapagos Transit Control Card (US\$20)
- Tren Crucero travel as described
- All land transportation in private vehicles (buses, including open-sided buses) as described, except during free periods
- Trips ashore on *pangas* as described
- Use of snorkelling equipment
- All entrance and sightseeing fees except during free periods
- Tips for yacht crew and captain
- Services of an English-speaking local naturalist guide (Galapagos National Park registered first class guide) (plus our Kudu Travel tour leader)

Price does not include

- International transportation to and from Quito
- Galapagos National Park Levy (\$100 US per visitor, payable in cash on arrival at Baltra airport)
- Trip cancellation, medical or other insurance
- Immunisations, prescriptions or other medical requirements
- Passport, visa and health documentation
- Personal expenses (laundry, alcohol besides beer at lunch & wine with dinners, free time activities, etc.)
- Meals noted as excepted in the daily notation
- Transport and transfer of excess baggage
- Ecuador departure tax, if any

VALUE FOR MONEY - SO MUCH IS INCLUDED

On Kudu trips, you will only need money for postcards, presents to take home, the odd G & T or an irresistible ice cream. Festival and opera tickets, museum and gallery entrances, National Park fees, all meals (with a very few exceptions specified in individual itineraries), wine with lunch and dinner, access to specialist books carried by the guides, gratuities for porters and hotel and restaurant staff, boat rides, train trips, internal flights, wine tastings, 4WDs with drivers, the services of skilled local guides and trackers etc. are ALL INCLUDED in the cost of your holiday.

We are confident that, like previous very satisfied guests, you will discover that our tours give you excellent value for money.

Visa and Health Requirements

Visitors from EU countries, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand currently require a valid passport, but not a visa, for entry to Ecuador. If you are a national of any other country, please check visa regulations with your nearest Embassy of Ecuador.

At present, there are no specific and compulsory health requirements for entry to Ecuador. Yellow fever vaccination certificate is not required if you are arriving from Europe or North America.

Immunisation/boosters against Hepatitis A, Tetanus, Typhoid and Polio are usually recommended – **please consult your doctor in good time (at least 6 weeks before departure) about this and anything else they recommend.** You may also wish to check the advice given to travellers by the Department of Health (www.dh.gov.uk/travellers) and the FCO (www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice).

Insurance

It is essential, and a condition of booking, that you protect yourself with a suitable travel insurance policy as soon as you book a trip. We can arrange comprehensive cover for UK residents. For further details, please see the Kudu website, or ask our office.

Caveat re Itinerary

The published itinerary for the Galapagos islands is subject to alteration if weather and sea conditions make it necessary. The captain's decision as to the most appropriate routing for the safety (and comfort) of the yacht, guests and crew is at all times definitive.

Please note that most of the time (particularly during night transits) the boat is under motor rather than sail and this is not a sailing trip as such, rather a stylish way to visit the Galapagos islands in a classic brigantine.

Size of Party

This trip will run with a minimum of 10 and a maximum of 12 guests.