

Explore Ecuador and the Galapagos

Project Overview

Curious to see what all the fuss is about?

The Galapagos Islands are world renowned for inspiring Darwin to create his theory of evolution and the notion of the "survival of the fittest." The sheer diversity of species is enough to keep any nature lover captivated. On this tour you will spend your first few days exploring Quito and then head to the mountainous area of Mindo where you will help conserve the rich biodiversity of the area. Then it's off to the Galapagos Islands for an incredible tour of this unique archipelago. Highlights include visits to flamingo lagoons, horse riding through the Sierra Negra volcano region, kayaking and snorkelling with amazing tropical fish!



Trip Highlights:

- Exploring the incredible Galapagos Islands
- Seeing 'Lonesome George' - the last of the Giant Galapagos tortoises
- Horseback crater tour of the Sierra Negra volcano
- Conservation work in the stunning Mindo valley

Day 1 - Arrival into Quito

Welcome to Ecuador! You will be met at the airport and taken to your home stay accommodation for a relaxing evening.

Day 2 - Orientation in Quito

After a leisurely morning in Quito you will meet your in country team in the afternoon and have an orientation session preparing you for your time at the project and the Galapagos Islands in the i-to-i office. Breakfast, lunch and dinner are included.

Day 3 - Travel to Mindo

Today you will travel to Mindo and get settled into the lush paradise of the Valle de Mindo. The trip from Quito to Mindo takes around 2 hours by public bus. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner are included.

Day 4 to 9 - Work at the project in Mindo

Get ready to roll up your sleeves and get to work! You will be doing conservation work in the reserve and activities may include reforestation, seed collection, organic farming and building bird feeders - all of which have been identified by the project as needing your help.

During the weekend you will have some free time to explore Mindo. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner are included each day.

Day 10 - Return to Quito.

You will return to Quito by bus and spend the night at a local hostel in Quito. Breakfast is included. You can spend the day exploring Quito or simply resting up for the next leg of your tour.

Day 11 - Fly from Quito to the Galapagos Islands (Island of Baltra)

You will transfer to Quito airport and fly to the island of Baltra. At the airport you will meet your English speaking guide who will take you to lunch at the port of Puerto Ayora on Santa Cruz Island. Next you will hop on a public speedboat and travel 3 and a half hours to the lovely Isabella island. You will have a chance to settle into your hotel on Isabella island but don't get too comfortable because in the afternoon you will take a trip to the aptly titled Flamingos Lagoon, the largest coastal lagoon in the Galapagos and a breeding ground for flamingos. Breakfast, lunch and dinner are included.

Day 12- Tour Sierra Negra Volcano on horseback and snorkel or kayak by Playa Grande

After a tasty breakfast, you will start the day with a full tour of the Sierra Negra Volcano, the world's second largest volcanic crater, measuring 6 miles in diameter and 300 feet deep. In order to cover the most ground, you will be touring the crater on horseback. In the afternoon, you will return to the hotel for a brief rest and then spend the afternoon either kayaking in Playa Grande, located in Puerto Villamil, or snorkelling in Concha Perla. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner are included.

Day 13 - Visit the highlands of Santa Cruz and see giant turtles

After a filling breakfast you will take the public speedboat to Puerto Ayora where your guide will be waiting. He will take you to your hotel to drop your bags and then you will set off for a visit to the highlands of Santa Cruz Island. Here you will spend some time observing giant tortoises in their natural habitat. After lunch in the highlands, you will return to Puerto Ayora to visit the Charles Darwin Research Station. At the station you will learn about the different species on the islands and even have the chance to keep "Lonesome George" (the last Galapagos tortoise of its species) company. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner are included.

Day 14 - Visit craters and travel back to Quito

Today after breakfast you will visit your final destination, the famous "Gemelos" or "Twins." These unique land formations are similar to craters but were formed by lava flowing below the ground rather than above it. You will then transfer to the airport and fly back to Quito where you will be met and taken to your hostel. Breakfast is included.

Day 15 - Departure

You won't believe how fast time has flown by. You will make your own way to the airport and return home with your heart still racing from all the fun and excitement of the past two weeks.

What's included:

- Airport pick-up on arrival
- All local transport related to the tour excluding flights to the Galapagos
- All accommodation in shared rooms
- Most meals - as per itinerary
- The services of i-to-i's in-country team throughout your time in Ecuador
- An amazing experience!

What's not included:

- Flights to Ecuador and Galapagos
- Visa - if applicable
- Any optional additional activities
- Transfer to the airport at the end of the trip



Who is this trip for?

- Anyone who loves nature and seeing wildlife in its natural habitat. The transport and accommodation are all basic but clean. Our only criteria is that you are 18 and older.
- To ensure your airport pickup, please book your flight to arrive at Quito (airport code UIO) on the advertised arrival date.

Fast Facts

Project Information

- Project Duration: Min 2 weeks
- Project Costs: £1159.00 for 2 weeks
- Location of project: Refer to tour itinerary
- Arrival Airport: Quito (UIO airport code) on arrival date. A flight on to San Cristobal will be arranged for you and added on to your statement (budget approximately US\$500)
- Activities: 5 days volunteering at a nature reserve plus a 4 day tour of the Galapagos Islands
- Working Hours: Flexible; usually full days at the project
- Getting to the project: Accommodation on-site
- Requirements: Minimum age 18
- Other: Semana Santa (Latin America Holy week) will be from March 26th to April 4th 2010 and from April 15th to April 24th 2011, you may have some disruptions to the placement during this time

What's Included

- Accommodation: Varied; shared accommodation in cabin, volunteer house, home stay and hostel
- Food: Most meals are included - please see itinerary for full details
- Airport Pickup: Included on arrival date. Ask us for details if you're arriving early!
- Training: In-country orientation
- Support: Pre-departure helpdesk, Local in-country team and 24hr emergency support
- Galapagos Islands entry permit

What's not included

- Flights (both to Ecuador and to the Galapagos Islands), Insurance, Visas

Country Guide - Ecuador

A little bit of history...

For thousands of years before the Incas arrived from Peru to expand their empire, advanced indigenous cultures made Ecuador their home. They fought hard to hold on but from the 1400s the Inca's succeeded in developing its civilisation into neighbouring territories. The Incas were not immune from shifts in power and, during the same year the Spanish set foot on Ecuadorian soil (1526), the Inca Empire was divided for the first time when Inca ruler Huayna Capac went against tradition by leaving his empire to two sons rather than one. After years of fighting, Atahualpa defeated Huascar to become ruler of the empire. His position was short lived and the Inca Empire was all but confined to a place in history when in the 1530s the Spanish laid down the foundations to rule the country. Under Spanish rule, Indians and Mestizos (people of mixed indigenous and European descent) suffered forced labour and several uprisings ensued. Liberator Simón Bolívar helped secure independence for Ecuador, which was fully achieved by 1830.

Against a backdrop of violent rivalry between liberal and



conservative factions, an unstable political climate dominated the 19th century and was marked by a quick succession of rulers. The 20th century brought mixed fortunes. The country's development was hampered by the collapse of the cacao market in the 1920s and the Great Depression of the 1930s but it achieved stable civilian rule and increased banana exports from 1948 to 1960. Recession and social unrest led to an anti-communist military government taking power in the early 1960s and it wasn't until 1979 that democratic constitutional measures were put into play. Indigenous groups now have a voice and influence on politics but the country has a lot of economic ground to cover and high levels of unemployment. On an environmental level, Ecuador is rich in biodiversity but has one of the highest deforestation rates in South America.

Best time to go...

The diversity of Ecuador does not fit neatly into four seasons. As a general note, it has a dry winter from June to September and a wet summer from December to April. For hiking in the highlands, the best time is during the cool winter. For exploring the jungle (the Oriente), there isn't a temperate period as it's often thick with humidity, while the sierra can get chilly and coastal areas are warm year round.

The Galápagos Islands experience hot, rainy weather from January to April and its waters are comfortably warm during this time, making it ideal for snorkelling. During the rest of the year the water is on the chilly side at around 20°C (68°F) or lower. The surfing season is typically December to February.

The biggest celebration days are Christmas, Semana Santa (Easter week), Inti Raymi (June 24), and Independence Day (May 24). Expect an influx of visitors during these periods and from June to August when the vacation season is in full swing.

Getting around...

There's no better way to see the snow-capped Andes than to fly. The flight from Quito to Cuenca alone takes in the sight of volcano after volcano. With great views aside, flying in Ecuador is affordable and also convenient; you can get to where you want to go in usually no more than half an hour's flying time. The country's main airlines like Tame offer daily services to the main towns and cities, usually departing from Quito or Guayaquil. It's also the best way to get to the Oriente, with other modes of transport unable to access the area. Flights to the Galápagos Islands, however, can be pricey and flying time from Ecuador is around 3 hours. Depending on your destination but particularly for flights to the Galápagos Islands and the Oriente, there is a system in place whereby foreigners are required to pay more than double what Ecuadorians pay. It's also worth noting that seats are not reserved and are given on a first come, first served basis. Reconfirming a flight 24 hours before is imperative as it's not unknown for airlines to renege your reservation if it hasn't been confirmed ahead of departure.

Buses are a cheaper option and although most long distance journeys take a day or less, it can feel longer due to the road conditions. Buses usually leave from central terminals and it's best to buy a ticket at least a few hours in advance to reserve a seat. Local buses are often very cheap but also very crowded. Taxis are a good option for short journeys or day trips out of cities if hired for the day and can be cheaper than car rental. Taximeters are in existence but not always switched on so it's best to agree on a price before the journey begins.