

ECUADOR AND GALAPAGOS

CRUISE

DAY 1

QUITO

Fly to Quito on the daytime flight, arriving in the evening.

Transfer to the [**HOTEL PATIO ANDALUZ**](#), located in the historic centre.

DAY 2

QUITO

Morning tour of historic Quito.

There will be a visit to downtown Quito to relish in this urban jewel and its treasures of art and architecture.

Quito's colonial quarter, the largest and best preserved of South America, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The stroll starts at the Independence Plaza, flanked by the Cathedral, the Presidential Palace, the Municipal Building and the Archbishop's Palace.

Visit the temple of La Compañía de Jesús and its awesome gilded interior.

Continue on to the Monastery of San Francisco, one the of great religious buildings of the New World; its impressive façade and atrium that lead to its Baroque interior influenced by Moorish style, with the winged Virgin of Quito at its main altar.

Then continue to the Equatorial Monument, 16 miles north of Quito, which marks the exact Middle of the World, latitude 0°, where you can stand with a foot on each hemisphere.

Visit the Ethnographic Museum inside the monument, which shows the different Native American groups living in Ecuador. Beside the monument there is a colonial-style town, complete with Main Square, church, post office, bullring, cafeterias, restaurants and many gift shops with postcards and souvenirs. You will get a certificate for having crossed the Equator.

DAY 3

AVENUE OF THE VOLCANOES

The adventure starts in Quito, heading due south through the outskirts of the capital.

This first leg reaches the charming town of Sangolqui, where a stop is made to explore the traditional Andean market, full of animals, produce and people: a great introduction to the Andean way of life.

Over to the east, the journey enters Cotopaxi National Park, an ecological sanctuary of 88,920 acres that harbours the magnificent cone of the Cotopaxi Volcano, rising 5,897 meters (19,347 feet) above sea level.

The evergreen landscape of the Ecuadorian highlands is one of the main attractions, as the programme travels along valleys and over mountains patch worked with multi-coloured fields.

After an hour and a half, the entrance to the park is reached and then it's up a dirt road for approximately one hour. Upon arrival at the park, there is an introductory briefing about the habitat of the Andean páramo or high-altitude moorlands.

Continue on to Limpiopungo Lagoon to observe a variety of birds and occasionally wild horses and to enjoy a short walk. On clear days, the Cotopaxi Volcano accompanies guests as a magnificent backdrop.

Lunch is served at a local restaurant in the area.

Continue along the Pan American Highway, up and down the slopes of the famous Avenue of the Volcanoes.

Continue by bus to Urbina Train Station, high up, at the foot of imposing Chimborazo Volcano.

Visit a Tagua nut workshop and warm up with a canelazo and biscuits by the fireplace and, if the Chimborazo is clear, an amazing sunset can be expected.

Then continue by bus to Riobamba for dinner and overnight at the [**HACIENDA ABRASPUNGO**](#).

DAY 4

DEVIL'S NOSE TRAIN

After an early breakfast, depart by road (about 2 hours) towards the small town of Alausí, the beating heart of the rehabilitation of the Ecuadorian Railway Company in the last years.

Great efforts have been made to restore the 100-year old train stations, replace railways and sleepers, renovate engines and classic coaches, and involve the Indian communities in the rail operation for tourism along the route.

The highlight is the thrilling 800-metre (2630-foot) descent via zigzags cut into the rock of the Devil's Nose.

At the bottom is the newly renovated Sibambe Station. Here there is time to visit the local museum "Condor Puñuna" built and run by the Nizag community, see the display of local handcrafts, fruit and medicinal plants and try the local coffee.

The train whistle calls guests back on board for the return to Alausí Station.

Continue exploring the Andean world by road to the south, passing through stunning landscapes before visiting the Inca Fortress of Ingapirca en-route.

Lunch is served in the area.

Arrival at Cuenca at dusk, for dinner and overnight at the [**MANSIÓN ALCÁZAR**](#).

DAY 5

COLONIAL CUENCA

Cuenca is Ecuador's third largest city; yet it still retains its pleasant provincial air. Its red tiled roofs, cobblestone streets, flowery plazas and museums make it very special.

This comprehensive visit includes the Plaza of San Sebastian, a colourful artisans' market, where handicrafts are sold.

Then, visit the Museum of Modern Art, featuring an excellent collection of contemporary fine art.

Next is a visit to the flower market at the small plaza in front of the carved stone entrance to the church of El Carmen de la Asunción.

From here, a stroll to the main square, surrounded by the imposing blue-domed Cathedral, the Court of Justice, the Municipal Palace, the Governor's Palace and the Church of El Sagrario.

Then, a drive along the Tomebamba river to admire the city's riverbank houses.

Lunch is at one of the excellent restaurants in Cuenca, and in the afternoon, a short drive visits a ceramics handcraft shop, followed by a visit to a Panama Hat factory to observe the whole process of making the famous hats of high-quality toquilla straw.

Overnight in Cuenca.

DAY 6

CUENCA TO GUAYAQUIL

Overland transfer from Cuenca to Guayaquil via El Cajas National park.

El Cajas National Park has an area of 28.544 hectares, in the western Cordillera of the Andes, with 235 lakes of glacial origin (Mesozoic and Quaternary Periods), at an altitude of 3200 to 4000 meters above sea level with humid Andean cloud forests which act like a sponge by soaking up water that Cuenca then utilizes.

Stops are made at Llaviucu Lake for a short stroll and for a view of La Toreadora Lake; beautiful scenery!

Overnight in Guayaquil at the [**HILTON COLON**](#).

DAY 7

GALAPAGOS ISLANDS

Fly to the Galapagos Islands to embark on your cruise and experience the amazing wildlife of the area.

Upon arrival to Puerto Baquerizo Moreno, our crew is waiting at the airport to escort you by bus, then zodiac to your yacht anchored in port, where you will be staying on either the [**ERIC, LETTY OR FLAMINGO**](#).

After the welcome briefing, a delicious buffet lunch and safety drill, we travel by bus to the southern shore to visit La Galapaguera Cerro Colorado.

Here, the National Park has established a breeding program for the giant land tortoises that you will encounter living in their natural habitat. Learn about their origin, evolution and threats by introduced animals at the information centre for visitors.

Along the trail, we find the San Cristobal (Chatham) mockingbird, lava lizard and Calandrinia plant, which are endemic to this island.

DAY 8

GALAPAGOS ISLANDS CRUISE

Today we visit the northeast tip of San Cristobal, Punta Pitt, a tuff formation that serves as a nesting site for many sea birds including all three types of boobies: Blue footed, Nazca and Red-footed boobies, both Frigate species, swallow-tailed gulls, Storm petrels and a colony of sea lions.

Punta Pitt is considered to be a first class site for birds and on par with Genovesa (Tower) Island.

A Zodiac ride is offered as well as kayaking and snorkelling from the beach following the walk.

We arrive to Cerro Brujo, a breath taking white coral beach, considered one of the most spectacular in Galapagos and great for a peaceful walk with expansive views and good bird watching.

We have an opportunity to snorkel or kayak from the beach or swim with sea lions as well as a Zodiac ride.

We return to the yacht for a briefing followed by dinner.

DAY 9

GALAPAGOS ISLANDS CRUISE

We disembark at Punta Suarez, ESPANOLA, where we witness the highest rate of endemic species in Galapagos.

Sea lions noisily greet us as we land on their beach.

Observe a unique species of marine iguana identified with traces of red and green colourings.

Colourful sally light-foot crabs crawl along the shoreline near to the famous "blow hole".

After a wet landing on Gardner Bay, ESPANOLA (HOOD), walk along seemingly endless stretches of this white sandy beach where you'll find large colonies of sea lions.

There is no trail to follow so this is a chance to explore or take a long walk or jog. You may find a Galapagos Hawk, Darwin's Finches or Hood Mockingbird.

Swim with sea lions right from the beach, explore the bay and islets by kayak or just relax on the beach.

There's an excellent snorkelling site off Gardner Islet with a colourful diversity of sea life near Tortuga Rock, explore caves by Zodiac covered with invertebrates.

We return to the yacht for a briefing followed by dinner.

DAY 10

GALAPAGOS ISLANDS CRUISE

Step ashore at Punta Cormorant, FLOREANA (Charles), one of the few populated islands in the Galapagos.

Floreana presents a rich human history with mystery and intrigue.

Set foot on a green-sand beach alive with the sounds of sea lions.

Follow a trail to a brackish lagoon, home of the pintail ducks, common stilts, and the Greater Flamingos, the pinkest in the world.

Wind your way past a rich variety of plants leading to a beach with power soft sand.

Sea turtles lay their eggs in the sand dunes and rays swim in the shallow water.

After the walk, we have an opportunity to snorkel at Devil's Crown or Champion, a shallow sunken crater colonized by a brilliant array of colourful fish and corral.

Chose to have a picnic lunch on deck or dine inside.

We also visit Post Office Bay, not the most scenic, but one of the most famous sites in Galapagos. Here is where a post barrel was erected and put into use in the late 18th Century by English whaling vessels. You are invited to leave a post card and to pick up any mail from your home area.

We return to the yacht for a briefing followed by dinner.

DAY 11

GALAPAGOS ISLANDS CRUISE

We disembark in port and travel by bus to the highlands of Santa Cruz Island.

The scenery gradually changes as we wind our way through all seven vegetation zones found in Galapagos.

Here, we visit the tortoise reserve at "Las Primicias" one of the private farms in the highlands where we encounter giant tortoises in their natural habitat.

We visit Los Gemelos, Spanish for "The Twins", a pair of large pit craters where we find the bright red male vermilion flycatcher.

Today we visit the Centro de Crianza Fausto Llerena (formerly the Charles Darwin Research Station). See all three tortoise corals and the breeding centre with new hatchlings and miniature tortoises not yet ready to be repatriated.

This evening you have the option to return to your yacht for a buffet dinner or remain in town on your own account.

Those who return to the yacht will be provided zodiacs to return to town to shop for souvenirs, watch a soccer game, or stop at a pub or internet café.

Zodiacs will be provided for your return to your yacht.

DAY 12

GALAPAGOS ISLANDS CRUISE

We disembark at Bartolome, where it seems like we are walking on the moon.

This young Island is inhospitable to most plants and animals.

After a dry landing, climb 30 minutes up stairs leading to the summit of a once active volcano.

Along the way, we pause to marvel at lava bombs, spatter cones and cinder cones.

From the top of the wooden stairs, we can gaze out across the island for a panoramic view of the island and "Pinnacle Rock", an eroded tuff cone.

Crystal clear water is an invitation to snorkel from the beach with schools of tropical fish and Galapagos Penguins or take a Zodiac ride.

We visit Las Bachas, which is the Spanish translation for "barges". There is a long stretch of a soft white sand beach and interior lagoons where we find the Greater Flamingo. There is also a wonderful chance to snorkel here from the beach.

Located off the Southern tip of Santiago is Sombrero Chino or Chinese Hat, which owes its name to its shape.

After a wet beach landing with sea lion colonies, the trail gives way to a primeval landscape of volcanic rubble including cracked lava formations and lava tubes.

We find marine iguanas and pairs of oystercatchers or you can choose to snorkel at a site that is frequented by Galapagos penguins.

There is a briefing followed by dinner as we anchor in a calm protected area.

DAY 13

GALAPAGOS ISLANDS CRUISE

Today we visit South Plaza, a small geological uplift with tall cliffs offering spectacular views.

After a dry landing, the trails lead us through Prickly Pear cactus or Opuntia and Sesuvium. Here we can find the Galapagos Land Iguana feeding on the cactus leaves.

Toward the end of the hill, we encounter a colony of bachelor sea lions. The dominant bulls are in various stages of recovery from battles lost over prime beach territory. We also find Swallow tailed gulls, Shearwaters and Red-billed tropicbirds who build their nests along the cliffs.

We have a dry landing at North Seymour, a small geological uplift.

We follow a trail that leads us to Swallow-tailed gulls, Blue-footed boobies and the endemic Land iguanas. Visit the largest colony of Magnificent Frigate birds found in Galapagos.

As we stroll along the beach, we find Marine Iguanas and sea lions body surf the northern swells.

After the walk there is a snorkelling opportunity offered in deep water.

We return to the yacht for the Captain's Farewell cocktail party and dinner as well as a special slide show presentation by your guides.

DAY 14

GALAPAGOS ISLANDS CRUISE

We visit the Interpretation Centre opened on San Cristobal Island in 1999.

Here we gain a more complete understanding of the natural and human history of the Islands.

Afterwards, we spend time in port before heading to the airport for our flight back to the mainland departing noon time on Aerogal.

Overnight in Guayaquil in the **HILTON COLON.**

DAY 15

Today you will be transferred to the airport for your return flight to London.