

Highlights

Andean Town Of Banos

Cotopaxi - The Highest Active Snow-capped Volcano In The World

Indian Market Town Of Otavalo

Papallacta's Thermal Springs

The Amazon Basin

The Panorama From Basilica Del Voto Naciona

UNESCO World Heritage-listed Colonial Quito

Bartolome's Lunar-like Landscape

Frigatebird Spotting

Puerto Ayora

Sombrero Chino

Sullivan Bay's Black Lava Field

The Tortoises Of Charles Darwin Research Station

Ecuador is a microcosm of South America. Within its borders are snow-capped mountains, smoking volcanoes, large rivers, lush tropical coastal plains and dense Amazonian jungle. And if this isn't enough to tempt the adventurous traveller then 1,000 km off the coast lie the world famous Galapagos Islands. These huge volcanic peaks, rising from the ocean floor, are home to many unique species of wildlife including the giant Galapagos tortoise. Charles Darwin's observations of the islands' flora and fauna played a substantial part in the formulation of his theory of evolution. On your Ecuador holiday you will get to experience all these things and much more.

Itinerary

Day 1

 Quito

Your trip starts today in Quito. No activities are planned, so you may arrive at any time. Quito is considered one of the world's most beautifully located capitals, surrounded by towering snow-capped volcanoes. Situated 2850 metres above sea level on the eastern slopes of an active volcano, Mount Pichincha, it is the second highest capital city in the world.

This evening there will be a tour briefing at our hotel – around 6 pm. If you are unable to make this meeting, please check at hotel reception for a message from your Imaginative Traveller's tour leader.

Note: On arrival in Quito, you may experience some of the milder effects of altitude such as dizziness, insomnia and shortness of breath. If this is the case we recommend that you drink plenty of fluids, and avoid any strenuous activity. Perhaps a perfect opportunity to instead soak up the atmosphere in one of the many bustling cafes and watch the colourful street life pass by in the colonial centre.

**Day
2**

Charles Darwin Station - Galapagos Cruise

You are transferred to Quito Airport for your early morning flight to the tiny island of Baltra in the Galapagos. You must pay a US\$100 national park tax on arrival at the Galapagos Airport. This is best done using cash as using credit cards is a time-consuming process. You are met in the arrival hall and then bussed to the Itabaca Canal. Crossing this narrow canal to Santa Cruz Island you then continue south across the Island to the small town of Puerto Ayora. The town is the economic centre of the archipelago and is home to the Charles Darwin Research Station. Here you come face to face with the giant Galapagos tortoise, which gave its name to the islands. There is time to visit the station and observe the research and breeding programs. In the late afternoon you board our boat anchored in the harbour. Once on board you will be assigned your cabins before we set sail. (B, L, D)

**Day
3**

Rabida - Santiago

Rabida is one of the most volcanically varied islands in the chain. The volcanic rocks are covered with palo santo trees, opuntia cacti and low, scrubby bushes. Sea lions abound on the red sand beach and nearby is a flamingo lagoon. There are also several species of Darwin finches to be seen. At Puerto Egas on Santiago we see amazing tidal pools formed from ancient lava flow, home to sponges, snails, hermit crabs, barnacles and fish. The beach is also the breeding ground for large numbers of marine iguanas. On a walk we also see a variety of shore birds including American oystercatcher and ruddy turnstone. Sugarloaf Mountain offers a magical backdrop to the area and a natural bridge leads to the inlets, where endemic fur seals are found. (B, L, D)

**Day
4**

Bartolome - Sombrero Chino

This morning a climb along the Summit Trail takes us to the top of Bartolome and to one of the most stunning, panoramic views of the Galapagos. Bartolome is a relatively new island in the chain and evidence of its volcanic past can be seen everywhere. The lunar-like landscape here is amazing. During World War II Pinnacle Rock was used for target practice, thus giving it its pinnacle-like formation. The tiny island of Sombrero Chino is approached via a beautiful crescent-shaped, sandy beach and is home to sea lions and Sally Lightfoot crabs. Here along the trails we discover the island's volcanic origin, which is more evident here than on the other islands. It is a miniature volcano that is shaped like a Chinese hat (hence its Spanish name – Sombrero Chino). Tonight is our last night on board the boat and an appropriate to drink a toast to the amazing journey we have just had! (B, L, D)

**Day
5**

North Seymour - Baltra - Quito

North Seymour is probably one of the Galapagos' most visited islands. A short loop takes one along the sandy beach with good views of Daphne Major and Minor. The trail takes us inland into a palo santo forest and low, bushy vegetation. Enjoyable for both its wildlife and views from the beach, the island is also the nesting ground for the magnificent frigate bird. Also look out for blue-footed booby, sea lion and marine iguana. We then cruise back to Baltra, where we say goodbye to the amazing Galapagos Islands and take our return flight to Quito. Please don't forget that a tip is considered appropriate for your guide and the boat crew, as they have worked hard to ensure that you have had a memorable trip to the islands. As a guideline we recommend each passenger consider US\$15 per day for the crew and US\$7-10 per day for your guide. On arrival in Quito we are transferred to our hotel, where there will be a meeting at 7.00pm in the evening to discuss the upcoming land portion of our tour. (B)

**Day
6**

Quito

Quito is not only the capital of Ecuador, but it also has one of the most impressive and well-preserved 'old town' areas in South America. In the morning we embark on a walking tour around the charming and evocative 'Centro Historico'. Declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1978, there is much to discover, meandering through the narrow, cobblestone streets and exploring the lively Plaza Grande and Plaza San Francisco. The city is filled with Baroque art and architecture, as exemplified by magnificent churches, monasteries and public buildings. We visit the beautiful Church of the Society of Jesus (La Compania de Jesus). With its ornate facade and intricately decorated and gold-gilded interior, this is undoubtedly Ecuador's most impressive church. Exploring further afield we head for one of the many viewpoints over the city. 'El Panecillo' (The Little Bread Loaf) offers sensational views of the city's white houses and surrounding volcanoes. The 30-metre high statue of 'La Virgen de Quito' sits atop this small hill and can be seen from all over the city. We then drive north of the city to visit 'La Mitad del Mundo' (The Middle of the World). This monument is built on what was claimed in 1736 to be the line of the equator. We also visit another smaller complex nearby called Museo Solar Inti Nan, which is supposedly where the equator actually runs through since re-measurements were made. This is an entertaining little place where experiments are conducted before our very eyes. The evening is free for us to dine out at one of the many great eating spots in Quito (optional).

(B)

**Day
7**

Equator Monument - Otavalo Market

Today we drive north of the city to visit 'La Mitad del Mundo' (The Middle of the World). This monument is built on what was claimed in 1736 to be the line of the equator. We also visit another smaller complex nearby called Museo Solar Inti Nan, which is supposedly where the equator actually runs through since re-measurements were made. This is an entertaining little place where experiments are conducted before our very eyes. We then continue on to enjoy the colourful indigenous town of Otavalo, where we find one of the best handicraft markets in the Andes. In the afternoon we visit the surrounding villages, where we can see

the local indigenous communities at work making beautiful handicrafts. Cotachi village is well known for its leather whilst San Antonio is famous for its woodcarvings. There may also be time to visit a beautiful crater-lake known as Cuicocha before returning to Quito in the late afternoon. (B)

**Day
8-9**

Papallacta Thermal Springs - the Amazon Basin

We leave Quito early and travel by road over the mountains and down to the Amazon basin. The highest pass is at 4060 metres before arriving at the volcanic baths at Papallacta. We break our journey here to relax and enjoy the hot thermal pools and the beautiful mountain scenery. Continuing our descent the scenery changes rapidly to thick jungle vegetation. We arrive in the jungle town of Tena and continue on to our jungle lodge on the banks of the Napo River for a two-night stop. During our stay we explore the jungle with a local guide who shares their extensive knowledge of the local flora and fauna. This will include forest walks through both primary and secondary forest, canoe rides and a visit to the Amazonico, a rehabilitation centre for injured jungle animals. There is a small entrance fee we need to pay here. At the centre we will see some of the animals that live in the more remote areas of this immense rainforest. (2B, L, 2D)

**Day
10-11**

Banos

Leaving the jungle we climb steeply into the Andes. Towering mountain peaks and deep gorges provide stunning scenery. We break our drive for a short trek to one of Ecuador's most beautiful waterfalls - El Pailon del Diablo. We arrive in Banos in the late afternoon. The town of Banos lies in one of the loveliest settings in the Andes. Here we have time to explore the town or, if we like, we can venture off into the surrounding countryside. There are many optional activities including mountain bike riding, white-water rafting and horseback riding. (2B)

**Day
12**

Cotopaxi Volcano - Quito

Today we return to Quito, stopping to visit the Cotopaxi Volcano (5897m) the highest active, snow capped volcano in the world. Those who are keen for some physical exercise can climb to the refuge, a 200 metre steep climb (from 4600 – 4800 metres). Once we reach the refuge it is an easy hike to the snow line and the glacier. We arrive back in Quito in the late afternoon for our final night together with new-found friends. (B)

**Day
13**

Quito

Our discovery tour of Ecuador and the Enchanted Isles finishes today after breakfast. (B)

Itinerary Variation

While the information presented here details our planned itinerary, including routes taken, activities included, accommodation and meeting times, please accept that unforeseen changes may occur. We are constantly on the lookout to improve our program and further enhance your experience. Naturally, we will keep you up to date with any last minute amendments to your tour.

About The Imaginative Traveller

Our aim has always been to provide exceptional travel experiences. We believe that adventure travel should be stimulating, and that it should give you an authentic experience of a place. We want our travellers to relish the amazing diversity of countries and cultures the world has to offer. Our focus is on innovation, not imitation.

Obsessed with quality

One of our strengths has been our obsession with quality. We've always believed that our commitment to you doesn't end as soon as you've paid for your holiday. On the contrary, it is just beginning. Whilst most operators simply get a local company to handle the day to day operation of their tours, we do it all ourselves. We have managers for each of our **key destinations** around the world and all our small groups are escorted by our own leaders. Our local teams include guides, drivers, administration staff and contacts in the local community who help us ensure that our adventures are active and involving.

For comparability, all prices in this dossier are quoted in one currency. We use the US Dollar since that is familiar to most. However, once on tour you will need to pay for all goods and services in the local currency. See your Country Dossier for details of exchange rates.

Trip Grade

Wildlife

Take your pick: hunt for tigers in northern India; listen to monkey chatter and birdsong in the jungles of Costa Rica and Peru; gawp at the Galapagos' diversity. And of course the big one: Africa. The names alone evoke images of wildlife: the Serengeti, Masai Mara, Kruger. And the reality's even better. Africa's got the lot, so go beyond the Big Five by hiking to close encounters with gorillas in Uganda's forests, walking with lions at Zimbabwe's Antelope Park, or canoeing past crocs on the Okavango Delta. From the Cape's loveable penguins to Egypt's loping camels, Africa's animals await.

Culture

Whether you're taking in man's greatest works at places like Petra or Angkor Wat, experiencing grand set-pieces like the Trans-Mongolian Railway or trying your hand at regional specialities like tango in Buenos Aires, getting to grips with local cultures is what travel's all about. A few tips from a local guide and a sense of adventure are pretty much all you need. So what are you waiting for? It's time to get the lowdown on high Tibet among Lhasa's magisterial temples; follow up Delhi's eye-popping bustle with a fix of its fiery food; and mix manic markets and Incan masterpieces in Peru.

Walking

Maybe you're after a ramble through Morocco's Dades Gorge, or a stroll in Malaysia's Cameron Highlands. Or perhaps something more energetic, a hike in South Africa's spectacular Drakensberg Mountains or along a stretch of China's Great Wall. Whatever you want, the same principles apply: keep it simple, and slow it down. Stretching the legs is a great way to discover somewhere, whether a city's downtown or remote countryside. You quickly get into the feel for how life's lived, the local rhythm of where you're travelling. And there's no better way of meeting locals – take a walk through African plains or South American valleys and you'll soon be trying to hurdle language barriers with friendly villagers and farmers.

Cruising

Camp on the Nile's banks or jump off your junk into Halong Bay. Chill out on the Mekong or explore Kerala's hidden channels. The perfect mix of relaxation and exploration, spending time on the water turns a holiday into an adventure, a chance to get closer to locals and see countries in a unique way. And there's one place if you want to explore you really must go by boat: the Galapagos. Only boats get you to uninhabited islands and the best snorkelling spots; only by boat can you get closer to all the amazing animals of these fabulous islands.

Fitness

Galapagos Voyage

No particular level of physical fitness is required for our Galapagos voyages, although you should be reasonably agile and enjoying good health. Please keep in mind that there are a number of shore excursions on your cruise. This involves boarding a small dingy or zodiac from the rear transom of the cruise boat. Disembarkation at some locations will be at steps or a small pier, whilst at other locations you may be required to disembark on the beach. This can involve having to wade ashore a short distance through shallow water. A degree of agility will be required for this. Once you are on shore you will undertake several walks, some across volcanic rock. For this a reasonable level of fitness is beneficial, as is a pair of good walking shoes or boots.

Included

- An English speaking naturalist guide on board the Galapagos vessel - Shore excursions during your voyage - Return flights from Quito to the Galapagos Islands - Jungle excursions during your Amazon stay - Quito city tour including One museum, Compania Church & Panecillo - Short hike to 'El Pailon del Diablo' (waterfall) - Entry to Cotopaxi National Park - Entry to Cuicocha Lake in Otavalo - Transport, accommodation and meals as listed below

Not included

International flights, arrival and departure transfers, departure and airport taxes, visas, entrance fees, Galapagos transit card, US\$100 Galapagos National Park fee, other meals, optional tours or activities during free time, snorkel hire, transfers outside of the tour program, travel insurance, tips and items of a personal nature

Meals

12 breakfasts, 4 lunches, 5 dinners

Accommodation

2 nights Amazon jungle lodge, 7 nights Budget/tourist class hotels, 3 nights Cruise boat

Single room supplement

Most of our travellers like the thought of travelling with a few like-minded souls. There are NO compulsory single supplements on most tours as we simply arrange twin shared accommodation for you and another tour member of the same sex. But don't worry if that doesn't appeal. We do understand there are times when you just want a bit of privacy and 'me' time so we are more than happy to arrange a private room upon request when you book.

Transport

Boat, Bus, Canoe, Minibus, Plane

Entrance fees

You must pay US\$100 entrance fee to Galapagos Islands National Park upon arrival at Baltra Airport in the Galapagos. In the interest of speed and efficiency, this is best paid in cash.

The Ecuadorian Government requires that all visitors to the Galapagos Islands, obtain a transit card. The cost of this transit card is US\$10 and you must pay this in cash upon entrance to the national park.

Optional excursions

*prices below are guide only

Banos - Bike rental

- US\$8

Quito - City tour

- US\$30

Quito - Mountain biking

- US\$50-\$60

Other information

On arrival in the islands you must pay US\$100 national park fee to enter Galapagos National Park. There is a naturalist guide onboard for the Galapagos cruise, but no Gecko's tour leader. Your Gecko's leader will join you on Day 5 for the land section of your adventure.

The itinerary and supplementary information has been compiled with care and provided in good faith. However it may be subject to change, and does not form part of a contract between the client and The Imaginative Traveller.

Responsible Travel - Travellers' Guidelines

At Imaginative Traveller we love helping our clients experience the beauty and cultures of the destinations we visit. However, hand in hand with this we have always been aware that we have a responsibility to minimise any negative impacts that tourism can bring.

Responsible Travel is twofold. It's about taking people to the places they want to go in a safe and responsible manner but also about respecting and maintaining the natural and often delicate balance of the destination. Economic gain from tourism is often fundamental to a country, but should never be at the expense of its culture or the environment.

Our Aims

It is our aim to provide journeys that have minimal negative and maximum positive impact on the places we visit.

We do not believe that, as visitors, we should impose our own cultures on others; rather that we should experience foreign cultures and appreciate them for what they are.

Whilst it is our aim to show destinations and cultures in a positive light, we do not believe in papering over the cracks or shielding visitors from the realities of life. This does not mean, however, that we condone or endorse certain situations or regimes that may be in place.

Our guidelines are meant not as rigid instructions but rather as suggestions to make our holidays more enjoyable – for everybody. As cultural and environmental sensitivities vary from country to country more specific guidelines can be found in our individual country and trip dossiers.

Travellers' Guidelines

- ✓ Before you depart try to spend some time familiarising yourself with the destination you will be travelling to – their culture and customs. The country dossiers on our website offer detailed information about all the regions we visit. They also include some useful phrases in the local language for you to use on your trip! A few words of the local language can open up many more opportunities for you to interact with the people you will meet.
- ✓ Although it is tempting to give out pens, sweets and money to people begging, and particularly tempting to give to children, we feel that this encourages a begging mentality and has a long-term negative impact on communities. If someone begging earns more than someone in the same community who works this can discourage local employment. If children regularly bring home money it may discourage their parents from sending them to school. It is of course your own personal choice but you could consider giving to registered charities or contributing to our Responsible Travel fund instead. Money donated through our fund to our worldwide projects is matched pound for pound by Imaginative Traveller and used to help local grassroots projects.
- ✓ Always ask permission to photograph local people and respect their decision if they would prefer not to have their picture taken.
- ✓ Respect local dress codes, especially at religious sites. Our tour leaders are always on hand to give you advice about this.
- ✓

In many of the countries we visit you might see examples of animal cruelty (for example dancing bears, performing monkeys and snake charmers). Please do not take photographs of this or offer money as it encourages the activity.

- ✓ Respect the environment you are in. It sounds obvious but do not throw litter, take it with you or use rubbish bins! You may see locals throwing rubbish on the street but do not follow their example!
- ✓ When shopping in countries where haggling is the norm – enjoy it and only pay what you feel is a fair price for the goods you are purchasing. However, remember that the shopkeeper does have to make a living so do stop once you have reached a price you are happy with. Bargaining should be fun but always remember that a small amount can mean much more to the vendor than to you.
- ✓ Endeavor to take home souvenirs made locally; the money you spend can be very important to the local communities. However, do use your common sense and don't buy anything that you think might be made out of endangered animals or plants.
- ✓ To help keep as much money as possible in the host country - try to eat in locally owned restaurants and order local drinks and produce rather than international brands.
- ✓ In hotels do be conscious of how much water you are using. Many of the areas we visit regularly have shortages; try not to have hour long showers! Don't leave lights, air conditioners or fans on when you leave the room – you wouldn't at home!
- ✓ Respect the environment you are in, especially when in national parks or reserves. Pay attention to rules about keeping on paths, keeping a distance from animals and not removing any of the natural habitat.
- ✓ Relax and immerse yourself in the differences of the culture you are in – you'll be back home in the familiar soon enough (and wishing you were still on holiday!). These cultural differences are part of what makes your experience special.

If you would like to offset the carbon dioxide that will be produced on your flights you can do this on our website ([on our Responsible travel page](#)). We work with climatecare, who will reduce the equivalent amount of carbon dioxide that you produce in another part of the World through their emission reduction projects. These projects are low carbon efficient technologies in developing countries and not only serve to reduce emissions but also help to spread the adoption of low carbon technologies and improve the quality of life for local communities. Details of climatecare's projects can be [found on their website](#).



If you would like to contribute to our Worldwide projects, helping communities all over the World, you can also do this on our website or with a sales consultant. Please refer to our [responsible travel page](#) on the website for details of our current projects. Any donation you make will be matched £ for £ by Imaginative Traveller (up to a maximum of £1000).

Have a great trip!

Please do let us know if you have any comments about responsible travel at rto@imtrav.net

The Imaginative Traveller & Gecko's Adventures This trip is operated by our partner company, Gecko's Adventures. Gecko's is an Australia based company with more than 10 years experience in adventure travel and they share our ethos for offering unique holiday adventures. As this is a code shared departure you can expect there to be both Imaginative Traveller and Gecko's travellers on your trip.

Last updated: 12/07/2011

Questions?

If you have any questions please [click here](#) to view our Q & A page where you can view questions other travellers have asked and submit your own.