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GALAPAGOS CRUISE AND COLONIAL QUITO ECUADOR TOUR

The Classic South America Cruise

8 DAYS / 7 NIGHTS

Explore Ecuador's highlights - the capital of Quito, the famous indigenous market of Otavalo, the Middle of the World Equatorial Monument, and of course, the Galapagos Islands. Combine a 4-day Galapagos Islands Cruise (which can be customized to add more days) with a city tour of Quito and its surrounding highlights, and you'll come away knowing the best that Ecuador has to offer. So many folks travel to Ecuador and simply bypass the mainland, opting to go straight to the Galapagos Islands. But mainland Ecuador is simply beautiful, with its colonial churches in Quito, the Avenue of the Volcanoes, and its large indigenous population. Don't miss out on Ecuador highlights - add this Quito Ecuador tour to any of our Galapagos Islands Cruises.

FROM
**GET
CUSTOM
PRICING**
per person

THIS TOUR INCLUDES:

- 3 nights in 4* or 5* Quito hotels
- All transfers and entrance fees
- All tours mentioned in the itinerary
- All meals aboard the cruise ship
- All breakfasts in Quito hotels
- Professional naturalist guides aboard the cruise
- Professional guides in Quito and surrounding areas

HIGHLIGHTS

- Quito City Tour
- Mitad del Mundo (Middle of the World) Monument
- Otavalo indigenous market
- Galapagos Islands Cruise
- Daily excursions while on the cruise: Guided nature hikes, volcano explorations, Snorkeling opportunities

ITINERARY



Day 1

ARRIVAL IN QUITO

Starting every Thursday or Friday

Upon arrival in Quito, one of our guides will greet you and transfer you to your Quito hotel. The capital of Ecuador, Quito is situated at the foot of the volcano Pichincha and is surrounded by hills and snow-capped mountains. The city is known for its colonial churches and well-preserved architecture, and was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1978. The city has nearly one impressive church on every block: there are 86 churches and monasteries built in the 16th and 17th centuries. Much of the architecture reveals a blend of Spanish, Flemish, Moorish, and pre-Colombian styles. Spend the rest of the day at your leisure, strolling along the sidewalks and getting acquainted with this bustling city.



Day 2

QUITO CITY TOUR & THE MIDDLE OF THE WORLD

Today, enjoy a city tour of Quito. Visit the Church of San Francisco, which is said to be the first religious building constructed in South America by the Spanish. Also see the church of La Compañía, which has the most ornate and richly sculptured façade and interior. Have a closer look at the heart of the city of Quito: the Independence Square with the Government Palace and the Cathedral. In the modern part of the city, admire the elaborate stone-carved façade of Ecuador's House of Congress, which tells the story of Ecuador's history. Then head to Guapulo, a natural terrace on the foothills of the Pichincha Volcano, admire the spectacular views to the Valleys of Cumbayá and Tumbaco and of the Eastern Chain of Mountains. On a day with clear sky, you can see the Cayambe, the Antizana and Puntas Volcanoes.

Our tour goes on to the Equatorial Line Monument called 'Middle of the World.' Here you get the opportunity to stand in both the Northern and Southern Hemispheres simultaneously. The Equatorial Monument, located as focal point of the park, marks the spot where an 18th century French scientific expedition established the exact position of the Equator. The area has been built as a typical colonial town, with restaurants, gift shops and Post Office with philatelic sales. Visit the monument and the Ethnographical Museum, which covers the history of pre-Colombian cultures of Ecuador. Overnight at Grand Mercure Alameda Quito hotel.



Day 3

OTAVALO MARKET

The town of Otavalo is known worldwide for its indigenous handicrafts market. The local residents their skill in weaving a tremendous variety of designs in belts, tapestries, ponchos and other clothing items. Community residents have a long tradition as artisans and traders. They commonly travel to Europe and other countries in the Americas to sell their wares. This typical indigenous city where tourists can see families wearing their colorful cloths and speaking Quichua as their first tongue and Spanish as their second, you will enjoy the unique variety of handicrafts that offers this giant colorful market and certainly, carrying some new souvenirs with you.

Before continuing to Cotacachi, visit Laguna Cuicocha, which is a crater lake of 3000 m above sea level. Two islands emerge from the center, both of volcanic origin, covered with vegetation and rimmed with totora, a type of reed. The small town Cotacachi itself is Ecuador's center of leatherworks. Here you can stroll through the small streets choosing one of the various shops as your favorite. Return to Quito. Overnight at Grand Mercure Alameda Quito hotel.



Day 4

TRANSFER TO THE GALAPAGOS

After breakfast, transfer to the airport for the 2.5 hour flight to the Galápagos Islands. Once at the Baltra airport, you'll be greeted by your Galapagos Cruise guide and transferred to the port to begin your Galapagos Cruise. For the next few days and nights, this luxury Galapagos cruise boat will be your floating hotel, and all meals and amenities are included. Afternoon excursion to North Seymour, one of the best places to see Blue-Footed Boobies (May - November) and the magnificent Frigate birds. Walk along the coast to search out the bird nesting areas, then continue inland to explore more of the island.



Day 5

SAN CRISTOBAL AND ESPAÑOLA ISLANDS

San Cristóbal is the easternmost island in Galapagos and was colonized during the 1860s. On its southwestern side is the town of Puerto Baquerizo Moreno, the capital of the province of Galapagos, which is also the second largest harbor where you still may feel the old fishermen style. Kicker Rock is a magnificent rock in the middle of the sea. Rising 500 feet straight from the ocean, this giant uplifted rock has the shape of a sleeping lion. It has a split with towering vertical walls on either side, forming a narrow channel through which small vessels can navigate. This beautiful rocky islet located off the west coast of San Cristóbal, is a nesting place of different species of sea birds.

Española is the southernmost island of the archipelago. Because it is one of the most isolated islands in the archipelago, the 14 km long and 7 km wide island has a high proportion of endemic fauna. You can see the Española Mockingbird, the giant Lava Lizard, the Española Marine Iguana and the Waved Albatross.

Punta Suarez is one of the most popular and attractive visits of the Galapagos. The quantity and variety of wildlife on this site are remarkable. A few steps inland from the landing site, groups of the Española variety of marine iguanas bask in the sun. Further inland Masked and Blue Footed Boobies nest almost right on the trails, Galapagos Doves peck around unaware of visitors and finches go about their business in the bushes. The trail continues toward the cliffs and the blowhole, a fissure in the lava where water spurts high in the air like a geyser.

The cracks in the rock are home to the attractive Swallow-tailed Gulls and Red-billed Tropicbirds. Further up the cliff, in an area of low-lying trees, is the only place where the Waved Albatross nests, and in fact, the 10 to 12,000 pairs of albatrosses on Española are all the individuals of this species that exist in the planet. They perform one of the most spectacular rituals of the animal world. Watching these large birds (up to 1 meter high) take off is another unforgettable moment. The albatrosses clumsily wobble to the edge of the cliff and launch themselves against the wind to be transformed into gracious flying creatures.



Day 6

SANTA CRUZ ISLAND

With a surface of 986 km², Santa Cruz is the second largest of the Archipelago. Colonized since the 1920s, Puerto Ayora, the populated part of the island, is the most important harbor of the Archipelago. With altitudes reaching 864 m this island comprises all plant zones, ranging from coast to pampas. The headquarters of the Galapagos National Park and the Charles Darwin Station are also located in Santa Cruz.

Visiting the Charles Darwin Research Station, you will have the opportunity to see how the conservation of the islands is conducted, and understand the huge efforts that scientists, park rangers, and park managers among others have to make to preserve this UNESCO World Heritage Site. Above all the reduction of brought in animals is very important for the natural balance of the archipelago. The Research station supports scientists all over the world with their work at Galapagos. Since 1965 the station is breeding and rearing place for the famous Galapagos or Giant Tortoises that give the name to the archipelago. These fascinating primeval animals are threatened by extinction. Here they live until the age of five before they are set free on their origin islands. The center gives also a good opportunity to photograph tortoises of all sizes.

On Cerro Dragon, or Dragon Hill, are the feeding grounds for flamingo. Hike along the beach and up the hill inland to several lagoons to see the flamingoes, as well as several land iguanas. They almost became extinct because of the predation by feral dogs. In the year 1990 all the dogs were eliminated and a group of iguanas was reintroduced.



Day 7

RETURN TO QUITO

After breakfast aboard the ship, you'll return to the port of Baltra and then transfer to the airport for the flight back to Quito. Your Quito guide will greet you and take you back to your Quito hotel. Relax in your hotel or explore the city on your own this evening.

Note: It is also possible to finish the tour in Guayaquil.



Day 8

DEPART FROM QUITO

After a final breakfast in your hotel, check out and transfer to the airport for your return flight home or to the next destination on your South America vacation. Remember, if you prefer a longer or shorter Galapagos Cruises, you can completely customize your Quito & Galapagos Islands tour!