

# Study Abroad Galápagos Summer 2020

June 10<sup>th</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup>

Brief Itinerary (revised 9.8.19)

## **Day 1 / Date: June 10th**

### **Arrival in Quito**

Bienvenidos! Welcome to Ecuador. You will depart Richmond International Airport in the afternoon and arrive in Quito late in the evening. Sitting at an altitude of 2,850 meters, under the gaze of Volcano Pichincha, Quito is one of the most attractive cities in South America. Late evening arrival and transfer to the hotel (Plaza Sucre Hotel or similar.)

## **Day 2 / Date: June 11th,**

### **Quito**

Today after breakfast you'll visit Vivarium of Quito. The reptiles and amphibians housed at this small colonial-style house is an eye-popper for kids... the most courageous may even have a chance to pet a live snake! Vivarium owns the largest collection of live reptiles and amphibians in Ecuador, a miniature zoo that houses some 40 species: boas, iguanas, turtles and a small collection of foreign animals (including the great pythons of Asia), colorful snakes, even caiman. After this visit you'll go to Botanical Garden, Quito's Botanical Garden is a must-visit! Gardens feature Quito's fascinating floral microclimate and ecosystem diversity, with permanent exhibitions including a colorful orchid house. After the gardens, you will travel back to the hotel for a welcome meeting at 6 pm. If you have time, take a walk down the famous Calle La Ronda, Quito's oldest street. La Ronda is a peek into the colonial past of the city. This awesome street offers the city's best in one place. You may even wish to explore further beyond the city and visit Otavalo, Cotopaxi, the Cloud Forest or the Equatorial Monument.

## **Day 3 / Date: June 12<sup>th</sup>**

### **Quito - San Cristobal Island**

Early in the morning you will be transferred to Quito airport for your flight to Isla San Cristobal in the Galapagos. Your flight (approximately 3.5 hours in total) will stop in Guayaquil to pick up more passengers. Landing at around midday, meet your naturalist guide who will transfer you to your hotel (Casa de Nelly or similar.) In the afternoon, head to the Interpretation Center to learn about the history of the islands and the challenges local conservationists face. Then you'll head to the Cerro Tijeretas (Frigatebird Hill) which is located 2 kilometers from the interpretation center, southwest of Isla San Cristobal. It is a bit of a climb to the top, but your reward is an amazing view of the bay. From here you can see the 140-metre-tall Kicker Rock, its twin volcanic slabs looming large in the ocean. Soon after you will travel to La Loberia to enjoy some snorkeling, perhaps spotting sea lions and sea turtles as you swim around.

## **Day 4 / Date: June 13<sup>th</sup>**

### **San Cristóbal**

Your second day in Isla San Cristobal begins with the visit to El Junco, and it can be seen on the

island of San Cristobal. The lake was formed tens of thousands of years ago after the last ice age. Locals named it El Junco after a flowering plant that grows in the area, *Eleocharis mutata*. And although the large hillside looks nothing like a volcano, the lake itself is in an ancient crater, its volcanic history hidden by green pastures.

Then you will visit La Galapaguera a tortoise research and conservation center, also a sanctuary for giant tortoises where we will learn more about these unique creatures in a natural setting. Afternoon excursion to Isla Lobos, located near San Cristobal Island, about 40 minutes away, Lobos Islet is home to a large sea lion colony, but that's not the only thing you will find this visitor side. You will disembark and go for an hour-long hike and snorkel around the island, hopefully spotting blue-footed boobies, marine iguanas and frigate birds. You will also be able to see rays and turtles on the sandy bottom. This is considered a great place for first time snorkelers as the water is clear and not far away from land.

### **Day 5 / Date: June 14<sup>th</sup>**

#### **San Cristobal - Santa Cruz**

Early in the morning you will take off to Santa Cruz Island, travelling by private speed boat (approximately 2.5 hours). Santa Cruz Island reaches a maximum altitude of 854 meters (2,835 ft.). The areas with a higher elevation are known as the Highlands. Here we visit the Giant Tortoises Reserve in their natural habitat, a once in a lifetime experience! The area is teeming with life: chirping vegetarian-, small-tree, large-tree and woodpecker finches, mockingbirds and flycatchers, as well as ducks, herons and gallinules make this an exciting morning visit. You will be exploring the tortoise reserve, we continue our road south bound across Santa Cruz Island to Puerto Ayora, the Galápagos' most populous town.

In the afternoon, you will have the opportunity to visit the Charles Darwin Research Station, where we will be able to learn about the success, they have seen in repopulating the islands with the once endangered land iguana and several species of giant tortoise.

Although Puerto Ayora is the most populated urban center in the Galapagos, it remains the small, sleepy town it has always been. Charles Darwin Avenue is dotted with typical restaurants and fine boutiques on either side, offering locally-made goods for sale. End the day by checking into the hotel (Lobo de Mar Hotel or similar.)

### **Day 6- 7 / Date: June 15<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup>**

#### **Day trips (Bartolome, Seymour, Santa Fe or Plazas)**

On Days 5 and 6 you will visit the below islands (one island per day). The islands you visit will depend on the day of the week you travel (subject to availability).

#### **Bartolome:**

Bartolome is the most recognizable and photographed island in the archipelago thanks to its distinctive pinnacle rock. You'll walk along a wood trail to the top of this once-active volcano, seeing the different lava rock formations that were created during the formation of island on the way. At the top you'll have a fantastic panoramic across to Santiago Island's Sullivan Bay – look out for the surrounding plants like lava cactus, as well as Darwin's finches.

#### **Seymour:**

The small island of North Seymour is home to many different species of animals and is the best place to see the frigate birds with their bulbous red throats, watch the iconic blue footed

boobies dance, spot land and marine iguanas, and search for Galapagos sea lions and fur seals.

**Santa Fe:**

Taking an 80-minute boat ride from Puerto Ayora, cruise to one of the most beautiful bays in the Archipelago. Here the pristine color of the water allows you to see the bottom, and you might swim alongside eagle rays, sting rays, sea turtles and lots of fish.

**Plazas:**

South Plazas is located on the east coast of Santa Cruz Island. It was formed from uplifted marine lava and is one of the smallest islands on the archipelago. It's one of the most concentrated wildlife sites around through. Disembark at a small dock frequently occupied by sea lions, then walk through a small forest of prickly pear cacti, decorated with their yellow flowers, and look out for land iguanas waiting for the fruits and flowers to fall to the ground.

**Day 8 / Date: June 17<sup>th</sup>**

**Santa Cruz – Isabela**

Today begins nice an early at about 5:30 am. Take a private speedboat to transfer to Isabela Island at approximately 6 am. Upon arrival transfer to Isabela Hotel (San Vicente Hotel or similar.) Time to check in at the beautiful hotel, then you will walk around the town to get more familiar with important places.

In the afternoon with a short bus ride (approximately 15 minutes) to the Giant Tortoise Breeding Center where you'll observe giant tortoises in all stages of development. The center has almost a thousand giant tortoises training for life on their own. After our visit we take a short bus ride (approximately 15 minutes) to a brackish lagoon where we will be able to observe flamingos.

**Day 9 / Date: June 18<sup>th</sup>**

**Isabela**

In the morning after an informative visit, board a small private pangas for Tintoreras . On our way we will go along the coast line in the hope to spot blue-footed boobies and the famous Galapagos penguin who is home on the western part of the archipelago. On arrival, hop off for a short walk on this isolated islet and popular iguana nesting site that's home to hundreds of marine iguanas. Snorkel in a calm inlet with colorful fish and winding underground lava tubes.

**Day 10/ Date: June 19<sup>th</sup>**

**Isabela**

Start your last day on Isla Isabela by heading towards the Sierra Negra Volcano (approximately 45 minutes by bus), one of the most active volcanoes in the Galapagos and the second largest crater in the world. Weather permitting, take a challenging hike of around 17 kilometers up the rocky mountain, which takes between five and six hours. After the hike, make your way back to town in the late afternoon for some free time to curl up with a book or venture down to the water for a relaxing swim before dinner.

**Day 11 / Date: June 20<sup>th</sup>**

**Isabela – Santa Cruz**

After Breakfast you will take off to Santa Cruz Island, travelling by private speed boat

(approximately 2.5 hours). Once in Puerto Ayora go to the hotel for check in (Lobo de Mar Hotel or similar), then start walking to Tortuga Bay. Tortuga is located to the southwest of Puerto Ayora, on Santa Cruz Island. Its name means “turtle”, and the island received this moniker because it is sea turtles favorite place to lay their eggs. The stunning white sand beach is considered by many the most beautiful in the Galapagos archipelago.

In the afternoon, you can walk to the lovely Las Grietas gorge, past cactus fields and lava rock formations or visit the buzzing local fish market, where cheeky pelicans try to get in on the daily catch. You might like to simply stay in Puerto Ayora, soak up the seaside ambience and make some of your own discoveries. The town itself is nice and small, perfect for exploring on foot.

**Day 12 / Date: June 21<sup>st</sup>**

**Puerto Ayora – Quito**

Transfer to the airport for your return flight to Quito. You can expect to arrive at your hotel at around 3 or 4 pm (Plaza Sucre Hotel or similar.) Enjoy an evening exploring Quito,

**Day 13 / Date: June 22<sup>nd</sup>**

**Quito city tour**

This interesting city tour goes through diverse neighborhoods for a look at both colonial and modern Quito, and visit top Quito attractions such as historic plazas, churches and colonial buildings, like the Independence Square, the Presidential Palace, the Archbishop Palace, the Municipal Building (City Hall), and the Cathedral. The visit to Compañía church cannot be missed, one of the most impressive of Latin America, then visit San Francisco Church, one the of great religious buildings of the New World. Finally, head to the most famous hill in Quito, Panecillo viewpoint where you'll notice the contrast between colonial and modern Quito. After this visit you'll be transferred to Quito craft market and then enjoy a farewell group dinner.

**Day 14 / Date: June 23<sup>rd</sup>**

**Departure day**

There are no activities planned for the last day of the trip. Hotel check out has been extended to the evening since the flight doesn't leave until late. Enjoy a final day to explore and then head for the airport for an overnight flight. Arrive back in Richmond the morning of June 24<sup>th</sup>.