

# Darwin's Eden

8 days | Starts/Ends: Quito



*Travel to the islands that gave birth to Darwin's theory of evolution with this classic tour of Quito and the Galápagos. Snorkel in marine-rich waters, hike through fragrant forests, trek across barren fields of hard lava and keep those binoculars to hand for the staggering array of wildlife waiting to greet you.*

## HIGHLIGHTS AND INCLUSIONS

### Trip Highlights

- Quito and the Centre of the World – touring of the UNESCO-listed colonial city and a visit to the Equatorial Monument
- The Galápagos – a cruise along the western islands
- Punta Vicente Roca – dramatic geology and flightless cormorant nesting spots
- Punta Espinoza – walking across the barren wilderness of dark lava
- Isabela Island – Tagus Cove and Urbina Bay for hiking, swimming and snorkelling opportunities
- Santa Cruz Island – the famous Charles Darwin Research Station
- Floreana Island – Post Office Bay for a unique way of mailing postcards,

Baroness Cove for superb views and Cormorant Point for flamingo-spotting

### What's Included

- 3 nights STANDARD accommodation in Quito. Upgrading to SUPERIOR or DELUXE accommodation options are also available upon request. Accommodation rating – See Trip Notes for details
- 4 nights aboard the M/V Santa Cruz II on a full board basis - main deck twin cabin (upgrades available on request) - Cruising the Western Galapagos Islands
- 7 breakfasts, 4 lunches and 4 dinners
- All airport transfers
- Services of local English-speaking specialist guide in Quito
- Services of professional English-speaking naturalist guides in the Galápagos
- Entrance fees to sites visited in Quito
- Tour of Quito on a private basis
- All relevant transfers and transportation
- All touring and excursions in Galapagos on a shared basis

### What's Not Included

- Entrance Fees: USD\$120pp Galapagos park fee & transit card, paid in USD
- International & Domestic flights and visas
- Laundry, drinks and items of a personal nature
- Tipping – an entirely personal gesture

## DETAILED ITINERARY

### Day 1 : Quito

¡Bienvenidos a Ecuador! Upon arrival you will be met at the international airport and take a scheduled transfer to your hotel in Quito where the rest of the day is free. **Overnight - Quito**

### Day 2 : Quito and the Centre of the World

This morning visit downtown Quito and its architectural treasures on a private city tour. Quito's UNESCO-listed colonial quarter is one of the largest and best-preserved in South America. Your stroll takes you through Independence Plaza, past the Cathedral and the Presidential Palace, and on to the temple of La Compañía de Jesús with its dazzling gilded interior and the impressive façade of the Monastery of San Francisco. Touring continues with the Equatorial Monument that marks the exact point of the Middle of the World. With a latitude of 0°, you can stand with a foot in each hemisphere and collect a certificate for having crossed the Equator. Next visit the Ethnographic Museum to learn about the different Native American groups living in Ecuador. Lunch is served at a local restaurant. **Overnight - Quito (B)**

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## Day 3 : Galapagos Islands



Quito – Galápagos. Early this morning a scheduled transfer will take you to the airport for your flight to the Galápagos. Arriving on Baltra Island transfer to the dock to board the M/V Santa Cruz II for an introductory briefing and lunch. Set sail for the north shore of Santa Cruz Island, disembark for an exciting walk through the amazing landscape surrounding Dragon Hill. Passing lagoons which are frequented various birds, ducks and flamingos, continue inland for stunning views of the bay and across to western islands of the Galapagos, en route you may encounter land iguanas with their vibrant yellow faces.

**Overnight - Galapagos Islands (B, L, D)**

## Day 4 : Punta Vicente Roca and Espinoza

Enjoy a coastal exploration of Isabela Island (Punta Vicente Rosa) on board a panga, a small watercraft, while the naturalist guide explains the dramatic geology of the area with remains of lava flows and tuff stone layers. The island is also the nesting place for flightless cormorants and groups of sea lions, Galápagos fur seals and penguins also gather on the shores. Depending on the weather conditions it may be possible to do a bit of snorkelling along the cliffs of partly-sunken Ecuador Volcano, near the northern tip of the island.

After lunch back on board continue to Punta Espinoza, the youngest island of the archipelago. A mile-long walk across dark lava will introduce you to the remarkable barrenness of the island and the surprising amount of native wildlife including sally light-foot crabs and hawks. **Overnight - Galapagos Islands (B, L, D)**

## Day 5 : Santa Cruz Island

This morning visit the Charles Darwin Research Station, the headquarters of scientific investigation, conservation and the National Park administration in the Galápagos. Meet the giant tortoise residents and visit the impressive giant prickly-pear cactus forest, home to many land birds. Lunch is enjoyed in the cooler highlands of the island.

The afternoon brings with it several different options for land and water based activities. Trek along trails amid miconia forest, mountain bike down to Garrapatero Beach, sea kayak or visit an organic coffee plantation. There's also the option to spend the day SCUBA diving, at an additional cost.

**Overnight - Galapagos Islands (B, L, D)**

## Day 6 : Floreana Island



Be part of a unique Galápagos tradition with a morning visit to Post Office Bay. For over two centuries a rum barrel has been used by sailors to send mail – sailors would leave their envelopes in the barrel for ships returning to their home ports to hand-deliver on arrival. This tradition continues to this day so bring your postcards with you!

Explore the north shore of Floreana Island along narrow channels with a short walk to Baroness's Lookout for amazing views of the island and a history lesson on the island's first settlers. Enjoy a spot of swimming or snorkelling off a sandy beach before lunch. Continue snorkelling around the volcanic Champion Islet or stay dry aboard a glass-bottom boat. Later we land on the olivine-crystal beach at Cormorant Point. An easy walk brings you to a brackish water lagoon where greater flamingos, pintail ducks, common stilts and herons gather. Further

on you come to a white-sand beach where sea turtles emerge at night to nest between December and May. Enjoy a farewell cocktail and dinner back on board. **Overnight - Galapagos Islands (B, L, D)**

## Day 7 : Back to the Continent



This morning disembark back at Baltra Island for your flight back to Quito. On arrival you will take a scheduled transfer to your hotel where the rest of the day is free for you to enjoy at leisure or head out to La Mariscal for last-minute souvenir shopping. **Overnight - Quito (B)**

## Day 8 : Quito

Sadly today tour arrangements conclude after breakfast and hotel check out with a scheduled transfer to the airport for your onward international journey.(B)

### KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

#### Ecuador Country Guide

#### Ecuador - Fact File

- Official Name: Republic of Ecuador
- Capital: Quito (population 1.4 million)
- Government: Multiparty Republic
- Population: 13.4 million
- Total Area: 283,560 kilometres squared, including the Galapagos Islands (slightly smaller than Nevada, USA)
- Official Languages: Spanish. Others: Amerindian languages (especially Quechua)
- Religions: Roman Catholic 95%
- Voltage: 110 volts. Sockets are a mixture of the European, two-pronged round variety and US flat-pin.
- Time Difference: For time differences please visit [www.timeanddate.com](http://www.timeanddate.com)
- International airport departure tax: US \$25. This is sometimes included in your

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airfare - please check with your airline before departure.

## Ecuador - Visas

Most nationals, including citizens of the EU, North American and Australasia do not need a visa to enter Ecuador. Entry is granted on production of a passport valid for more than six months, a return air/bus ticket and proof of funds to support yourself for the duration of the stay. You'll be issued with a T-3 tourist card on arrival, which you should keep safely with your passport as it will be collected when you leave the country. The tourist card can allow up to 90 days stay, although it's up to the immigration official to decide whether you're allocated 30, 60 or 90 days on arrival. Visa requirements do change periodically so you should check for the latest information on your specific visa requirements with your local Ecuadorian embassy or consulate well in advance of your planned date of travel.

## Ecuador - Climate

Ecuador is divided into the coastal plain (costa), inter-Andean central highlands (sierra), and flat to rolling eastern jungle (oriente). There's no real summer and winter in Ecuador, with weather patterns varying according to geography, and temperatures determined more by altitude than by season or latitude. As a general rule, the warmest and driest months in the sierra are June to September, though this is complicated by various microclimates found in some areas. Outside these months, typical sierra weather is characterised by sunny, clear mornings and cloudy, often wet, afternoons. In the oriente, you can expect it to be warm, humid and rainy throughout the year, though there are often breaks in the rain between August and September and December to February.

In the lowland areas it can get particularly hot on clear days, with temperatures easily topping 30°C. The coast has the most clearly defined wet and dry seasons, with the best time to visit being from December to April, when you'll get frequent showers but also clear blue skies and warm weather. From May to November, the southern coast, in particular, is often overcast and relatively cool, with less chance of rainfall.

Check the weather chart on our website or visit [www.worldclimate.com](http://www.worldclimate.com) to get an idea of what the weather will be like on your trip.

## Ecuador - Money

### Important

In Latin America you will have problems changing the US\$100 CB B2 2001 series notes and it is important you do not to bring them. In some countries banks won't even take them. The serial number is located in the top left hand corner and bottom right hand corner on the side with the President's face. This serial number starts with CB and then a few more numbers and then directly under that B2. At the bottom of the note near the signature of the Treasurer it says which series of notes it is and it is there that it says 2001 series.

### Local Currency

In April 2000, the government in Ecuador decided to 'dollarise' the economy due to the instability of their own currency, the sucre. The country now uses the US dollar as its own currency, which means that you do not need to change money on arrival (if you bring sufficient US dollars with you). If you do need to change money into dollars, you can do it at the bank after exiting the luggage hall or use one of the ATMs outside the terminal. Remember that if you are travelling through to other countries in South America, Ecuador is the best place to load up on US dollars cash without paying high charges. Having said that we do recommend that you bring as much US dollars cash as you feel comfortable carrying as it is not always easy to get money out on credit and debit cards. You should carry your US dollars in small denominations (US\$1, US \$5, US\$10 and US\$20 are best) as there is always a shortage of change.

Although bank cards are often the easiest way to go, there are times where they will not work for you even if your bank at home tells you it will! Do not rely on your card as your only source of money. Always have a few back-ups with you.

## Ecuador - Local Transport

Most of Quito is easy to visit on foot, although there is a cheap trolley bus system which

travels from north to south of the city. There are also normal buses which are cheap but can get very crowded. We recommend that you use taxis at night as they are fairly cheap but also have meters so you do not need to worry about bartering to get a good price – just make sure the driver puts the meter on when you get in.

In other Ecuadorian towns and cities walking is basically the best and cheapest way to see the sights.

## Ecuador - Food & Drink

As a guideline a simple snack (e.g. a sandwich) can cost as little as US\$2, a light meal will cost around US\$4-5, and even a meal in one of the best restaurants in Quito or Cuenca costs very little in comparison to what you would expect to pay at home (usually around US\$30-40). Obviously this depends on what you order and if you have wine or other drinks which will certainly increase the bill.

All drinks such as water, soft or alcoholic drinks are at your own expense at all times. The following is a guideline for drinks bought in a shop in the street. Prices in restaurants and hotels can sometimes be more than double the prices specified below;

- 1 litre of water - US\$1
- 30cl bottle of soft drink - US\$0.70
- 30cl bottle of beer - US\$1.20
- 50cl bottle of beer - US\$1.70

### Food

In Ecuador the basic diet focuses around chicken, beef or seafood, mostly with french fries or rice (or both) and possibly a little salad. Ceviche is fish marinated in lemon juice, onion and hot peppers traditionally served with corn on the cob and tostado (roasted maize). Other popular dishes include fritada (roast pork), lomo ala pimiento (pepper steak), humitas (ground corn steamed in a maize leaf) and quimbolitas (similar to humitas but with corn-flour and cooked in banana leaves). For a simple fish, you should ask for pescado which can be grilled, pan fried with breadcrumbs (apanado) or served with a sauce. An interesting local speciality is cuy (pronounced: cooe). This is roasted

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guinea pig which some people say tastes like chicken, others, like cooked cardboard!

Maize and potatoes feature in many dishes, particularly soups. Locro de papas is cheese and potato soup, sancocho de yucca is vegetable soup with cassava or manioc root and sopa de bola verde is vegetable banana dumpling soup. Typical snacks are empanadas (little fried pasties usually filled with meat, chicken, cheese or even prawns) and patacones (fried vegetable banana chips, served as a side dish).

Much of Ecuador's food is not too hot and spicy but you will find a bowl of aji (which is a chilli or hot pepper sauce) on most tables which can be added to spice things up.

### Vegetarians

If you are a strict vegetarian you may experience a distinct lack of variety in the food available, especially in small towns. You might find that you are eating a lot of omelettes and other egg dishes. Our tour leaders will do their best to organise interesting vegetarian alternatives for included meals, but your patience and understanding is requested.

### Drinks

You should be wary of drinking the local tap water. Bottled water, carbonated soft drinks and fruit juices are widely available and are generally safe to drink. Please note however that fruit juices are sometimes made with unboiled tap water and could upset your stomach. An easy way around this is to order juice 'con leche' (with milk) instead. The choice of different juices is incredible e.g. mora (blackberry), piña (pineapple), naranjilla (mixture between mandarin and orange), maracuya (passion fruit), tomato de argol (like a tomato but with a harder texture), guanabana (custard apple) and curia (which has a great taste – just try it!).

In Ecuador some of the hotels we use have bars or serve alcoholic drinks. If there is not a bar in the hotel then there is sure to be a bar within walking distance. In more up-market hotels, imported beers and spirits are available but usually at a high price. If you are happy to drink the local spirits then there is an array of rums, aguadiente (a kind of

ouzo) and imported Chilean and Argentine wine can sometimes be found cheaply. There are various brands of beers including Pilsener, Club and Biela.

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