

Quito and Galapagos Islands Exploration

September 7 – 16, 2020

Junior Suite \$6,159 Per Person, Double Occupancy from Chicago; Single Supplement - \$1,690
Balcony Suite \$6,639 Per Person, Double Occupancy from Chicago; Single Supplement - \$1,890



This is an exclusive travel program presented by the Northern Illinois University Alumni Association

Day by Day Itinerary

Monday, September 7 – CHICAGO / QUITO (I)

We depart Chicago's O'Hare Airport this afternoon by scheduled service of American Airlines and travel to Miami, Florida, from where we begin our journey to Quito, Ecuador. On arrival at Mariscal Sucre International Airport this evening, we'll meet our Tour Guide who will travel with us throughout our stay in mainland Ecuador. Founded on the ruins of an Incan city, the capital of Ecuador has a setting that few other cities can match. Surrounded by snowcapped volcanoes, but only 15 miles from the equator, Quito enjoys a spring-like climate all year round.

Tuesday, September 8 – QUITO (Otavalo & Liberty Train) (B,L)

This morning we'll travel to Otavalo, located between the capital city of Quito and the border with Colombia. The city's crown jewel is its Old Town, full of colonial monuments and architectural treasures, and without a doubt, South America's most famous indigenous market, where we'll enjoy an arts and crafts shopping adventure. Then we'll travel to Ibarra where we'll board the Liberty Train, which gets its name from Ecuador's struggle for liberty and independence from Spain 200 years ago. As the locomotive chugs through the rolling hills of northern Ecuador, an otherworldly vista opens up before our eyes. Our destination is the town of Salinas. We'll be welcomed with traditional song and dance, enjoy lunch in a local Andean Hacienda, and take a quick tour of the small town. Afterward, sit back, relax and enjoy the amazing and diverse Andean landscape on our drive back to Quito.

Wednesday, September 9 – QUITO (B)

This morning we'll enjoy an introduction to Quito's colonial past as we explore the bustling streets and squares of the largest historical Old Town in the Americas. We'll see the stone-carved facade of Ecuador's House of Congress, and then head to the Plaza de la Independencia, one of the most attractive colonial centers in Latin America. Next, we'll visit the Church of La Compania. Richly intricate both inside and out, it is a masterpiece of baroque and Quiteno colonial art. Nearby, we'll also take in the Plaza San Francisco named for its church and monastery honoring Quito's patron saint. Then, we'll travel outside of the city for a panoramic view from the top of Panecillo Hill, where on a clear day you will be able to see the volcanoes that surround Quito and the historic downtown. From here, our tour will take us north to visit Mitad del Mundo, the Equatorial Monument, which marks the precise location of the equator - don't miss an opportunity to straddle the equatorial line with one foot in the northern hemisphere and the other in the southern hemisphere!

Thursday, September 10 – QUITO / CRUISING (San Cristóbal) (B,D)

Today we take to the skies for the island of San Cristóbal, one of the easternmost of the Galapagos Islands, and the most populated and fertile island of the archipelago. On arrival, we'll transfer to the pier for embarkation aboard the M/V Galapagos Legend, our home for the next four evenings. The M/V Galapagos Legend is an expedition ship designed with comfort and luxury in mind. Panoramic windows allow you to not only observe the destination but also to be a part of it. As we're about to find out, the Galapagos Islands is a paradise where animals have no fear of man; it is a magical realm where creatures seem to be enchanted.

This afternoon we'll visit the Interpretation Center, an excellent place to learn about natural history in the Galapagos, as well as the history of San Cristobal. The museum displays information on the volcanic origins of the islands, their remoteness from the continent, ocean currents, climate, and other points of interest. Afterward, we'll travel to the base of Tijeretas Hill, a name commonly known for two species of frigatebirds. An easy to moderate walk amidst beautiful landscapes will take us to a lookout point for a magnificent view of a frigatebird nesting colony.

Friday, September 11 – CRUISING (Española Island) (B,L,D)

Today's port of call is Española Island, the Archipelago's oldest island. Our first stop will be at Gardner Bay, excellent for swimming and snorkeling. We'll also have an opportunity to enjoy an easy walk along the long white, sandy beach, lapped by turquoise waters, that is home to a colony of Galapagos sea lions, indifferent to the humans that walk amongst them. The Hood mockingbirds, endemic to this particular island, will be eager to inspect us and satisfy their innate curiosity. Darwin's finches may also join the throng, including the reclusive warbler finch.

This afternoon we'll cruise to Suarez Point, a naturalist's paradise. A slew of brightly colored marine iguanas, unique to this island, and sea lions will greet us at the landing site, from where a demanding walk will take us for an up close encounter with blue-footed and Nazca boobies, the Hood Mockingbird, and even a dramatic blowhole where water shoots 75 feet up into the air. This will be our only opportunity to commune with the Waved Albatross, the largest bird in Galapagos with a wingspan of up to 8 feet. Their breeding season occurs between April and December, and with any luck, we may even catch their complex courtship display.

Saturday, September 12 – CRUISING (Floreana Island) (B,L,D)

Today we cruise to Floreana Island, which arguably has the most interesting human history of all of the Galapagos Islands. The first Galapagos resident, a bold Irishman named Patrick Watkins, lived here from 1807-1809. Floreana was later colonized by Ecuadorians in 1832 as a penal colony. However, that didn't last long because of the lack of fresh water. To this day, Floreana continues to be one most altered by the presence of humans and invasive feral goats. On arrival at quirky Post Office Bay, an easy walk leads to the famous Post Office Barrel – an opportunity for us to play mailman for a day. Claimed to have been set up in 1793 by the Captain James Colnett, it remains the oldest functioning "post office" in the Pacific. Nowadays, the tradition is still alive for travelers to leave behind letters and postcards, with the hope that other travelers will take them. Although the delivery time can take days, weeks or even up to years!

This afternoon we sail to Cormorant Point. You'll notice a golden-greenish beach rich in olivine, a collection of volcanic crystals originating in the Earth's mantle. Not far inland, an easy hike will take us to a large brackish lagoon, often inhabited by a variable number of Galapagos Flamingos. From here, the trail continues to a beautiful white-sand beach, one of the most important nesting sites of the Green Pacific Sea Turtle. As we paddle bare foot in the shallow water, you'll want be on the

lookout for sea turtles, diamond stingrays, and small white-tipped reef sharks floating along the shoreline in search of food. Afterward, we'll head back to Cormorant Point where free time will allow you an opportunity to swim or snorkel amongst sea turtles, reef fish, sea lions and white-tipped reef sharks. If snorkeling is not your thing, it's also a wonderful locale for a cruise in the glass-bottomed boat.

Sunday, September 13 – CRUISING (Santa Cruz) (B,L,D)

Today we visit the island of Santa Cruz. Located on the center of the archipelago, it is also the most populous of the islands, and a focal point for scientific research, where a variety of Galapagos land animals are studied. The Galapagos Islands are synonymous with giant tortoises, and today is our chance to see these iconic reptiles in all stages of their development. On arrival in Puerto Ayora, we'll visit the Charles Darwin Research Station, a biological center for the study and conservation of Galapagos flora and fauna. We'll have an opportunity to get up close and personal with adorable baby tortoises, to view a staggering natural history collection that includes specimens of over nine thousand species, and to learn about the creative conservation efforts that have been applied in order to protect one of the island's most popular residents. Afterward, we'll visit the Highlands Tortoise Reserve where we have our best opportunity to interact with a population of tortoises, as they walk freely around the private and National Park lands.

This afternoon we'll cruise to Ballena Bay, located on the north shore, the perfect spot to enjoy water activities. You can expect to see many fish species including king angelfish, surgeonfish, parrotfish, damsels, rays and sharks, all from the comfort of a glass-bottom boat. Inland, a moderate walk can take you to one of the quieter and least visited sites in the Galapagos. This is one of the few visitor sites in the Galapagos which is more open, allowing visitors to wander somewhat freely and explore for themselves.

Monday, September 14 – CRUISING / QUITO (B,L)

Today we cruise to Baltra Island and take to the skies on our return journey to Quito. On a clear day, we'll have an opportunity to view three of Ecuador's four contrasting ecosystems - the Galapagos Islands, its sandy beaches and snowy volcanoes.



Tuesday, September 15 – QUITO / EN ROUTE (Mindo Cloud Forest) (B,I)

This morning we'll travel to the Nambillo-Mindo Cloud Forest, a natural sub-tropical paradise in one of the most biodiverse zones in Ecuador. We'll visit Mariposas de Mindo, a butterfly breeding farm dedicated to the exhibition, reproduction and conservation of the butterflies in the cloud forest of Mindo. We'll also allow time to climb the observation towers from where we can admire the beauty of the cloud forest from above, and the colorful hummingbirds native to this area. As we'll soon find out, Mindo is also known for its coffee and chocolate production, and we'll enjoy a behind-the-scenes look at the chocolate-making process from bean to bar at a small-batch factory. As all good things must come to an end, this afternoon we return to our hotel where day rooms will allow us an opportunity to freshen-up and relax prior to tonight's overnight flight en route to Miami.

Wednesday, September 16 – MIAMI / CHICAGO

Early this morning we arrive in Miami and change planes for the connecting flight returning us to Chicago. No better time to reflect on memories of our Quito and Galapagos Islands Exploration vacation that will last a lifetime and new friendships made along the way!

***** Welcome Home *****

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The Tour Price Includes:

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- Informational packet.
- Alumni staff assistance for a worry-free travel experience.
- Economy-class air transportation by scheduled service of American and Avianca Airlines.
- Transportation by deluxe private motor coach with accompanying Tour Guide on pre and post-cruise days.
- Hotel accommodations at the Dann Carlton Quito and cruise line accommodations aboard the M/V Galapagos Legend based on the travelers choice of a Junior or Balcony Suite.
- All meals as shown in the Day by Day Itinerary.
- Sightseeing as detailed in the Day by Day Itinerary including applicable entrance fees.
- Luggage handling and portage charges for one suitcase per person.
- Airline taxes and fees, Galapagos National Park Tax, Quito Migration Control Card, taxes for included ground services, and cruise line fuel surcharge totaling **\$440 per person**.

The Tour Price Does Not Include: Items of a personal nature such as passport fees; luggage handling at airports; gratuities to the motor coach driver(s), local guides, and ship personnel; personal and baggage insurance; and meals other than those stated above.

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Contact the NIU Alumni Association at 815-753-1512 to make your reservation.

\$100 of the trip cost is tax-deductible as a charitable donation.

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