

## Exploring the Amazon Rainforest and the Galapagos Islands

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5 graduate hours credit \$7200 without credit. \$7445 with credit.

Day 1: Fly into Quito, Ecuador, which is a beautiful city built on the slopes of the volcano Pichincha in the Andes Mountains. At 9,350 feet above sea level and just south of the equator, Quito, an Unesco Heritage Site, boasts some of the most beautiful scenery and biodiversity of any South American city. Quito existed as a marketplace, even before it was inhabited by the Incas. In the 1534, the Spanish conquered the city, which has since been revered as a cultural center of the Andes.

Day 2: After exploring the richness of Quito, we will take a tour into the nearby Ecuador Cloud Forest, which is home to many bird and wildlife species. The cloud forest is a totally different ecosystem from either the lowlands of the coast or the western slopes leading down to the Amazon Rainforest basin. Forty one species of hummingbirds alone live in this cloud forest, so our tour of a bird feeding station should be sensational. We should also have time for a tour of a local chocolate factory.

Day 3: After shuttling to the airport, we will take a 30 minute flight past many looming active volcanoes to the tiny Napo port town of Coca. Meeting our Napo Riverboat Tour guides, we will depart to a shuttle by motorized canoe down the River Napo to meet up with the Manatee, our riverboat home. This is our first introduction to the beauty, biodiversity and grandeur of the Amazon River ecosystem. Upon meeting the M/V Manatee and settling into our staterooms, we will listen to an introduction lecture by the crew of the ship. Then all eyes on deck as we scan the skies for parrots, macaws, herons, skimmers, and hundreds of other bird species as well as scan the waters for the famous Giant River Otters. After our evening meal, off we will go to explore the Amazon on foot for a nocturnal rainforest walk. As the songs of frogs and birds fill the air, our flashlights will search for the thousands of species of wildlife that call the Amazon home.

Day 4: Our riverboat home will continue down the Panayacu River Delta, where we will travel by motorized canoe in Panacocha Lake (Pirana Lagoon). This beautiful and diverse ecosystem is flooded by blackwater river water and is home to primates such as Napo Saki, Squirrel Monkeys, Tamarins, Marmosets and Woolly Monkeys. We will often hear the screams of territorial disputes of the Howler Monkeys and will hopefully catch a glimpse of both the Red Howler Monkey and the Mantled Howler Monkey. Bird life abounds in these rainforests, so our eyes will be on the lookout for the ancient Hoatzin, the 3 native species of Macaws, or the many species of parrots, parakeets, and toucans. Native guides will be our riverboat tour guides as well as our canoe and walk guides. An optional kayak trip is offered in the early evening, followed by a BBQ and taste of local cuisine.

Day 5: A visit to the Parrot Clay Licks is a sensory overload treat. These unique pools of mud and exposed soil are rich in minerals that the parrots crave. Hundreds of birds arrive every day to satiate themselves on these minerals. We will then continue downstream on the Napo River to come to our afternoon tour at the Sani Warmi Kichwa Interpretation Center, where a group of local women will share their customs, foods, and culture with us. Here we will have a chance to

purchase handmade jewelry, crafts and local souvenirs which help the local women. After our tour at the Cultural Center, our riverboat home will start its way back upstream to Coca for our departure to the Galapagos. In the evening, we will stop and help the local Charapas turtle Conservation Center by releasing endangered river turtles back into their habitat.

Day 6: We will boat back upstream and then take the motorized canoe trip back to Coca. It is still a birding paradise and a monkey habitat, so we won't take our eyes away from the beautiful Amazon Rainforest that we are boating through. After our flight back to Quito, we will be transported to a hotel near the airport to await our exciting adventure in the Galapagos.

Day 7: Off we go to fly to the Galapagos and the San Cristobal Airport. Our shuttle guides will take us to our small touring ship and we sail away to Isla Lobos to view Sea Lions. Wildlife here includes Blue Footed Boobies, Frigatebirds, Pelicans, Noddies, Warblers, Finches, and lava gulls. We will snorkel near Leon Dormido and hopefully, play with our swimming companions, the Sea Lions.

Day 8: As we set off to sea toward Gardner Bay, we will hear our local guides discuss the geology, ecology and amazing history of the Galapagos Islands. Only locals are hired as guides for the Galapagos, and the guides go through extensive training and are experts at local flora, fauna, and history. After snorkeling at Gardner Bay with thousands of beautiful fish and invertebrate species who come here for the rich upwelling of nutrients in the water, we will sail to Suarez Point, one of the most diverse and stunning bird areas in the Galapagos Archipelago. Around 12,000 nesting pairs of birds live here on Espanola Island. If we are lucky, we may even catch sight of the Waved Albatross, doing its fascinating mating dance. Here we will also be treated to views of marine iguanas and lava lizards sunning or swimming in the surf.

Day 9: Off we sail to Post Office Bay, where old time whalers would pick up their mail from a barrel. If we chose to continue this tradition, we can also mail postcards to home from a barrel.

Next we visit Punta Cormorant on the west of Floreana Island. This green sand beach, which is rich in volcanic olivine, is famous for its unique sand. We will then take a panga ride around Devil's Crown, a tiny islet off the coast of Floreana. The sea erosion has created amazing cliffs in the shape of a crown. Again we will snorkel in this beautiful, clear water. Tonight we will be treated to a star party, hopefully with clear skies around the Galapagos desert islands. This is a great time to learn southern constellations, including the Southern Cross.

Day 10: Back at Santa Fe, we will tour the Opuntia cactus forest, home of one of the two species of land iguanas. Back we jump into the water for our last snorkeling adventure, hopefully with turtles, rays, sea lions and hundreds of species of tropical fish. In South Plaza, we will tour a tiny island with a huge population of land iguanas. We will hike a cliff – side trail for magnificent views of the islands and the ocean.

Day 11: After visiting the Charles Darwin Research Station to learn about the natural and scientific history of the area, we will tour a tortoise breeding and rearing station. In the afternoon, we will transfer off of our ocean boat home and connect with our flight back to the mainland. We will stay at the airport this evening to catch our flights to the states, which will leave after 9:30 this evening.