

Ecuador's Natural Wonders for Johns Hopkins University - 2020

Dates of trip

JAN 14 – 25 JAN

12 Days – 11 Nights

Number of participants

18 – 24 PARTICIPANTS

25 – 29 PARTICIPANTS

30 - 35 PARTICIPANTS

Day by Day Itinerary

DAY 1 - Jan 14 (Tue) Arrive in Quito

Welcome to Ecuador!

Arrive in Quito and transfer to your hotel near the airport for overnight.

Hotel: Rincón de Puenbo or similar

DAY 2 - Jan 15 (Wed) To the Ecuadorian Amazon

Pick up from the hotel, transfer to the airport for the flight to Coca town. A 30 minute flight over the Andes Mountains leads you to a bustling oil town called Coca located in the Amazon Basin. A quick lunch in Sacha's private house and then it's off to the town docks where you will board Sacha's private canoes for the 2 hour journey down river to Sacha's Lodges property. A 30 minute hike through the rainforest leads you to lake Pilchicocha. Here, you are met by native workers to paddle you across the lake to your final destination. Arrive at Sacha Lodge around 15:30 or 16:00 pm (subject to change). Swim in Lake Pilchicocha, which is a black water lake home to many species of fish and animals. A refreshing swim after arriving may be just what you need after being in the equatorial heat all day. Bird observing from the mini tower offers guests an excellent opportunity to view several species of birds common around the lodge. Also a great place to watch the sun set. Visit the butterfly house with your naturalist guide to view the beautiful colors of many different species of butterflies. After dinner, accompany your naturalist guide on a night walk through the rainforest to view the hundreds of different species of animals that can only be found at night. Or maybe a canoe ride on the lake to view the spectacled and black caimans with their glowing orange eyes as you silently paddle across the lake to get a closer view.

Hotel: Sacha Lodge Meals: B, L, D

DAY 3 - Jan 16 (Thur) Ecuadorian Amazon

Begin morning activity between 6:00 and 7:00. Begin walking on trail Liana Chica and arrive at the canopy walk, for spectacular views of the rainforest canopy and the many different species of vibrantly colored birds. Designed to be a self-standing rigid suspension canopy walk, it is one of only a few in the world! Located within Sacha's private reserve, 2 miles from the shores of the Rio Napo and 1 mile from the lodge, the bird walk gives guests the opportunity to get an up close and personal view of the rainforest canopy. Two of the three towers have observation decks every 12 meters making towers accessible for everyone. The canopy walkway is at 36 meters high and 275 meters long, giving guests a "bird's eye view" of all the wonders and beauty the tropical rainforest has to offer. The canopy walk is designed as a sturdy walkway enabling guests to casually move along while enjoying the spectacular views. After the canopy walk, Liana Grande through terra firma and igapo forest habitats where native guides will explain many different species of medicinal plants that have been used in their culture for hundreds of years. Liana Grande will turn into the trail Higueron, which will take you through pristine primary forest with huge Kapok and Fig trees towering hundreds of feet above your head. After lunch, you may choose to take a leisurely hike along the Rio Napo, or choose a little more challenging hike on the trail Leoncillo to try and spot the elusive dusky titi monkey. Either way the trails will lead you back to the main boardwalk for your final hike and canoe ride back to the lodge.

Hotel: Sacha Lodge Meals: B, L, D



DAY 4 - Jan 17 (Fri), Ecuadorian Amazon

Leaving the lodge after breakfast, you begin your hike on trail Lagartococha. This trail offers you the chance to learn more about the native people and their relationship with the forest. Learn about the trees where native people believe the spirits of their ancestors live, and the mysterious "dwende" or devil-man of the forest. After arriving at lake Lagartococha, take a tranquil canoe ride through a natural swamp, which is the home of anacondas, caimans, and capybaras. After the canoe ride, a walk on the other side of Lagartococha may give you the opportunity to spot capuchin or squirrel monkeys playfully jumping through the trees. Return from the walk or canoe ride and head back to the lodge for a refreshing dip in the lake, or a nice relaxing nap in your personal hammock on your private balcony.

After lunch, your native guide will teach you how to fish for the infamous razor-toothed piranha. Keep in mind that piranhas will never attack a person and swimming at the same time is perfectly safe and fun! Around 15:30 you will begin what many think is the best trail at Sacha, a silent canoe ride through the flooded Amazonian forest. Where you have a good chance of being surrounded by troops of squirrel, capuchin, and howler monkeys. Keep your eyes peeled for the shy and elusive river otter as well as the incredibly well camouflaged three-toed sloth!

After your eye-popping ride through the flooded forest, you will arrive at Sacha's 135-foot wooden tower built around an ancient Kapok tree. Get close up views of vibrantly colored birds through Sacha's powerful scopes, and watch the sun set with an amazing view of Mount Sumaco, a volcano, and possibly a view of the snow-covered caps of the Andes! Leaving the tower just before or after sunset will give you an experience not soon forgotten. A canoe ride back through the flooded forest at night will be an awe-inspiring experience. Listen to the symphony of frogs and insects as you navigate through the narrow flooded forest trail, keeping your eyes open for caimans. Watch the several species of bats flying over your heads and listen to the many species of nocturnal birds making their eerie nighttime calls. Finally, after your mesmerizing canoe trip through the Amazon, you will arrive back at lake Pilchicocha and the welcoming lights of Sacha lodge.

Hotel: Sacha Lodge Meals: B, L, D

DAY 5 - Jan 18 (Sat), Flight Coca – Quito

Breakfast and departure from the lodge at 7:30am for an easy walk on the boardwalk to watch monkeys one last time before your final departure. Arrive in Coca and be escorted to the Coca airport where all plane tickets will be in the hands of Sacha employees waiting to help you board the plane and a final farewell. Scheduled arrival at Quito's airport is at 12:30pm (subject to change). Box lunch en route. Afternoon explore Quito's historic center; the best preserved and least altered historic center in America. Learn about Quito's rich history and artistic legacy. Admire the wonderful architecture of its colonial buildings and the uniqueness of religious art pieces from the famous Quito School of art, which combines European Renaissance and Baroque styles with indigenous and mestizo influences. Enjoy dinner at a local restaurant.

Hotel: Wyndham Garden or Similar Meals: B/L*/D (*Light lunch in Coca before flight).

DAY 6 - Jan 19 (Sun),) Discover the Otavalo Indigenous Culture; Customs, traditions and artisan background.

Enjoy the beautiful countryside landscape on your drive from Quito to the Otavalo Area. Otavalo is located approximately 90 km / 60 miles away from Quito. Explore the famous Otavalo craft market where locals show their products and crafts for sell and enjoy closer contact with the community while bargaining for their products. Visit a local indigenous family who will share with you their culture and traditions, including their weaving ability, their music; and their ancestral knowledge of medicinal plants. Taste the flavors of the Andean cuisine while enjoying lunch prepared with typical ingredients and products of the Ecuadorian Highlands. In the afternoon return to Quito.

Hotel: Wyndham Garden or similar Meals: B/L

Day 7 - Jan 20 (Mon), Flight to Galapagos – Baltra & Santa Cruz

Pick up from the hotel and transfer to the airport (Flight information and pick up times to be advised)

Land at Baltra Island by plane in the morning and transfer to the dock to board the Santa Cruz II, Receive a welcome introductory briefing, boat drill and lunch. In the afternoon visit Las Bachas Beach on Santa Cruz Island. This beautiful visitor site is located on the north shore of Santa Cruz Island, a glorious white beach with a couple of brackish lagoons only a few steps away from the sea. These lagoons are the feeding grounds of various wading birds, from stilts to flamingos. You may enjoy swimming and or snorkelling at this beach too. At night enjoy a welcome cocktail, expedition plan for Tuesday and dinner.

Boat: M/V Santa Cruz Meals: B/L/D

DAY 8 – Jan 21 (Tue) Buccaneer Cove (Santiago Island) + Puerto Egas (Santiago Island)

After breakfast, explore the coastline along the impressive cliffs of Buccaneer Cove, learning about the area's distant and recent history. The cove is home to a large number of marine birds, sea lions, and inter-tidal organisms. Enjoy fantastic natural formations such as the "Elephant Rock", "The Bishop" and an impressive natural cave. Opportunity for snorkelling, and a ride on the panga or glass-bottom boat.

On the afternoon, disembark at Puerto Egas Beach. Enjoy a swim or snorkel amid a rocky shoreline, usually in the company of marine turtles. From here, we head off to our walk, a great opportunity to see land and marine birds amid landscape of tuff-stone layers and lava flows. At low tide, marine iguanas graze upon the algae beds and we can also observe a colony of fur seals. After the visit, we had some time for swimming and snorkelling.

Boat: M/V Santa Cruz Meals: B/L/D

DAY 9 - Jan 22 (Wed) Rabida Island (Jervis) + Bartolome Island

Some groups will go for a fascinating panga ride along the shores while others will disembark on Rabida Island's red-coloured beach, caused by the unusually high content of iron in the volcanic material. Our walk brings us close to a colony of sea lions, marine iguanas, mockingbirds, yellow warblers and several species of Darwin's finches. Very close to the beach, a salt pond occasionally hosts American flamingos. This is a great place to snorkel from the beach, both for beginners as well as for experienced snorkelers, due to the unique combination of underwater species and submarine landscapes. During navigation to our next island, we can sometimes spot dolphins!

Today's afternoon activities begin with a wet landing on the golden beach of this famous island, dominated by the imposing Pinnacle Rock. There's great snorkelling and swimming from the beach plus the chance to ride the glass bottom boat. After returning to the ship, we split into two group: the first lands for a hike to the summit of this diminutive island that boasts fantastic views of the archipelago. This is a moderately steep climb aided by a wooden staircase, resting platforms and handrails – the view from the top is worth the effort! The second takes to the pangas to explore the rugged and volcanic shoreline. The groups then swap so that each one experiences the full beauty of this island.

Boat: M/V Santa Cruz Meals: B/L/D

DAY 10 - Jan 23 (Thur), Prince Philip Steps + Darwin Bay (Genovesa Island)

The morning starts with a steep climb (only 90 feet) up some stairs to reach a flat rocky plateau. Along our walk, we can observe large colonies of Nazca boobies, red-footed boobies, great frigate birds and storm petrels. Those not wishing to disembark can enjoy a longer panga ride along the cliffs (depending on weather conditions). Kayaking is optional.

In the afternoon, we land at this beautiful beach to enjoy some swimming and/or snorkelling. Following our dip, we take an easy stroll to observe hundreds of birds, mainly frigate birds, red-footed and Nazca boobies, gulls, herons, finches and mockingbirds. Opportunity for snorkelling, kayaking and swimming.

Boat: M/V Santa Cruz Meals: B/L/D

DAY 11 - Jan 24 (Fri), Tortoise Reserve – Flight back to **Guayaquil**

We start our last morning at the north shore of Santa Cruz Island. After breakfast, your luggage will be taken to the airport, while you visit the Tortoise Reserve. A dry landing at a passenger's wharf and a bus ride to the loftier region of the island will provide the last highlight of the cruise: giant tortoises in the wild. The windward slopes of the island are home to two species of giant tortoises. These lush highlands include dense forests of Galapagos daisies, orchids and bromeliads, and several endemic land birds. After this visit we will transfer directly to Baltra airport. Farewell to Galapagos.

Once you arrive in Guayaquil you will meet your Guide, who will assist the group for the international flight check in. Dinner will be on your own.

Meals: B

END OF PROGRAM

Meal Codes B/breakfast, /L/lunch, /D/dinner.