

***21-day Galapagos Islands (Land-based), Quito, Andes and the Amazon
Jungle University Group Itinerary***

- A ‘Cruise-Based’ Itinerary takes on the same format as the Land-based except that instead of 11-nights in hostels in the Galapagos, the first 7-nights are on a cruise that circuits the islands and the last 4-nights are hostel-based on Santa Cruz Island.
- During the following itinerary the guests will be staying in hostels in the four inhabited islands of Galapagos. In a comfortable, fun and educational way, the tour aspires to the wildlife of the cruises, and in several cases includes top visits and snorkeling sites that the cruises are sometimes unable to go to.
- The itinerary gets you into the water as much as possible, where the wildlife observation possibilities are greatly enhanced with more immersions. Of the mega-fauna, there are good chances of sealions, rays, marine iguanas and in a couple of places, possibilities of Galapagos penguins!
- If there is a certain interest or discipline that a professor is interested in orienting the study to, this itinerary can be written to incorporate this, e.g. geology, tortoises, marine biology, etc.
- Often, talks are given by the students, professors and local guides/scientists. If this is the case, room for this and materials (whiteboard, markers) are available in most locations.
- The tour requires one or two leaders (professors, teachers) of the group to coordinate with carefully-selected local guides, experienced in leading these kinds of trips and well-versed in their fields.
- Please contact us for the price which we will base on the optimum 16-person group including professors, etc. but not including local guides.
- The itinerary is a template and a guideline which can be molded to fit your requirements and desires. A final dossier would include hostel names, addresses and phone numbers, emergency contacts, meal indications and timings.

Day 1

Arrival in Quito

Group transfer from Quito airport to the hostel, ten minutes away.

Day 2

Quito to San Cristobal Island, Galapagos

After breakfast, an early morning airport transfer and flight will take you to the island of San Cristobal, the site of Charles Darwin’s first stop in Galapagos. Here, you’ll be met and transferred to your hotel. The afternoon will involve a trip to the Interpretation centre where you’ll get an overview of the colorful history and breath-taking natural history before heading on to Cerro Tijeretas, Darwin’s first port of call in Galapagos for your first snorkeling. Here, we often encounter playful sealions and gliding frigates.

The evenings welcome dinner will be served with some of the islands fresh fish and produce.

Day 3

El Junco, Galapaguera and La Loberia

Today will be bus-based, as we visit the interior of San Cristobal Island. Covering about 50 miles, we'll visit the high points of the island including El Junco, the only natural fresh water lake in the Islands, offering views of the coastline and lowlands from all angles as well as the endemic Miconia forest, a highly endangered and unique bush.

La Galapaguera will offer you your first views of giant tortoises. This is a semi-natural habitat that holds examples of the endemic San Cristobal sub-species.

Upon your return to port, you'll visit "La Loberia" for a snorkel with sealions and maybe even large marine iguanas, commonly found in this area.

Day 4

La Galapaguera, San Cristobal

Today begins with a short ride in a launch, your inter-island transport for the next few days. After 30 minutes you'll stop in Isla Lobos to observe nesting frigates and blue-footed boobies. This is followed by a snorkel with the playful young sealions, one of the snorkeling highlights.

You'll then continue on to Kicker Rock, the dramatic yellow remains of a Tuff Cone protruding out of the ocean like a sky-scraper. Here you'll be able to snorkel with Sea-turtles, manta rays and maybe the harmless Galapagos Sharks, among a lot more.

This will be followed by a visit to the white coral beach at Cerro Brujo, one of the most beautiful beaches on the island, returning to port by late afternoon.

Day 5

San Cristobal to Isabela Island, via Floreana

An early morning final departure from San Cristobal will take you to the eastern islets of Floreana, four hours away. The journey may take in dolphins and the endemic waved albatross on the way.

Snorkeling will be the menu of the day in some of the best sites in Galapagos, with superb schools of tropical fish. After 2-3 immersions, you'll continue on to the small community of Puerto Velasco Ibarra and the highlands of Floreana. This area is associated with some interesting history and caves. A mid-afternoon departure from here will take you on to Puerto Villamil on Isabela Island and your hostel for the next three nights.

Day 6**Sierra Negra Volcano, Isabela**

Today you'll ride to the top of Sierra Negra Volcano, one of the most active volcanoes in Galapagos and the second largest active crater in the world at 6-miles diameter. A walk will take you along the caldera rim and to the site of a recent eruption surrounded by majestic lava flows, sulphur and steam vents with a backdrop of dramatic views of out-lying islands. A dip in the sea on the endless sandy beach surrounding this Pacific village will sooth your body after the volcano hike. Often sealions, penguins and beautiful fish will abound while snorkeling around the mangroves of the Pearl Oyster lagoon.

An evening relaxing on the empty beaches that surround this town is a perfect end to a perfect day.

Day 7**Puerto Villamil, Isabela**

Today, we will take you (tide and water conditions permitting) to a superb snorkel site an hour west along the coast of Southern Isabela. This place is called "The Tunnels" and with luck, penguins and sea turtles will be spotted among many others.

Upon returning, there will be some opportunities to spot the Galapagos flamingos in lagoons nearby and visit the local Giant Tortoise rearing centre, where you'll get to know the various species of Isabela giant tortoises and the community conservation efforts to protect them.

Day 8**Isabela to Santa Cruz Island**

Following an early morning departure to the Island of Santa Cruz there'll be another great opportunity to snorkel near the islands of Cuatro Hermanos.

After settling into your fine hostel, an afternoon visit to the Charles Darwin Research Station (CDRS) will teach you about the conservation issues that have been aggravating the natural habitat and how the institution is dealing with it. Top of the agenda are the giant tortoise restoration projects that are underway. These cover several sub-species including that of famous Lonesome George, the last of his race and the emblem of species conservation.

Day 9**Bartolome Island**

An early pick and overland transfer by bus to northern Santa Cruz, to board a day-tour yacht for a visit to Bartolome Island. This charming islet is the jewel in the crown of Galapagos. Its majestic volcanic scenery is unrivaled and is the image of Galapagos. Endemic penguins can be observed on the coastline and are often seen during the snorkel too.



Day 10**North Seymour & South Plaza Islands**

After breakfast you'll take an overland transfer to northern Santa Cruz by bus, to board a yacht bound for North Seymour Island. This islet is home to blue-footed boobies, great and magnificent frigates, land iguanas and myriad sealions. A great snorkel in this popular dive spot could result in Fur seals and garden eels. After lunch you'll visit Bachas beach, a turtle nesting haven with cactus forests and small lagoons beyond the sand dunes. Feeding flamingos and other lagoon birds are spotted here at close proximity.

Tonight there'll be a short briefing by a scientist from Conservation International, building the picture of how the work you'll conduct tomorrow will be of benefit in the grand scheme.

Day 11**Volunteering with Conservation International**

Breakfast followed by a volunteering day with Conservation International. The areas of work and education will be in the highlands of Santa Cruz, concentrating on reducing the introduced plants and assisting the endangered native plants. The ecosystem includes eight species of Darwin's finch and the giant tortoises. It is under threat by invasive plants which are totally altering the land. Several strategies are being implemented and you will help in one or several of them.

A mid-afternoon arrival will allow time to kayak in the bay of Puerto Ayora, explore the idyllic beach of Tortuga Bay or simply relax and/or snorkel on the CDRS beach.

Day 12**The highlands of Santa Cruz**

Upon arrival, a free day will ensue with options to kayak, explore the idyllic beach of Tortuga Bay or simply relax and snorkel on the CDRS beach.

After a brief drive you'll embark on a search for some of the biggest giant tortoises in the wild. This population is 3,000-strong and easy to observe. You'll also get to walk through extensive lava tunnels, and explore Los Gemelos, the most intact endemic highland vegetation in Galapagos. Here, the geological formations, finches and other features of this natural cloud forest will be explained to you. Later in the day you'll head off to Tomas de Berlanga School to learn about a social education project.

Returning home in mid-afternoon will allow free time to engage in the activities around Puerto Ayora.

Day 13**Fly to Quito**

Crossing north over Santa Cruz will take you to a narrow canal across which is the island of Baltra. Bus, ferry then bus will get you to the airport there, where you'll take your Quito bound flight. You'll arrive in the late afternoon at the hostel.

Day 14**Otavalo Market**

2 hours North along the Pan-American highway is the town of Otavalo. Long before the Spanish Conquest, town squares like the one here, were used by the indigenous people to sell their products. This tradition has remained unchanged and in these colorful and noisy "mercados" the natives offer all of their wares in the largest market of its kind in South America, displaying a wide variety of goods, folklore, arts, crafts, ceramics and regional garments. Certain days also hold the fruit and animal market.

A day tour would take you to various surrounding villages and take in some breathtaking Andean views.

Day 15**Cotopaxi Volcano**

2 hours south along the Pan-American Highway is the most impressive active volcano of the Andes. With its limpet shape, and snow-capped peak, Cotopaxi Volcano provides a great way to get close to Andean summits. Glacial streams lead to rivers ending either in the Pacific or the Amazon.

Its surrounding foothills are a national park where condors sometimes soar past. At this high altitude (15,000ft), extreme weather has shaped an extraordinary flora.

Among the birds found here is the Ecuadorian hillstar: the world's highest humming bird. Many others make the national park their stopping ground or home, and the high mountain lake a great sight for bird-watching.

Day 16**Amazon**

A mid-morning flight will take you east into the Amazon jungle.

Days 16 – 20**La Selva**

Get a taste of the Amazon. 'La Selva' ('The Jungle') is the more comfortable way of doing this. Only a half hour plane ride from Quito to Coca, then an exciting path down the Napo river, a tributary to the Amazon river, takes you to remotely situated Sacha Lodge.

The lodge consists of a series of cabins with insect screens and other 'creature' comforts. The dining area butts on to the mosquito-free lake. Although full of Cayman and piranhas, it is the most comfortable swim you can imagine.

Excursions take place from the lodge itself and will take you on to canopy walks, rowing down streams, visiting butterfly breeding areas. Staying put and relaxing in the lodge itself is a great option, often resulting in some of the best wildlife and bird experiences.

Day 20**Amazon to Quito old town**

After quite a morning adventure upstream in the jungle and back to Quito, you'll be given an optional visit to the old colonial town of Quito.

The city's historical centre is one of the most famous and dazzling testimonies of the colonial past of America. It is the first Cultural Heritage site designated by UNESCO.

A tour would include a visit to the Independence Square at the very heart of the colonial city where public buildings, baroque churches and neoclassical monasteries were built. From the nearby hill named "El Panecillo", you can admire the entire city with its mixture of high, modern buildings and 17th century domes.

Day 21**Leave Ecuador**

An early morning transfer to the airport where you'll bid farewell to a memorable experience in this great country!

Leaving the students with an unforgettable life-building experience, an enthusiasm for their subject and