

Ecuador - Cock-of-the-rock

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline Itinerary

Day 1	Quito
Day 2/4	Mindo
Day 5	Mindo - Quito
Day 6	Papallacta Pass – Guango Lodge
Day 7	Guango Lodge/east slope
Day 8	Guango – Quito; depart
Day 9	Arrive UK

Departs

Generally February, March, August, November

Focus

Birds

Grading

To enjoy the trip to the full you should be reasonably fit as we will be spending the majority of each day on foot.

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code ECU05) or brochure

Highlights

- Experience an active Cock-of-the-Rock lek
- Visit Angel Paz's famous Antpitta reserve at Mindo
- Superlative Neotropical birding. Tanagers & hummingbirds galore!
- Wonderful cloudforest & mountain scenery
- High altitude birds at Papallacta include Seedsnipe & Andean Condor
- Expertly guided by one of our outstanding Ecuadorian ornithologists
- Extend your holiday with a visit to the Galapagos Islands or to the Amazon Basin (Sacha Lodge)



Cock of the Rock



Torrent Duck



White-whiskered Hermit.



Naturetrek Mingledown Barn Wolf's Lane Chawton Alton Hampshire GU34 3HJ UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Fly Quito

We leave London in the morning on Iberia's scheduled service to Quito (alternatively with KLM via Amsterdam). Changing planes in Madrid, we will arrive in Quito in the evening and transfer to our simple but comfortable birders' lodge not far from the new airport. Although we will not have much opportunity to see the city, Quito is probably the most attractive of all the colonial capitals of South America. The city is located in a hollow at the foot of the volcano Pichincha. On a clear day Andean peaks tower around and the sun is bright and strong. The climate is delightful: the name means "Eternal Spring" in the ancient language of Quechua. Standing at 9,000 feet, Quito is the second highest capital in the world.

Day 2

Nono-Mindo

After an early coffee and breakfast in the hotel, we will drive up out of Quito to our first stop at Yanacocha, an area of moss-clad temperate forest on the slopes of Volcano Guagua Pichincha. Hummingbirds will be especially active during the early morning, and possible species include Golden-breasted and Sapphire-vented Puffleg, Shining Sunbeam, Rainbow-bearded Thornbill, Tyrian Metaltail, Purple-backed Thornbill,



Barred Fruiteater (Colin Green)

Great Sapphirewing and, with a good deal of luck, the very rare and local Black-breasted Puffleg. This will also be our first experience of mixed-species feeding flocks, and we will be on the look out for Black-chested, Hooded, and Scarlet-bellied Mountain-Tanagers, Barred Fruiteater, Andean Pygmy-Owl, Crowned Chat-Tyrant, White-browed Spinetail and the attractive and sought-after Ocellated Tapaculo.

We next pass over the western ridge of the Andes and drop down onto the pacific slope along the famous old Nono-Tandayapa-Mindo road. Over the years this forested valley has gained an impressive reputation for the quality and number of birds that can be seen along its length including Rufous-chested Tanager, Tawny-rumped Tyrannulet, Beautiful Jay, Toucan Barbet, Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan, Masked Trogon, White-capped Dipper, Cinnamon Flycatcher and many species of tanager and hummingbird. Prior to reaching our lodge we will have chances to admire a different suite of birds including Rusty-margined Flycatcher, Pale-mandibled Aracari, Choco and Chesnut-mandibled Toucans, Fawn-breasted Tanager and the unusual-looking Pacific Hornero, surely one of the most attractive all of the furnarids.

We will take a box lunch to eat while birding on the route and aim to arrive at Mindo Loma Lodge in the late afternoon for a 3-night stay.

Day 3/4

Mindo Loma

This property, located at an elevation 1,800 metres on the western Andean slope, will be our base for three nights. Species-rich patches of cloud forest between 800m and 2,000m are right on our doorstep. The rest of the area is covered in secondary forest in various stages of succession. Around 350 bird species have been recorded here, amongst them spectacular species such as Esmeraldas Antbird, Andean Cock of the Rock and Toucan Barbet. Mammals, whilst much harder to see, are also very diverse. At least 45 species are present and include Puma, Ocelot, many species of bats, agoutis, peccaries, tapirs and, in particular, the rare Spectacled Bear. The Reserve is also incredibly rich in orchids, ferns and bromeliads and they greatly add to the wonderful and mysterious atmosphere of the cloud forest. The variety of plants is staggering and over 1,200 species have so far been identified, although it is thought the total could be nearer 2,000!

Mindo Loma Lodge is a very simple family lodge designed to fit into the wonderful landscape of the cloud forests that surround it. Entirely made of natural materials with a thatched palm roof, the dining and reception areas are open sided so that it is possible to make the most of the wonderful views and serious bird watching is even possible whilst relaxing in your hammock! The open-air design of this unique lodge allows intimate contact with nature and the soothing sounds of the hummers at feeders. The lodge has a full kitchen that serves three meals a day, utilising the best of local ingredients and recipes (although we may choose to take a packed lunch with us). Is a homely lodge where the Herrera family will provide a very warm welcome.

The birding is wonderful here. As the sunlight penetrates the canopy it may illuminate the splendid plumage of a Plate-billed Mountain-Toucan, whilst a pair of Toucan Barbets may reveal their presence by their loud duetting calls. As the mist rolls in, swirling flocks of dazzling Golden, Flame-faced, Golden-naped, Beryl-spangled, Blue-capped and Fawn-breasted Tanagers may be seen feeding on the fruits of the silvery-leaved Cecropia trees. Sets of hummingbird feeders around the



lodge provide a thrilling spectacle as White-whiskered and Stripe-throated Hermits, Green-crowned Brilliant and Green-crowned Woodnymph indulge themselves on the artificial nectar. Other species we may see in this area include Crested Guan, Barred and Roadside Hawks, Band-tailed, Plumbeous and Ruddy Pigeons, Red-billed Parrot, Golden-headed Quetzal, Masked Trogon, Crimson-mantled Woodpecker, Azara's and Red-faced Spinetails, Rusty-winged Barbtail, Uniform Treehunter, Long-tailed Antbird,

Spillmann's and Nariño Tapaculos, White-tailed Tyrannulet, Bronze-olive Pygmy-Tyrant, Smoke-coloured Pewee, Black Phoebe, Streak-necked, Cinnamon, Ornate and Golden-crowned Flycatchers, Green-and-black Fruiteater, Olivaceous Piha, Turquoise and Beautiful Jays, Mountain Wren, Grey-breasted Wood-Wren, Brown-capped Vireo, Black-crested and Three-striped Warblers, Spectacled and Slate-throated Whitestarts, Blue-winged Mountain-Tanager, Dusky Bush-Tanager, Superciliaried and Black-eared Hemispinguses, Tricoloured Brush-Finch and Masked and White-sided Flowerpiercers.

We'll also take the opportunity to drive down to San Miguel de los Bancos lower down on the western Andean slope. The rustic lodge here offers a good coffee/lunch stop with lush gardens adorned with bird feeders. Here we will be able to see species such as Black-cheeked Woodpecker, Green Thorntail, Ecuadorian Thrush, Thick-billed Euphonia, various tanagers like Rufous-throated, Emerald, Silver-throated and Guira, plus Orange-billed and Black-striped Sparrows. This will be a good opportunity to look for species we may have missed at Mindo, and to study new hummingbird species coming to the feeders at the lodge.

Day 5

Milpe - Quito

One of the highlights of our week will be a dawn visit to nearby Refugio Paz de las Aves with its tame antpittas and Cock-of-the-Rock lek. The owners of this private reserve have constructed a basic viewing area and providing dull-coloured



Yellow-breasted Antpitta (Colin Green)

clothing is worn and the group is quiet, the Cock-of-the-Rocks usually come fairly close. It is a quite breathtaking experience watching these stunning Jackdaw-sized birds at such close quarters. Previous groups have enjoyed views of many other interesting species in the vicinity of the lek, including Rufescent Screech-Owl, Cloudforest Pygmy-Owl, Olivaceous Piha, Beautiful Jay, Orange-breasted and Scaled Fruiteaters, Giant, Yellow-breasted and Moustached Antpittas, Black-chinned Mountain-Tanager, Streak-capped

Treehunter and many others.

After this remarkable experience, we return for a sumptuous breakfast at the lodge. Later on we will drive back to Quito, birding en-route. We overnight back at the lodge in Puenbo.

Day 6

Papallacta Pass – Guango

The eastern slope of Ecuador offers more excellent birding. Today we drive up over the eastern ridge of the Andes and drop down to Papallacta, following the original route taken by Spanish conquistador Francisco de Orellana in 1541 on his way towards El Dorado. Not far from the source of the Napo River, Ecuador's

largest Amazon tributary. The road affords splendid views of several snow-capped peaks as it winds its way over the 4,000-metre-high Papallacta Pass and with good luck we may find an Andean Condor soaring over the crags. Other species to look for include Black-chested Eagle, Giant Hummingbird, Many-striped Canastero, White-chinned Thistletail, Stout-billed and Barred-winged Cinclodes, Slaty Flowerpiercer, Band-tailed and Paramo Seedeaters, Tawny Antpitta, Paramo Tapaculo, Black-billed and Paramo Ground-Tyrants, Red-rumped Bush Tyrant, White-crested Elaenia, Red-crested Cotinga, Giant Conebill and Rufous-bellied Seedsnipe. The flowering shrubs in this inhospitable habitat act as a magnet to a plethora of splendid hummingbirds such as Shining Sunbeam, the endemic Ecuadorian Hillstar, Blue-mantled Thornbill and the bat-like Great Sapphirewing.

After crossing Papallacta pass and heading down towards the Amazon basin, lush vegetation soon begins to blanket the valleys. The forested roadsides and trails around Papallacta offer fantastic habitat for tanagers and hummingbirds. We will hope to see Sword-billed Hummingbird (a species with the longest bill in relation to body length of any bird in the world), and Shining Sunbeam, together with Lacrimose, Scarlet-bellied and Buff-breasted Mountain-Tanagers.

Our accommodation for the night is at the lovely little lodge at Guango.

Day 7

Guango Lodge/east Andean slope

As we descend down the picturesque eastern Andean slope, past tumbling waterfalls and small villages, we open up a whole new chapter in possible target species. Torrent Duck, White-capped Parrot, Scaly-naped Amazon, Crested Quetzal, the mouse-like Blackish, Equatorial Rufous-vented and Ash-coloured Tapaculos, Rufous-breasted and Pale-edged Flycatchers, the endearing Rufous-crowned Tody-Tyrant, Rufous-headed Pygmy-Tyrant,



Smoky Bush-Tyrant, Dusky Piha, Rufous, Sepia-brown and Plain-tailed Wrens, Glossy-black, Pale-eyed and Chestnut-bellied Thrushes, Capped Conebill, Grass-green Tanager, Lacrimose Mountain-Tanager, and Subtropical and Northern Mountain Caciques are all possibilities as we descend down to 2,000 metres towards San Isidro for lunch. Considered one of the best birding lodges in South America and surrounded by 1,300 hectares of pristine and undergrowth cloudforest, San Isidro holds very important birdlife such as Bronzy Inca, Gorgeted Woodstar, Marble-faced and Variegated Bristle-Tyrants, White-bellied Antpitta, Emerald Toucanet, Highland Motmot, Black-chested Fruiteater, among others. If there is some spare time, we will take the most 'birdable' portion of the Borja – Baeza old. Some eastern foothill bird species are

usually around this area such as Lafresnaye's Piculet, Blackish Antbird, White-backed Fire-Eye, Olive-backed Woodcreeper, Olivaceous Siskin, Sierran and Motled-backed Elaenias, Black-and-Chesnut Eagle, Russet-backed Oropendola, Chesnut-bellied Seedeater, Red-breasted Blackbird, Blackish Pewee, Southern Lapwing and more! The whole day will be spent in the field before a late return to Guango Lodge.

Day 8

Guango – Quito

A further morning exploring the environs of Guango during the morning, targeting local species that we may have missed such as Andean Guan, Torrent Duck, Black-and-Chestnut Eagle, Grey-breasted Mountain-Toucan, Chesnut-naped Slate-crowned and Chesnut-crowned Antpittas, Slaty-backed and Rufous-breasted Chat-Tyrant, Green-and-Black Fruiteater, Dusky Piha, White-capped Dipper, Oleaginous and Black-capped Hemispingus, Mountain Cacique, Slaty Brush-Finch and others. As we slowly start our journey back up into the páramo we can look for Blue-mantled Thornbill, Viridian Metaltail, White-chinned Thistletail, Andean



Viridian Metaltail

Tit-Spintail, Rufous Antpitta, White-throated Tyrannulet, Agile Tit-Tyrant, Brown-backed Chat-Tyrant, Tawny Antpitta, Paramo Tapaculo, White-throated Tyrannulet, Red-crested Cotinga, Brown-bellied Swallow, Grass Wren, the rare Masked Mountain-Tanager, Superciliaried Hemispingus, Pale-naped Brush-Finch and Paramo Seedeater. Nearby are a few patches of stunted *Polylepis* woodland where we may see the nuthatch-like Giant Conebill and, with luck, we will encounter a family group of Black-backed Bush-Tanagers. If the weather is clear we will be able to see the huge, ice-clad peak of Antisana and its associated glacier.

In the afternoon we'll drive down out of the mountains and have people back in the airport in time to check in for international departures.

Day 9

London

We arrive in London during the afternoon.

Flights

There are no direct flights from the UK to Quito. We can choose between connecting flights offered by AA, Iberia and KLM through Miami, Madrid and Amsterdam respectively.

Tour Grading

To enjoy the trip to the full you should be reasonably fit and mobile as we will be spending the majority of each day on foot. The trails around Maquipucuna are steep in places and can be muddy, although rest periods can be spent at the lodge, where there are numerous hummingbird feeders. The time spent up on the Papallacta pass will be at over 4,000m in altitude.

Weather

The climate in Ecuador varies enormously, depending on the region and the altitude. Quito is mild and temperate with chilly nights; like a spring day in England. There is a possibility of heavy rain at any time, but hopefully not to the extent that it will spoil your enjoyment.

Clothing

Please inspect the separate clothing list, sent to you on booking, thoroughly.

Food & accommodation included in the price

All accommodation and meals are included, except for evening meals in Quito (£50 should be more than enough for these).

Extra expenses

Please note that we do not include the following in the cost of this holiday: all items of a more personal nature such as drinks, laundry and souvenirs. Small entrance taxes totaling \$40 - \$50 per person are also payable locally at Yanacocha the hummingbird garden, Angel Paz, Papallacta and Guacamayos.

Single rooms and group size

The vehicle we generally use for this tour, a 10-seater American furgoneta, suits a group of 9 and no more. At Guango Lodge our accommodation is restricted to 5 twin rooms and 1 single room. Therefore only two single rooms are available on any one tour.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or

connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking. Please note that as all our Bargain Selection tours are carefully costed on maximum group sizes to maximise value for money, it may be necessary to impose a small group surcharge of 10% on groups falling short of 8.

Extensions

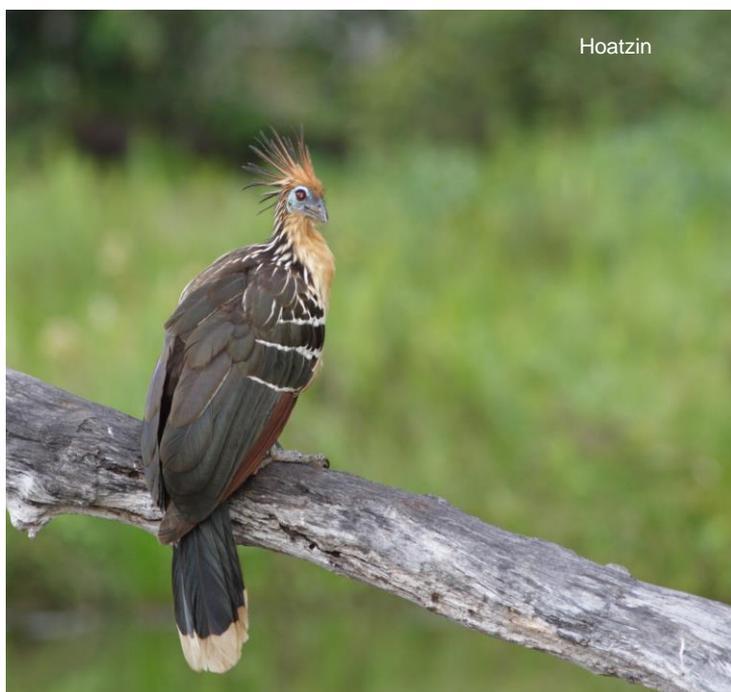
Two main extension possibilities present themselves: the Galapagos, the Amazon basin, and extended time in the western slope cloud forests.

Sacha Lodge extension

Your extension starts with a night's accommodation in Quito.

Day 9

A 45-minute flight takes you over the Andes and down to the port town of Coca, properly named Puerto Francisco de Orellana, after the discoverer of the Ecuadorian Amazon. The hot, humid jungle air will hit you as you step from the plane and you will be taken down to the river where you board a covered motorized canoe for the 2 ½ hour, 50 mile journey downstream to Sacha. The River Napo is Ecuador's principal Amazon tributary and at this point it is about 1/3 of a mile wide. Its waters are sediment-rich and during the dry season huge sandy beaches are exposed. We will look for various herons, kingfishers and birds of prey as you continue downstream.



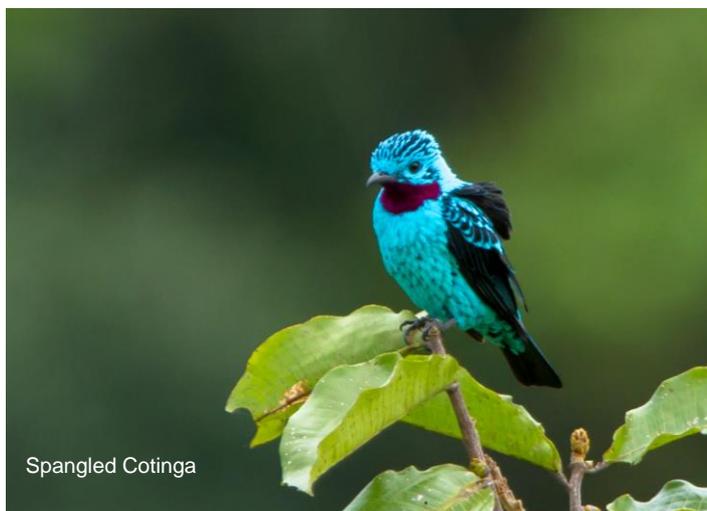
Hoatzin

Upon arrival at Sacha's 3,200 acre reserve you will take your first walk along a raised boardwalk through dense flooded palm forest where several species of monkey are often seen. The path leads to the ancient blackwater oxbow lake of Pilchicocha, where traditional dugout canoes await to take you across to the far side of the lake where the lodge lies partially concealed in the rainforest. After a welcome drink you can do some birdwatching around the lodge before sunset. The swampy land around Pilchicocha supports a large group of Hoatzin, that strange Archaeopteryx-type bird, plus Smooth-billed Ani, Red-capped Cardinal, Black-capped Donacobius and many more.

After your first of Sacha's superb buffet meals you will retire to bed in comfortable cabins with the sounds of the rainforest echoing around.

Day 10 – 12

The highlights of the lodge are many. An unforgettable morning or afternoon will be spent in Sacha's 43-



metre canopy tower. This amazing structure is constructed around a giant kapok tree and affords splendid views of the surrounding rainforest canopy. Toucans, tanagers, flycatchers and raptors abound, as well as many highly sought-after canopy-dwelling species such as Plum-throated and Spangled Cotinga, White-browed Purpletuft, Amazonian Umbrellabird and Dugand's Antwren. With some luck, Red Howler Monkeys, Squirrel Monkeys and Three-toed Sloth may also be seen from the tower. Sacha also has an extensive trail system providing challenging

inner-forest birding for antbirds, foliage gleaners, manakins and woodcreepers. In addition we can arrange, if weather conditions permit, an early-morning trip to a nearby parrot lick to observe hundreds of parrots and parakeets eating clay on the banks of the Napo. The islands in the Napo have their own special avifauna with spinetails, flycatchers and, with luck, Castlenau's Antshrike and Grey-breasted Crake. A night walk in the forest is a whole new experience again and we shall also take to the waters of Pilchicocha at night to search for the Spectacled Caiman.

Day 13

One final walk along the boardwalk through the flooded palm forest will bring you back out to the River Napo for our journey upstream to Coca. Our flight to Quito will depart in the late morning and we should be back in Quito by early afternoon. Any time spare during the rest of the afternoon will be spent at leisure birding back at our birders' guesthouse over a coffee, before checking in for the return flight to Europe.

Day 14

Arrive back in London late afternoon.

Cost: £1,395 sharing a room and £1,650 in a single. This price includes the internal flights, 1 additional night in Quito (B&B) and extra airport transfers. Also full board and activities at Sacha, with the services of an expert birding guide.

Galapagos extension

Please note that Galapagos extensions are not on specific birding itineraries or boats. Whilst you will have a chance to see many of the special birds of the archipelago, you will be sharing the boat with non-birders. As such you will not enjoy the cruise if you are expecting to twitch all the endemics. If you go with an open frame of mind however, and set out to enjoy swimming and snorkelling, photography and learn about the Darwin story, evolution and ecology, you will find it a fascinating experience.

We propose the Aida Maria boat which offers an 8 day/7 night cruise from Sunday to Sunday. The boat is a comfortable budget-mid range vessel, offering the equivalent of 2-3 star accommodation.

Your extension starts with a night's accommodation in Quito on the Saturday night, and an early morning transfer to the airport for your flight to Galapagos on Sunday morning.

The cruise (bearing in mind that schedule changes do occur) covers the following islands:

Day 9

This morning you fly from the Ecuadorian mainland to the islands on an early morning flight via the port city of Guayaquil. As you prepare to land in Baltra, the landscape below will seem otherworldly - and it is, for you have come to a place like no other.

The Galapagos Islands are unique to the world and you are about to see why. Your bilingual naturalist guide will greet you at the airport and assist you through customs. During lunch he or she will introduce you to the islands and specifically the flora and fauna you will encounter at our first destination, Las Bachas Beach.

On the sandy white beaches of Las Bachas we will get a close look at a sea turtle nesting area and a lake frequented by Greater Flamingos and other migratory shore birds. Afterwards, you will be able to cool off with your first dip in the blue Pacific. As this is our first evening together, the crew will invite us to a pre-dinner cocktail on the yacht before the welcome dinner. If the night is clear, as it usually is, the stars above will bedazzle; look for the Southern Cross, the Big Dipper (turned up-side down!) and Orion.

Day 10

We sail on to Plazas. Here a jetty ensures a comfortable landing on this small island which has been peculiarly tilted by geological events. Unfortunately we may have to chase some Galapagos Sealions off the jetty as they often find it a perfect spot for basking in the sun. The lower shore holds a dense breeding colony of sealions, which over millennium have worn down the rock to the smooth texture of polished marble. The bare, open ground is dotted with bright red Sesuvium plants and giant cacti. The island supports a dense population of about 300 Galapagos Land Iguanas, which dig burrows in the soft sand and their confiding nature allows them to be easily photographed. At the upper end of the island, sheer cliffs

rise above the sea. Along them cruise Red-billed Tropicbirds, Audubon's Shearwaters and Swallow-tailed Gulls. There is even a colony of bachelor sealions on the cliff top! The breeding ecology of these huge beasts is fascinating: a fully grown sealion will try to secure a harem of females on the island's lower shores, but will soon be ousted by a fresh male. He is then forced to take a rest in the bachelor's colony, which also contains those males too old or young to hold territory.

We may have time for a brief stop - a couple of hours or so - on SANTA FE. This island has a sandy inlet jealously guarded by sealions. We can swim amongst them from our boat. The rocky reef here is a good place to look for the White-tipped Reef Shark! Inland there is an interesting giant *Opuntia* cactus forest and, if we have time to walk to the island's hilly interior, we may see the endemic Santa Fé Land Iguana or the endemic Galapagos Snake.

Day 11

Española - a spectacular island and the oldest in the archipelago. At Punta Suarez, colonies of Galapagos Sealions line the beach, where we also find large numbers of a particularly colourful form of Marine Iguana. We walk along a cliff-top through colonies of Blue-footed and Masked Boobies, which may have chicks in season and we stand a good chance of seeing a Galapagos Hawk here. Other land birds include three species of Darwin's Finch, the Galapagos Dove, Yellow Warbler and the fearless Hood Mockingbird (which is endemic to the island). The latter species is renowned for its close approach, and has even been known to perch on birdwatchers' tripods! From May to November, we arrive at a colony of Waved Albatross, which breed nowhere else in the world; they may have young chicks, looking like grey feather dusters! At the far side of the island we reach a cliff, where peculiar Swallow-tailed Gulls nest, and we may see Red-billed Tropicbirds and shearwaters. A dramatic blow-hole adds to the charm of one of the most fascinating of the Galapagos Islands.



Other land birds include three species of Darwin's Finch, the Galapagos Dove, Yellow Warbler and the fearless Hood Mockingbird (which is endemic to the island). The latter species is renowned for its close approach, and has even been known to perch on birdwatchers' tripods! From May to November, we arrive at a colony of Waved Albatross, which breed nowhere else in the world; they may have young chicks, looking like grey feather dusters! At the far side of the island we reach a cliff, where peculiar Swallow-tailed Gulls nest, and we may see Red-billed Tropicbirds and shearwaters. A dramatic blow-hole adds to the charm of one of the most fascinating of the Galapagos Islands.

Day 12

Floreana. Famous tales and legends emanate from this island, for Floreana was the favourite haunt of pirates! It is the only island to boast a freshwater spring, but its human inhabitants are few. You may like to chance your luck by posting cards and letters in the barrel on Post Office Bay; they should be picked up by a passing ship! At Punta Cormorant we will visit a lagoon inhabited by Greater Flamingoes, which sometimes breed here, and where other coastal birds include White-cheeked Pintail, Black-necked Stilt, Brown Pelican and various waders. Some interesting plants can be found along the shores of the lagoon, including the endemic Cut-leaf Daisy and *Scalesia*. At the far end of the walk is a fine white sand beach

where rays, turtles and sharks are often seen. We may also visit Devil's Crown to snorkel in this shallow flooded crater which has some of the best snorkeling in the archipelago.

Day 13

Santa Cruz highlands. It is often dank and humid up on the highlands of Santa Cruz but, with luck, a wild Giant Tortoise may be found. Other upland birds may well be seen, such as Vermillion Flycatcher, Short-eared Owl and, with luck, the remarkable Woodpecker Finch.



Giant Tortoise

Charles Darwin station on Santa Cruz. Puerto Ayora is the main town of the Galapagos, with about 6,000 inhabitants. There are a few small hotels and bars but, more importantly, this is where we find the Charles Darwin Research Station with its Giant Tortoise breeding project. The tortoise populations were severely depleted in the past by whalers, pirates and sealers, and in recent times have been further threatened by the introduction of

mammals such as dogs, pigs and rats. The project aims to hatch the eggs in captivity and to introduce the tortoises into their natural habitat once they have reached a certain size. Darwin's Finches are common around the tortoise enclosures and some of the more elusive tree finches may be seen during a trip through the vegetation belts to the highlands.

Day 14

Rabida is a small island with a range of land birds. Sealions bask on the red beach and there is some good snorkeling in the clear water.

James Island will be next on our itinerary. Buccaneer Cove is a sheltered bay famed for its association with British pirates and fragments of old pottery can easily be found. The volcanic geology is fascinating here, and the vegetation resembles the thorn scrub of the African Savannah. Darwin's finches, Galapagos Doves, Galapagos Hawks and Painted Locusts are the special attractions. At Puerto Egas we will visit the fur seal "grottos". Galapagos Sealions also occur here, testing your skill at telling these two species apart! Also along the shore we will see Marine Iguanas, crabs and coastal birds such as Whimbrel, Wandering Tattler, American Oystercatcher and Black-bellied Plover.

Day 15

On Bartolome we will ascend a steep slope, aided by a stairway, through an almost lunar landscape to the summit of the island. From this vantage point there is a magnificent view over Pinnacle Rock, often described as the classic Galapagos scene. It is a view that has featured in many books and films. The Gregory Peck film, "The Dove", was located here. As well as being one of the most beautiful and impressive islands, Bartolome is also a paradise for those with a geological interest. Cinder and spatter cones, lava tubes and lava flows comprise this quiet and derelict landscape. There is a sandy beach used by turtles for egg-laying and providing pleasant conditions for swimming and snorkeling around the Pinnacle Rock. It is the only place in the world where it is possible to swim with penguins without the need for a dry suit!

Day 16

North Seymour. North Seymour is a small uplifted island with a colony of Blue-footed Boobies and Magnificent Frigatebirds, which can be seen, in season, displaying by inflating their red throat pouches. Galapagos Sealions line the rocky shore and can often be seen "body surfing" the foaming breakers.

After our visit to North Seymour we will sail to Baltra Island to catch our plane back to the mainland in time to check in with our international flight out to Madrid and London.

Day 17

Arrive London late afternoon.

Cost: approx £2,995 per person sharing a room in Quito and a cabin on the boat. The price includes 1 extra night in Quito B&B, extra transfers, full board and guiding on the boat and flights to and from Galapagos. Does not include Galapagos National Park entrance tax (payable on arrival in dollars cash) \$110, drinks, tips and personal expenses.