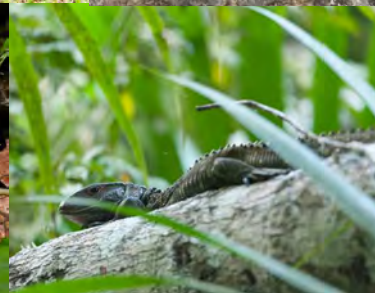
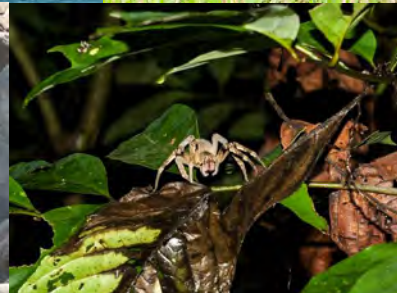


A trip to remember

A visit to Ecuador including The Galapagos Islands

March 2015

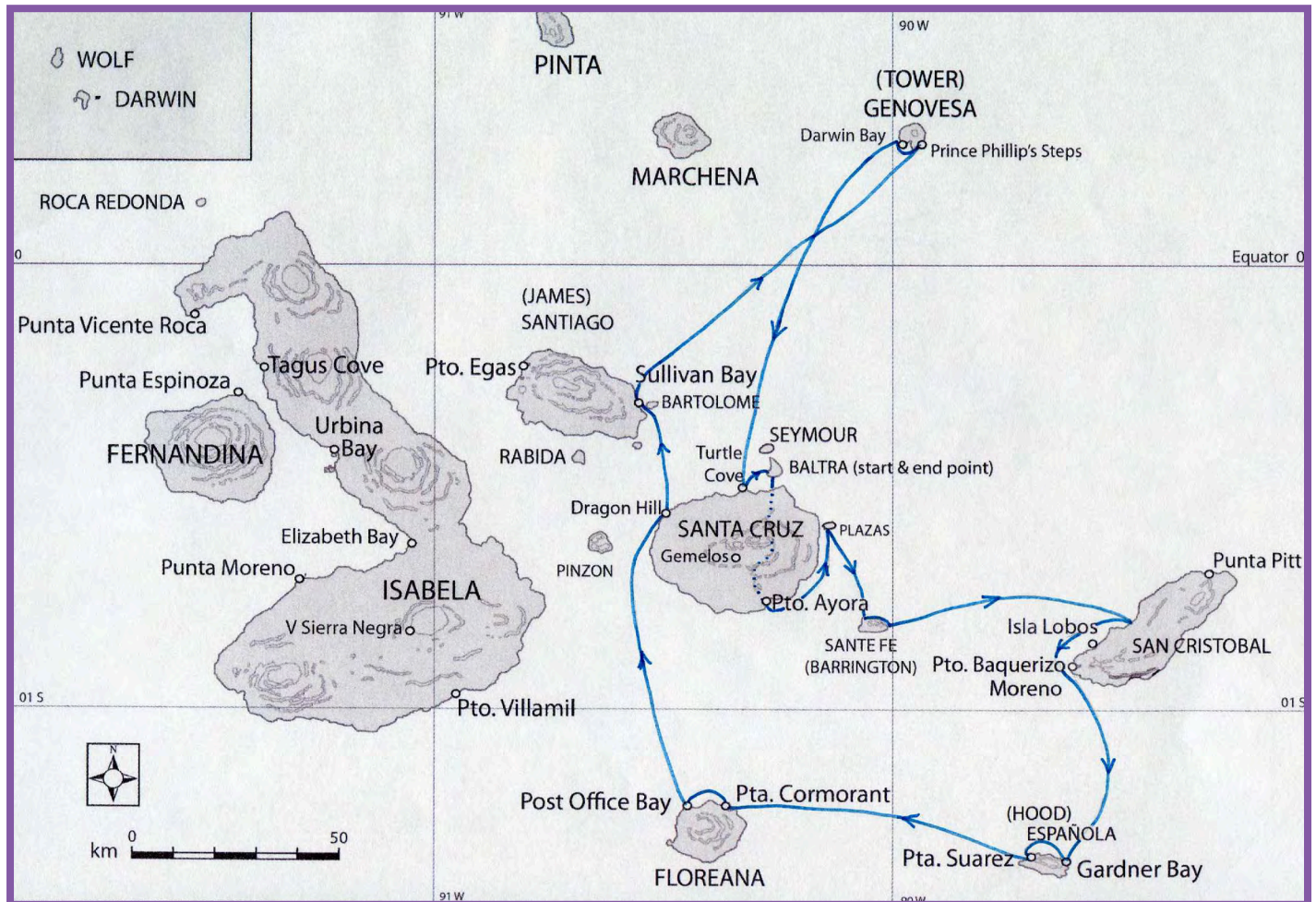


A trip to remember

A visit to Ecuador including The Galapagos Islands

March 2015

the Galapagos Islands straddle the Equator, 1000 kilometres off the coast of Ecuador
A one week cruise takes in half the islands - our trip was in the east as shown on the map



Monday 2 March

We began our adventure in Quito, the capital of Ecuador, after a 4.30am flight from Heathrow via Amsterdam.

We flew straight into Quito but many routes stop at Guayaquil further south, the largest city in Ecuador, on the way in and out of the country. Many business people commute between the two. Also aircraft leaving Ecuador have to pick up more fuel at the lower altitude before an overseas flight as the air is so thin in Quito at 2800 metres they would not be able to take off with a full tank. This extends the journey by up to two hours.

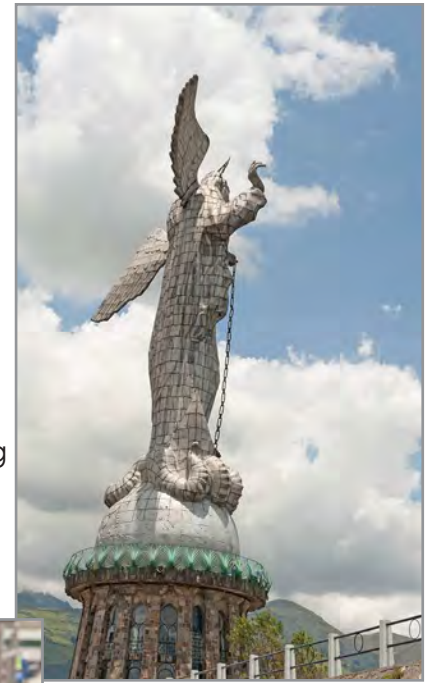
Our hotel in the city centre was very good; typical international hotel with acres of space, a bar and a very good restaurant. We were given a suite with 6ft bed, bathroom, storage and dressing area, sitting room and two TVs! We were glad to get to bed after a couple of drinks and a meal.

Tuesday 3 March: Quito

Our organised tour of the old part of the city required an early start and was well worth it. We saw four different denomination churches each with distinctive and impressive architecture – one was decorated inside completely with gold leaf.

Another had amazing columns inside matching those on the outside of the building depicting the different birds and animals.

At the highest point of the City was the amazing aluminium statue and a fantastic view of the surrounds. We were left to return on foot via the Botanical Gardens which was a good opportunity to stop and look around. That evening Robin was unwell so couldn't eat dinner – we think it may have been the lunch when out or on the plane.



'The Virgin of Quito' made from 7,000 pieces of aluminium the largest statue of its type in the world

scarf seller



Wednesday 4 March: Quito/ Isla Santa Cruz

The Galapagos Islands are about 600 miles off the coast of Ecuador so our journey begins with a bus to the airport leaving at 6.30am then a flight, delayed by about an hour which is quite usual with Tame (the internal airline). Again the plane lands at Guayaquil then on to Baltra in the Galapagos which was a US base in the war – handy for Panama – so the surroundings look a bit desolate now. Quick baggage collection which went straight onto a lorry and we, with quite a few others at this point, went by ferry across the narrow divide to the north point of Santa Cruz. This is the second largest island and the most populated. A road was built in 1975 to link the airport in the north to the major settlement in the south.

as we approached Santa Cruz, blue footed boobys spotted a shoal of fish so we had our first sighting of a feeding frenzy!



We began the journey by minibus south across the island for our first glimpse of the changing vegetation as the road climbed up from the coast. The coastal area is arid with ginger brown rocks and the main vegetation is a tree cactus. As the road climbed, trees appeared but looked dead apart from just a few leaves beginning to emerge. Evidently the rain should have arrived by now and when it does it takes only a few days for the leaves to sprout.

tree cactus bark with its peeling bark



Further up, a really green landscape emerged. Here we stopped for lunch at a wonderful place where lots of tortoises lived enjoying the plentiful grass. This was the only place we saw them, apart from the Research Centre, as they only live on a couple of islands. Our guide reckoned the largest one weighed about 300 kg which makes him very old, possibly about 100 years, as they continue to increase in size throughout their lives.







Back on the bus to Puerto Ayora on the south side of the Island which is the largest settlement with a population of about 27,000 and headquarters to the conservation organisations which keep access to the Galapagos Islands carefully controlled. The whole area is a National Park with an entrance fee of \$100 which we all had to pay when booking. This is also the hub of the supply industry to the boats which cruise the islands. There are about eighty which have a licence to land with tight control on where and when to restrict visitor numbers at any allowed embarkation point.

Here we visited the Charles Darwin Research Centre where we saw pens of young tortoises which they rear and ensure any eggs are kept true to their species. A few old animals ones are rehomed here to

keep them safe. All guides on the islands have to return to the Centre for two weeks every year to be kept up to date with new information and restrictions. We walked down through Puerto Ayora to the quay passing sea lions resting all over the place and joined by assorted large sea birds at the fish market.

At the quay we were helped onto a panga (rib) for the first of many boardings of the 'Cachalote', our twin-masted schooner for our week among the islands. Our naturalist guide who met us at the airport is Darwin. He was named such as his birthday is 15th September which is the anniversary of the day Charles Darwin landed on the Galapagos Islands in 1835 after four years at sea. He is enormously dedicated to all aspects of the islands preservation with amazing knowledge of all the birds and animals – the guides have to know all the latin names especially as there may be a difference in the species between islands.

Cabins on board our delightful boat are small which we knew, but the shower is very good and there is no limit to water. The boat has a desalination plant and we have a drinking water supply in the main saloon as plastic bottled water would not be feasible. There are eight cabins but the boat is not full and we have 11 passengers and six crew. Darwin gave us an outline of life on board – three fixed mealtimes, except when we have to be up really early, two maybe three trips ashore each day and plenty of time to relax. The first of our excellent meals was served at 7 o'clock after which Darwin gave us details of tomorrow's itinerary.

Thursday 5 March: Islas Plaza – the south of the two

We sailed during the night leaving at 4am to be ready for our first morning landing at 7.30 after a plentiful breakfast (juice, fruits, eggs, and various additions, tea, coffee). This was a dry landing among the sea lions. Walking along the marked route was difficult here as the rocks were large and very uneven.

the Cachalote





Then we saw our first prehistoric looking land iguanas. Many were still but when they move are surprisingly quick and quite oblivious of us. It is very dry here; saw a few small lizards and several different birds.





*I was so thrilled to see
iguanas - one of the
reasons I wanted to visit!*



land iguana





swallow-tailed gull





During lunch and siesta time we motored south to Santa Fe ready for our afternoon walk on the beach. Lots of swallow tailed gulls perching along the coastal rock faces.





Saw a tiny hermit crab whose tracks in the sand look just like bicycle tyre tracks.

galapagos lava lizard





sea lions could be very curious



Friday 6 March: Isla San Cristobal: Cerro Brujo/El Junco

Breakfast at 6.30am as we are anchored close to Kicker Rock, off the west coast of San Cristobal, where we are going to snorkel at 7.30. The water was a bit choppy so we went round the other side where it was calmer. There are always two pangas around when we are in the water so they keep an eye on everyone usually. We got into the pangas and when they stop at the chosen spot you just slip over the side with your snorkelling gear on.

The water was quite cold and very deep but I was getting on quite well but then the valve on the top of my pipe closed a couple of times and I panicked; I couldn't blow hard enough to open it. There was no panga or Darwin in view but Cathil, a young Irish guy in our group who was like a fish in the water, came to my rescue and held on to me until Darwin appeared and I got back on the panga. The next time I used a straight tube without a valve and was fine.





and coming back!



going out



*snorkelling at Kicker
Rock*

Back on board the Cachalote at 8.30am then to a most beautiful sandy beach at Cerro Brujo where we disembarked in bare feet. It was very special - we had a swim from this beach with the boat anchored off and only the dozen of us on the island!



Lots of Sally Lightfoot crabs here which are bright red but the young ones are black and hard to see against the black lava rock which is how they avoid being eaten while they have soft shells.





Back on board for lunch – pork chops today – and motored on to Puerto Moreno (the provincial capital of the Galapagos) at the west side of the island. Took a bus ride from here to the slopes of the volcano then walked up to the top to see the El Junco Lagoon, a circular lake at 700metres. This is the only fresh water reservoir in Galapagos.

We watched the frigate birds dive in the lake to wash their feathers – they cannot land on the water as their feathers are not oily but they fly up again and do lots of feather shaking as they go. This area is in the Miconia Zone of vegetation and we could see lots of raspberries growing – they are an invasive species which they are trying to eradicate. We took the bus back to town where we bought cards (couldn't post them as no stamps available!) and sat in the sun with a beer – like a normal holiday!



El Junco Lagoon





One of the photographer's challenges - the frigate birds dive and skim the surface to rinse their feathers but must not get too wet; unlike other birds which have oily feathers.

We looked at Jill's photos later on her laptop. She has an enormous lens - a real birder - and a year off work to travel the world taking photographs! She had amazing shots of the boobys which dive into the water like arrows to fish.





Puerto Moreno



all our 'going ashore' shoes had to be removed as soon as we got back on board; this meant no sand below deck



this most photographed sea lion, who is usually laying on the bench, became newsworthy as the locals complained about him always being here. The visitors, of course, are delighted to see him!

Saturday 7 March: Isla Espanola: Gardener Bay & Punta Suarez

We cruised from 9pm last night for a few hours south to **Espanola** where we moored off Gardener Bay with a couple of other boats. Breakfast was at the normal time of 7am and at 8am the pangas are waiting to take us to shore. This was a beach landing with about a mile of white sand. Unfortunately the other boats put their clients ashore so we saw three other groups, not what we are used to!

A few finches and mocking birds were about. Sea lions were lolling on the sand and marine iguanas which are so dark they are hard to see as they lay on the black rocks.

We had a swim here then back on board and motored a short distance to Isla Gardner, which is a big rock offshore, to snorkel. We saw a huge shoal of small fish – Darwin spotted them and called us all over, then we watched as he swam down through them.

marine iguana on the lava rocks

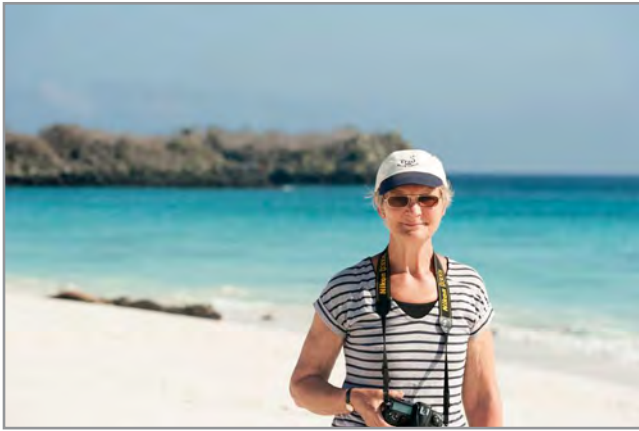


hooded mockingbird



two semi-terrestrial hermit crabs arguing over a shell





the sea lions definitely beat us on style!





Robin, Darwin, sea lions and iguanas



In the afternoon we went ashore at 4pm at Suarez Point. Saw the red and black marine iguanas – venustissimus. Marine iguanas only exist on the Galapagos. Really difficult landing as waves were breaking on the rocks and had to walk over huge boulders to get onto the rock path. Iguanas were littered about.



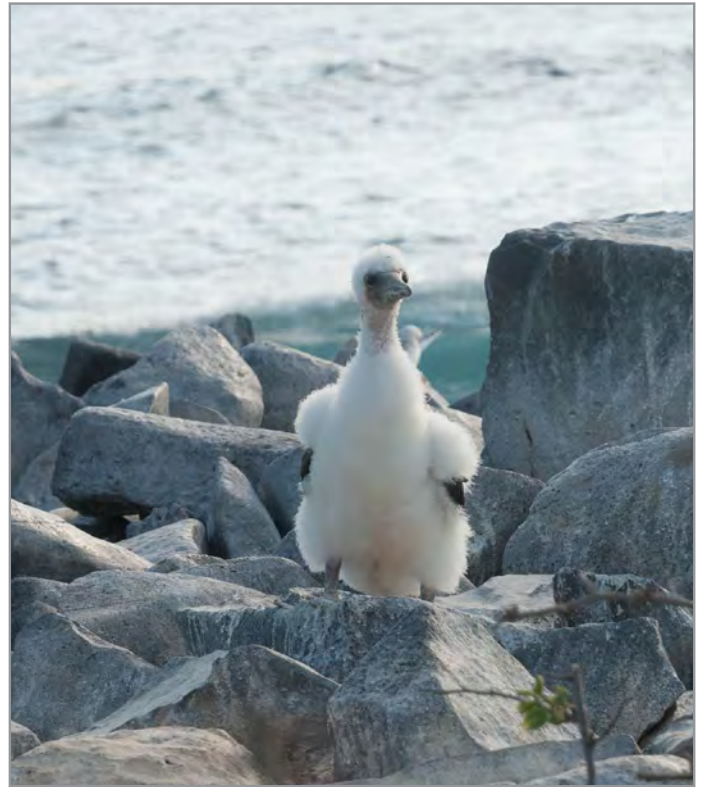


marine iguanas





nazca booby and chick



sheltering from the sun



Suarez Point is a nazca booby nesting site so each bird had a huge fluffy chick – lots of them. A few other birds were seen and an impressive blowhole when the waves rolled in.



galapagos dove

Back on board most people had a beer. I felt it was exhausting just concentrating on not tripping up on the rocks and trying to get some good shots. We are sailing tonight to Floreana.

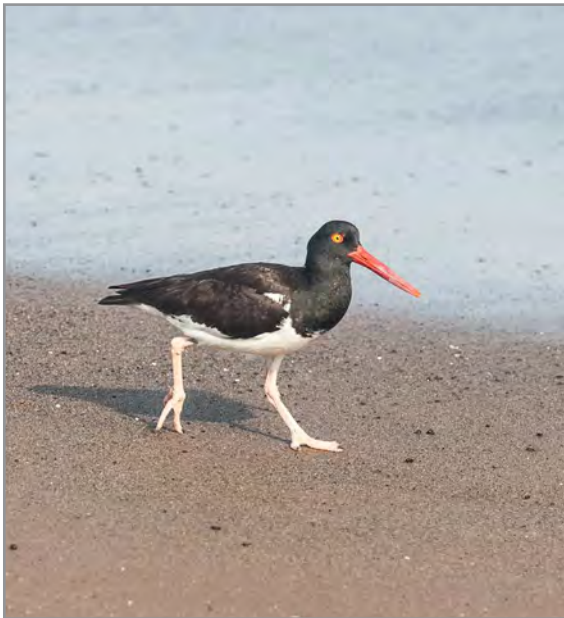


Sunday 8 March: Isla Floreana or Santa Maria

Breakfast at 7am and wet landing on a sandy beach at Cormorant Point in the north of Floreana. Two other boats were there so other people around but it's a huge beach which is a turtle egg laying site. We saw the big mounds and hollows higher up the beach where we are not allowed to walk. One turtle was on her way back to sea but was resting on the water's edge, hardly moving all the time we were there. We saw others in the water.



american oystercatcher





blue-footed boobys



*lava heron
seeking
some shade*





We left the beach and back on board went to the Devil's Crown. This is a drowned extinct volcano where part of the rim is visible above the surface. We went to the far side which Darwin said was best so we would be swimming with current so just needed to be careful not to go too near the rocks which are very sharp. There are big lumps of lava sticking up but it is worth the effort as it is one of the best snorkelling sites in the islands. Lots of fish about and I saw my first small shark and a turtle. I stopped for a few minutes and held on to the ladder on the side of the panga but then decided I could do a bit more so set off again. I felt more at ease here as the group were close together but I still got out before the others when I felt tired.



After lunch at 3pm we went ashore at Post Office Bay taking snorkelling gear and a torch. Postcards are left here in the 'postbox' and newcomers look through them and if there is an address near you, you take it there on your return. Sailors used to pass messages this way, so the historic practice keeps going to amuse the visitors. We found an address in Wokingham so took it home to deliver. *We left a card in the box addressed to ourselves and it was delivered to us by later visitors in June!*

A rocky path leads to a lava tunnel which has been made accessible by wooden steps down part of the way then it is a bit rocky underfoot and opens out into an underground cavern. Darwin asked us all to stand still, switch off our torches and close our eyes. When you opened them it was so black it didn't make any difference!

Next it was back to the beach for a welcome swim as we were very hot. The beach shelved quite quickly and a lone pelican was determined to keep us company bobbing along on the gentle waves. Spent time on our return to the boat looking at Jill's amazing photos. Twelve hour overnight sail tonight and quite choppy.

brown pelikan



this very unusual shell was spotted on the beach: after picking it up to look at it had to be placed back exactly where it was found.



jellyfish: we saw very few fortunately

Monday 9 March: Santa Cruz /Santiago

This was better – no other people around as we landed on the rocks at Cerro Dragon on the NW side of Santa Cruz. The beach was made up of very tiny shells. The walk inland was very difficult here but the iguanas seem keen to be photographed. Many land iguanas about and we could see their tracks and nesting holes. It has been dry for so long they actually shrink in size by re-absorbing calcium. When it rains they will rehydrate and get bigger – the rain is long overdue now. Lizards and finches also featured here.



Another two hours of cruising brought us to Sullivan Bay on the east of Santiago. This is a possible penguin sitting spot but there was only one.





tree cactus



vermillion flycatcher



Tuesday 10 March: Genovesa (Tower)

We had to be up early after a nine hour overnight voyage for breakfast at 6am to leave the boat at 7am. Genovesa is small, a seabird colony. Rocky cliffs are home to thousands of seabirds. Landed at Prince Phillip's Steps (he has been here but it was of Belgium!) steep steps then easy walking.

Here there are lots of boobys – red footed which perch in trees and nazca boobys which are sitting on the ground some close to the track. They had their giant fluffy chicks which looked beautiful but also a bit comical. We saw three owls which are big and brown blending into the rocky backdrop. Lots of frigate birds, who take food from other birds in the air as they are no good at fishing, and lots more; a really super place to see many birds.



Prince Phillip's Steps

*the rocky shoreline is
ideal for a nap*



red-footed boobys





nazca boobys





paths which have to be closely followed are marked by posts on the islands

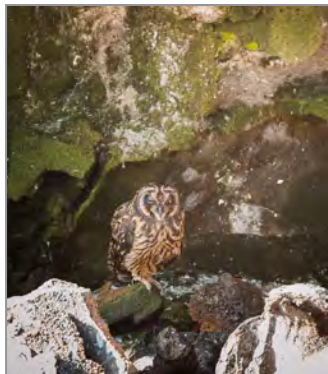


female frigate birds



*male frigate birds:
at rest and displaying*

Back on the boat to get the snorkel gear and off in the pangas close to the rocks. Saw two hammerhead sharks swimming beneath me this time so was very pleased and dolphins cruising past. Robin had a good outing in the panga so could take photos and shark spot. There were lots of dolphins about which was great to see.



short eared owl

Came back for lunch then to Darwin Bay for a swim and walk along the beach. Lots of birds, some sheltering from the sun in shady rock crevices and others holding their wings out in the sun. This evidently is to expose the mites in their plumage to the heat which they cannot stand so they drop off. A shark came in really close in the shallow water so everyone rushed back in the water to see it!

Later on board was the last voyage back to Santa Cruz taking us back

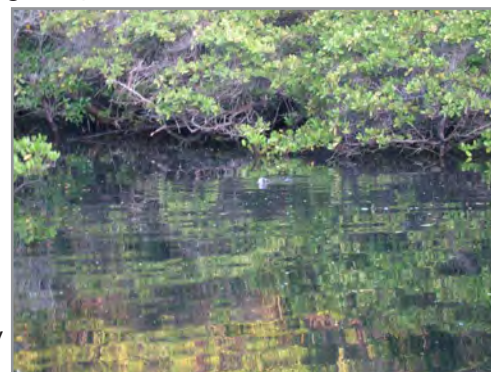


across the Equator. There was quite a swell but packing had to be done ready for an early start tomorrow but this was my undoing and for the first time on the cruise Sue could not cope with being afloat!. Had to finish the task after we had moored up and it was a bit smoother.

That evening it was Susan B's 60th birthday so her friend had bought a bottle of champagne and chef had made a special pudding/cake with a candle in the middle. Darwin put out all the lights so what a special birthday!

Wednesday 11 March: Santa Cruz/Quito

We had to be in the pangas by 6am for a last ride – this time into the mangroves at Black Turtle Cove on the north side of Santa Cruz. We saw turtles and rays and pelicans perched in the mangrove bushes. It is forbidden to snorkel in this area as sun tan lotion is banned. It contains various heavy metals that are harmful to marine life. A wet suit would have to be worn to go in the water. Back on board for breakfast while the Cachalote was moored off Baltra and we left the boat for the last time. This was very sad as the crew had looked after us so well - especially the chef as the food has been excellent.



speeches on the last evening



The six crew: captain, chef, engineer, navigator, first mate and steward all help with getting us on and off the pangas and making sure we are safe.

the last few shots before we leave the Galapagos!



the only penguin we saw during the whole trip was on Genovesa



a ray in the murky waters of the lagoon

The Cachalote now will go back round to the south of the island to Puerto Ayora to restock and prepare for the next group of visitors which will arrive on the plane we will be leaving on. Darwin left with us as he has now got a couple of days leave so another naturalist guide will be on board. The naturalists are mostly self-employed and would be booked by travel companies. Darwin was working for Naturetrek whereas the boat was chartered from the owners Enchanted Expeditions. As Naturetrek hadn't filled the boat others who had made up the numbers were lucky to have such a special guide on their trip.



The control of visitor numbers on the islands is very strict. A guide can take maximum 15 people in their group and stay for a maximum of 2 hours on shore.

snorkelling gear neatly stowed each day

dolphin playing near the panga





our daily itinerary board

the essential group photo!



must be the most comical looking chick!



just to prove Sue really did go snorkelling!

Now I understand the dead looking trees in front of the terminal building will burst into leaf just as soon as the rain comes! We have a tedious wait for the Tame plane to arrive, then the stop at Guayacil on the way for one and a half hours but finally back at Quito and met by Manuel who will be our guide for a couple of days. This time we are taken to a more traditional style hotel in the Puembo district just half an hour from the airport which opened only a couple of years ago. The Hotel Rincon de Puembo is obviously extending etc. into its new found role as an airport hotel but is very pleasant with a garden and pool. Our room is huge compared to our cabin and the bed so soft!

Thursday 12 March: Quito/Antisana

Up at 5.30 for coffee and toast in reception and waited for a delayed Manuel at 6.30am. Two others from the boat are still with us for the remainder of our trip. Into the minibus and out of town in a south-easterly direction, through Pinta where the road climbed up into the National Park with a wonderful view of Antisana which is a volcano topped with four glaciers. It is a good road just wide enough for two vehicles.



There are private quarries along this route which although huge are dwarfed by the enormous landscape. It costs \$10 to go into the Park and we drove as far as possible, stopping often to get out and bird spot. It had started to drizzle but we were really lucky with the visibility as it could have been very wet or in a cloud. At this last point we wandered downwards and were glad to get in the bus for a sit down as we were at 4200 metres. We were all quite pleased with ourselves because until you try nobody knows how altitude will affect them.



Manuel had a spotting scope and he is an expert in this field. He did a Masters in Edinburgh and is going to do a phd on the effects of 'playback' on different types of bird. He liked Scotland but couldn't get on with our daylight hours compared with the set times when on the equator!



mountain caracara



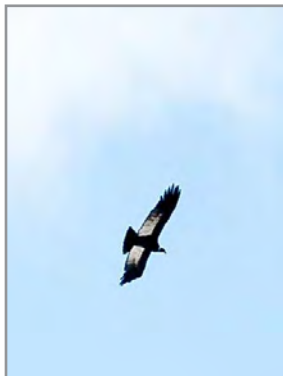
views from Tamor Condor Restaurant

*the adult
condor
keeping an
eye on her
nest*



We stopped for lunch at a wonderful restaurant, the Tamor Condor Restaurant, which is the home of Vladimir, a guide and conservationist involved with condors. There are very few in Ecuador but on the craggy cliffs across the valley from Vladimir's farm is a nest with a large

chick testing his wings for the first take off! We saw the adult soaring over the top. They are so far away you can only see them with binoculars and trying to find the chick in the photos we took is impossible.



condor

It was a very good lunch – cheese featured in every course, even in the baked apple, as they make their own. They keep cows and use horses to round them up. We were then invited to plant a tree sapling in a corner of the paddock. This is a new idea and we are the first visitors to take part. The trees were Polyalepis.



Back at the hotel we got our instructions for tomorrow and said goodbye to Manuel. We sat by the pool with a beer and watched a large group of Japanese tourists called from their relaxing to the lawn where exercises were being held. One explained to us that in Japan there is a programme on the radio each morning at 6.30am for them to follow at home.

The next part of the trip begins tomorrow when we travel over the mountains to the Amazon Basin for a few days in the rain forest.

Friday 13 March: Quito/Coca/Sacha Lodge

A taxi came at 8.30am after a very meagre breakfast, compared to what we had grown used to, for the trip to the airport where a Sacha Lodge rep, Christina, met us and saw us through check in. The flight to Coca was only slightly delayed and the flight is only 45 minutes over the Andes. Bags arrive immediately as it is such a small operation here. The four of us from the boat and two young couples were met by Luis who is to be our naturalist/guide.

We were taken to the Sacha Lodge office in Coca for refreshments and to collect a life jacket each, then in a bus for the short distance to the river. We boarded a huge canoe – must be 50ft long with a covered roof and plastic side screens which we were soon to find out were essential.



Two massive outboards powered the boat; very necessary as the river is huge. The spray comes up the sides – you would get very wet without screens. The River Coca joins the Napo (a direct tributary of the Amazon) here and the current was quite strong. We were heading downstream on a two and a half hour, fifty mile trip towards the Lodge. We stopped at a small monastery housing a simple museum for refreshments. This is a reminder of the missionaries that came here, not to convert, but to bring medical and practical aid. Along the way we passed some local Indian settlements and oil company camps but they soon disappeared.

We reached our destination - just a jetty - and then had a half hour walk along a boardwalk into the flooded palm forest. On arriving at Pilchicocha Lake we got into a dugout canoe which took six passengers with Luis and our local guide, Dominio, paddling, crossed the lake to what looked like a small thatched wooden building on the opposite shore. This was Sacha Lodge.



Behind this building was a system of raised boardwalks leading to twenty-six cabins hidden amongst the tropical vegetation together with all the necessary amenities for a very comfortable hotel stay! It is delightful – all wood of course – a wonderful open dining area and our cabins are spacious. We have two double beds, a large bathroom with twin basins and good shower, a verandah with hammocks and lots of electric points. The humidity is amazingly high, if you washed an item of clothing you could not get it dry! There was a cupboard in the room with a light on constantly in which to keep camera equipment etc. which was a brilliant idea.

There are two generators which switch over at 6am and 6pm providing constant electricity. Our first job was to be fitted with wellington boots which were essential for most outings unless staying in the canoe.

We were allotted a table in the dining area with the other two Sues and another couple who were American. We will spend the days together as the canoes seat six people so that is the maximum number in a group. At dinner, which is always at 7pm, Luis sits with us so he could tell us about the next day's itinerary and be quizzed on everything we thought of. He was an independent guide, had been doing the job for thirty years and had a very good reputation. He was employed by the tour operators, such as Naturetrek who we went with.

Luis delighted in telling us how, back in the eighties, he helped a very interesting man, with incredible enthusiasm, and a film crew gain the access to the tree canopy they needed for their programme by getting anchor ropes high up in the trees for them. Of course, this was David Attenborough and The Natural World team! We had a beer, then a very good dinner before seeking our comfy bed. We have a fan in the room which is essential.



walkway from the main building to the canoe dock

Saturday 14 March: Sacha Lodge

Our wake-up call is at 5am this morning for breakfast at six and in the canoes at 6.30. We went across the lake and



then into a creek running eastwards through the vegetation to a little dock. The capuchin monkeys didn't like being disturbed and dropped small broken branches down



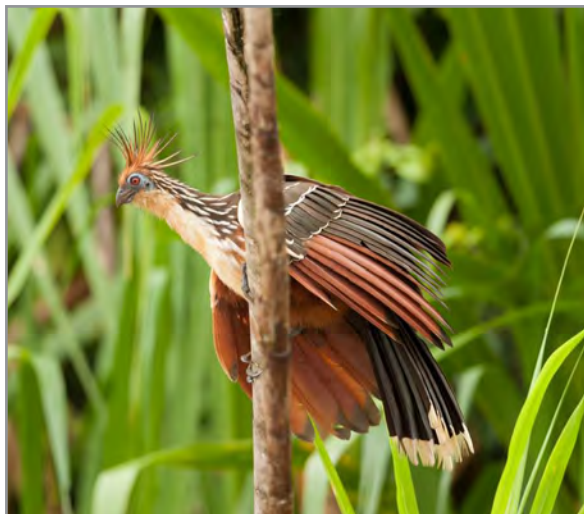
on us. We got out for a walk to a platform 135ft high built round a huge kapok tree. We climbed up so we could see the river and across the valley at tree top height for very good bird spotting. Returned about 11.30 for a relax and lunch which is always at 1 o'clock.

chestnut woodpecker



many-banded anacari

The next trip at 3.30pm was walking a mile to a tower and aerial walkway. The tower was quite high and I didn't think I would make it to the top but had a couple of stops and found I had reached the walkway. This is fairly stable but is 900ft long suspended 120ft above the forest floor. The others had already reached the other side so I thought I couldn't go home regretting not trying. Also as it is the highest it appears in the guide books - I had seen photos of it - but it was fine! We saw owl monkeys in a tree hole and spent ages bird spotting. Luis and Dominio had brought scopes along for this outing – here it is very different from being so close to large birds on the islands.



owl monkey

hoatzin

Both our guides took us for a night walk after dinner. Torches and wellies were compulsory and watching the corridors of ants we were glad of protected feet. We saw a tarantula, two good lizards, various spiders (including a wolf which is dangerous) and huge stick insects.

wolf spider



ecuadorian tarantula



Sunday 15 March: Sacha Lodge

Everything feels so damp – rinsed out clothes will not dry as the humidity level is so high. We are going to the River Napo today to see one of the most accessible parrot licks – they come to eat the clay that has essential minerals for them to neutralise the toxins in their diet.

After the canoe trip across the lake and the walk we had a half hour trip on the river into the Yasuni National Park, Ecuador's largest protected area. Here is the cliff where the parrots congregate. It was a bit disappointing as there were less parrots than I has seen in photographs and they were all the same green ones except for four with blue heads.

The next event was a stop at a native village. This was a very good visit; we were shown the crops they grow and other plants that thrive there and the uses of various leaves and roots. This is a main meeting place for those living some distance away as no huts were in the vicinity. They proudly showed us their school (shame it was Sunday so no-one there) and then to the main building where lunch was being cooked over an enormous barbeque and the women's beadwork jewellery was for sale.

Luis showing us the crops grown by the women



parrot lick



main building in the village



jewellery and crafts for sale

Lunch was fish, tapioca, and rice was served on banana leaves with a giant maggot if you could face one - even if they did taste like bacon! Robin did try one but we had been shown it by Luis before it was cooked – squirming on its skewer!



squirrel monkey



red howler monkeys

Back to the lodge for lunch then our last canoe paddle at 4 o'clock along little creeks. There were a few birds around and red howler monkeys leaping about above us. Then we came across a big family of squirrel monkeys. These are small with very long tails and seemed very interested in us; peering round tree trunks and branches and rushing around in the tree canopy.



we had a quick visit to the butterfly farm

We passed by the huge black caiman laying in her bed of flattened vegetation with her long snout and huge eye above the water. Then we spotted the baby sitting on her head.



Our last dinner was a BBQ which happens every Wednesday and Sunday evenings at the lodge. The local guides are invited to join our tables for the meal and all the staff are thanked for looking after us so quite a merry evening.

our luggage did the same journey as us across the lake by canoe. The lads from the Lodge manage the difficult part of the trip which is taking the baggage on trolleys along the forest boardwalk



We had to be packed, up at 5am, breakfast at 6 and in the canoes half an hour later. Our return trip, a canoe paddle across the lake, a half hour walk and two hours in the huge motorised canoe this time up the Napa, a reverse of our arrival brought us back to Coca – where they reckoned the water level was two metres higher than when we arrived. The guys driving the boats have to be on constant watch for trees etc. being washed down the river.

Coffee and a banana (these are the main exports so always available!) at the Sacha Lodge office at Coca, then off to the airport and the short flight back to Quito and the rest of the world

the huge Napa River and the motorised canoes at the dock at Coca



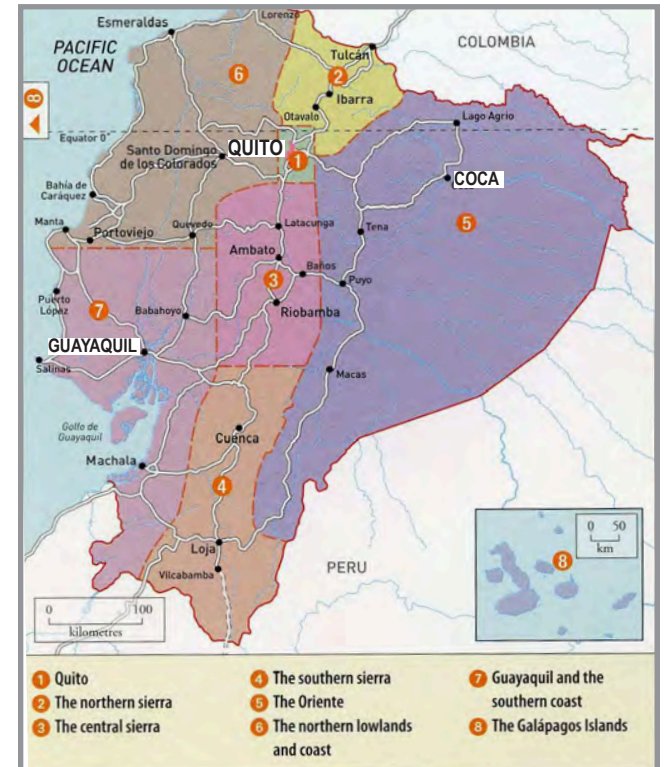
Where we went:

The Andes run the length of Ecuador - the sierras on the map. Quito, the capital, is at 2800 metres. All aircraft fly via Guayaquil, the largest city and economic centre. Coca is in the Amazon rain forest.

At Quito a taxi met us and took us to a delightful B & B for a couple of hours where we had a super lunch and a shower and change. What a relief to wear dry clothes! Our hostess was called Mercedes. She collected stray dogs and had eighteen she told us.

The colourful garden was full of bird feeders and therefore all sorts of birds; the whole place was lovely. This was a great 'last impression' of the country as the taxi came to take us back from Puembo along the wonderful new road to the airport and so the KLM flight home began.

We worked out the journey took us 29 hours in total even though it went according to plan. The taxi waiting for us at Heathrow was such a welcome sight.



Robin and Sue Warwick - March 2015

