

Abercrombie & Kent



Program Overview:

Duration: 9 days

Highlights: Visit Otavalo justly renowned for its friendly people and their world-famous market, a gathering that has occurred here since pre-Incan times, Find the hidden secret of Ecuador: a hotel mixed with the native flavor of the Andes, Discover why Galapagos is known as the Enchanted Islands.

ITINERARY:

Day 1

Quito-La Mirage

Welcome to Quito!

Upon arrival you will be transferred directly to La Mirage Garden Hotel & Spa.

From Quito, drive north through dramatic mountain landscapes dotted with tiny villages, and white churches to Cotachachi. Perched on a hillside, two hours from Quito, you will find the hidden secret of Ecuador: a hotel mixed with the native flavor of the Andes. With a beautiful view of the mountains and gardens. This former hacienda is a paradise of plant life filled with a thousand fragrances from its bougainvillea's, hibiscus, roses and orchids that you will also find in freshly cut bouquets beside your bed.

In the intimacy of your suite, enjoy a bottle of sparkling wine and fresh strawberries dipped in sweet, organic Ecuadorian chocolate. To end this magical night a romantic candlelight dinner will be served at the elegant main restaurant.

Overnight: La Mirage Garden Hotel & Spa

Abercrombie & Kent

Day 2

La Mirage

After breakfast, we will visit *Cuicocha*, a crater lake located in the Western Cordillera of the Andes 25 kilometres west of Otavalo. “Cuicocha” is a Kichwa word meaning “Guinea Pig Lake”, a name given due to the shape of the large islands in the center of the lake.

Created 3,100 years ago by a massive eruption, the lake is three kilometers long and occupies a stunning setting with deep azure waters. You have the option of hiking along the ridge surrounding the lake; a trek which can last anywhere from 30 minutes to six hours depending on your ambitions and the schedule of the day.

We will enjoy a lunch in a local restaurant and make a stop in the village of Peguche to visit the home of Mr. José Luis Pichamba, whose family has a long lasting musical tradition. Your hosts will show you the process of crafting traditional instruments as well as demonstrate how to play them. If you're up for it, you can even try to play them yourself! Peguche is also home to many of the area's textile weavers. A visit to one of their workshops is easily arranged. Here, you will be able to see examples of the ancient weaving techniques to produce their famous textiles.

Overnight: La Mirage Garden Hotel & Spa

Day 3

Otavalo-Quito

Today we will visit the famous Otavalo market, the colorful and authentic produce market, which gives you the opportunity to see many of the unique fruits and vegetables of Ecuador.

We won't leave without visiting the *Plaza del Poncho*, where the textile market is held. This is a real explosion of colors and smells. It is also interesting to see the vendors; they are dressed in a traditional way that shows the evolution and maintain of their identity.

After a lunch in Cusin, a very interesting Hacienda, beautifully decorated and with gardens hosting a lot of birds and local plants. We'll then, leave to go to Quito.

Afternoon at leisure.

Overnight: Plaza Grande Hotel

Day 4

Quito- Galápagos

Upon arrival at Baltra Airport, you will pass through an airport inspection point to ensure that no foreign plants or animals are introduced to the islands. You will be met and transferred to the M/V Grand Odyssey, where you will check in to your cabin.

PM: Cerro Dragon, Santa Cruz Island

The north shore (dry landing) of Santa Cruz is home to Cerro Dragon (Dragon Hill). Its name stems from the fact that this was one of the few sites on Santa Cruz Island where a healthy population of land iguanas were found when researchers came in 1975. Our walk includes a brackish lagoon frequented by lagoon birds, including stilts, pintail ducks, sandpipers, sanderlings and, occasionally, flamingos. Further inland, the trail offers a beautiful view of the bay and the western islands of the archipelago. This area is a natural nesting site for land iguanas, constantly monitored and assisted by the Charles Darwin Research Station. The arid-zone vegetation can be a rewarding location for bird watching, where Darwin's finches, Galápagos mockingbirds, the

Abercrombie & Kent

endemic Galápagos flycatcher, and yellow warblers are regular sightings. You will have the chance to go swimming or snorkelling after the walk. Difficulty level: Moderate

Overnight: M/V Grand Odyssey

Day 5 **Galápagos**

AM: Black Turtle Cove, Santa Cruz Island

Black Turtle Cove is one of the most beautiful marine sites in the Galapagos. It is a complex maze of tranquil salt-water inlets surrounded by three different species of mangrove.

Its waters are a nursery site for sea turtles, rays, and sharks as well as a nesting site for sea birds. This site is only accessible by panga or kayak.

PM: Sombrero Chino Islet

Less than a quarter-of-a-square-kilometre in size, the tiny island of Sombrero Chino (wet landing) gets its name from its unique appearance: similar to that of a Chinese hat. Lying just off the southeastern tip of Santiago Island, this islet was formed fairly recently and makes for a beautiful spot for scenic photographs. Explore along its 400-metre long trail, which begins at a crescent-shaped white sandy beach. Several species of shore birds can be spotted, along with marine iguanas, sea lions, lava lizards, Galápagos penguins, Darwin's finches, and sally lightfoot crabs. The cove offers excellent swimming and snorkelling with sea lions and tropical fish in the tranquil blue waters. Kayaking is also an option.

Overnight: M/V Grand Odyssey

Day 6 **Galápagos**

AM: El Barranco, Genovesa Island

Genovesa (dry landing) is the northernmost island that is allowed to be visited by naturalist (non-diving) cruises.

This island is extremely remote and home to literally millions of birds belonging to many different species including red footed boobies, frigate birds, swallow-tailed gulls, and even endemic owls! El Barranco, also known as Prince Phillip's Steps, is a steep path (90 feet) with stairs carved into rock which leads to a plateau full of bird life amongst a *Palo Santo* forest. You will see Nazca boobies, Galapagos doves, mockingbirds, and storm petrels. With some luck, you may even spot a short-eared lava owl. Difficulty level: Moderate

PM: Darwin Bay, Genovesa Island

Darwin Bay's soft, coralline white sand (wet landing) is only the beginning of a spectacular excursion. An easy stroll from the beach takes you into lush mangroves where red footed boobies nest. As you'll continue, you'll observe thousands of birds, including frigate birds, Nazca boobies, swallow-tailed gulls, herons, finches, and mockingbirds. Snorkelling along the cliffs is a must here as sea lions, sharks, colourful reef fish, rays, and tortoises are common. You may also go out for a paddle in a sea kayak.

Overnight: M/V Grand Odyssey

Day 7 **Galápagos**

Abercrombie & Kent

AM: Bartolomé Island

We discover a fascinating moonscape (dry landing) dotted with volcanic formations such as lava tubes and spatter, tuff, and cinder cones — as we hike up a short, yet somewhat steep trail.

Along the way, we will also encounter pioneer plants, lava cactus, *Scalesia* plants, marine iguanas, and lava lizards. The view from the top is the true prize: iconic ‘Pinnacle Rock’ next to golden beaches and turquoise waters. Returning through dunes and mangroves, we reach the north shore. Beach time is a great opportunity to see and perhaps snorkel with Galapagos penguins, sea turtles, sea lions, rays, and white-tipped reef sharks among a great variety of colorful schools of fish. For many visitors, this may turn out to be their best snorkeling experience; the water here is generally clear, lacks large surf, and is full of marine life. Difficulty level: Moderate

PM: Sullivan Bay, Santiago Island

This is the perfect place to see and feel the volcanic origin of Galápagos. You’ll arrive (wet landing) at a white coral sand beach and walk over lava that flowed here less than 100 years ago. Formed during an 1897 eruption, the lava was so hot that it essentially evaporated anything in its path, leaving only an imprint of what had been there before. It’s a stark, surreal, and strangely beautiful environment. One observer aboard a sailing vessel reported that the ship approached the lava flow so closely that the pine tar used to seal the hull of the ship began to soften, and the captain had to hurry the ship away from the bay. Snorkeling is possible at the end of the visit.

Overnight: M/V Grand Odyssey

Day 8

Galápagos-Quito

AM: Highlands, Santa Cruz Island

The trail to the highlands leaves from Bellavista and passes through the agricultural zone, near the National Park boundary, the Miconia zone, and finally the fern and sedge zone. The highlands are one of the best places in the islands to observe giant tortoises in their natural habitat.

The tortoises are easy to spot as they lumber around eating grass and leaves and wallowing in the small pools that are common in the area. They can weigh between 250 and 300 kg and live up to 150-200 years. They have few natural enemies; their principal threat has always been humans. You may also spot some highland birds such as cattle egrets, Galápagos rails, mockingbirds, finches, and vermilion flycatchers. There are several lava tunnels nearby, a great place to spot the barn owl. There is also a small lagoon covered in red algae where gallinules and Galápagos pintails can be found.

After your visit to the highlands it will be time to depart to the airport for your return flight to Quito.

Transfer to your hotel and afternoon at leisure to enjoy Quito’s colonial night.

Overnight: Plaza Grande Hotel

Day 9

Departure

Transfer to the airport for your international flight.

“End of A&K Services”