

Title:

Galapagos Cruise - Tour In Ecuador

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Summary:

Galapagos cruise and tours to Machu Picchu in Peru, the islands are better than you can imagine.

Keywords:

Galapagos cruise and tours to Machu Picchu in Peru

Article Body:

We arrived late in the evening in Quito after circling the airport for some time. My husband and I came to Ecuador to visit our daughter who is studying in the south of Ecuador. While there we wanted to visit Otavalo and cruise in the Galapagos Islands. We were happy to see our guide, Jorge, meet us at the airport as the hour was late and there were no taxis to be seen. Our guide had waited patiently for the plane to land. We found out later that flight delays in and out of Ecuador, especially Quito, are common at certain times. Quito, is in the Andes, over 9,000 feet above sea level and landing there takes the skill and patience of an experienced pilot.

Jorge was very affable, friendly, and spoke perfect English. Turned out that he had lived for some time the states, in New Jersey. We checked in that evening to our hotel, the Dann Carlton. We had chosen this hotel as it is located in the Mariscal area, known for great restaurants, and lots of good shops. We wanted a nice hotel, not too expensive, within walking distance of shops and restaurants. Other choices might have been the JW Marriott or the Swissotel, also hotels in the nearby area. Our tour company, Stanford Travel Systems arranged our tours, transfers, Galapagos cruise, and the flights to the Galapagos Islands.

Originally, we had wanted to stay in the old colonial area near the main plaza of San Francisco and La Compania church. Though many of the hotels there have the old world charm, we found out that they lack a certain standard of service, plus access in and out of the colonial section, "old Quito" can be difficult since the roads are narrow - most of them were built several hundred years ago = and traffic and congestion can be a problem.

TOUR OF THE OTAVALO MARKET

On Friday, Jorge and his driver, met us at the hotel lobby as we had planned an entire day to the area north of Quito, known as Otavalo country. This area is about a one and one half to two hour drive to the north. We had a chance to see the small Ecuadorian towns of Peguche and Cayambe along the way. Jorge knew all the locals and introduced us to his friends and colleagues. In that area is an extinct volcano {Ecuador is full of volcanoes} and a beautiful lake, perfect for an afternoon walk. In Peguche, we met the local weaver, famous in the area for his tapestries and he demonstrated his art to us, as well as meeting a local instrument maker who makes Andean flutes and other instruments for local bands. First a demonstration on how to make the instruments, and then a performance for us. In the Otavalo Market, the Otavalo Indians bring trade goods from miles around for sale or barter. It is a bustling open air market, and the Otavalo Indians are a proud and independent indigenous group from the north of Quito. Lunch was served at a an Ecuadorian hacienda near the town. Hacienda Cusin has almost three centuries of history in Ecuador to boast of.

ON TO THE GALAPAGOS AND OUR CRUISE

An early morning departure with the guide to the airport and we met with a representative from the ship. Our luggage was tagged and stored for delivery on the ship and we were off to the Galapagos for our adventure cruise. Arriving at Baltra island, the airport is small and you must first register before entering. The Galapagos Islands are actually a national park and regulated by the park service. You must pay a entrance fee to enter.

Once on the islands, the first amazing thing you notice is that the animals have no fear of being around you. They walk right up to you, or just ignore you and walk right past and even seem to be a little curious as to why you have come to visit their island.

The ship we were on was recently refurbished: with all new deck furniture, brand new main lounge room furniture, new hairdryers in the private bathroom etc. There were 15 different countries represented on our boat, with many passengers from the US, of course. I used the glass bottom boat one afternoon. No, you do not need to make a reservation. The snorkeling is great. One afternoon, we saw, from the sun deck, a huge black manta ray, the gigantic kind. Many saw it while snorkeling.

We decided ourselves to go back down to the beach for some snorkeling. The cool water was welcome after our hot hike. At first, my mask leaked a bit around the temples so every minute or so I stopped to drain the mask. In spite of all this,

I could see, and enjoyed it more and more. At one point, a sea lion swam by to check us out. Then James saw a penguin on the rocky cliff next to us. A little while later the penguin must have dropped into the water because we saw him swim right under us. Wow! After about an hour of snorkeling, we went back to the ship, had an ice cream social, and then some down-time to sit on the deck and catch up on my journal.

The ship was still in the bay and we had an awesome view of the red beach and the islands beyond. Two fellow passengers came by and sat with us. James's first words after sitting down and seeing the view were, "All this, and heaven, too." Amen brother. Amen.

In only four days, we saw tons of wildlife, including a pod of sharks in 2' of water. The islands are better than you can imagine. The food on board is VERY good & the service is excellent. The crew is terrific, the islands beautiful. We stayed on the top deck in a good cabin, but you spend NO time in your room, except for sleeping. The bathroom is small, but as expected on a boat. We had a fabulous cruise, meeting wonderful, interesting people from all over the world.