

HOLY CROSS HIGH SCHOOL GOES TO ECUADOR - GALAPAGOS

13 days

Itinerary downloaded on: September 26, 2023

Day 1: *Arrival in Quito, and transfer to the Hotel Sierra Madre or similar*

Overnight in Quito

Day 2: *Quito - Limpiopungo Lake - Banos*

We depart Quito this morning following in the footsteps of the German scientist, Alexander von Humboldt, to rediscover what, in 1802, he called the "Avenue of Volcanoes," a 325 km (202 mi) long valley between the major cordillera ranges. Massive and standing alone, the volcanoes provide brooding, snow-covered contrast to the green equatorial lushness. We see snow-capped summits, mystical brooks and rivers, terraced farmlands, small villages and fascinating cultures.

En route we stop for a walk around Limpiopungo Lake, located at the foot of Cotopaxi, the highest active volcano in the world. Along our route leading to the lake, it's possible to observe llamas and other species of mammals such as rabbits and deer.

After a lakeside picnic lunch, we continue to the local indigenous market at Latacunga. We finish our day in the city of Baños.

Overnight in Baños. Hotel Alisamay or similar.

Meal Plan: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 3: *Banos - Riobamba*

Today we visit the most famous and beautiful waterfalls of Ecuador. There are seven main falls and we will enjoy a walk to see the greatest one, Pailon del Diablo. There is a tremendous diversity of flora and bird species in this area.

After lunch, we'll travel to Riobamba, stopping at the Urbina shelter where we can see some llamas and alpacas, as well as some traditional indigenous houses and possibly the volcano Chimborazo. Given that the Earth is flattened at the poles and bulges at the equator, Chimborazo (at 6310 m / 20,700 ft) is the closest point on Earth to the sun and the furthest from the centre of the Earth. Arrival at Riobamba.

Overnight at the Hotel el Molino.

Meal Plan: Breakfast, Lunch, and Dinner

Day 4: *Riobamba - Devil's Nose Train - Cuenca*

Early this morning we will attend Easter Mass at Riobamba's Cathedral. Throughout Holy Week, religious processions are common and one can find an endless supply of fanesca, a delicious, typical stew typically eaten throughout the week.

Later we continue our trip to the small town of Alausi, where we will embark on a famous train journey along a route called the Devil's

Nose, or Nariz del Diablo. In addition to the magnificent scenery, the route is also fascinating from an engineering standpoint.

Lunch at a local restaurant. In the afternoon we visit the biggest and best preserved Archaeological site in Ecuador, the Ingapirca ruins, where we will explore and learn about the Canaris and Inca culture. We finish our day in Cuenca.

Overnight in Cuenca. Hotel Hotel Orquidea or similar.

Meal Plan: Breakfast, Lunch, and Dinner

Day 5: Cuenca: City Tour

Today begin our tour of Cuenca with a stroll through the cobbled streets of this beautiful World Heritage City, crossed by four rivers that give it its full name—Santa Ana de los cuatro ríos de Cuenca. Charming adobe houses, wrought iron balconies, and religious art treasures capture the spirit of centuries long past. There will be a chance to learn about the ancestral cultures of Ecuador at the Museo del Banco Central.

One of the most interesting visits of the day will be to the Panama Hat Factory. The visit includes lunch in a charming local restaurant. Our day also includes the Turi Viewpoint and the Eduardo Vega Gallery.

Overnight in Cuenca. Hotel Hotel Orquidea or similar.

Meal Plan: Breakfast, Lunch, and Dinner

Day 6: To Be Announced

This is a "floating day" that could occur elsewhere in our program for the purpose of engaging in some mission work. Details to follow...

Day 7: Cuenca - Cajas National Park - Guayaquil

Today we will have a short drive towards the lower zone of the El Cajas National Park, world renown for its 232 lakes and diverse plant and animal life. We will have an easy hike in the Llaviuco Lake area, excellent for bird watching and for its attractive landscape. The Mountain Toucan, Andean Guan, Masked Trogon, Turquoise Jay, various colorful Tanagers and 12 species of Hummingbirds and aquatic birds are among the residents to look out for. The tour will continue towards the high zone of the park, to observe "Páramo," or moorlands vegetation, and to witness the impressive contrasts created by different levels of altitude. This zone hosts some 150 upper Andean bird species; the most notable is the Violetthroated Metaltail, a humming bird endemic to this protected area. Lunch will be served in the area.

We will continue our trip descending the Andes from 4100 m / 13,450 ft to sea level and the Ecuadorian coast. En route we'll stop in at a local family house for a visit and to learn more about cocoa cultivation. This very special fruit was once used as currency in some pre-colonial civilizations; the locals will teach us how to prepare the cocoa for the production of chocolate.

We arrive in Guayaquil. Time-permitting, we may be able to include a panoramic city tour.

Hotel City Plaza or similar

Meal Plan: Breakfast, Lunch, and Dinner

Day 8: *Guayaquil - The Galapagos / Baltra & Bartolome Islands*

This morning we fly from Guayaquil to Baltra Island and board our cruise vessel for our exploration of the unique and beautiful Galapagos Islands.*

An archipelago of 12 large and several hundred smaller volcanic islands occupying a 4800 sq km (3,000 sq mile) area about 1000 km (620 miles) west of Ecuador, the Galapagos Islands have become one of the world's premier adventure travel destinations. Over the course of your visit, you'll enjoy up-close views of unusual, specially-adapted animals, plants and terrains including sea lions, tortoises, iguanas, land and sea birds, volcanic landscapes, unusual cacti and vegetation. Little has changed about the islands since Charles Darwin's visit in 1835 to "this little world within itself" inspired his first theories of evolution. Nearly the entire archipelago is a natural sanctuary where you'll have thrilling encounters with some of the world's last completely untamed wildlife that has never learned to fear the presence of humans.

We will be navigating the Galapagos on board the M/V Galapagos Legend, a 110-passenger luxury expedition ship totally converted in December 2001. The M/V Galapagos Legend has all-new passenger accommodations with 1800 sq m of social areas and was built with marine certified materials qualifying with Safety of Life at Sea specifications. All cabins are booked in outside 'superior' class with plenty of space for luggage in the wardrobe closet. Private bathrooms feature hot and cold water, shower, and hair dryer. Also aboard, a highly trained crew, 24 hour physician, and naturalist multilingual guides. An auditorium for conferences, spacious social areas, dining room, 24 hour coffee bar, swimming pool and sun decks, observation platforms, cocktail bars, long distance calls, fully airconditioned.

Upon arrival on Baltra Island, you will transfer to the ship, have lunch, and embark immediately for Bartolome Island and a dry landing (passengers step directly from a dinghy to rocks or a dock). Arriving at this island seems as if you were walking on the moon. The volcanic formations on this island include lava bombs, spatter cones, and cinder cones.

There is a hike to the summit, aided by wooden steps, from where you will have an impressive view of the islands, including Pinnacle Rock an eroded tuff cone. On your way to the top you have the possibility of admiring a large colony of marine iguanas and lava lizards. Among the flora you may find red mangroves and tequila cacti.

You will have free time for snorkelling and / or swimming from a beautiful sandy beach. Here you can spot Galapagos penguins, marine tortoises (January through March), and docile white-tipped sharks.

Return to ship for passenger welcome and briefing; there is a presentation of the crew. At this time a safety drill is practiced.

Free time on board. After dinner a guide's briefing on next day activities in the auditorium.

* The operators reserve the right to alter or omit any part of an itinerary, and change the order of the places to be visited or move reservation without prior notice due to readjustment of National Park policies, seasonal changes, safety reasons, weather conditions or 'force majeure' which may dictate these changes. These decisions are oriented in terms of passenger safety and in the interest of the islands' conservation. We may also substitute vessels due to scheduled or unscheduled maintenance.

Overnight Galapagos cruise.

Meal Plan: Breakfast, Lunch, and Dinner

Day 9: *Galapagos Cruise / Fernandina & Isabela Islands*

Buffet Breakfast.

Urbina Bay (Isabela): Isabela is the largest island in the Galapagos. Visitors learn more about the eruption of five volcanoes that flowed together to form this landmass. After a wet landing (passengers alight the tender into knee deep water with the assistance of crew) passengers will go towards the fossil beach and then to the coral area. On the way, depending on the season, it will be possible to

observe many endemic species, such as: giant tortoises, land iguanas and flightless cormorants. After the walk we will have time for

snorkeling.

Return to ship; the crew will welcome you with canapes followed by lunch.

Fernandina (Espinosa Point): After a dry landing at Espinosa Point, passengers will see the biggest marine iguanas mingling with sally-light foot crabs. They will also enjoy the flightless cormorants nesting sites, the Galapagos penguins, Galapagos hawks, and sea lions. Among the flora and volcanic formations observers will note brachycereus cactus, and two kinds of lava formations "pa-hoe-hoe" lava and "AA". Numerous mangrove beds extend into the sea, depicting a healthy and thriving eco-system.

Return to ship; the crew will welcome you with canapes. Free time on board. Guides briefing on next day activities.

Overnight Galapagos cruise.

Meal Plan: Breakfast, Lunch, and Dinner

Day 10: Galapagos Cruise / Santiago Island

Buffet Breakfast.

Santiago (Egas Port): After cruising through the Bolivar channel for a possible observation of whales and dolphins, we take a Panga ride and disembark to visit Egas Port on Santiago Island. We go for a medium-length walk in search of land iguanas, orange-yellow in colour with large spines along their backs, as well as Flamingos and Oysterscatchers.

Great possibilities for swimming and snorkelling where you can spot hammerhead sharks, white tipped sharks, Galapagos sharks, eels, groupers, and snappers.

Return on board, the crew will welcome you with canapes. Lunch.

Rabida (Jervis): We have a wet landing at the dark red-coloured beach of volcanic origin frequented by sea lions. It is often considered the geographic center of Galapagos because it has the most diversified volcanic rocks of all the Islands. A short trail leads to a saltwater lagoon, where you will occasionally find flamingos. July thru September is a good time of the year to observe how brown

pelicans nest in the salty bushes found at the far side of the salty lagoon. Also to be observed are boobies and 9 species of Darwin's finches. Dinghy ride by the reefs and an excellent opportunity for snorkelling.

Return to ship; the crew will welcome you with canapes. Free time on board. Guides briefing on next day activities.

Overnight Galapagos cruise.

Meal Plan: Breakfast, Lunch, and Dinner

Day 11: Galapagos Cruise / Santa Cruz Island

This morning we have the chance to investigate the Charles Darwin Research Station in Puerto Ayora, staffed with international scientists conducting biological research and conservation projects. Here you can also admire giant tortoises, part of the breeding program. Travellers can also admire the impressive giant pricklypear cactus forest and many land birds. The visit to the station takes around 40

minutes. After this visit, passengers have some free time to walk around town and shop for souvenirs. Lunch.

Santa Cruz (Highlands): You will have an option is to cross the highlands of Santa Cruz. Passengers will visit Cerro Chato. On this visit, you'll be able to observe the famous giant tortoises that gave the name to these islands. Additionally, travellers can walk in

dormant lava tubes. Free time on the island.

Return to ship; the crew will welcome you with canapes. Free time on board. Guides briefing on next day activities in the auditorium. Overnight Galapagos cruise.

Meal Plan: Breakfast, Lunch, and Dinner

Day 12: Galapagos / Santa Cruz & Baltra Islands - Quito

We arrive at Las Bachas beach in the north of Santa Cruz Island for a wet landing. Here you will encounter different sea birds, marine iguanas, sea turtles, etc. Passengers will have the opportunity to swim and snorkel from this white sand beach.

Return to the M/V Galapagos Legend, check out* and depart to the airport for our flight to Quito (via a stop in Guayaquil).

*PLEASE NOTE: Gratuities for the ship's crew are NOT included in tour price. (We have found that trying to pre-pay tips on your behalf is not practical, for a number of reasons). Accordingly, we suggest that you allow approximately USD 50 total per passenger for satisfactory service.

This afternoon we will enjoy a city tour of Quito. Explore the heart of historical Quito, the first city in the world to be declared a World Cultural Heritage by UNESCO in 1978.

Overnight in Quito.

Meal Plan: Breakfast, Lunch, and Dinner

Day 13: Otavalo Valley and Departure

This morning we travel by road north to the town of Calderón where we visit a bread-dough handicrafts workshop for which the town is famous.

Through changing landscapes we'll arrive to a sightseeing point over San Pablo Lake at the border of Imbabura Province. We'll continue to the city of Otavalo where you'll have time to stroll through the colourful handicraft stalls. The Otavalo Valley is well known as a successful example of indigenous economic development based on the production of traditional products.

We break for lunch and then continue to the town San Antonio de Ibarra to visit a wooden sculptures shop, and continue to Peguche's weaving workshop and an Andean musical instruments workshop. Return to Quito. Later we transfer to the airport for our homeward flight, departing just after midnight.

BUEN VIAJE!

Meal Plan: Breakfast, Lunch, and Dinner