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President's  *Picks*

Ecuador's Galapagos & Amazon

15 Days

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Welcome

"The Galapagos Islands and the Amazon Jungle have never been more endangered. This luxury program was designed to illustrate that tourism done the right way can help preserve the Galapagos as well as the Amazon, by employing the right local guides, and using the right sustainable properties. This is about seeing the real Ecuador, the one that the large cruise lines and majority of tourists overlook. Step back in time and see this amazing country the way it was meant to be seen."

Ashish Sanghrajka

Day By Day Itinerary

Day 1: Guayaquil, Ecuador

Welcome to Ecuador! After claiming your luggage, you will be met by your Big Five Ecuador representative and transferred to your hotel. The remainder of the day is at leisure.

Hilton Colon Guayaquil

Day 2: Guayaquil / San Cristobal Island – Cerro Tijeretas and Puerto Baquerizo Moreno

After a morning flight to San Cristobal Island, you are greeted at the airport and transferred to your hotel.



It enjoys a prime waterfront location and boasts some of the best seafood in San Cristobal. After lunch and a quick introduction, you begin your journey at the Galapagos Interpretation Center to learn about the unique wildlife, geology, history and social dynamics of the fabled Galapagos Islands. Begin a hike of about 2 kilometers/1.24 miles to Cerro Tijeretas (Frigatebird Hill) along natural trails formed of lava rocks. The path is surrounded by native plants such as the Galapagos cotton, palo santo, acacia, and cacti. On your walk, you will likely come across blue footed boobies, frigate birds, pelicans, herons, gulls, warblers, mockingbirds and finches in the vegetation and along the cliffs. Tijeretas was one of the first places Charles Darwin landed and is the ideal spot to enjoy a spectacular views of white sand beaches on one side and the roofs of Puerto Baquerizo Moreno on the other. After your hike, cool off with a refreshing snorkeling session at Carola Beach, surrounded by sea turtles, sea lions, and marine iguanas. After dinner, explore the friendly, laid-back beach town and stroll down the boardwalk to visit the neighboring colony of Galapagos sea lions. **Golden Bay Hotel (B,L,D)**

Day 3: San Cristobal Island – Punta Pitt or Cerro Brujo

The day begins with a morning of kayaking along the coastal bays and coves of San Cristobal's north coast, where you encounter blue footed boobies, frigate birds, sea lions and sea turtles. You may visit Leon Dormido (Kicker Rock), Punta Pitt or Cerro Brujo. Sites depend on the week day and Galapagos National Park regulations. Snorkel among sea lions as well as marine iguanas and countless reef fish. Swim with spotted eagle rays, golden rays, Galapagos sharks, starfish, clams, and a colorful variety of fish. With luck, you might even see some menacing-looking but harmless hammerhead sharks. After a full day exploring the seas, you return to your hotel for dinner. **Golden Bay Hotel (B,L,D)**



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Day 4: San Cristobal Island / Isabela Island – Tintoreras

After breakfast, transfer to San Cristobal airport for your flight on a small propeller plane to Isabela Island. Enjoy this bird's eye view of the archipelago's volcanic formations. The semi-submerged craters, turquoise waters, rocks and islets are breathtaking. Isabela is the largest island in the Galapagos, and one of the most volcanically active locations on earth. After landing, settle into your hotel. In the afternoon, visit another Tintoreras, this one a rock formation that is home to a great variety of wildlife in its crystalline waters including white tip reef sharks, Galapagos penguins, turtles, blue footed boobies and sea lions that are a joy to snorkel with. You may also tour the Tortoise Breeding Centre, which has an exhibit of the stages of development of the Galapagos tortoise. **Iguana Crossing Lodge (B,L,D)**



Day 5: Isabela Island – Sierra Negra

Spend the day exploring Sierra Negra, a large shield volcano at the southeastern end of the island. It rises to an altitude of 1,124 meters/3,688 feet and is one of the most active of the Galapagos volcanoes, with the last eruption in 2005. Hike the extraordinary 16-kilometer/10-mile trail to the caldera, the largest of all of the Galapagos volcanoes, and over petrified lava flows with impressive views of the island. The southern and southeastern slopes of the volcano provide habitat for the endangered Sierra Negra giant tortoise. **Iguana Crossing Lodge (B,L,D)**

Day 6: Isabela Island – Tunnels

The tunnels are one of the most spectacular snorkeling sites in Isabela. This marine sanctuary is characterized by its unique geologic formations. Lava flows have produced a number of arches and tunnels both under and above water that are filled with marine life. Entry into this site is shallow and the waves can be quite strong. The Wall of Tears is a historic landmark that was built by prisoners between 1945 and 1959, when the island served as a penal colony. Called El Muro de las Lágrimas, the wall is 25 meters/65 feet high and it is said that a thousand died during its construction. **Iguana Crossing Lodge (B,L,D)**



Day 7: Isabela Island / Santa Cruz Island

This morning you are transferred to the airport to board your flight to Santa Cruz Island. An English-speaking naturalist guide meets you at the VIP lounge at Baltra Airport to take you into the highlands of Santa Cruz. Enjoy a delicious, locally-produced lunch at a farm in the western hills. Take in the area's natural beauty, which encompasses pit craters, lava tunnels and Scalesia and Guayabillo forests. At the Tortoise Reserve, share some time in the giant tortoise natural habitat, surrounded by the abundant bird life of the area. End this day at Galapagos Safari Camp with a sunset cocktail followed by dinner. **Galapagos Safari Camp (B,L,D)**

Day 8: Santa Cruz Island – North Seymour & Las Bachas

This morning, discover North Seymour Island, which was raised from the ocean floor by a seismic event, accounting for its low, flat profile. Swallow-tailed gulls sit perched on ledges in the cliffs only a few meters high that form the shoreline. A forest of palo santo trees stands just above the landing site, usually without leaves, wait for rain to bring them into bloom. You will spot sea lions, land iguanas and blue footed boobies. The trail turns inland where you discover find active, dynamic colonies of both the magnificent and the great species of frigate birds.

This afternoon, you travel to Las Bachas, a beautiful coralline beach located on the north shore of Santa Cruz Island. It is the perfect place for practicing snorkeling, swimming or to simply enjoy the white soft sand. Several brackish lagoons, just a few steps away from the sea, are the feeding grounds of various wading birds, from stilts to flamingos. **Galapagos Safari Camp (B,L,D)**



Day 9: Santa Cruz Island – Fishing Adventure

This morning you will explore the waters in the company of local fishermen. Developed by the Galapagos National Park Service, this is both a wildlife experience and an opportunity for cultural exchange. The program has a two-fold mission - to engage local fisherman in tourism activities that provide alternative means of income while at the same time protecting local fisheries from depletion. The fishermen have safe and modern privately charter speedboats that you will enjoy today. With your guide serving as translator, you listen to the fishermen share anecdotes from a lifetime at sea, and learn local fishing tricks. Later, you land on a deserted beach and snorkel and in a spot known only to locals. If you prefer to limit fishing and enhance the snorkeling or beach experience, your guide will assist in adapting the day to your preferences. **Galapagos Safari Camp (B,L,D)**



Day 10: Santa Cruz Island / Quito

Visit the famous Charles Darwin Research Station to learn about its preservation and conservation efforts and scientific research. You will have an up-close experience with the tortoises that are the islands' name sake. Also enjoy free time to wander around Puerto Ayora, the largest town in the Galapagos Islands, and tour the local fish market on the waterfront before you are transferred to the airport for your

flight to Quito. After you arrive in Quito and claim your luggage, you will be met by your guide and transferred to your hotel. Enjoy an evening tour of the panoramic colonial city, which includes



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Independence Square, La Compañía Church, and San Francisco Square with its historic church. Dine at a local restaurant before returning to your hotel. **Casa Gangotena (B,D)**

Day 11: Quito / Coca / Yasuni National Park

This morning you are transferred from your hotel to the airport for your 30-minute flight to Coca over the eastern Andes Mountain range. After landing mid-morning, you will be met and transferred to Port Francisco de Orellana, where you will embark on a fascinating river trip into the Amazon Rainforest in a comfortable covered motor boat. Travel into the Yasuni National Park along the Napo River for about two and a half hours and relish the peacefulness and the richness of the bird life.



The national park lies within the Napo moist forests ecoregion and is primarily rainforest. The park is about 250 km/155 mi from Quito and was designated a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 1989. It is within the claimed ancestral territory of the Huaorani indigenous people. Yasuni is home to two uncontacted indigenous tribes, the Tagaeri and the Taromenane. The park is among the most biologically diverse spots on Earth, and is at the center of a small zone where amphibian, bird, mammal, and vascular plant diversity all reach their maximum levels within the Western Hemisphere. The park holds a world record for 150 amphibian species and is also in the top locations for amphibian diversity compared to other sites sampled in the western Amazon. The total number of amphibian species here is more than the United States and Canada combined. Reptile species in the park are also very high with 121 documented species. In spite of covering less than 0.15% of the Amazon Basin, Yasuni is home to approximately one-third of amphibian and reptile species. The park also harbors very high levels of fish diversity with 382 known species.

It's possible that you may spot monkeys and a host of birds such as toucans, parrots, herons, kingfishers or even macaws. At the Napo Wildlife Center, after a short break, you transfer to a traditional dugout canoe for the short ride of about ten minutes to the lodge, arriving in late afternoon. The lodge boasts an impressive view of Añangu Lake. Enjoy a welcome drink and settle in before dinner. After dinner, you may join an optional visit to the lake to scout for cayman (alligator) and just enjoy the natural sounds of the forest at night. **Napo Wildlife Center Amazon Lodge (B,L,D)**



Day 12: Yasuni National Park

Wake early this morning in order to reach the best and most easily accessible parrot clay licks in Ecuador, about an hour away from the lodge. You'll reach there just before parrot activity kicks off at the clay lick between 7:30 and 8:30 am.

A total of 11 species of parrots, parakeets and macaws come to the lick. This visit depends on weather conditions but is usually successful. Later, you set out on a hike along the forest trail to visit to the traditional Quichua community of Añangu and share time with a family to learn about their activities and



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way of life in the forest. Return to the creek and hike through a terra firme forest for about 30 minutes to the second parrot clay lick. Savor a box lunch at the parrot clay lick observatory before returning to the lodge in late afternoon. **Napo Wildlife Center Amazon Lodge (B,L,D)**

Day 13: Yasuni National Park

After an early breakfast, set out from the lodge to go to the canopy tower on the Napo for an amazing treetop adventure. A 36-meter/118-foot high canopy tower is a great way to experience life above the forest floor. This is the second tower at the Napo Wildlife Center (the first is attached to the dining hall and allows great views of the lake). The canopy tower is about 20 minutes from the lodge deep within the terra firme forest. As you ascend the 12-story tower, you pass through different levels of the forest and emerge on top of a huge Ceiba tree. Here you cross onto a wooden platform that built into the tree to encounter life in the forest canopy as it opens before you, with views once reserved for birds and monkeys. The metal tower itself was constructed to the highest standards, galvanized, and carefully inspected by engineers. Safety is the priority. The platform in the top of the tree was constructed by tree platform specialists brought from EcoEcuador's Peruvian partner organization Perú Verde. From top to bottom, there is no finer canopy experience in Eastern Ecuador. Flocks of colorful tanagers and blue-and-yellow macaws can be seen in the canopy and in nearby trees spider monkeys search for fruit. You can hear two species of large toucans calling in the early mornings and afternoons. Birds that are virtually impossible to see from the forest floor below are suddenly right beside you, oblivious to your presence. Lunch is served at the lodge followed by an afternoon hike. Hike along primary forest to discover the forest interior, and search for lizards, colorful manakins and the tiny, endangered golden mantle tamarin monkeys. After the hike, explore the lake and creeks by dugout canoe, and you may run into a giant otter family on the way. **Napo Wildlife Center Amazon Lodge (B,L,D)**



Day 14: Yasuni National Park / Coca / Quito

Today is an early departure with one last canoeing adventure on the way back to the Napo River dock. The creek may reveal new sights of giant otters, Monk Saki monkeys or rare birds. At the dock, you embark in covered motor boat to return to Coca, arriving in time to check in for the flight back to Quito. Upon your arrival, you will be met and transferred to your hotel. **Casa Gangotena (B)**



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PLEASE NOTE: *This is a sample itinerary for the Amazon and is subject to change due to weather conditions, safety and the interests of guests. Changes and additions are made in order to maximize wildlife viewing and wilderness enjoyment, and cultural interaction with local people in the richest rainforest in Ecuador – the Yasuni National Park.*

Day 15: Quito / Depart

The capital of Ecuador, Quito, lies at an elevation of 2,743 kilometers/9,000 feet in the province of Pichincha surrounded by the Andes Mountains. One of the most beautiful capitals in the world, the city was founded as San Francisco de Quito on December 6th, 1534 by the Spanish conquistadors. Today, it is a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site. The historic center of Quito, known as the "Old Town" is the largest and best-restored historical center in the Americas. It is, as you might imagine, eccentric with narrow, winding cobblestone streets, magnificent churches and wide, open plazas lined with shops of all kinds. The buildings reflect the rich Spanish colonial influence in the balconies, tile roofs, thick columns and central patios. Explore Old Town on foot for a personal experience of this magnificent area. Your local resident guide is part of the neighborhood and a member of a grassroots NGO organization, the San Roque Heritage Guardians. This group of neighbors, artisans and merchants are actively interested in sharing the daily life and work of the neighborhood. They see this the best way to recover and strengthen their heritage, and by doing so, leave a legacy for the local and global community.



Enjoy walking along the nearby streets, up the hill on Calle Rocafuerte. Browse San Francisco Market, one of the oldest in the capital, to learn about the Ecuador's fresh fruit and vegetables, and how they are traditionally used. You also have the chance to meet one of the local herbal healers, who has a shop in the market. Walk downhill to La Ronda Street, considered one of the flagship regeneration projects in the city. You meet a variety of artisans in their workshops, shopkeepers, hat makers and candy makers that are a part of the Manos en La Ronda Project. You will see how candy was made in colonial times! This is not the candy you know back home. Made by traditional techniques that date back centuries, it is prepared simply in huge pot. You'll delight in a visit to a chocolatier, where you taste some of the finest chocolate in the world, which are made right here. In fact, Ecuador is one of the world's main exporters of cocoa. Learn about the cocoa fruit and its many surprising uses beyond chocolate, including various ointments. You can sample chocolate combined with everything from tree tomatoes to blackberries. And then there's the ice cream shop where you can try local traditional flavors such as humitas con café. You can visit a healer and learn about the superstitious and folklore of Ecuador. See how springer children's toys, are made and how kids in Ecuador still play with old-fashioned wooden toys.



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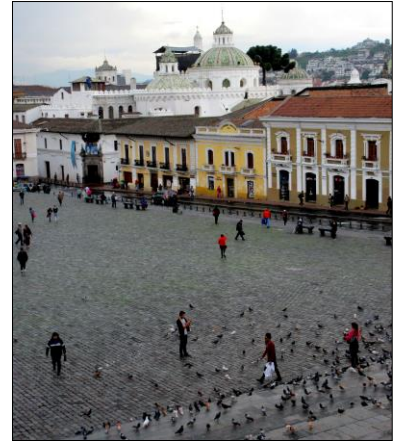
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From the La Ronda area, walk northwards through the handsome streets of the Old Town to the Plaza Grande, the political heart of the city. Stroll to the Jesuit church of La Compañía with its stunning gold-leaf interior. Return to Plaza San Francisco, visit the church, choir and distinctive patios of the Franciscan order before savoring a lunch of Ecuadorian specialties prepared by the hotel's talented chefs. This afternoon, cross the street to the excellent Casa del Alabado Archaeological Museum, a restored 17th-century colonial mansion, with a stunning collection of pieces dating back some 5,000 years. Late this afternoon, you leave this stunning city to transfer to the airport to board your flight home. **(B)**



End of Travel Arrangements



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Included In The Tour Cost:

- Hotel accommodations as indicated in the itinerary, including taxes and service charges
- Meals as indicated (B-breakfast, L-lunch, D-dinner)
- Services of an English speaking guide during all included excursions on a shared basis
- All transfers in an air conditioned vehicle
- Entrances at parks, sites, and monuments
- Comprehensive assortment of pre-tour materials and amenities
- Big Five's 24-hour White Glove Service® guest assistance
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Big Five Edge

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- **Ahead of the Crowds:** Our Destination Specialists combine creativity with their impressive knowledge. As a result, we are on average two years or more ahead of the pack when it comes to *new and innovative travel ideas*. We focus on lesser known unique touring activities and emerging concepts that are not yet mainstream. We forge paths and take risks few others are willing to because we are committed to the principles of authenticity and sustainability. Most tour companies rely on an in-country counterpart for product ideas. At Big Five, we don't wait for anyone else. In 30 of our 44 destinations, and counting, we pioneered the itineraries and activities that are well ahead of current trends, and have taught our ground team, who actually live in those countries. We invest in our team, constantly sending them out to find new experiences that most overseas companies are unaware of because they rarely leave their home territories.
- **Booking in North America vs Booking Overseas:** Before you work directly with a company overseas, look closely to insure you are comparing apples, and not grapes to kumquats. What appears to be a \$1,000 price difference, actually is almost at par when you add in all the "extra fees" overseas companies put in their fine print. We don't charge merchant fees for using a credit card, most overseas companies will charge you 3% or more to pay by credit card. Your Big Five journey comes with complimentary enrollment in our 24-hour White Glove Service® guest assistance program up to 2 weeks before your departure; something no overseas company has the ability or capacity to do. We usually have more inclusions with fewer "optional" activities. You are backed by a comprehensive liability coverage plan that was written and is operated in North America. Booking overseas leaves you in the hands of the liability coverage that is written and operated in the country you are visiting, following local rules and guidelines, which may not be known to you. Make sure your apples are really apples – *otherwise it might cost you more than just money*.
- **Sustainability:** We believe in a sustainable future for all. Big Five has been consistently recognized as *a leader in the sustainable travel*, receiving accolades for our work to help change the world through travel. Big Five has also been honored by an internationally recognized travel network as the only company to twice receive an award for *Sustainable Leadership* after being judged against nearly 100 other companies by two separate independent panels.