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ECUADOR & GALAPAGOS



SMALL GROUP

OCT 17 - NOV 2, 2025 | 17 DAYS | 40 MEALS

JOURNEY LEADER: MARK AITCHISON

Llamas in the Ecuadorian Andes

Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands offer an incredibly diverse and captivating experience. We will explore Quito, the breathtaking Andes, ancient indigenous culture, Spanish colonial history, stunning landscapes, and exquisite artisan crafts. This destination is a haven for photographers, featuring charming villages and bustling market scenes set against the majestic backdrop of the Andes Mountains. A major highlight of our journey is the two nights we'll spend at Mashpi Lodge in the cloud forest, renowned as one of the top ecological preserves in Ecuador, if not all of South America.

Our adventure continues as we board the beautiful Yacht Isabela II to unravel the enigma of the Galapagos Islands. We'll delve into the origins of these volcanic wonders, and marvel at the stark beauty of the landscape and its unique flora and fauna. Seals, iguanas, tortoises, and an astonishing variety of birds freely roam in their natural habitat, seemingly putting on a show just for us.



Inclusive Features

- Return economy group airfare from Canada to Quito
- Accommodations in deluxe and best available hotels as indicated, including world renowned Mashpi Lodge
- 5-day fully inclusive deluxe cruise on Yacht Isabela II
- 40 meals as shown in the itinerary (B - 16 breakfasts, L - 12 lunches, D - 12 dinners)
- Services of your journey leader, national and local guides
- All gratuities, taxes and service fees for included services
- Airport transfers in Canada or equivalent value with purchase of group airfare

Highlights

- Historic Quito, a UNESCO World Heritage Site
- 5-day cruise on the beautiful Yacht Isabela II to experience the wonders of the Galapagos Islands
- 2 days at Mashpi Lodge, experiencing the cloud forest
- Wonderful views along the Avenue of Volcanoes
- Colonial gem of Cuenca
- Lively market of Otavalo

Journey Leader

Mark Aitchison and his life partner, **Pattie**, have escorted groups on our behalf to Israel, Peru, South Africa, Egypt, Norway, the Dalmatian Coast and Greece and travelled throughout Europe including two journeys featuring the Oberammergau Passion Play as well as to the South Pacific and Turkey. Mark served for 40 years as a pastoral minister in the United Church of Canada, living in rural and urban communities in Ontario and Saskatchewan. During his ministry he has also served in interim postings in Edinburgh, Scotland and Newcastle, Australia. The Aitchison's are very excited about this journey to Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands and look forward to sharing the experience with you.



OCT 17, Friday CANADA / QUITO, ECUADOR

Travellers from across Canada gather in Toronto for our flights to Quito. Known as the northern capital of the Incas and a 16th century Spanish colonial city, Quito has had a varied and fascinating history. Today, the city is a storehouse of elegant churches, ancient monasteries, colonial mansions, fascinating antiques and hand-crafted native artifacts. **JW Marriot** (2 nights)

OCT 18, Saturday QUITO

Gain a deeper understanding of this beautiful Andean city, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, with visits to the impressive San Agustin Church, the Monastery of San Francisco and the church of La Compañía de Jesús. Afterward, savour a sweeping vista of the city from the heights of Panecillo Hill. Complete the excitement of the day with a delightful welcome dinner. **BD**

OCT 19, Sunday QUITO / CUENCA

We begin our exploration with the awesome scenery of the Ecuadorian Andean Region. Enjoy close-up views of unique flora and fauna at Cotopaxi National Park while making our way across the slopes of Cotopaxi Volcano for lunch. This evening, we catch a flight to Cuenca. **Four Points by Sheraton Cuenca** (3 nights) **BLD**

OCT 20, Monday CUENCA

Cuenca, Ecuador's third largest city, is sure to charm and captivate you with its red-tiled roofs, cobblestone streets, flowery plazas, and museums. We will visit the Plaza of San Sebastián, the Museum of Modern Art, the flower market and stroll in the Main Square. Then enjoy a relaxing drive along the Tomebamba River to admire the overhanging houses. After lunch, we will visit a ceramics handicraft shop and a Panama Hat factory. **BLD**

OCT 21, Tuesday EI CAJAS NATIONAL PARK

Explore one of the most impressive landscapes and ecosystems found in the country. El Cajas National Park allows us to experience a habitat that is home to more than 40 species of mammals and more than 150 species of birds. We visit the lower part of Llaviuco Lagoon to admire an elfin Andean rainforest, and listen to the melodious song of the Andean toucan. **BL**

OCT 22, Wednesday CUENCA / GUAYAQUIL

Today offers us another wonderful experience as we drive from the highlands to the coast, crossing through a series of climatic and vegetation zones. En route we visit Ingapirca ruins to see a unique example of the cultural richness that prevailed in the country before the arrival of the Spanish. On arrival in Guayaquil, enjoy a brief orientation drive through Ecuador's second city and major port. **Hotel Hilton Colon Guayaquil** (1 night) BLD

OCT 23, Thursday GUAYAQUIL / GALAPAGOS

This is the day that we have been anticipating! We fly westward to the Galapagos Islands, some 600 miles away. After landing, we cross the Itabaca Channel to Santa Cruz Island. We head inland to the highlands, where we will learn about its unique ecosystems and biodiversity. After lunch at a local restaurant, we visit a nearby reserve that is home to the archipelago's most famous inhabitants, the giant tortoise. We visit the Charles Darwin Research Station and the Giant Tortoise Breeding Centre in Puerto Ayora. This afternoon we stroll along the main street before embarking the Yacht Isabela II. Designed to hold 40 passengers, our ship is fully air-conditioned, has a comfortable lounge and dining room, and all cabins have private facilities. **Yacht Isabela II** (4 nights) BLD

OCT 24, Friday BARTOLOME & SANTIAGO ISLAND

We begin our on-shore exploration climbing a wooden staircase for an incredible panoramic view of the surrounding area. Following our walk on land we take a panga ride around colossal Pinnacle Rock in search of the Galapagos penguins amongst other local wildlife. After lunch on board, we land at Sullivan Bay on Santiago Island. Our trail runs along a lava field, the perfect place to see and understand the volcanic origin of the archipelago. BLD

OCT 25, Saturday SANTA CRUZ & SANTIAGO ISLAND

After landing at Dragon Hill on Santa Cruz we head ashore. Our walk passes a brackish-water lagoon frequented by shorebirds, ducks, and American Flamingos. Those interested can take the opportunity to snorkel along the shore to see some of the marine life. After lunch, at Buccaneer Cove on Santiago Island, we shall explore the coastline, the impressive cliffs of the cove and hope to see plentiful marine birds, sea lions, and inter-tidal organisms. This area is also home to the unique rock formations of 'Elephant Rock' and 'The Bishop'. BLD

OCT 26, Sunday ISABELA & FERNANDINA ISLAND

At Punta Vicente Roca, Isabela, fauna includes the largest marine iguanas of the Galapagos and a healthy population of flightless cormorants. Galapagos is the only place where one can find penguins above the Equator. Nearby we may spot Nazca boobies, noddies and brown pelicans nesting. This afternoon visit Punta Espinoza, on the youngest island of the archipelago, Fernandina. Disembark for an exciting walk over dark lava. Having no introduction to mammals, Fernandina boasts a very unique environment with the highest density of marine iguanas, sharing their space with sea lions, sally-light foot crabs, hawks, penguins and the flightless cormorant. BLD

OCT 27, Monday BALTRA / QUITO

Disembarking at Baltra, we catch our flight back to Quito, with the evening free to simply relax. **JW Marriot** (1 night) B



Colourful textiles in a market in Otavalo



Blue Domes of the Cathedral in Cuenca



Colourful Sally Lightfoot crab, Galapagos Island



A giant tortoise enjoying a snack

OCT 28, Tuesday QUITO / MASHPI LODGE

Heading north from Quito, we navigate through the rugged mountains that divide the coastal plains from the rainforest interior. Our journey leads us to an exceptional eco-lodge, meticulously crafted to harmonize with its surroundings and provide a close-to-nature experience in the Cloud Forest. In the afternoon, a welcome briefing awaits, offering us the chance to explore our interests with on-site naturalists and receive an introduction to this extraordinary environment.

Mashpi Lodge (2 nights) BLD

OCT 29, Wednesday CLOUD FOREST

A full day of activities awaits us with our dedicated naturalist and local guides. Enjoy walks through the pristine jungle surrounded by 150-foot-high trees, visit the butterfly farm to learn about these delicate creatures, or take a ride on the tree-top gondola to enjoy the flora and fauna of the cloud forest. Be sure to visit the observation tower, where you can stand on top of the rainforest canopy and learn about this ecological wonder. Observe toucans, parrots and dozens of other birds and, with some luck, the infamous howler monkeys, foraging squirrel monkeys, or the gentle three-toed sloth. This will be a day to remember!

BLD

OCT 30, Thursday MASHPI LODGE / OTAVALO

As we depart from our cloud forest reserve, we journey northward through lush farmlands and awe-inspiring mountain vistas until we reach Otavalo, home to South America's most unique market. En route, enjoy lunch in a traditional hacienda, and visit the artisan village of Peguche, famous for its hand-woven textiles and sacred waterfall. **Hacienda Pinsaqui (1 night)**

BLD

OCT 31, Friday OTAVALO / QUITO

Following an early visit to the stunning Cuicocha Lake, we'll have the pleasure of exploring the renowned leather goods and exquisite woodcarvings of the artisan villages of Cotacachi and San Antonio de Ibarra. Lunch today will feature a gourmet interpretation of common Ecuadorian homemade recipes. Visit the world-famous silent market of Otavalo, where sellers barter with their hands, a welcomed contrast to the raucous babble of most markets. We will have ample time to bargain for colourful ponchos, woollen goods, and native jewelry. **JW Marriot (2 nights)**

BL

NOV 1, Saturday QUITO

Quito's artistic pathways lead to some of the most rewarding cultural journeys you can embark on. The pre-Inca people crafted some of the oldest and most exquisite artifacts and jewelry. Following the Spanish arrival, new artistic techniques emerged alongside religious influences, leading to the creation of notable religious sculptures. In the 20th-century, local artists produced dramatic and expressionist paintings, reflecting a blend of historical and cultural evolution. Discover three pivotal eras in the country's history (pre-Columbian, colonial and contemporary) at the National Archaeological Museum and La Capilla del Hombre (Chapel of Man), a striking modern edifice that houses the works of Ecuador's most renowned painter, Oswaldo Guayasamín. This evening, we enjoy our farewell dinner.

BD

NOV 2, Sunday QUITO / CANADA

Our 'once-in-a-lifetime' journey draws to a close as we catch our flights to our homes across Canada.

B

CT Rating 4/5 - Very Challenging: Although close to the equator, the high altitudes in central Ecuador and the cooling currents near the Galapagos mean that we can expect pleasant temperatures. During the cruise, we will travel to shore in small boats and experience several wet landings. During the time in the central highlands, we will be between 7,000 and 10,000 feet above sea level (altitude sickness is possible). Because of the many different and sometimes difficult conditions, it is vital that all members be fully mobile and in good physical health.

Book by May 30, 2025 and save \$500 per person

Tour & Cruise Cost in Canadian Dollars Per Person

Land & Cruise Only* (Join / Leave Quito Hotel)	\$13,675
Toronto	\$14,995
Ottawa / Montreal	\$15,175
Halifax / Winnipeg.....	\$15,395
St. John's.....	\$15,495
Regina / Saskatoon	\$15,495
Calgary / Edmonton / Vancouver.....	\$15,395
Victoria.....	\$15,495

*Land & cruise only rate is based on joining the group at the first hotel and leaving the group at the last hotel, and it includes all internal flights. International airfares from other gateways are available on request. Airfares and air carrier are subject to change and will be confirmed prior to final payment. Refer to inclusive features for details.

The single supplement for both the cruise and land portions is CA \$4,375, with limited availability.

Alternatively, a single supplement for the land portion only is subject to availability if a single traveller requests to share accommodation during the cruise portion.

Prices are based on taxes, surcharges, airfares and exchange rates effective September 2024 and are subject to change. Tour/Cruise prices are per person, based on sharing a double/twin room at hotels/cruise and a minimum of 20 participants travelling.

Insurance is NOT INCLUDED but is highly recommended. Premiums are calculated based on the individual's age, destination (country), trip length, and trip booking window – please contact our staff to receive a quote. Your coverage starts on the effective date of your confirmation of coverage. Please discuss your insurance coverage prior to booking. Check our website for the most current information. Refer to the enrollment form for terms and conditions.

Final payment is due on June 17, 2025

Deposit is \$2,000 per person

To reserve your spot on this tour, you can either book online through our website or submit an enrollment form along with your deposit to:



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