Ecuador’s Natural Wonders for Johns Hopkins University

OPTION 1

Dates of trip

JAN 7 TO 19, 2016

Number of participants

27 STUDENTS + 3 FACULTY MEMBERS

Day by Day Itinerary

Jan 07 (Thu), Arrive in Quito / Explore the city
Welcome to Ecuador!
Arrive in Quito and transfer to your hotel. Explore Quito’s historic center, the best preserved and least altered historic center in America. Learn about Quito’s rich history and artistic legacy. Admire the wonderful architecture of its colonial buildings and the uniqueness of religious art pieces from the famous Quitenian School of art, which combines European Renaissance and Baroque styles with indigenous and mestizo influences. Enjoy welcome dinner in a local restaurant.
Hotel: Hotel Quito   Meals: Dinner

Jan 08 (Fri), Papallacta: Among hot springs and bird’s sanctuaries
Follow a scenic drive descending the Eastern slopes of the Andes cordillera into the entrance of the Amazon basin. Arrive to Papallacta, a peaceful and quiet town surrounded by humid temperate forest characterized by stunted trees with dense crowns and surrounded by a large amount of bird flocks. Enjoy the restoratives effects of its volcanic hot springs while spending time at the thermal pools. In the afternoon return to Quito.
Hotel: Hotel Quito or similar Meals: B/L/D

Jan 09 (Sat), To the Ecuadorian Amazon
Pick up from the hotel, transfer to the airport for the flight to Coca town. A 30 minute flight over the Andes Mountains leads you to a bustling oil town called Coca located in the Amazon Basin. A quick lunch in Sacha’s private house and then it’s off to the town docks where you will board Sacha’s private canoes for the 2 hour journey down river to Sacha’s Lodges property. A 30 minute hike through the rainforest leads you to lake Pilchicocha. Here, you are met by native workers to paddle you across the lake to your final destination. Arrive at Sacha Lodge around 15:30 or 16:00 pm (subject to change). Swim in Lake Pilchicocha, which is a black water lake home to many species of fish and animals. A refreshing swim after arriving may be just what you need after being in the equatorial heat all day. Bird observing from the mini tower offers guests an excellent opportunity to view several species of birds common around the lodge. Also a great place to watch the sun set. Visit the butterfly house with your naturalist guide to view the beautiful colors of many different species of butterflies. After dinner, accompany your naturalist guide on a night walk through the rainforest to view the hundreds of different species of animals that can only be found at night. Or maybe a canoe ride on the lake to view the spectacled and black caimans with their glowing orange eyes as you silently paddle across the lake to get a closer view.
Hotel: Sacha Lodge  Meals: B, L, D

Jan 10 (Sun), Ecuadorian Amazon
Begin morning activity between 6:00 and 7:00. Begin walking on trail Liana Chica and arrive at the canopy walk, for spectacular views of the rainforest canopy and the many different species of vibrantly colored birds. Designed to be a self-standing rigid suspension canopy walk, it is one of only a few in the world! Located within Sacha’s private reserve, 2 miles from the shores of the Rio Napo and 1 mile from the lodge, the bird walk gives guests the opportunity to get an up close and personal view of the rainforest canopy. Two of the three towers have observation decks every 12 meters making towers accessible for everyone. The canopy walkway is at 36 meters high and 275 meters long, giving guests a “bird’s eye view” of all the wonders and beauty the tropical rainforest has to offer. The canopy walk is designed as a sturdy walkway enabling guests to casually move along while enjoying the spectacular views. After the canopy walk, Liana Grande
through terra firma and igapo forest habitats where native guides will explain many different species of medicinal plants that have been used in their culture for hundreds of years. Liana Grande will turn into the trail Higueron, which will take you through pristine primary forest with huge Kapok and Fig trees towering hundreds of feet above your head. After lunch, you may choose to take a leisurely hike along the Rio Napo, or choose a little more challenging hike on the trail Leoncillo to try and spot the elusive dusky titi monkey. Either way the trails will lead you back to the main boardwalk for your final hike and canoe ride back to the lodge. **Hotel: Sacha Lodge**  **Meals: B, L, D**

**Jan 11 (Mon), Ecuadorian Amazon**
Leaving the lodge after breakfast, you begin your hike on trail Lagartococha. This trail offers you the chance to learn more about the native people and their relationship with the forest. Learn about the trees where native people believe the spirits of their ancestors live, and the mysterious “dwende” or devil-man of the forest. After arriving at lake Lagartococha, take a tranquil canoe ride through a natural swamp, which is the home of anacondas, caimans, and capybaras. After the canoe ride, a walk on the other side of Lagartococha may give you the opportunity to spot capuchin or squirrel monkeys playfully jumping through the trees. Return from the walk or canoe ride and head back to the lodge for a refreshing dip in the lake, or a nice relaxing nap in your personal hammock on your private balcony. After lunch, your native guide will teach you how to fish for the infamous razor-toothed piranha. Keep in mind that piranhas will never attack a person and swimming at the same time is perfectly safe and fun! Around 15:30 you will begin what many think is the best trail at Sacha, a silent canoe ride through the flooded Amazonian forest. Where you have a good chance of being surrounded by troops of squirrel, capuchin, and howler monkeys. Keep your eyes peeled for the shy and elusive river otter as well as the incredibly well camouflaged three-toed sloth! After your eye-popping ride through the flooded forest, you will arrive at Sacha’s135-foot wooden tower built around an ancient Kapok tree. Get close up views of vibrantly colored birds through Sacha’s powerful scopes, and watch the sun set with an amazing view of Mount Sumaco, a volcano, and possibly a view of the snow-covered caps of the Andes! Leaving the tower just before or after sunset will give you an experience not soon forgotten. A canoe ride back through the flooded forest at night will be an awe-inspiring experience. Listen to the symphony of frogs and insects as you navigate through the narrow flooded forest trail, keeping your eyes open for caimans. Watch the several species of bats flying over your heads and listen to the many species of nocturnal birds making their eerie nighttime calls. Finally, after your mesmerizing canoe trip through the Amazon, you will arrive back at lake Pilchicocha and the welcoming lights of Sacha lodge. **Hotel: Sacha Lodge  **Meals: B, L, D**

**Jan 12 (Tue), Flight Coca – Quito**
Breakfast and departure from the lodge at 7:30am for an easy walk on the boardwalk to watch monkeys one last time before your final departure. Arrive in Coca and be escorted to the Coca airport where all plane tickets will be in the hands of Sacha employees waiting to help you board the plane and a final farewell. Scheduled arrival at Quito’s airport is at 12:30pm (subject to change). Box lunch en route. Continue to Otavalo area. En route visit Cochasqui Archeological complex and Quitsato project. **Hotel: Las Palmas or similar  **Meals: B, L, D**

**Jan 13 (Wed), Discover the Otavalo Indigenous Culture; Customs, traditions and artisan background.**
Enjoy the beautiful countryside landscape on your drive from Quito to the Otavalo Area. Otavalo is located approximately 90 km / 60 miles away from Quito. Explore the famous Otavalo craft market where locals show their products and crafts for sale and enjoy closer contact with the community while bargaining for their products. Visit a local indigenous family who will share with you their culture and traditions, including their weaving ability, their music; and their ancestral knowledge of medicinal plants. Taste the flavors of the Andean cuisine while enjoying lunch prepared with typical ingredients and products of the Ecuadorian Highlands. In the afternoon return to Quito. **Hotel: Hotel Quito or similar  **Meals: B, L, D**

**Jan 14 (Thu), Flight to Galapagos - Santa Cruz Island**
Pick up from the hotel and transfer to the airport (Flight information and pick up times to be advised)  
**AM - Baltra**
Departure from Quito to Baltra (2 ½ hours flight). Passengers are picked up at the airport by our naturalist guides and taken on a ten minute bus drive to the pier to board the M/V Galapagos Legend  
**PM - Black Turtle Cove**
On the north shore of Santa Cruz Island, accessible only by sea where four species of mangrove crowd from the shore out into the lagoon, turtle enjoy swimming in the calm waters, peaking their heads above the surface while fish, rays and small...
sharks circle below. White-tipped reef sharks can be seen beneath the boat, sea birds, including pelicans, herons and egrets, all feed in the cove. This cove has been declared as a “Turtle Sanctuary”

Boat: M/V Galapagos Legend  Meals: B/L/D  (Lunch is provided during flight - snack lunch)

Jan 15 (Fri), Santiago & Rabida Islands
AM-Sullivan Bay (Santiago)
Wet landing. This visitor site located at the southeastern portion of Santiago Island, and of important geologic interest, features extensive lava flows believed to have been formed during the last quarter of the 19th century.
Difficulty level: difficult, 1.5 km path.
Type of terrain: flat volcanic lava
Duration: 1h30 walk / 1 hour snorkeling/swimming
PM–Rabida
Wet landing. Dark red sand covers these unique beaches with incredible landscape; Rabida is considered the epicenter of the Galapagos Islands due to the diversity of its volcanic geology. Nesting Brown Pelicans are found from July through September and nine species of the famous Darwin’s finches can be seen. We will also take a dinghy ride along cliffs to observe nesting seabirds, and snorkel off the coast, where marine life is particularly active.
Difficulty level: easy
Type of terrain: sandy
Duration: 1h30 walk / 1 hour snorkeling / 1 hour dinghy ride
Boat: M/V Galapagos Legend  Meals: B/L/D

Jan 16 (Sat), Isabela Island
AM-Urbina Bay (Isabela)
Wet landing on a volcanic “black” beach. Depending on the season, we may find giant tortoises*, land iguanas*and the unusual Flightless Cormorant. After a short walk inland, snorkeling time is allotted, giving you yet another chance to swim with sea turtles, sea lions and countless tropical fish. Urbina Bay features a wide variety of plant life that changes depending on the season. We can observe the beautiful colors of plants that attract different insects, birds and reptiles. We will explore the uplifted coral reef that resulted from 1954 volcanic activity, with a spectacular view of Alcedo Volcano.
Difficulty level: intermediate
Type of terrain: flat
Duration: 1h30 walk / 1 hour snorkeling
PM–Tagus Cove (Isabela)
Dry landing on Galapagos’ largest island where we will learn about the eruption of the five volcanoes that form it. The trail leads to Darwin’s salt-water crater Lake and excellent views of lava fields and volcanic formations. We will return by the same path for a dinghy ride along a shoreline full of marine wildlife, where we will admire a variety of seabirds*, such as Blue-footed Booby, Brown Noddy, tems, Flightless Cormorant and depending on the season, a large number of Galapagos Penguins* which are only 35 cm. tall; the only penguin species in the world to extend its range into the northern hemisphere along the equator. They are monogamous and lay their eggs in small cracks of lava, on the lower parts of the island near the shoreline not reached by the ocean waves. The population of penguins on the islands is about 2,000 individuals, most of which live on this western portion of Isabela; others are scattered further south on the island. We will have an opportunity to snorkel in deep water. Graffiti believed to have been left by 19th-century pirates is a curious reminder of an intriguing past.
Difficulty level: intermediate
Type of terrain: steep
Duration: 2 hour walk / 40 minutes dinghy ride / deep water snorkeling 1 hour
Boat: M/V Galapagos Legend  Meals: B/L/D

Jan 17 (Sun), Fernandina and Isabela Islands
AM–Espinosa Point (Fernandina)
Dry landing. Espinosa Point is the only spot that we visit on Fernandina, and from it we can see the island of Isabela across the Bolivar Channel, an area that boasts some of the highest diversity of endemic sea fauna in the Galapagos. The largest, most primitive-looking race of marine iguanas* are found mingling with sea lions and Sally Lightfoot Crabs; a wonderful opportunity to encounter Flightless Cormorants at their nesting sites, Galapagos Penguins and the “King” of predators on the Islands, the Galapagos Hawk.
“Pa-hoe-hoe” and “AA” lava formations cover the majority of the terrain. Vegetation is thus scarce inland, but we encounter Brachycereus cacti and extensive mangrove beds lining the shores.

Difficulty level: intermediate
Type of terrain: rocky
Duration: 2 hours walk / 1 hour snorkeling
PM–Vicente Roca Point (Isabela)
Great deep-water snorkeling at one of the richest marine havens on Earth (Bolívar Channel). We take a dinghy ride along the coast to observe a great diversity of
Sea and coastal birds: Nazca and blue-footed boobies, noddies, brown pelicans, penguins, flightless cormorants. The upwelling of coldwater currents in this part of the Galapagos gives rise to an abundance of marine life.
Duration: 1 hour snorkeling / 1 hour dinghy ride
Boat: M/V Galapagos Legend
Meals: B/L/D

Jan 18 (Mon), Flight back to Quito - Santa Cruz highlands
AM–Highlands (Santa Cruz)
Dry landing. A 45 minute bus ride will take us to the Santa Cruz highlands, located to the northwest of Puerto Ayora, where we will find a natural reserve with giant tortoises. These enormous and slow-moving reptiles are responsible for the island’s name and therefore approaching them in their humid and forested abode is always an inspiring adventure. They can weigh between 250 and 300 kg and can live up to 150-200 years.
Difficulty level: easy
Type of terrain: flat & muddy sometimes (depending on season)
Duration: 45 minutes drive / 1 hour walk
After the visit passengers will be transferred to Baltra airport for return flight to Quito. Once in Quito, transfer to your hotel.
Dinner at the hotel
Hotel: Hotel Quito or similar
Meals: B/L/D

Jan 19 (Tue), Departure day.
Transfer to the airport for your flight back home or to your next destination.

END OF PROGRAM
Meal Codes
B/breakfast, /L/lunch, /D/dinner.