



ECUADOR

Custom Sample Itinerary The Galápagos Islands, Mashpi Cloud Forest Lodge & Quito 13 days/12 nights (can be adjusted longer or shorter according to preference)



[Map of South America](#) (interactive links)

Destination Maps: [Galapagos Islands](#) & [Ecuador Mainland](#)

SEASON: Year round. The equatorial location gives Ecuador a typically mild climate, with temperatures varying more by altitude than by season. The country has a dry season in the Andean highlands from June to September and November to January. Quito ranges from low 40's at night to mid 70's during the day. The **Galápagos Islands** have a sub-tropical climate regulated by the cool Humboldt Current and the warm waters from the Panama Basin. The islands only receive an average of 10" of rain/year so it is never "rainy". Temperatures vary according to the strength of the trade winds. **December – June:** Cooling currents subside and temps rise. Many consider this the hot/wetter season. Daytime highs are upper 80's-low 90's and 70's at night. The water temp is at its warmest (ave 72-76°F). Feb-Apr have the highest precipitation levels (1-2"/month), rest of year is less than 1"/month. **July – November:** The trade winds pick up and the climate becomes cool & breezy. Many consider this the cool/drier season. Daytime air temp ave is 73°F and 62°F at night. The ave water temp is 68°F. The sea can be a bit choppy during these months and the sky can be misty, a phenomenon locally called "garua."

TRIP RATING: Easy/moderate highland & island tour (Grade I) - This activity oriented trip includes excursions at elevations of up to 12,600 ft in the Andes together with optional water activities in Galápagos such as swimming, snorkeling and kayaking with marine wildlife and easy hikes of up to 4 hours duration on occasionally rough or rocky trails. Anyone in reasonably good fitness and condition can enjoy a visit to the highlands and the *Enchanted Isles*.

This is a personalized guided trip with your own private guide and vehicle/driver in Quito. At Mashpi Lodge and on the cruise, you can choose from a variety of nature excursions led by on-site expert guides in small groups with other guests.

INTRODUCTION: Ecuador's highlands feature some of the most beautiful countryside vistas in South America. In this majestic region, we encounter fertile rolling hills and a land where time stands still. The tranquility, here at the center of the world, is arrayed with patchwork fields, awe-inspiring glaciated volcanoes, lush cloud forests and centuries-old colonial villages. Handicrafts flourish, including wood carving, leather working, ornament making and intricate weaving. In addition to exceptional cross-cultural opportunities, we find **Mashpi Lodge** offering a state-of-the-art upscale eco-experience in a private reserve home to unique species of flora and fauna.

Quito is a charming city along the Avenue of the Volcanoes as a rising star among South American capitals and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The mainland Andean climate is spring-like year round and just outside the city is a visitor site marking the equators path through the country where you can put a foot in both hemispheres at the same time.

Galápagos National Park straddles the equator 600 miles west of Ecuador's Pacific coast. Undisturbed for centuries and isolated from the mainland, unusual species of birds, plants, reptiles and some mammals developed on the island's rocky, volcanic atolls. Darwin's visit and subsequent studies of the island's flora and fauna in 1835 contributed to the formulation of his theory on the evolution of species and brought this fascinating ecosystem to the world's attention. Ecuador's largest park, was established in 1959 to protect the archipelago's unique environment and wildlife. The landmass consists of nearly 3,000 square miles which is divided between 6 large islands, 12 smaller islands, and over 40 islets. The creation of the Marine Resources Reserve expanded the preserved area to include more than 27,000 sq miles of ocean.

DATE TOURING / HOTELS / MEALS (indicated as B,L,D)

<p>DAY 01 Sun</p>	<p>TO ECUADOR Depart home and arrive this evening to Quito, Ecuador's Andean capital set in a wide valley between rugged volcanic peaks. Meet your friendly Southwind guide at the airport and transfer 20 min to a nearby colonial style country-inn at an elevation of 7,875 ft. Hostería Rincon de Puembo</p>	
<p>DAY 02 Mon</p>	<p>QUITO / ANDEAN CLOUD FOREST / MASHPI LODGE After breakfast, transfer 4 hours (70 miles) to Mashpi Lodge in the evergreen wilds on the western slope of the Andes. The shift in altitude (from 8,500-3,200 ft elev) brings natural diversity as we travel through the dry Pomasqui valley towards the cordillera's western flank, into lush, misty cloud forest to reach Mashpi, a nature sanctuary located in the spectacular Chocó, one of the most celebrated bioregions in the world, known for its record-high endemism. En route we visit the archaeological ruins at Tulipe, said to have belonged to the ancient Yumbo civilization of pre-Inca Quito, set in a magical forested location. We'll taste delicious Ecuadorian appetizers and fresh-brewed coffee prepared by members of the local community before descending into Mashpi Reserve.</p> <p>After settling in, you'll be introduced to the naturalist guides who will briefly speak about the cloud forest and its conservation, the activities offered and helpful tips about what to wear and bring during excursions. Groups are small (up to 8 guests) with an English speaking guide and a native guide from the community.</p> <p>This afternoon's guided nature hike is on the "Cucharillo" trail, an Ecuadorian endemic tree common at Mashpi but otherwise threatened throughout the country. The trail has a few steeper portions, but not too demanding thanks to recycled plastic crates that form steps. At trails end, discover a waterfall and riverbed with beautiful ponds. The excursion takes about 2 hours.</p> <p>Optional 7pm sunset excursion as the forest transforms, the sounds and smells intensify and other senses are awakened. Listen to the evening croaking of nocturnal frogs and incessant buzz of insects. Turn off flashlights to observe sparkling fireflies and feel bats zipping by. On the ground, discover the faint glow of bioluminescent fungi all around. We'll notice the reflection of hundreds of tiny insects. Owls and other nocturnal birds may call into the night, while the rustling of branches above us may mean that we're in the presence of kinkajous, an arboreal mammal, making their way through the trees in search of ripe fruit. Back at the lodge, a delicious dinner is served in the glass-walled dining room. (B,L,D)</p> <p>Mashpi Cloud Forest Lodge – 4 days/ 3 nights (National Geographic Unique Lodges of the World)</p> <p>Special upgrade: As a bonus, Southwind will include a half day Dragonfly Aerial Tram experience with access to a birdwatching platform and scenic areal views while riding in a 4 person gondola with your naturalist guide. This is an optional excursion that is normally extra, but we are including it according to interest.</p>	
		
		

DAY 03 MASHPI LODGE & BIODIVERSITY RESERVE EXPLORATION

Tue

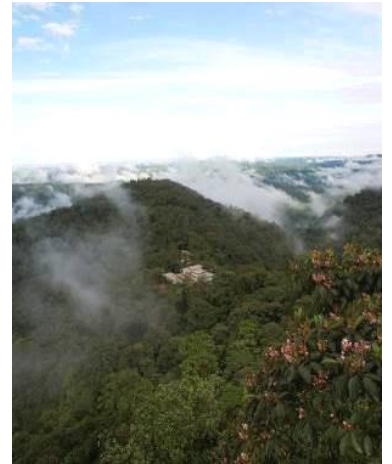
Begin the day with a birding outing and visit to the **Life Center's butterfly house**. We gather for coffee, hot chocolate and biscuits before walking to the Life Center on the lookout for bird flocks colorful tanagers.

We'll hike the "Howler Monkey's trail" crossing primary forest with ancient trees, including the "copal" the most emblematic. At this time of day, the trail buzzes with activity from rare birds such as the Rufous-fronted Wood-quail or the Rufous-crowned Antpitta. Guides are keen on sounds and movement revealing **colorful birds or elusive howler monkeys** while explaining more about the local ecology and medicinal uses of forest plants.

The Life Center offers marvelous views from the comfort of an expansive wooden deck, where wildlife abounds. Identify birds and mammals who visit the fruit feeders. Around 8:00am, enjoy a picnic breakfast on the deck. The center is conceived as a place for learning and discovery, but also a place where guests can disconnect. Explore the life of butterflies, the many species found in the Mashpi area and their metamorphosis from egg, larva, caterpillar, and chrysalis to winged wonder. Discover various species of host plants that butterflies use to lay their eggs on, such as passion flowers, birds of paradise, milk weeds and other species found in the garden. Not far from the Center, is a "tropical orchard" where many varieties of fruit trees and plants are grown, including banana, manioc, cacao, hot chili peppers, coffee and wild raspberries.

We return to the lodge to enjoy some leisure time in the Jacuzzi or a massage at the **Wellness Center**. By mid-afternoon, gather for an afternoon excursion along the Napa Trail, a moderately difficult 2 hour **hike crossing a variety of habitats**. The walk highlights the importance of forest conservation within the Chocó bioregion with scenic beauty and excellent bird watching.

This evening, an optional 30 min lecture sums up the different scientific research projects and hidden wildlife camera footage in the Mashpi forest. (B,L,D)
Mashpi Cloud Forest Lodge



DAY 04 MASHPI LODGE

Wed

Early birds are rewarded by dawn light that lures a variety of fascinating species. Bring a cup of fresh coffee or tea to the terrace to take in the beauty and cacophony of sights and sounds as the forest comes to life. Your guides help spot birds through a telescope. After breakfast, depart to the Sky Bike and **Observation Tower** (a 15 min walk). Looming above the treetops, the Mashpi tower offers views of the protected forest in all its glory. At 162 steps and 100 ft high, this is an ideal site for nature lovers to appreciate the forest's complex structure and the species rich canopy (70% of the forest's biodiversity is found here in the treetops). Nearby, the **aerial sky bicycle** makes for an original and exciting way to explore the canopy up close. Designed for two people, one person pedals the bike along a cable stretched between two points, around 200 mt (655 feet) apart, crossing a gorge and river. This silent, easy-to-use fun activity provides a thrilling vantage point to Mashpi's lush natural world.






Those looking for more exercise have the option to return to the lodge via the San Vicente waterfall trail, a steep hike of about 1 hour requiring good physical condition. Refreshing natural juice and fresh towels await at the lodge. After lunch and a siesta, head to the **Hummingbird Station**. Mashpi boasts a total 32 hummingbird species identified to date, many of which inhabit different altitudinal ranges, with around 19 species considered common at our specially designed feeder station. Observe hummingbirds of all kinds along with toucans and tanagers. The site is located at a natural viewpoint, which, on clear days, provides breathtaking views of the reserve's forested hills. This is a veritable photographer's paradise, regardless of your level of experience. (B,L,D)

Mashpi Cloud Forest Lodge



<p>DAY 05 Thu</p>	<p>MASHPI LODGE / QUITO</p> <p>Optional guided birding early this morning around the lodge in search of feeding flocks and multiple species. After breakfast, depart for the Copal Waterfall, a beautiful 2 hour hike featuring a landscape of moss-covered trees, bromelias and orchids at every corner. The trail ends at a dramatic 150 ft waterfall.</p> <p>Return to the hotel for a nourishing lunch and checkout. Depart for Quito along Ecuador's Avenue of the Volcanoes. Quito is a rising star among South American capitals with narrow cobbled streets, fine eateries, flowered balconies and colonial churches. Time permitting, join your private guide for a brief introductory tour of the city's highlights before settling in at your boutique hotel (elev 9,350 ft) with an ideal location in the center of pedestrian friendly old town Quito. The main plaza (Independence Square) is only a half block away. Cafes, shops are museums are also within walking distance. The hotel features a central atrium for dining with warm natural light and an inviting colonial-style architecture with large arches and interior patios. (B,L)</p> <p>Patio Andaluz Boutique Hotel</p>	 
<p>DAY 06 Fri</p>	<p>QUITO</p> <p>After a leisurely breakfast, meet your guide in the hotel lobby for a private city tour of Quito – a UNESCO World Heritage Site for its whitewashed adobe buildings, historic churches and preserved plazas. Visit the main Plaza de la Independencia, home to the Presidential Palace and nearby La Compañía and San Francisco churches with collections of colonial paintings. We also visit the Casa del Alabado Museum and enjoy lunch at Pims either at Panecillo or Itchimbia Hill with nice views of the valley and surrounding mountains. At a local chocolate workshop learn how Ecuador has risen to the top of world fame for producing award winning chocolate from locally produced cacao - you can try some local treats. Return to your hotel with the evening at leisure to relax and dine in or nearby at one of Quito's fine restaurants. (B,L)</p> <p>Patio Andaluz Boutique Hotel</p>	
<p>DAY 07 Sat</p>	<p>QUITO / MITAD DEL MUNDO</p> <p>After breakfast, join your guide for a drive about an hour north of the capital to Mitad del Mundo, marking the equator's path through the country where you can put a foot in each hemisphere. Nearby, visit the intriguing open air Inti-ñan solar museum with exhibits unique to the geographical location, such as balancing an egg on the head of nail and the Coriolis Effect, demonstrating equal forces only found on the equator. A sun dial not only tells time, but produces a shadow on its south and north face precisely for 6 months and only on both faces during the equinoxes. Exhibits of Ecuador's ethnic groups feature typical clothing, housing styles and local customs. Lunch is included at the nearby Santana Brewery to try craft beers and local dishes before returning to Quito for some leisure time to shop and dine out in old town this evening. (B,L)</p> <p>Patio Andaluz Boutique Hotel</p>	
<p>DAY 08 Sun</p>	<p>QUITO / GALAPAGOS ISLANDS / BEGIN CRUISE ON M/C ENDEMIC</p> <p>After an early breakfast, meet your guide for a private transfer to the airport to check-in for a flight from Quito to Galápagos-Baltra Airport (2 hours). Meet your naturalist guide and transfer with other guests to the port to board the luxurious motor catamaran to begin your cruise through the Galapagos archipelago. Settle in to your spacious modern stateroom with your own private balcony and bathroom.</p>	

	<p>After a safety briefing and lunch onboard, join your naturalist guide for an afternoon visit to Dragon Hill on Santa Cruz Island. Some say the rocky hill got its name because it's shaped like a dragon, others say it's because there are so many land iguanas along the trail (that just a few decades ago were on the brink of extinction). Either way, Dragon Hill is a fun hike along a dusty trail winding through cacti and Palo Santo trees. Look for birds, including flycatchers, warblers and flamingos and pintail ducks in the salty lagoons. This visit is followed by the opportunity to snorkel offshore.</p> <p>Excursion type: nature walk / dry landing / easy (B,L,D) M/C Endemic (or sister catamaran M/C Elite) - 5 day/4 night cruise</p>	
<p>DAY 09 Mon</p>	<p>M/C ENDEMIC CRUISE: SAN CRISTOBAL ISLAND MORNING: Kicker Rock No one seems able to agree what Kicker Rock looks like. This distinctive rock formation off the coast of San Cristobal island is called León Dormido, or "Sleeping Lion" in Spanish, but "Kicker Rock" in English. Depending on how you squint at it, it can be seen as vaguely shaped like a lion or a boot. As one of the archipelago's most iconic features, we sail around it for some incredible photographic opportunities. Lucky visitors may even get a glimpse of rays and sharks swimming just below the surface.</p> <p>Excursion type: Circumnavigation viewing (no landing)</p> <p>Witch Hill This visitor site gets its name from the "pájaro brujo," or witch bird, better known in English as the Vermilion Flycatcher. The site bewitches visitors even without the little red birds: it consists of a white coral sand beach perfect for playing in the sand, kayaking or snorkeling. You can snorkel or kayak in the gentle surf off the beach or take a zodiac ride among intriguing rock formations.</p> <p>Excursion type: nature hike, snorkeling, kayaking / wet landing / easy</p> <p>AFTERNOON: Sea Lion Island This site lives up to its name! A favored snorkeling spot, Isla Lobos is a long islet off of San Cristobal Island. The calm channel is perfect for beginning snorkelers. The island is home to a large colony of sea lions who sometimes splash into the calm bay and frolic with swimmers and snorkelers. It's also a great place to practice your kayak skills! Blue-footed boobies, marine iguanas and great frigate birds are fun to watch here. (B,L,D)</p> <p>Excursion type: hike, photography, snorkeling / dry landing / easy-moderate M/C Endemic</p>	  
<p>DAY 10 Tue</p>	<p>M/C ENDEMIC CRUISE: ESPAÑOLA ISLAND MORNING: Gardner Bay A gorgeous white-sand beach greets visitors. You can simply lounge and catch some sun alongside sleeping sea lions or take a stroll down the beach among bright orange-reddish Sally Lightfoot crabs and prehistoric looking marine iguanas as well as wading birds. The gentle surf here may lure you into the water to snorkel or float among the waves.</p> <p>Islets Osborn & Gardner One of the best snorkeling spots in all of Galapagos, Osborn Islet is known for tranquil waters and abundant sea life. Sea lions frolic with snorkelers while brilliant parrot fish nip at the coral on the sea bed and sea turtles swim by. Nearby, Gardner Islet is also home to a sea lion colony. These islets are near each other so guides may decide which to go to see depending on conditions.</p> <p>Excursion type: Snorkeling, zodiac ride, kayak, short hike / wet landing / easy</p>	

	<p>AFTERNOON: Suarez Point An astounding visitor site, Punta Suarez is a personal favorite of many veteran Galapagos guides. It is the only place in all of the islands for a chance to see the majestic Waved Albatross. The winged giants migrate away from Española between January and April, but are found here the rest of the year. Suarez Point is also home to Nazca Boobys, Masked & Blue-footed Boobys, Red-billed Tropic Birds, marine iguanas, the endemic Hood mockingbird and more. Excursion type: nature hike (1.9 mi) / dry landing / moderate (B,L,D) M/C Endemic</p>	
<p>DAY 11 Wed</p>	<p>M/C ENDEMIC CRUISE: SANTA FE ISLAND & SANTA CRUZ ISLAND MORNING: Isla Santa Fe Santa Fe is a small island with a memorable trail winding its way through a forest of tall, prickly cacti. The cacti are the preferred food of a thriving population of endemic Land Iguanas. The Santa Fe rice rat, one of the few mammals in the islands, is also found here, although the elusive rodent is seldom seen. The native population of giant tortoises on Santa Fe was wiped out by whalers over a century ago, but in 2015 some Española tortoises were released back onto the island. It is possible to go snorkeling and kayaking after the hike. Excursion type: nature hike, snorkeling / dry landing / moderate</p> <p>AFTERNOON: Charles Darwin Station/Fausto Llerena Breeding Center The breeding center is home to hundreds of baby tortoises of different subspecies being raised until they are large enough to be released. Over the years, thousands of tortoises have been released into their natural habitats. Here, visitors can learn all about the tortoises and other conservation programs run by the prestigious Charles Darwin Foundation. The famed Lonesome George tortoise is found here, he died in 2012, but his legend and conservation story lives in an exhibit at the center. (B,L,D) Excursion type: Walk through center & village / dry landing / easy M/C Endemic</p>	 
<p>DAY 12 Thu</p>	<p>M/C ENDEMIC CRUISE / SOUTH PLAZA ISLAND / DEPARTURE Our final excursion is to South Plaza, a low, rocky island populated by cacti and a healthy population of land iguanas waiting for a prickly pear to fall from the branches. This favorite spot among visitors to Galapagos is home to the sesuvium plant, which is bright red at certain times of the year. This gives the site an otherworldly look and makes it one of the most picturesque sites in the archipelago. As you hike, look for boobys diving for fish offshore! Excursion type: nature walk / dry landing / easy</p> <p>Back onboard, as the ship navigates back to the port, we'll make final departure preparations and say farewell to the crew. We disembark with a short transfer to the Baltra airport with assistance checking in for the return flight to the mainland. Fly from Galápagos (Baltra) to Quito (1 stop in Guayaquil en route). Reception by your local guide and transfer to the nearby community of Tumbaco to relax during the layover at the peaceful grounds of Rukka Lodge. You can dine among several open-air eateries at the adjoining Garden House and relax by the pool. Your guide will pick you up later this evening and transfer you to the Quito airport with check-in assistance for your overnight flight home. (B)</p>	 
<p>DAY 13 Fri</p>	<p>ARRIVE HOME Arrive in your gateway city this morning, clear customs and make onward connections home.</p>	

Meals: B=breakfast; L=lunch; D=dinner. If a meal is not indicated above, you have flexibility to dine out at your leisure.

OPTIONAL LONGER OR SHORTER TRIPS: For travelers with less time, we can take out 1 night from Quito. If you have more time, consider a 3 night pre-extension to the southern city of [Cuenca and the Inca site of Ingapirca](#). For those interested in the [Amazon rainforest](#), a 3 night stay at Sacha Lodge can be arranged or a 3 night nature cruise on the Anakonda riverboat. For avid hikers, we can plan 2-3 nights in the Riobamba/Chimborazo Volcano area with a stopover in the hot springs town of Baños beneath the active Tungurahua Volcano.

NEXT STEP: Please contact Tom Damon to setup a custom planning phone call. With your feedback on the destinations, activities and accommodations in this sample itinerary, Southwind will create a custom proposal tailored to your travel style, goals, dates and budget. Your proposal will provide Land Cost pricing and more details. Accommodations shown in this sample itinerary are in the 4-5 star category with superior or preferential rooms with views. Optional upgrades to exclusive top tier hotels can be provided during the planning. Note that space or room types cannot be guaranteed until a design fee or deposit is paid and Southwind receives confirmation. It will help to finalize plans at your soonest convenience for best selection. For high season or holiday dates, we are able to place a complimentary hold with a design fee to help secure space while we fine tune your itinerary.

We look forward to having you travel with us in Ecuador & the Galápagos Islands!

For more information please contact your personal travel planner:
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