

The Galapagos Islands – A one-week cruise

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

- Day 1** Fly Quito
-
- Day 2** Quito
-
- Day 3** Fly Galapagos; transfer Cachalote
-
- Day 4/9** Galapagos Islands
-
- Day 10** Fly Quito
-
- Day 11** Antisana/Otavalo
-
- Day 12** Depart Quito
-
- Day 13** Arrive UK
-

Dates and Prices

See www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code ECU12) or the current Naturetrek brochure

Focus

Natural History

Grading

A. Generally gentle day walks only

Highlights

- Outstanding Galápagos-based guides – the best on the islands and superb naturalists!
- Cruise with a small group of up to 16 like-minded wildlife enthusiasts
- 8 cabined vessel, air-conditioned and en suite
- Wonderful crews ensure a convivial, informal and fun atmosphere on board
- We focus on the whole Galápagos experience



From top: Land Iguana, Blue-footed Booby, Magnificent Frigatebird



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Introduction

The Galapagos Islands form a volcanic archipelago straddling the equator some 960 kilometres off the coast of Ecuador. They consist of volcanic peaks, strange lava fields, beautiful sandy bays, and clear seas. Their natural history is outstanding, and much of it is endemic. There are Giant Tortoises, prehistoric-looking Land and Marine Iguanas, and countless breeding seabirds. Most appealing of all is the 'tame' and obliging nature of the islands' extraordinary wildlife.

For nearly 30 years Naturetrek groups have been visiting this wonderful and unique oceanic archipelago in search of its very special wildlife. Each year we charter two wonderful motor-yachts (Cachalote, as on this itinerary, and Beluga) to cruise slowly around these fabled islands which straddle the equator off the coast of Ecuador. Our groups take in the extraordinary wildlife, stunning volcanic landscapes, endemic birds, plants and reptiles, crystal clear seas and snorkelling opportunities. Particularly memorable moments include swimming with Galápagos Penguins and playful Galápagos Sea Lions, visiting a Giant Tortoise meadow in the highlands of Santa Cruz, Blue-footed Booby and Waved Albatross breeding colonies and a chance encounter with a pod of Orcas or a Sei Whale. It really is a magical place!

Itinerary

Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

In flight

We leave London in the morning, usually on KLM's service to Quito, via Amsterdam. We will arrive in Quito in the late afternoon and transfer to our comfortable hotel for a good nights' rest.

We try to be flexible with flights; regional flights with KLM are also generally available from Bristol, Birmingham, Manchester, Newcastle and Norwich. Please state your preference upon booking. Iberia also fly to Quito via Madrid and Avianca fly overnight to Bogota from Heathrow. This latter route means leaving Heathrow on 'day 0' and a mid-morning arrival in Quito on Day 1.

We are also able to offer an alternative to the high altitude of Quito by flying to Guayaquil. If this is of interest to you, please let us know upon booking.

Day 2

Quito

We will have the whole day in Quito, which is probably the most attractive of South America's colonial capitals. The city is located in a hollow at the foot of the volcano Pichincha. On a clear day Andean peaks can be seen towering around the city, and the sun is bright and strong. The climate is delightful: the name 'Quito' means 'Eternal Spring', or 'Place of the Hummingbirds' in the ancient language of Quechua. Standing at 9,000 feet, Quito is the second highest capital in the world so we would be sensible not to undertake anything too strenuous on our first day. It is a small capital

by South American standards and it is relatively easy to wander around the streets of the colonial city without getting hopelessly lost or put off by the distances involved.

After a leisurely breakfast, our city tour this morning will start at around 9am when we board our tour bus. Our first stop is usually at La Basilica Nacional, a wonderful example of a 20th century neo-gothic church. Next, the bus we will take us south towards the Plaza de la Independencia, where we will start our walking tour. Around this main square in the heart of Quito, we will see the Presidential Palace, The City Hall, The Archbishop's Palace and the Metropolitan Cathedral. The latter is now an important museum of religious art and history. Here we have the remains of Ecuador's most important independence hero, the field marshal Antonio Jose de Sucre. At the same plaza, we will have the option to visit the Presidential Palace balcony, a great spot from which to take pictures of the plaza. We will continue our walk through the Metropolitan Cultural Center, enjoying different exhibitions depending on the time of year. We visit the Great Jesuit Complex and one of the most beautiful churches in Latin America, the "Golden Church", La Compañía de Jesus. Next we walk to Plaza San Francisco. This Franciscan church and convent offer a real mixture of architectural styles of the 16th century. We will have a little free time to wander around or see 'El Tianguéz' – an open air market in the old town with products from different indigenous communities of Ecuador. Back in the tour bus, we will go to Panecillo Hill at 3,000 meters above sea level, with amazing views of Quito. After the tour finishes, there is the option to stay on for lunch in the old town and continue to explore the wonders that Quito has to offer to the visitor. After a short safety briefing for those who prefer to stay in the old town, our bus will start the ride back to the hotel located on the other side of Quito in the modern town. The afternoon is free for relaxation.

Day 3

Fly Galapagos

During the early morning we will transfer to Quito airport for our flight to **Baltra** in the Galápagos Islands. The flight is usually routed via Guayaquil, where we transit through the quarantine-type procedures which aim to prevent non-native species from crossing over from the mainland to the islands. We fly on out over the Pacific to Baltra where we collect our baggage and meet our Galapagos-based tour leader. Having collected our baggage, we'll likely see our first Small Ground Finches and Yellow Warblers pecking in and around the terminal building. Next, we board a small ferry for the short distance over the Itabaca Channel to **Santa Cruz**. In the channel and around and about we may see our first Blue-footed Boobies, Brown Pelicans, Magnificent Frigatebirds and Elliot's Storm Petrels.

Next we will have to sort our luggage, extracting sun huts, sun cream and, if not already on, outdoor footwear together with waterproofs (just in case). The main baggage will be sent off to the Cachalote, our schooner, while we drive off towards the highlands of Santa Cruz, watching the scenery changing rapidly from dry scrub through to extensive forest, with ferns and orchids evident at certain times of the year. Eventually we draw up to a farm for lunch and then some time exploring the surrounding open grassland, looking for Santa Cruz Giant Tortoises which are common on the approach to the farm, and almost everywhere you care to look. After a very pleasant lunch (usually roast chicken), a short walk usually reveals hundreds of Small Ground Finches and the odd Warbler Finch. A small pond sometimes holds Common Gallinules (Moorhens!) and White-cheeked Pintail.

We'll also likely see our first Galapagos Mockingbirds and Galapagos Flycatchers. After spending some unforgettable time with the enigmatic Giant Tortoises, we continued our drive south to Puerto Ayora, the main town on the Galapagos, and a visit to the Charles Darwin Research Station and the Giant Tortoise Breeding Project. In addition to the fascinating Giant Tortoise work, there are enclosures with several large Land Iguanas, and we will also see Painted Locusts, West and Central Lava Lizards, and watch Cactus Finches feeding on the flowers of their favourite food - cacti.

Following this visit to the Charles Darwin Station we will have some free time for a slow amble through the town and down to the jetty where we meet up with the Pangas (zodiacs) that will transport us to the Cachalote. This is one of the few opportunities we'll have to see the locals go about their daily lives and they'll be evidence of the artisanal local fishing industry, together with attendant Lava Gulls, Brown Pelicans and Magnificent Frigatebirds darting in for scraps. At about 1830 we embark Cachalote to settle in, sort out our baggage and have dinner, before an early night ahead of an early morning sailing to Plazas tomorrow morning.

Day 4

Plazas/Santa Fe

Arriving at **Plazas** in the early morning, a jetty ensures a comfortable landing on this small island which has been peculiarly tilted by geological events. Unfortunately, we may have to chase some Galapagos Sea Lions off the jetty as they often find it a perfect spot for basking in the morning sunshine! The lower shore holds a dense breeding colony of sea lions, which over millennia have worn down the rock to the smooth texture of polished marble. The bare, open ground is dotted with bright red Sesuvium plants and giant cacti. The island supports a dense population of about 300 Galapagos Land Iguanas, which dig burrows in the soft sand, and their confiding nature allows them to be easily photographed. At the upper end of the island, sheer cliffs rise above the sea. Red-billed Tropicbirds, Galapagos Shearwaters, Brown Noddies, Red-billed Tropicbirds and Swallow-tailed Gulls can be seen cruising above the cliffs. A colony of bachelor sea lions awaits us on the cliff top! The breeding ecology of these huge beasts is fascinating: a fully grown sea lion will try to secure a harem of females on the island's lower shores, but will soon be ousted by a fresh male. He is then forced to take a rest in the bachelors' colony, which also contains those males too old or young to hold territory.

Back on Cachalote, we will up anchor and set a course south-east to **Santa Fe**. This will be our first opportunity to chill out and watch the world go by from the upper deck. En route we'll be keeping an eye out for Oceanic Sunfish, Galapagos Petrels and both Elliot's and Galapagos Storm Petrels. On arrival at Santa Fe we anchor outside the volcanic reef, relax, and then embark on the first of several snorkelling expeditions. Inside the reef the waters are usually calm and inviting, allowing us to get to grips with a wealth of fish species, including our first encounters with Whitetip Reef Sharks.

Later in the afternoon, we will disembark for our first wet beach landing amongst Galapagos Sealions and feeding Wandering Tattler and perhaps other waders. A gorgeous sandy beach here leads off into giant *Opuntia* cactus forest. Santa Fe Land Iguanas are common, in addition to Lava Lizards and showy Marine Iguanas. Back onboard Cachalote for dinner, we have a nocturnal sailing tonight to San Cristobal.

Day 5

San Cristobal

Our captain will determine the hours of sailing but generally, come dawn, we'll be anchored in Cerro Brujo off **San Cristobal** and, after a hearty breakfast, it will be off to the beautiful beach to be greeted by the usual Galapagos Sealions. Chatham Mockingbirds should also be quickly evident. A gentle beach walk usually reveals American Oystercatchers and Yellow Warblers, and precedes a snorkelling sessions from the beach amongst a myriad fish species.

We then re-embark for the sail down the island's north coast to Puerto Baquerizo Moreno. From here, we take a bus up into the highlands of the island and to the lagoon of El Junco. The lagoon is the only fresh water reservoir in Galapagos and wonderful views can be enjoyed from its 700m high viewpoint.

Day 6

Espanola

Down to the south lies **Española** (Hood), a spectacular island and the oldest in the archipelago.

We usually visit Gardner Bay in the morning, an exquisite and unspoilt white-sand bay in the north of the island. Raucous and fearless Hood Mockingbirds will greet us here, looking for titbits and a gulp of bottled water (please resist any temptation to provide hand-outs!), along with several Galapagos Hawks, Yellow-crowned Night Herons and Galapagos Flycatchers. Just offshore, Isote Gardner and Isote Osborn are snorkeling sites where we will see an abundance of tropical fish along with odd reef sharks and turtles.

At Punta Suarez, the western-most point of Espanola and the focal point of our afternoon visit, colonies of Galápagos Sea lions line the rocky beach and we will also find large numbers of a particularly colourful form of Marine Iguana. We walk along a cliff-top through colonies of Blue-footed and Nazca Boobies, which may have chicks in season and we stand a good chance of seeing more Galápagos Hawks here. Other land birds include three species of Darwin's Finch, Galápagos Dove, Yellow Warbler and the once again the fearless Hood Mockingbird (which is endemic to the island). The latter species is renowned for its close approach, and has even been known to perch on birdwatchers' tripods! Between June and December, we arrive at a colony of Waved Albatross, which breed nowhere else in the world; they may have young chicks, looking like grey feather dusters! At the far side of the island we reach a cliff, where Swallow-tailed Gulls nest and we may see Red-billed Tropicbirds and shearwaters. A dramatic blow-hole adds to the interest and charm of one of the most fascinating of all the Galápagos Islands.

Day 7

Floreana

Floreana with its relatively flat topography and rare supply of fresh water, was once a favourite haunt of pirates, whalers and buccaneers. It is the only island to boast a freshwater spring, but its human inhabitants are few. At Punta Cormorant we will visit a lagoon inhabited by Greater Flamingoes, which sometimes breed here, and where other coastal birds include White-cheeked Pintail, Black-necked Stilt, Brown Pelican and various waders. Some interesting plants can be found along the shores of the lagoon, including the endemic Cut-leaf Daisy and Scalesia. At the far end

of the walk is a fine white sand beach where rays, turtles and sharks are often seen. After the walk we may also visit Devil's Crown to snorkel in and around this shallow flooded crater which has some of the best snorkelling in the archipelago, with many fish, turtles and reef sharks often present.

After lunch we land at Post Office Bay to see the famous post box. We sort through the piles of postcards to see if there are any which we can pick up and deliver. We also leave our own cache for the next passing boat!

Next we arrive at the small town and port of Puerto Velasco Ibarra, where we board our converted truck for a journey through very dry and dusty countryside, up to the green and verdant Asilo de la Paz. Our main quest here is Medium Tree Finch, found only on Floreana.

Day 8

Santa Cruz/Santiago

After a fairly long overnight sea crossing, we arrive on the north-west coast of **Santa Cruz** for dawn. Our morning activity takes us to Cerro Dragon, a walk which usually reveals several different waders and Darwin's finches. The post-walk snorkelling can often include Galapagos Penguins. A real highlight is watching these endearing birds "flying" underwater.

After lunch it is up with the anchor, and a short cruise across to Sullivan Bay on **Santiago Island**. Buccaneer Cove is a sheltered bay famed for its association with British pirates, and fragments of old pottery can easily be found. The volcanic geology is fascinating here, and the vegetation resembles the thorn scrub of the African Savannah. Darwin's finches, Galápagos Doves, Galápagos Hawks and Painted Locusts are the special attractions. At Puerto Egas we will visit the Galápagos Fur Seal 'grottos'. Galápagos Sea lions also occur here, so this will be a test to your skill at telling these two species apart! Also along the shore we will see Marine Iguanas, crabs and coastal birds such as Whimbrel, Wandering Tattler, American Oystercatcher and Black-bellied Plover. Espumilla beach has a long, sandy, but wave-swept shore. Behind it is a mangrove thicket and a beautiful lagoon, which sometimes dries out. Flamingoes are sometimes found here, together with White-cheeked Pintail, Black-necked Stilt and numerous migratory waders. Ghost and Fiddler Crabs haunt the muddy shores, whilst Vermillion Flycatchers chase insects amongst the tangle of mangrove trees. The whole island holds great interest for the geologist and the walks lead through un-eroded black lava, which resulted from eruptions 100 years ago. We'll see examples of pahoehoe lava, lave tubes and even lava moulds of destroyed trees.

Back on board Cachalote, we set off for the long voyage north to Genovesa.

Day 9

Genovesa

We'll awake on the approach to **Genovesa** or perhaps at anchor inside the caldera. Red-footed Boobies, which nest on this island in numbers, will likely be perched on the rigging. The sheer cliffs surrounding our anchorage hold Great Frigatebirds, Nazca Boobies and Swallow-tailed Gulls. We alight at El Barranco, or Prince Philip Steps (not as hard as it looks at first glance!), and we'll encounter a tree-nesting Red-footed Booby colony at the top of the natural rock staircase. Our walk will lead us through a Great Frigatebird nesting colony and we should see Short-eared Owls,

which prey here upon the thousands of crevice-nesting Wedge-rumped Storm-Petrels. Sharp-beaked Ground Finches are common here.

Before lunch the more confident swimmers can snorkel off the cliffs. The depth plummets off here so it is not for the faint-hearted. It is one of the very few spots in Galapagos where it is possible to snorkel with a chance of seeing Hammerheads.

After lunch we alight with a wet landing on a pristine white sandy beach called Darwin's Bay. A lovely walk here reveals Galapagos Sea Lions, Land Iguanas, Great Frigatebirds, several species of waders, Red-footed Boobies, including white-morph adults, and close up views of Large Ground Finches.

We next up anchor for our voyage south, crossing back over the equator while enjoying the seabirds and sunshine up on deck. Genovesa is a magical island!

Day 10

Santa Cruz/Quito

Black Turtle Cove is a mangrove lagoon on the north shore of Santa Cruz Island. We anchor at the entrance to the cove and enter the area in our panga. In the smaller and most interesting areas of the cove it is prohibited to use a motor so we paddle the dinghy for a wonderfully quiet journey through this beautiful and unique area.

There are a number of small 'secret' passageways through which our guide will take us in search of large schools of Golden Rays, Green Sea Turtles, White-tipped Sharks, Galapagos Sharks, Lava Herons, Yellow Warblers and a variety of other species.

Then it's a sad farewell to our crew and guide, before check-in formalities for the flight back to Quito. Upon arrival in the capital we'll be greeted again by our friendly guides and transported the short distance to a new hotel positioned conveniently close to the airport.

Day 11

Antisana/Otavalo

We take the opportunity today to show you some of the best of mainland Ecuador, offering a choice between high-altitude birding at Antisana and a day at the colourful Indian market town of Otavalo.

Option 1

Leaving Quito early this morning we drive to the outskirts of Quito and up to the high slopes of Antisana. Permanently adorned with snow, this is one of the highest active volcanoes in the world at 18,714 feet. The scenery is most impressive, with Chimborazo, higher but dormant, visible to the south. We will take a few easy walks to look for the varied birdlife (including tanagers, hummingbirds, ibis and seed-eaters) before returning to Quito in the evening. A period of time today will be spent at close to 4,000 metres altitude, although we won't be reaching the glaciers and snowline (which provides for stunning scenery if the weather is clear). Lunch is a sit-down affair in a mountain refuge.

Option 2

After breakfast in our hotel we head north on the Pan Americana to the market town of Otavalo, 2½ hours away. Otavalo has what is considered to be one of the best indigenous markets in South America. The variety and quality of the textiles, not to mention the value-for-money prices, are staggering. We will have a leisurely morning browsing around the market before taking lunch in one of the nearby haciendas. In the afternoon we will explore the surrounding area, Indian villages and the beautiful lake, Lago de San Pablo, at the foot of the Volcano Imbabura.

Option 1 will appeal to birdwatchers but just a word of warning. It is difficult to predict how you will react to the altitude; some people in the past have struggled due to the thin air. It is an excellent site for many of the high-altitude species and the scenery is spectacular on the days that the mountain remains free from cloud.

Option 2 will be more enjoyable for non-birders and those with more general interests.

Please note that we'll need your decision in plenty of time before travelling.

Day 12

In flight

After a free day in Quito we will transfer to the airport in the mid-afternoon for evening departures.

Day 13

In flight

We are due back in the UK by early evening.

Cachalote

Chartering our own small vessel provides a freedom, flexibility and group independence essential to the specialist nature of this holiday. However, to a greater or lesser extent, you will hear the engine on a small vessel. If this will upset you, please take the necessary precautions (ear plugs) or choose to cruise on board a big boat. Note that many people actually find the engine noise and vibration during navigation soporific. Others find that the engine noise disturbs their sleep. The service that we receive from Cachalote's crew is first-class, and the guide the best there is. Each cabin is air-conditioned with its own en suite loo, shower and wash basin. Communal areas on the boat (dining room/bar) are also air-conditioned. The cabins are small though, with very limited storage space. This is not usually a problem, as people only go below deck to wash, brush up and sleep! Cachalote's deck areas are spacious and ideal for scanning for seabirds and cetaceans, as well as for taking in the coastal scenery and topping up the tan (although note that the equatorial sun is fierce – be sure to wear a high factor sun-cream, sun hats, sunglasses etc.).

I suffer from motion sickness. Will I enjoy a cruise in the Galápagos?

The sea is generally very calm around the islands, and the overwhelming majority of clients, whether or not they are previous sufferers of motion sickness, 'find their sea legs' after a couple of days on board. If you suffer from sea sickness then we suggest you consider the period between January

and March when the sea is at its calmest, rather than August when there is generally more lateral roll.

Is tourism damaging the islands? Will I see many other boats/tourists?

Tourism is well organised and managed by the park authorities and brings valuable revenue which is used for conservation and research projects by the various authorities who have a say in running the islands. With regard to the fragile ecology of the area there are less than 60 landing sites in the whole National Park, and visitor numbers (in total and to each individual site at any one time) are strictly controlled. Your guide and boat crew will ensure that the many park rules and regulations are adhered to. Whilst the fearlessness of the wildlife is renowned, you are not allowed to touch animals or birds in any way, and once on land there are marked trails which must not be deviated from. Naturetrek groups are typically the first to disembark in the mornings at popular landing sites, ensuring that we have the best of the peace and quiet before other groups land. Even at the popular landing sites in the middle of the archipelago, it is unusual to see more than about 10 boats at any given site on any day.

Do I need to be fit?

You need to be mobile but not necessarily fit. There are guides who will assist with embarking and disembarking if you need help, and none of the excursions are strenuous. The longest island walk (apart from the hike to Sierra Negra/Alcedo) is about two miles, and this is over the course of three hours or more. Many paths are rocky and uneven and we occasionally walk on rough lava fields. Many people find walking poles useful or essential. To make the absolute most of a Galapagos cruise you should therefore have a good sense of balance and certain nimbleness; otherwise, during the trickier landings you are free to remain on board the boat to relax.

Can I dive?

The marine ecosystem of the Galápagos is richly diverse and swimming and snorkelling in this environment offers possibilities of seeing turtles, sharks, penguins, many varieties of fish, sea lions and dolphins, to name but a few. Indeed, the snorkelling, which is available on most days, is one of the highlights of a visit to Galápagos. Diving is highly specialised in Galápagos. Underwater visibility is variable, the water is cold and strong currents and drops offs complicate matters. If you wish to dive, therefore, and have the relevant experience, you should book on a dedicated diving cruise where dive masters are employed to dedicate the required time to detailed briefs on dive sites and safety.

Clothing

Please inspect the separate clothing list, sent to you on booking, thoroughly.

Additional expenses

All accommodation and meals are included, except for lunches and dinners in Quito. Allow £50+ worth of US Dollars.

Regretfully an increasing and varied number of local taxes are charged to the individual by local Ecuadorian government departments. As these are forever changing, we do not include such taxes in the cost of our Galápagos holidays. All these taxes are charged in US Dollars and are currently as follows:

Tourist tax on entry to the Galápagos is US \$100.

It would also be wise to allow a minimum of US \$150 per person for tips to your local guides throughout the tour.



Images clockwise from top left: Cachalote, Deck view, Cabin, Salon, Bridge

Amazon Extension – Sacha Lodge

Cost

£1,095

Single room supplement

£295

Sacha Lodge is one of the best rainforest lodges in the world. It is a wonderful place to stay and experience the Amazon rainforest. The birdwatching is excellent and there is a good chance of seeing some primates and other species of mammal.

Day 12

Friday

To Sacha

Our flight to the Oriente departs Mariscal Sucre Airport in Quito mid-morning. A 45-minute flight takes us over the Andes and down to the port town of Coca, properly named Puerto Francisco de Orellana, after the discoverer of the Ecuadorian Amazon. The hot, humid jungle air will hit us as we step from the plane and we will be taken down to the docks to a covered motorised canoe for the 2½ hour, 50-mile journey downstream to Sacha. The River Napo is Ecuador's principal Amazon tributary and at this point it is about a third of a mile wide. Its waters are sediment-rich and during the dry season huge sandy beaches are exposed. We will look for various herons, kingfishers and birds of prey as we continue downstream.

Upon arrival at Sacha's 3,200-acre reserve we will take our first walk along a raised boardwalk through dense flooded palm forest where several species of monkey are often seen. The path leads to the ancient blackwater oxbow lake of Pilchicocha, where traditional dugout canoes await to take us across to the far side of the lake where the lodge materialises out of the jungle at the last possible moment. After a welcome drink we will do some birdwatching around the lodge before sunset. The swampy land around Pilchicocha supports a large group of Hoatzin, a strange Archaeopteryx-type bird, plus Smooth-billed Ani, Red-capped Cardinal, Black-capped Donacobius and many more.

After a delicious buffet meal we will retire to bed in comfortable cabins with the sounds of the rainforest echoing around us.

Days 13-14

Saturday & Sunday

Sacha Lodge

The highlights of the lodge are many. An unforgettable morning or afternoon will be spent in Sacha's 43-metre canopy tower. This amazing structure is constructed around a giant kapok tree and affords splendid views of the surrounding rainforest canopy. Toucans, tanagers, flycatchers and raptors abound, as well as many highly sought-after canopy-dwelling species such as Purple-throated and Spangled Cotinga, White-browed Purpletuft, Amazonian Umbrellabird and Dugand's Antwren. With

some luck, Red Howler Monkeys, Squirrel Monkeys and Three-toed Sloth may also be seen from the tower.

In 2004, in addition to the existing canopy tower, two new extravagant canopy towers, linked by an amazing canopy walkway were built.

Sacha has an extensive trail system providing challenging inner-forest birdwatching for antbirds, foliage gleaners, manakins and woodcreepers. All our time will be spent in the company of one of the lodge's native Quichua guides; it is fascinating to learn about the medicinal uses of many of the forest plants, the local beliefs and customs as well as the ecology and fragility of the rainforest ecosystem.

In addition we can arrange, weather-dependending, an early-morning trip to a nearby parrot-lick to observe hundreds of parrots and parakeets eating clay on the banks of the Napo. The islands in the Napo have their own special avifauna with spinetails, flycatchers and, with luck, Castlenau's Antshrike and Grey-breasted Crake.

Sacha also has Ecuador's largest butterfly farm. The farm exports pupae to butterfly houses and educational centres around the world and we will spend an afternoon in the 'flying area' admiring the butterflies and taking advantage of the photographic opportunities. A night walk in the forest is a whole new experience again and we shall also take to the waters of Pilchicocha at night to search for the Spectacled Caiman.

Day 15

Monday

To Quito

One final walk along the boardwalk through the flooded palm forest will bring us back out to the River Napo for our journey upstream to Coca. Our flight to Quito departs late morning and we should be back at a guesthouse in Quito by early afternoon for a coffee, a chance to freshen up and some light birding in the garden. Later on we transfer back to the airport to check in for our flight back to Europe.

Day 16

Tuesday

In flight

We arrive in the UK during the early evening.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call

us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.

Please note that our Galápagos departures tend to book up a long time in advance. Please book as early as possible to avoid disappointment.

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Panga ride to the landing on Espanola