

## **“Mother Nature’s Finest – The Galapagos and Amazon Rainforest”**

### **Quito, Galapagos Islands, Coca, Napo Amazon Region**

**May 5 – 12, 2019**

*“Hence, in space and time, we seem to be brought near to the great fact that mystery of mysteries-the first appearance of the new beings on earth.” - Charles Darwin 1835*

Come sail away with AFS to commune with nature in its purest form. Over 9 days, you'll witness extreme diversity of nature's wonders by water and by land as we explore the best of Ecuador! This special small-group exhilarating adventure combines 2 of the world's most intriguing destinations – the World According to Darwin in the Galapagos Archipelago and the serene beauty deep in the Amazon Rainforest with the Kichwa people. FYI, Ecuador is considered the world's most biodiverse country per sq. mile. I love it for its affordability (currency USD), no visa and your air is easy roundtrip - just 6 hours away. All our past groups loved it and many AFSers begging now for these two bucket list experiences!

After Quito, we fly to the pristine Galapagos, preserved as a renowned UNESCO World Heritage Site. Boat based trips are the way to see Galapagos Islands and to sustain its fragile ecosystem. You'll love our magnificent sailing vessel with all meals and shore excursions included. Enjoy rides on zodiacs, dinghies, kayaks and dugout canoes throughout. May is the best time to visit for its weather and it's when the green sea turtles lay their eggs which draws more birdlife.

You can search other Galapagos or Amazon trips but not with the **AFS Difference...**

- We add 3 days in the mysterious world of the Amazon. This is the real deal jungle, authentic as it can get with our cultural immersion at Napo Lodge with the indigenous natives as well as the adventurous activities.
- We include 2 nights in delightful Quito touring its colonial Spanish Old Town.
- We go farther. Each Galapagos island is an adventurers' paradise. We sail to the best parts beyond where tourist masses go to visit islands that include red-footed boobies, seahorses and unique equatorial penguins! (All the islands are home to century old tortoises, flightless cormorants, marine iguanas, orange sally lightfoot crabs, frigate birds, blue footed boobies, reef sharks, huge rays, sea lions and much more.)

Crave fun? Mind your step. The fearless animals here won't move so you can get up close and personal with wildlife in both the Galapagos and especially the Amazon. Snorkel with playful sea lions in crystal-clear waters. Maybe swim alongside juvenile sharks, penguins and sea turtles along the shores. Visit a breeding center for giant tortoises. Hike a volcano on Bartolome. Get your best panoramic photos at San Cristóbal. The islands of South Plaza and North Seymour will leave you spellbound. Then we change environs for jaguars, tapirs, monkeys, sloths, toucans to macaws, parrots and giant otters.

High demand now for both Galapagos and Amazon means prices will continue to rise so now is the time to deposit and our one-time AFS vacay has it all! Witness evolution in two of the world's most pristine ecosystems. Join us to relax, discover and disconnect in the world's last true wildlife sanctuaries for a journey you'll never forget.

### **Our Glorious AFS Itinerary**

(May 4 – Perhaps you may want to go early to explore Ecuador. Air details will come in Trip Tips to your email.)

#### **May 5 – Arrive Ecuador**

Arrive in Quito, Ecuador and check into beautiful Wyndham Quito Airport Hotel with all amenities. . You'll have free time to explore what was the first city to be declared an UNESCO site because of its exquisite Spanish Architecture. Locals say they can “touch the sky” with the city's breathtaking height in the Andes. Relax and prepare for the epic journey you'll very soon

make through the Galapagos Islands.

Overnight: Wyndham Quito Airport Hotel

### **May 6 – Galapagos** **B/L/D**

After breakfast, or guide escorts to airport for check in. We'll fly to Baltra Island, our point of embarkation for our Galapagos adventure.

We board the Galapagos Legend, a boutique luxury cruise boat that accommodates just 100 passengers. No need to worry about seasickness on this smaller, more intimate vessel. Newly refurbished, the Legend has wide open decks where you can for better observation of this fascinating set of islands. Enjoy the spa, sun deck, pool, casino and piano lounge. They provide an opportunity to relax and socialize following a day of exhilarating excursions by some of the best guides in the islands. Their evening lectures are so interesting. The food aboard the Legend is legendary on its own and is included along with the excursions. All water equipment provided.

While enjoying our orientation lunch, the Legend will cruise through tranquil waters of the Galapagos seas to the iconic **Bartolomé Island**. This is probably the most photographed of all of the islands. You may recognize it from movies such as "Master and Commander." Here, we climb the lava rock to the lookout point and snap some photos of unmistakable Galapagos beauty with the famed Pinnacle Rock in the backdrop. Looking down at the landscape, it will appear more lunar than earthly. You'll see why this is the favorite stop in the islands because of the views and the golden sandy beaches, sally light-foot crabs, lava herons and giant rays. This is the only island home to the home to adorable **Galapagos penguins!**

We also will enjoy snorkeling in some of the most wildlife rich waters of any of the Galapagos' 13 islands. (Snorkel gear is provided by the Legend.) Bartolomé's waters are home to green sea turtles, rays, octopi, enormous colorful starfish and schools of tropical fish of all shapes and shades. This may be your first encounter with the curious and playful sea lions who may come to check you out while you swim.

Enjoy a gourmet dinner aboard the Legend.

Overnight: Galapagos Legend

### **May 7 – South Plaza & North Seymour Islands** **B/L/D**

Following breakfast we'll take our zodiacs to South Plaza Island for a morning of fascinating hiking around the bluffs and flats. South Plaza is the smallest of the islands, but is arguably the most colorful. Sandy dunes are surrounded by mangroves and you'll find forests of prickly pear cactus. Colors range from vibrant green in the rainy season to purple and orange during the dry season and of course the skies here are filled with colorful tropical birds. There is also the biggest population of land iguanas in the islands!

We'll head back to the ship for lunch and a cruise to nearby **North Seymour Island**. As you hike onto this island, we are greeted almost immediately by a crowd of slumbering sea lions. We'll also meet up with the "pirates of the Galapagos," the Great Frigatebird. There is a huge colony of these birds who are known for their large inflatable red sacs on their breast. Because their feathers aren't waterproof, their method of hunting involves harassing boobies and other seabirds into dropping their catch, which they then steal for themselves. We'll also see more

land iguanas as well as marine iguanas, swallow-tailed gulls, Darwin finches, mocking birds and blue-footed boobies.

There are more snorkeling opportunities here. North Seymour rises high on a tectonic plate and offers great pics of geological wonders and cliffs. The waters surrounding it are teeming with tiger, reef and Galapagos sharks who come here for the cool currents. We return to the Legend for dinner and a relaxing evening.

Overnight: Galapagos Legend

### **May 8 – San Cristobal**

**B/L/D**

We have a full day of adventure on San Cristobal Island, the 5<sup>th</sup> largest island in the archipelago. The small town, Puerto Baquerizo Moreno has fun streets filled with cute shops and cafes we can enjoy. But more importantly, San Cristobal is the only island in the Galapagos where all three species of boobie birds and the great frigatebird can be seen nesting in the same area and we're here to see them!

We'll visit the wildlife hotspot of Pitt Point (Punta Pitt) on the northeastern tip of the island. This protected cozy cove of crystal clear waters provides a unique nesting site for many species of birds including storm petrels, the Nazca, blue-footed and the **rare red-footed boobies**, as well as both kinds of frigatebirds. We take advantage of another snorkeling and swimming opportunity to again play among sea lions and the giant turtles drawn to the shores.

Following lunch we head to the eroded hill known as Frigate Hill where we find the most beautiful beaches in the Galapagos. White powdery sand and the abundance of animals in this area make it especially idyllic for swimming and snorkeling among beautiful tropical fish, rays, anemones and sponge coral. Here you can also swim with sea turtles and sea lions. You'll return to the Legend for our final night aboard.

Overnight: Galapagos Legend

### **May 9 – San Cristobal & Quito**

**B/L**

We head back to San Cristobal and Colorado Hill where we witness efforts to increase the numbers of healthy Giant Tortoises in the Galapagos. We'll visit a Breeding Center and learn about the distinguishing habitats and conditions of these magnificent creatures, as well as the ongoing conservation efforts.

In the afternoon, we leave the Galapagos behind to fly back to Quito where we have the afternoon and evening free.

Overnight: Wyndam Quito

### **May 10 – Amazon Basin**

**B/L/D**

Immediately after breakfast, transfer to airport and fly into the Amazon basin and the town of Coca. This town gets its name from the capuchin monks who once occupied the area. The staff will show you to the motorized canoe, which will take us on a compelling two hour journey with lunch down a narrowed tributary of the Amazon River to our rain forest haven in the Napo Cultural Center. We'll travel through the dark tea-like waters surrounded by the compelling sights and sounds of herons, kingfishers and monkeys.

We are warmly welcomed with a traditional drink, briefed and escorted to our thatched cabins.

Built and owned by the native Kichwa Añangu Community, the Napo Cultural Center is rich in traditions, costumes and customs of the local people. Our visit helps support these indigenous natives. The Center's staff displays hospitality typical of the Kichwa community. Napo boasts 82 square miles of rainforest in its backyard and numerous attractions to explore.

In the afternoon, enjoy a one hour walk along the "Playas" trail and witness a wildlife wonderland which boasts 500 species of birds and 11 species of monkeys, not to mention Giant Otters and an enormous number of reptiles. Expert guides are adept at spotting things in the rainforest canopy and are eager to point them out. Look for toucans, sloths, and my fav squirrel monkeys.

Following your hike, we have the option of witnessing the glorious Amazonian sunset while kayaking on the vast Napo River. Listen to the jungles night sounds as we enjoy dinner and a quiet evening

Overnight: Napo Cultural Center

### **Mar 11 – Kichwae**

**B/L/D**

After breakfast, we board motorized canoes to visit the amazing Parrot Clay Lick that easily brings visitors face to face with 11 types of parrots and macaws! Latter we visit the intercultural interpretation center "Kuri Muyu" which means "golden seed" in Kichwa native language. Local tribal women will teach us about customs and culture as well as demonstrating crafting skills.

After lunch, we set hike to an Observation Tower that puts us over 100 feet high above the jungle canopy. We'll be eye-level with innumerable birds, howler monkeys, squirrel monkeys, toucans, parrots and sloths. Later, we head back to Napo Cultural Center and board a paddle canoe for a front row seat to the spectacle of wildlife diversity through Anangu creek.

Dinner features a taste of local flavors of the Amazon, followed by a special night walk around the Lodge. Prepare to see a variety of insects, reptiles and even nocturnal mammals like night monkeys.

Overnight: Napo Cultural Center

### **May 12 – Farewell ritual**

**B/L**

As the end of our visit draws near, we'll have the opportunity to take part in the "wayusada" ritual. This optional but truly unforgettable activity involves rising at approximately 4:30 am, the time when the Kichwa family share traditional chants and "interpret dreams" with the wisest "mamakuna" in the community. We are accepted as family member and can have our dreams interpreted by this native expert of the Kichwa community.

Following breakfast, we depart Napo Cultural Center for Coca via motorized canoe and then fly back to Quito

Our final fun as a private tour of the quaint and historic "old town" of Colonial Quito. We visit the striking La Compania, a church with an ornate baroque façade and gold-leaf interior, built entirely out of volcanic stone. The Church of San Francisco is Quito's largest colonial structure and its adjacent museum houses church artwork dating to the 1600s. We travel to a vantage point where the winged statue of the Virgin of Quito (El Panecillo) watches over the city from atop a 650-foot peak. We'll have 360-degree views of Quito and the surrounding valley.