



Erin Leider-Pariser



Fall in Ecuador November 10-19, 2010



Journey to Ecuador and experience one of the world's most environmentally diverse places on earth. At 9350 feet above sea level, Quito is the capital of Ecuador and declared a cultural heritage site by UNESCO. We will immerse ourselves into the cultural center with more than thirty churches in close proximity. We will hike in and around Cotopaxi, the highest active volcano, and visit San Rafael Falls, Ecuador's highest waterfall. Our philanthropic venture at Hacienda Zuleta will contribute to the empowerment of their community by visiting and supporting their social, conservation, and economic development programs. Gigantic Galapagos tortoises are another encounter on our journey to this unique archipelago brimming

with natural splendor and diversity. If you take the highest mountains outside of Asia, add English meadows, Alpine cows, Amazonian rain forest, and mix with the Spanish and Incan cultures, you get the extraordinary assets of this tiny country called Ecuador. It's one of Latin America's best-kept secrets...until now.



November 10 - Depart USA and arrive into Quito early evening. We'll get settled in quickly and proceed to have dinner at Vista Hermosa, on the top floor of a posh residential building complete with 360-degree views over Quito. It's a perfect introduction to the City as we stare at the statue of the capital's Madonna standing sentry on Panecillo Hill. A little mariachi music and we are off and running.

November 11 - Wake up to sounds of people on the move as we prepare for our own kind of moving in a yoga class at a local studio. There are more than thirty churches in the colonial center and the massive Jesuit, Dominican, and Franciscan monasteries dominate various plazas. Our tour guide will give us the low-down on this colonial city before lunch at a very local charming spot. In the afternoon, we make our way out of town stopping at the famous Otavalo market before arriving at our authentic Hacienda Zuleta. Built in 1691, it belongs to the same family of Mr. Galo Plaza Lasso, a former president of Ecuador for more than 100 years. We pass flocks of sheep overseen by Indians, little schools with soccer pitches, sleepy villages with roosters and dogs out front and tiny churches. The twists and turns of the Pan American Highway as it snakes around the sides of peaks have a life-clarifying effect and are not for the faint of heart. AHHH... breathe as we settle into this living and working colonial farm of 4,000 acres with antique gardens, cozy reading rooms, and delicious home organic cooking.



November 12 - Morning yoga in the sanctuary. During an exquisite homemade breakfast, we will learn about their very own cheese factory and how the process has changed throughout history. Our major hike for the day will take us through pastureland where ancient monuments of the Caranqui culture still exist dating back to 700 A.D. alongside giant ceremonial truncated pyramids from the 13th century. After lunch of freshly caught trout, we hike up to Condor where we will look to spot a family of Spectacle Bears (hum). On our way back to the hacienda, we will visit the Zuleta women's cooperative where we can admire countless beautiful hand made colorful

embroidery. Our horse drawn carriage awaits to take us to visit their foundation run library where we see the local children playing, reading, and doing homework. It's a long day and certainly worth the massage and hot bath before our opening ceremony and dinner.



November 13 - Breakfast in the organic garden, where we can learn more about permaculture and see exactly where the ingredients for our meals originate. Feed calves, count sheep, and talk to the vaqueros (cowboys) training young fillies. Our mountain bike ride will take us to explore the Zuleta community and valley near Cunro Mountain where you can almost see the town of Ibarra. While we enjoy lunch with stunning views, we look up to see the condors flying by. Return to the hacienda late afternoon just in time to watch Inocencio demonstrate the traditional weaving process and the most antique and unique embroidery pieces that Zuleta's women have created throughout history. A retail opportunity and our philanthropic venture. Dinner is waiting for us and we are lucky to dine with family members who have endless stories of Zuleta renowned history, including visits of celebrities and dignitaries.



November 14-15 - Our next stop is San Agustin de Callo, a family-owned hacienda to the south of the capital that sits in the shadow of one of Ecuador's most dramatic volcanoes, Cotopaxi. Scientists have said "Cotopaxi's shape is the most beautiful and regular of all of the colossal peaks in the high Andes. It is a perfect cone covered by a thick blanket of snow which shines so brilliantly at sunset it seems detached from the azure of the sky." But before we witness Cotopaxi, we will stop along the way to hike in the shadows of Cayambe Volcano which is Ecuador's third-tallest peak. During our stay, we will explore Cotopaxi National Park hiking mostly uphill towards Ruminahui (10,000 feet) along slopes of glaciers shining in the high clear air. We will visit Saquisilí market, not far from the hacienda, which remains one of Ecuador's most important with thousands of people streaming into town from the surrounding communities.

November 16-19 - The Galapagos are Ecuador's major calling card, but as we now can attest to after the last 5 days, this lovely little country has a lot more to offer than these enchanted Isles. However, the Galapagos November just inspire you to think differently about the world. Nowhere else can you engage in a staring contest with wild animals and lose. This is not the Bahamas. In fact, most of the islands are devoid of vegetation and look more like the moon than Hawaii. What's truly special is that these creatures that call the islands home act as if humans are nothing more than slightly annoying paparazzi! With our naturalist guide on our small vessel, we will hike, snorkel, and learn about the area that was the first site to be recognized by the United Nations and UNESCO as a natural Patrimony of Mankind. Charles Darwin famously perfected his theory of evolution while conducting research amongst these paradisiacal islands filled with finches, frigates, penguins, albatrosses, pelicans, and blue-footed and red-footed boobies. Gigantic tortoises roam the islands over the course of their 150-year life span and the islands beaches are populated with resting sea lions and giant iguanas.



November 19 - Early morning departures back for international flights home. Another incredible journey creating memories and ever-lasting friendships.



The Investment is \$4,400, not including airfare.*
STAT will donate 100% of its profits to local charities in Ecuador.



*The Galapagos is a limited tourist destination; therefore the prices are high and subject to change.