



## Essential Galapagos and Ecuador Pre-Trip Information

*Rest assured that we will go to great lengths to make sure your trip is a fun, memorable, and safe one. We try to get to know our guests and their individual needs as much as possible before the trip begins to ensure it truly is a wildlife and adventure travel trip of a lifetime. This document will help you plan for your trip and answer some questions you may have.*

*Despite this document being quite long, it is by no means exhaustive, so please do get in touch with us any time with any questions you may have and we are always delighted to help. Your final details on the trip will usually be sent around two weeks prior to travel, as we need to wait until then for the final details to be confirmed on the ground.*

### What You Need To Send Back To Us and When

- A copy of your air itinerary, if you are making your own flight arrangements, at least 90 days before departure
- A copy of your travel insurance policy

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# 1. Essential Travel Documents

## Your Passport

If you don't have a passport, apply for one now because the process can be lengthy. If you do have a passport, find it and check the expiry date. The expiry date is important because many countries, **including Ecuador, won't let you enter unless your passport is valid for at least six months beyond the date you complete your trip.**

**IMPORTANT:** If your passport changes between the time you book with us and when you travel, you need to let us know ASAP. The airlines that provide the flights to Galapagos **do not permit any changes in the passport numbers/names etc.** and require that we issue a completely new ticket and we only get a partial refund on the un-used ticket.

## Your Visas

Citizens of the European Union, UK, USA, Australia and Canada visiting Ecuador are allowed to stay in the country as a tourist for a maximum of 90 days. Tourist cards aren't issued anymore (they used to be), but as you enter the country they will register your arrival date and from then on you have 90 days, regardless of what you declared as your return date. If you need to change or postpone your return flight out of the country, this is fine as long as you do not exceed the 90 days permit you have as a tourist.

## Travel Insurance

Whilst Think Galapagos has a corporate insurance policy and financial failure cover that ensures all our guests' payments to us are protected, all passengers must take out their own separate travel insurance to cover any medical expenses, trip cancellation due to unexpected medical circumstances, travel delay or abandonment (the official term for if your flight out to your holiday is delayed due to extreme weather events for example so you would be covered for that). Also our recommendation is that any insurance that you take out should include emergency evacuation cover of at least \$100,000 (around £80,000) given the remote nature of some of the islands.

When booking a Galapagos holiday with us, please make sure to inform your travel insurance company that you will be on a Galapagos cruise as part of your trip. It is best to give them as much detail as possible including cruise duration and number of passengers. Some companies will include this in their cover and others will require cruise cover as an add on to your policy. Cruise cover includes scenarios such as being ill and confined to your cabin or missing your departure.

You must bring your travel insurance certificate, policy and terms with you on the trip and have them handy in case the migration official on entering Ecuador requests to see them as it is now required under Ecuadorean law that all guests prove they have medical insurance covering their time in Ecuador. *Please can you also and provide us with your policy number and emergency contact before travelling.* You will be fully responsible for any medical expenses that you may incur. In the event of an emergency, the trip leader is responsible for making the final decision regarding evacuation.

## Record of key information

We recommend that you make and keep copies of all important travel documents, including your passport and airline tickets. Keep copies of your credit card numbers separate from your purse or wallet. If one of these is lost, having this information will make your life much easier.

## 2. Medical Matters

Please be aware that hospital facilities for serious medical problems may at times be a long way away, that a doctor may not always be available, and that evacuation can be prolonged, difficult, and expensive. Your guide does not carry prescription medications.

Insect repellent and bite remedies are always good to have with you. It is also good to have some over the counter remedies such as headache tablets, Imodium and rehydration sachets with you in case you need them. Although they are available in Ecuador and the towns in Galapagos, it is always good to use those that you are used to taking.

Remember that Think Galapagos Ltd is not a medical authority and that we can give you only general information, which may not be accurate by the time you travel. You should confer with your GP at least eight weeks before travelling. The following is a ROUGH GUIDE for immunisation – you must seek and abide by the specific advice of your local doctor/medical professional. Regulations and recommendations change frequently, so we advise you to check with your local GP, doctor or the Ecuadorean Embassy.

### Vaccinations

- **Yellow Fever-** there is a small risk of Yellow Fever in some areas of Ecuador – however if you are just staying in the Andes including visits to the cloud forest areas of Mindo or the eastern slopes you will be fine. In essence this is required only for people travelling to the Amazon region or the coastal lowlands (an overnight stop in Guayaquil is fine). Official advice is to consult your GP and they will conduct a risk assessment before deciding whether or not they recommend a vaccine.

\*\*\*If you are travelling from Brazil the Ecuadorean authorities will require you show you have received a Yellow Fever vaccination at least 10 days prior to entry into Ecuador and you will be required to show the certificate at migration on arrival.

- **Malaria-** like Yellow Fever, if your trip is in the Andes of Ecuador, including the cloud forest, you don't need to worry about this. If you are travelling to the Amazon region, coastal locations and at places under 1,500m altitude the official recommendation is to take anti-malarial medication. The new varieties are much easier to take than older versions of anti-malarial tablets; however there are side effects in some guests like a bad tummy, mouth ulcers etc. Whilst we stress we aren't medical authorities, local information is sometimes useful when making decisions on what medications you want to take. To our knowledge speaking to people in the lodges in the Amazon and the areas there have been no reported cases of malaria in the areas of the lodges we work with and we ourselves personally don't take anti-malarials when travelling to the Napo Wildlife Centre, La Selva or Sani Lodge. For those guests stopping over in Guayaquil for a brief stay, similarly, it may be useful to know that we don't personally take anti-malarials for this.

- **Dengue Fever**\_- Travelers should take mosquito bite avoidance measures.
- **Hepatitis A**- A vaccine is available and travelers should practice strict food, water and personal hygiene precautions.
- **Tetanus**- A vaccine is available. This is caused by a toxin released from Clostridium bacteria. Travelers should thoroughly clean all wounds and seek medical attention.
- **Rabies** – In the last few years we have had guests say that they have been recommended to have anti-rabies medication. If your GP advises you to have this done, we would ask that you give us a call to discuss this to see if it really is necessary.

### Altitude

For those of you flying to Quito from sea level, you might feel the effects of altitude on the first day or so given that Quito is at 2,800 meters (9,500 feet). The best advice we can give is that you take it easy, avoid alcohol, heavy food, and cigarettes, and make sure to drink plenty of water to keep hydrated. Some people may have a light headache from the altitude for the first few days until you have acclimated; be sure to bring your favourite headache remedy with you just in case you need it.

### Staying Healthy

At all the hotels and lodges you will be provided with either filtered water in a jug in your room or sealed, bottled water (“agua linda”) which we recommend for brushing your teeth as well as drinking. Do not open your mouth in the shower, **and never drink tap water** except on the boat where you can brush your teeth with tap water. Also ask for your drinks without ice on the mainland (“sin hielo”), because you can’t be sure it was made from purified water.

### Sea Sickness

This is a concern for some of our Galapagos guests as you are at sea for much of your trip. Speaking as a terrible motion sickness sufferer myself (Rachel!) – who even gets sick on trains and planes, I completely understand the concern. The nice thing about Galapagos is most of the navigations are done at night so it isn’t a problem for the vast majority of guests. As for navigations done during the day, you are out on deck in search of dolphins, rays and whales. However for those who do suffer from motion sickness whilst travelling in Galapagos a guest kindly introduced me to a fantastic medication; a small patch that you put behind your ear that is slow release and lasts for up to 3 days.

For most people it is a good precaution to take some normal motion sickness tablets just in case; they sell a variety in all pharmacies and they are all pretty much the same – but for those who have a regular problem with motion sickness it may be worth seeing your GP about getting a prescription for the patches – they are called Transderm Scōp® (Scopolamine). If you do take the patches, it’s a good idea have some micro pore tape or something similar on top of the patch when snorkeling to make sure they keep dry and don’t come off!

### 3. Money Matters

Ecuador's currency the Sucre was suspended in 1999 following rampant inflation. Today US dollars are the only accepted currency in the country. Whilst you will need to have US\$ in cash with you on arrival, you can draw money from ATMs at any major bank in Quito or Guayaquil (BUT please ask your guide to accompany you to do this for security). Credit and debit cards are widely accepted in shops and restaurants in Quito and Guayaquil and are particularly useful for more expensive items.

You will also find ATM services at the airports well as some tourist hotspots. Most hotels and lodges we work with accept credit and debit cards to pay their bar bill, as do many yachts, however tips for guides and crew are always in cash.

Please note that the majority of commerce and banking systems in Ecuador do not accept \$100 bills. We advise all guests not to bring US \$100 bills with them because these probably will not be accepted. Even changing them at banks may be difficult.

#### How much do I need to take?

If most meals are included in your trip with us, for approximately a 2 week trip including an 8-day cruise, we recommend taking approximately \$800 per person for items not covered in your land/cruise cost, and for additional items you may want to purchase.

Costs per person not covered on your trip include: alcoholic drinks, \$200 Galapagos National Park entrance fee, \$20 Galapagos Transit Control Card, airport tax, tips for your crew and guides, and possibly some meals (\*were possible we do now try and pre-pay guests Galapagos National Park fee and Transit Control Card fee – if we do we will notify you that we have pre-paid this for you but if we do not, please assume you need this cash)

**Travel Tip:** It's good to have some single dollars handy on arrival if you would like a luggage cart at the airport to get your suitcases or bags through customs control. According to our latest information they cost \$2. Once you pass through customs control, your guide will be there waiting for you so you don't need to worry about carrying your bags further than this.

#### Entrance Fees for Galapagos

When travelling to the Galapagos Islands, there are two fees, both paid in cash, that you will need to prepare for: the INGALA Galapagos Transit Control Card at \$20 per person and the Galapagos National Park Entrance Fee of \$200 per person. Where possible to make life easier for our guests Think Galapagos now try and pre-pay the Transit Control Card and if possible the Galapagos National Park fee too. If we have pre-paid this for you - we will notify you and include on your invoice BUT for most guests you will have to be prepared to pay your Galapagos National Park fee in CASH on arrival to Galapagos.

## INGALA Galapagos Transit Control Card, TCT or Galapagos Migration Card

The INGALA Galapagos Transit Control card, also referred to as the Galapagos Migration Control card, or TCT, is an immigration control measure set by the Ecuadorian government. It is like your own personal Galapagos ID that you will need to keep safe for the duration of your trip. You won't be allowed to board your flight to Galapagos if you do not have a valid Transit Control Card. You will also be required to show this card upon arrival to Galapagos at the airport and also at the airport when you depart the islands. INGALA is the Ecuadorean government agency that regulates all things relating to Galapagos (in Spanish it is called Consejo de Gobierno del Regimen Especial de Galapagos).

Most Think Galapagos guests can ignore this next section as we will process your Galapagos Transit Control Card in advance and either your guide doing your transfer for the flight to Galapagos will have this for you or the yacht will have a representative at the airport waiting for you to give it to you – but for some guests who are not having airport transfers and are flying out to Galapagos earlier than the cruise starts this may not be possible if this is the case for you we will definitely have notified you of this so you are aware in advance.

*Here is what you need to know if we have notified you that we are unable to process your transit control card.*

Before you check in, in the event that we haven't prepared in advance for you your Galapagos Transit Control Card you then need to go to the 'Consejo de Gobierno de Galapagos' counter (Galapagos Migration Authorities) where you will have to give your passport number, nationality, age and other personal information and then you have to pay \$20 per person for the card which contains details about your visit. The counters are very clearly marked at both the Quito and Guayaquil airports. In Quito it is directly to your left as you enter; in Guayaquil it is a counter close to the check-in desks. If you haven't got your Galapagos Transit Control Card in advance you can do it on the day of the flight itself but please ensure you are at the airport in plenty of time - at least 3hours before your flight. As an experiment, during a recent Galapagos trip queued to get this paperwork ourselves and were in the queue over 35 minutes and it could easily have been longer !

**IMPORTANT:** Your Galapagos Migration Card (also called the Transit Control Card or TCT) needs to be retained to show also when you are departing Galapagos so keep it safe in your passport otherwise you may need to pay the US\$20 again!

## Tipping

This is always at our guest's discretion and is by no means obligatory and should always reflect the quality of service you received. However most people DO tip for good service in Ecuador. As our guests frequently request a guideline on tipping, we recommend the following per person so you have a rough idea:

- Mainland Ecuador day tours or multi-day trips, around \$10-15 per day (per couple/family rather than per individual)
- If you have a private driver with you, around half the amount you tip the guide is recommended.
- For Amazon lodge staff assuming a 4-5 day stay around \$40-50 per person

- On Galapagos cruises, it is customary to leave a tip for the guide and crew separately. There will be a tips box or envelope for you to put your tips in at the end of the cruise. We suggest around \$10-20 per day per person for the guide and \$20-30 per person per day to be shared with the crew. \*Some yachts will say higher, particularly on the high end cruises so you may wish to pay more or consider this but we think this is a fair amount.

## ATMs

Cajeros automáticos (ATMs) are found in nearly every city and town in Ecuador, as well as at major airports and bus terminals. ATMs are linked to the international Plus (Visa), Cirrus (Maestro/MasterCard) systems, American Express and other networks. They will accept your bank or credit card as long as you have a four-digit PIN.

Visa, MasterCard, and American Express are most widely accepted in Ecuador's major hotels, restaurants, and shops and also in many shops and restaurants in Galapagos. Some merchants may add a surcharge (most often they don't in mainland Ecuador, but sometimes it could be 5% but can be as high as 10%) so it may be better to have cash handy in these circumstances.

If you plan to use your credit/bank card, be sure to notify your provider that you will be using it in Ecuador; otherwise, a hold may be put on your account, which will require an international call back to your bank to clear it.

You may be able to use your credit/debit card to withdraw funds from participating banks in Ecuador. Please ask your guide for more advice and to assist you with this. ATMs are normally open 24 hours.

For safety reasons, use ATMs inside banks with security guards, preferably during daylight hours – and we recommend you always to ask your guide to accompany you to the ATM for security.

**Security tip!** In recent years the number of credit cards which are 'cloned' in Ecuador has increased dramatically. In order to avoid this don't hand over your card to staff in shops or restaurants when paying. They should have a terminal that they can bring to the table in restaurants, or in shops on the counter, and failing this you could go with them with your card to pay, but avoid giving your card to them and it going out of your sight as they could have a cloning machine in their pocket.

## Service Charge and VAT/Sales Tax (IVA)

Under Ecuadorean law, restaurants and bars have to add onto your bill a 15% Sales tax (know locally as IVA) and a 10% Service charge to your bill. So any prices you see in a bar, or restaurant you need to add on 25%. Some places do include it in the prices but it is rare so usually assume this will be added on.

It is worth mentioning that typically the staff do not get this 10% so it isn't a tip.



## 4. Luggage, Clothing & Travel Accessories

Checked baggage on international flights is generally restricted to 20 kg, some airlines can be more generous, but bear in mind that for your internal flights your baggage is limited to a **checked bag weighing no more than 23 kg (50lbs) and a daypack that will fit under your seat or in the overhead bin.**

In the Galapagos it is worth bearing in mind that most cabins are fairly small and you wouldn't want any more luggage than that anyway. Also, we recommend using soft-sided luggage as it is easier to transport and pack away in a cupboard than hard suitcases.

The luggage restriction for the internal flight from Guayaquil or Quito to Galapagos and from Quito to the Amazon is the same, both are 23 kg (50 lbs) + day pack.

While you are in the jungle, cloud forest or anywhere outside of Quito or Guayaquil, your city clothes or excess baggage can be safely stored in a luggage storage area at your hotel providing you will be returning there. This means you can pack sets of clothing etc, one for the Andes, Amazon or coastal portion and one for the Galapagos and leave the things you don't need at the hotel.

**TOP TIP!** For those of you going to the Amazon Rainforest - plastic bags are great for keeping your clean clothes really dry whilst in the humidity of the rainforest region.

### Clothing

Ecuador is divided into 3 distinct regions, Andes, Amazon and Coast (including Galapagos) each of which has its own climate, and so requires slightly different clothing.

- For all 3 regions a sunhat and sun cream of at least SPF 50 are recommended as the equatorial sun can be very strong.
- A protective sun hat/ cap is also good to have for all regions, in particular in Galapagos as the equatorial sun can be very strong. Also for Galapagos it is good to have a hat with straps as guests have been known to lose them with the hats blowing off whilst on the motorised dingy rides that take you from the yacht to the island!
- Towels will be provided in all the hotels, lodges and on the yacht so you don't need to bring any.

### Andes

**Climate:** Quito is at an altitude of 2,800 metres (9,500 feet) and most places you visit in the Andes will be around that altitude. Daytime temperatures range between 10°C and 22°C and evening temperatures between 4° and 10°C. A lightweight wind/rain jacket and fleece will come in handy year-round.

**Clothing:** In the Andes layers work well, with a warm layer for morning and evening. Although warm in the daytime the temperature at night in Quito and Andes can get as cool as fresh spring or autumn day in the UK. In general for your time in Quito and the Andes we



recommend wearing long trousers and layers on top so you can respond to changing temperatures! T-shirts, a long sleeved jumper and light fleece jacket is usually enough. Attire is very informal, though some people do like to bring a lightly smarter change of clothes for the occasions when you eat meals in restaurants, though it is still casual.

## Amazon

**Climate:** The temperature will be approximately 27°C during the day, falling to around 10° C at night. It will be quite humid and not surprisingly you may experience some heavy rain downpours during your stay.

**Clothing:** We recommend long trousers and long sleeved cotton shirts for the Amazon – though in the Amazon a short sleeved shirt can also be worn as well with a light dousing of insect repellent. Full waterproof clothing isn't needed for the Amazon – you will probably get wetter with sweat than with rain! Rain Ponchos along with rubber boots are provided at the lodges we work with so you don't need to bring them along.

## Coast & Galapagos

**Climate:** For those starting the trip in Guayaquil you will be at sea level. Daytime temperatures here are similar to those in the Galapagos ranging between 27° and 22°C. Rain during your stay is very unlikely though there is often light wind in the evenings.

### Clothing

**Guayaquil and the Coast:** Ecuador's coast is wonderfully steamy and tropical, so shorts or light trousers, or sundresses/skirts with t-shirts will be fine. As is the case with Galapagos, It's useful to have long sleeved shirts too as the sun can be strong. Also worth mentioning is that the hotels in Guayaquil all have air conditioning and can feel quite 'cool' so have something warmer to wear when inside!

**Galapagos:** T-shirts and shorts or light trousers are the best clothing for the Galapagos. For those with very fair skin, it is probably best to wear long-sleeved shirts in Galapagos as the sun can be very strong. It's nice to have something to get changed into for an evening, but everything is very casual in Galapagos. We would also recommend a lightweight wind break jacket and a sweater as it can often be cool and breezy in the evenings. It's also useful to bring along a couple of swim suits so you can alternate whilst one is drying.

For those who will be snorkelling we DEFINITELY recommend a 'shorty' wetsuit particularly during the months from June to December. They can in many cases be hired for the week on the yacht and now quite a few yachts include wetsuit rentals free of charge (ask us for details as this changes from yacht to yacht ranges from US\$45 to US\$75 per week). It is also quite good as it gives you protection from the sun and some buoyancy. If you don't use a wet suit you would need to use one of your t-shirts whilst snorkelling to protect your back from the sun as you will usually be snorkeling in the middle of the day when the sun is at its most powerful.

*A couple of Galapagos visitor sites that are worth a special mention in terms of wearing specific things for:*

**Highlands of Santa Cruz:** there can be fire ants here, so we always recommend for your visit to the highlands of Santa Cruz to have shoes and socks on rather than sandals. Also it can be misty and cooler sometimes so good to have a light jacket with you.

**Volcan Sierra Negra (Isabela) :** this is a lovely hike, however if you have this included in your yacht itinerary we do definitely recommend having good sturdy boots as it can be muddy in parts and waterproofs with you. Also, you need to ensure you always take enough sun cream with you as you out for several hours.

### **Footwear**

Sturdy, properly fitting footwear can make your trip much more pleasurable and this is the area we get asked most questions on. If you're buying new boots for this trip, please break them in by wearing them as often as possible before the trip. A combination of the two kinds of footwear recommended below is sufficient for any of the trips we organise.



- Comfortable rubber-soled walking shoes with good traction or lightweight hiking boots with good ankle support are the best for the trip. These are suitable for Andes, Galapagos and Amazon.



The best footwear for the Galapagos and for in and around the lodge in the Amazon are sports type sandals (with a trainer like base) that can be purchased in most outdoor shops, good brands are Merrell, Teva (shown above), though most shops have a good selection. These sandals are very comfortable, have a very good grip and you can get them wet without any problems. We prefer those with open toes, but some guests prefer those with a toecap to avoid stubbing their toes on lava, such as those below.



For Galapagos it's good to have a comfortable pair of shoes to wear whilst in the yacht as you can't wear any of your shoes that you use for visiting the islands inside (or barefoot is a good option too!)

### Snorkel Gear

If you have your own snorkel mask and tube, we recommend taking that along with you on the trip, no need for fins as those are large and bulky and the yachts have plenty of these for you. The yachts do provide snorkel gear free of charge on board if you prefer not to take them.

For beginners or non-confident swimmers or for those who aren't confident in the water, a snorkel vest can really help. They are designed to give you buoyancy in the water but keep your face in the water which is needed for snorkeling (vs life jackets which are designed to keep your face out of the water). If you put into a search engine 'snorkel vest', a range of options comes up – and they cost around £15 or US\$20 each. Usually, we recommend guests also have a shorty wet suit for snorkeling, some yachts provide this free of charge or if not yachts rent them for around \$45-75 per week, but just ask us for details as all the yachts have slightly different policies on this.

### Photography and Video

Ensure you bring enough digital memory for your cameras. You invariably will take more photographs than you expect. For video, bring extra batteries just in case. It is useful to have a waterproof bag that you keep your equipment in just in case. These are available in all outdoor shops.

Electricity for recharging batteries available on the yacht, at the rainforest and the Andes is 110V (American style – adaptors are the same as those you need for the US). For keen photographers, our advice on lenses is that a range of a wide-angle zoom (16-70 mm) and an 80-200mm zoom lens will be enough. (Some 70-300mm are now available in the market which would completely cover any needs you have in terms of a zoom lens).

**Binoculars:** We strongly recommend that you bring along binoculars if you are visiting the rainforest or cloud forest as you will get much more out of your trip there. For Galapagos they aren't so essential, though always good to have. We recommend you bring high quality binoculars with specifications of 7x35 up to 10x40. If you're travelling as a couple, you should each have your own pair because it doesn't work well for two people to share one pair—one of you is certain to miss a good sighting!

## 5. A few practical things for while you're on the trip....

**Toilets:** Toilet roll in Ecuador and Galapagos must be placed in the separate basket next to the toilet. This is a little strange to get used to at first, but is common throughout Latin America as their pipes and sewage system can't cope with toilet paper.

**Wet landings in Galapagos:** will always be onto soft sand.

**No locks on cabin doors in Galapagos:** Just a heads up that your cabin on the yacht in Galapagos won't have a key so you won't be able to lock it, in many yachts they do provide a safe. The same goes for your lodge in the Amazon. The reason is to avoid the problems that come with lost room keys in very remote places – in all the years we have been doing this, we haven't had a case of anything going missing from a guests room.

**Electricity:** Ecuador is on the 110V system, the same as in the US so you will need a travel adaptor – the electric plug is flat (American style). You will have places where you can charge your electrical devices in all the yachts we work with in Galapagos and lodges in the Amazon.

**Biodegradable Soap/Shower Gels and Shampoos:** In some of the Galapagos yachts they will provide biodegradable shampoos and shower gel in the bathrooms, it is good to use them where they are available, but do always take along your own supply as they may not be available everywhere. In the UK, all the shampoo and shower gel sold on [ethicalsuperstore.com](http://ethicalsuperstore.com) are biodegradable

**Time Zones:** Mainland Ecuador GMT minus 5 hours. Galapagos minus 6 hours

**Internet Connection and mobile (cel) phones:** Virtually all the hotels we work with offer free WiFi services which is enough for most guests to allow you to stay in touch with home and allow people to get in touch with you.

However, if you want data on the move without paying large data roaming charges there are a couple of options. The best option is to buy what's known as an eSIM if you have a compatible smartphone. This is a digital SIM embedded directly into your device, removing the need for a physical SIM card. Providers of eSIMs include Airalo, Holafly and Gigsky. Alternatively you can purchase a local prepaid SIM for your time in Ecuador. These are available at the airport. The prepaid SIM cards and eSIMs work well in populated areas in mainland Ecuador and on the Galapagos Islands. However, there may be weak or even no cell phone signal in parts of Galapagos away from the main islands or in the more remote areas of mainland Ecuador.

Increasingly Galapagos yachts offer WiFi as part of your cruise, on some yachts this is provided for no cost on others you can pay for access. Just a heads on this, it isn't particularly strong and is only for receiving or sending messages, not for streaming.

**Hair driers:** The good news is that they are provided in almost all of the hotels and yachts we work with (please do ask if this is important so we can double check for you.)

**No plugs in sinks:** Very often in mainland Ecuador and on yachts in Galapagos, they won't provide a plug for your sink. There are various reasons for this, arguably the main one is that culturally in Ecuador they use sinks only for running water for washing faces and

brushing teeth and don't have the custom of filling a washbasin with water to use it. It also prevents accidental flooding of washbasins.

**Ear plugs:** If you are a light sleeper, it may be a good idea to bring along ear plugs with you. All the yachts we work with are small yachts, which means there is some engine noise at night, especially as most navigations in Galapagos take place at night. For most guests this is fine (especially if you are on the main or upper decks) but if you are a light sleeper ear plugs can help.

**Towels:** These are provided at all the hotels, lodges and yachts we work with so you don't need to take them along.

**Left Luggage:** They do provide a left luggage at Quito and Guayaquil airports in the Arrivals area –the cost is around \$15 per day for a medium bag and US\$20 for a large bag.

**Shopping:** Quito is a great place to buy Ecuadorian handicrafts. Not only is Ecuador the home of the Panama hat, but there is a wide selection of locally made woven goods such as sweaters, hats, gloves, wall hangings, rugs, and shoulder bags. There are also leather crafts, woodcarvings, intricate basketry, and Ecuador's famous baked-dough ornaments. Quito also has some fantastic silver jewellery. The artisans market in the Mariscal area of Quito is definitely worth a visit if you have time in Quito and like handicrafts, if it isn't already included in your city tour, ask Rachel to organise this for you or you could walk there yourself. Guayaquil has some good shops, but you will need to ask your guide to show you them as they aren't easy to find.

### **Laundry along the way....**

When planning your packing, knowing when you can get your clothes laundered along the way can definitely help! Especially for our guests who like to travel light. In general only the most luxurious Galapagos yachts offer any laundry service due to the issues of water use on board so whilst you are on board we recommend to rinse out anything you need and put it to dry in the drying line outside (peg things on firmly as they can blow off!) However in the mainland most hotels you will stay at offer a laundry service and can turn laundry around fairly quickly. Some hotels are more expensive than others, so if you would like to plan where would be best to do the laundry on your trip, do let us know and we can share with you the latest laundry costings from the hotels you will be staying at.

### **Do I need flight or hotel vouchers?**

For most of our guests this is not needed. Everything will be taken care of by our team in Ecuador from the moment you arrive. You will be picked up from the airport by one of our guides, and from that moment on they will take care of everything, advising you of the next stage of the journey, exact pick up times for transfers and giving you flight tickets as and when you need them. The yacht or Amazon lodge will take care of checking you in for your flight and will co-ordinate with our team on the ground in Ecuador.

However there are some cases if you are doing your own logistics prior to the cruise or Amazon lodge where we will need to provide you with vouchers ahead of your trip. We will advise you if vouchers are needed and we will send out if required. Usually our final logistics voucher (and any other vouchers you may need) will be sent out around 2 weeks prior to departure when we have all the final timings confirmed.

### **Travel via the USA – ESTA**

If you are travelling from Europe to Ecuador via the USA - if you do fly via the USA you need to get an ESTA – or visa waiver - you would need to do these yourselves via the website: <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov/esta/>

## **6. Arrivals in Quito or Guayaquil**

*For guests arriving who have organised transfers with us:*

For those arriving to Quito or Guayaquil and for whom we are providing transfers as part of your program, your driver or your guide (depending on what we have confirmed with you) will be waiting for you as you exit the baggage claim area. There will be a lot of agencies waiting to meet their guests, so please walk slowly and look for your guide carrying our Think Galapagos sign. If you don't find your guide straight away, go to a place close to the door you came out from and wait a few minutes for your guide. If you don't find your guide after this time, for Quito you can go out of the crowded arrivals area to the area where the Car Rentals area is which you can see clearly marked and your guide will come to meet you there.

For Guayaquil to the information desk which is located in the middle of the airport and clearly marked (it isn't a large airport). It very rarely happens (we can count on one hand in all the years we have been doing this that it has happened), but just in case! As an absolute back up, you always have with you the numbers for our team in Ecuador who are there 24/7 and you can get in touch with them.

The new Quito airport that opened in 2013 is located roughly 60 minutes away hotels that are in Quito itself.

*For guests arriving who have not organised transfers with us:*

Quito airport now has a relatively efficient and safe way of getting taxis – you will see a taxi desk pretty much at the point where you come out of the baggage claim area, you can go there, tell them where you want to take the taxi to, they will give you a price for that and then when you step outside, you can then take the next car waiting. There are always taxis available 24/7 and only those authorised by the airport can pick up people from the airport.

## 7. While You're In Quito

Quito was already an Inca capital when the Spanish arrived in the 16th century, but nothing from that era remains (the residents put a torch to the city rather than let it fall into the hands of the conquistadors). The current city was founded on the ruins of the old city in 1534. Quito's old colonial quarter has been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site, which means that its centuries-old, red-tiled, whitewashed buildings will be preserved. This is the town centre where the legislative buildings and beautiful old cathedrals are located. Quito also has a modern, bustling downtown city centre, which is where most of the hotels, businesses, airline offices, and restaurants are located. The Equatorial Monument is located about 40 minutes north of the city centre with a museum, shops, restaurants and view of the city. The city's 9,500-foot altitude makes it a cool, comfortable place to visit and, on a clear day, there are spectacular views of the snow-capped volcanoes that rise around it. Much of Quito's population is made up of transplanted Europeans and Quechua-speaking Indians.

## 8. While You're in Guayaquil

Guayaquil is Ecuador's largest city and busiest port. It is a steamy tropical bustling city full of energy, with charming colonial buildings hidden amongst the skyscrapers and modern developments. In the heart of the downtown and a couple of minutes walk from the Grand Hotel, Parque Bolivar has the unique attraction of being home to a colony of tame land iguanas whose prehistoric appearances contrasts wonderfully with the surrounding shopping malls. Nearby, the Malecon is a waterfront park skirting the wide, Rio Guayas which was rebuilt in 2000 is now home to modern shops and cafes.

## 9. Security

As with all big cities of the world you have to be aware of security in Quito and Guayaquil and you'll be wise to follow some simple safety precautions. Leave valuables such as passport, cash, jewelry and air tickets locked in the hotel safe or locked in your case - don't carry them with you because of pickpockets and don't leave them lying in the open in your room.

- Never leave your handbag or backpack unattended, even in the hotel lobby.
- Carry just a reasonable amount of spending money and credit cards stashed in a money belt or hidden pouch (bags and purses attract attention).
- If you visit the old colonial city of Quito take no valuables, as it is not a safe area to walk around alone especially after dark (the exception is La Ronda area, which many of our guests staying in Quito now stay in).
- As a precaution if you would like to walk to a restaurant near to your hotel in Quito – we recommend that you ask someone from reception to walk you to the restaurant, and someone from the restaurant will then walk you back to the hotel (or the same person from the hotel can come back to meet you.) If it is further away (as is the case definitely for those staying in Guayaquil) the hotel reception can order you a taxi, and then for your return – ask the restaurant to organise for you a taxi to take you back. (\* please ask us if you would like us to help organise this in advance for you and we can help with this).



- Don't ever flag down a taxi on the street there are numerous cases of fake taxis – so please always ask the hotel reception or the restaurant to organise your taxi for you. If you are out and about, go to the nearest hotel and ask the reception staff to help you – they are usually very good at doing this.
- If you are getting money out of an ATM, please ask your guide to accompany you.

## 9. Getting to Galapagos and boarding your cruise

If you are flying from Quito, the plane will most likely stop in Guayaquil first before proceeding to Baltra in Galapagos. Total travel time from Quito – Guayaquil – Baltra is approx. 3 hours. If you fly directly from Quito or Guayaquil to Galapagos, you will arrive in Baltra approximately 1 hour and 45 minutes after take-off. During the flight to Galapagos they will spray the aircraft with a mild insecticide approved by the World Health Organisation in order to prevent insects such as mosquitoes, moths, flies or wasps travelling to Galapagos where they could become an invasive and potentially very destructive species.

They usually spray the airplane around 15 minutes before landing in the Galapagos.

We want to stress the importance of keeping safe your luggage ticket given when you check in for your Galapagos flight. Several guests have had problems getting their luggage without the ticket due to security measures at the airport

### Quarantine and Inspection

After you have processed your Galapagos Transit Control Card, you need to go through the quarantine and inspection system, Sicgal. They will x-ray your luggage checking for any live organic matter (soil, seeds, plants, some foods or any animals). Granola Bars, chocolate and other similar snacks are fine as long as they are packed and processed. Before packing, please give your clothes, shoes and other luggage a good clean.

Once you have completed these two stages, you will be able to check in. As your flight ticket is an e-ticket, you just need to present your passport and your reservation code and copy of your reservation (if you have it). The person at the counter will give you your boarding pass. Following this you need to go through security.

Please remember not to carry sharp metal objects in your pockets or hand luggage as they could be confiscated. Carry those objects in your checked bag. The last time we checked – water in plastic bottles is allowed through security in Ecuador (though this could change at any time, you should be fine).

Once you arrive you will have to go through customs procedures. Please show the Galapagos Migration Authorities your migration card. And, you will need to pay a Galapagos National Park entrance fee of \$200 cash (this is US\$100 for children under 12 years) , per person .

\* Remember to adjust your watch when you arrive - Galapagos time is one hour earlier than mainland Ecuador.

Once you have paid the US\$200 and given your Galapagos Transit Control Card to the officials, you then proceed to collect your luggage and then form another line to get your hand luggage inspected (to ensure you are not bringing in any live matter as detailed above).

After this final check you come to an area where you will be met by your guide who will be holding a sign for the yacht or wearing branded clothing with the yacht's name on it (or in the case of guests with a stay on the island before the cruise, with your name or our Think Galapagos logo). At this point your luggage will be taken care of by your guide or the crew from the yacht and you can start your Galapagos trip!

## **10. Galapagos National Park Environmental Rules**

The Galapagos Islands are governed by the rules of Galapagos National Park. Fortunately for the environment of the Galapagos, these rules are strictly enforced by the naturalist guides. Many rules are common sense, but we discuss them here so you'll be aware of them. All groups who visit the Galapagos are, by law, accompanied by trained naturalist guides, and the guides will advise you further about these various rules.

- Don't remove or disturb any plant or animal or remains of them (shells, bones, pieces of wood).
- Don't transport any live material to or from the islands or from island to island. Check your clothing before landing for seeds or insects. In particular, check your boot soles for seeds or dried mud before you leave the boat. Inadvertent transport of these materials represents a special danger in the Galapagos, as each island has its own unique fauna and flora, and introduced plants and animals can quickly destroy this uniqueness.
- Do not take any food to the islands. Food may introduce organisms that might be dangerous to the fragile island ecosystem. Because of their seeds, fresh fruits or vegetables are especially dangerous.
- Don't touch the animals. It is harmful to them and they will lose their remarkable tameness if thus treated by human invaders.
- Don't feed the animals. This can destroy the animals' social structure and can affect their reproduction.
- Don't startle or chase any animal. Be extremely cautious when you are walking through breeding colonies of sea birds and be sure you don't frighten the birds off their nests. This exposes the eggs or chicks to the sun and predators.
- Don't step off the prescribed trails. This is important, particularly because the islands' trails are heavily used. It may be tempting to walk a few steps off the trail to get a better photo, but don't. The trails are there to make sure visiting humans have the least possible impact on these fragile islands.
- Don't dispose of anything while you're on the islands. Litter of all types must be kept off the islands. Keep all your film wrappers, chewing gum, and so on, in a plastic bag in your pocket for proper disposal on the boat. While on the boat, don't throw anything overboard. All trash items will be properly disposed of by the crew.

- Don't buy souvenirs or objects made from plants or animals of the Galapagos Islands. The best way to discourage this trade is not to buy any of these articles. If someone offers you such a souvenir, inform your naturalist guide. You will see items for sale in Puerto Ayora made of black coral, but we ask you to refrain from buying them, as black coral is slow growing and the resource is limited.

## **11. Plastic Free Galapagos**

Galapagos isn't immune from the threats posed to wildlife by our use of plastics, and so it was a very positive development when in April 2018 the Governing Council of Galapagos announced their plan to phase out single-use plastic straws, bags, polyethylene containers and bottles on the islands.

As visitors there are also ways we can help.

- Although many yachts do provide them, we would always suggest that guests take their own refillable water bottle. All the yachts have large drinking water dispensers for you to use to fill up your own water bottle for use whilst you are visiting the islands.
- Refuse a plastic straw (hopefully with the ban on single use plastics this won't be an issue for long) but it will help to stop the use of straws if guests request drinks without a straw. "No sorbete, por favor!"

## **12. Recommended Reading**

You'll enjoy your trip so much more if you are well informed about the places you'll visit and the wildlife you'll see. Here are some of our favourites, it is by no means an exhaustive list and new books are being released all the time, but hopefully this is helpful to get you started.

### **General introduction to the Natural History**

- Galapagos: a Natural History by John C. Kricher
- Galapagos: the Islands that Changed the World by Paul D. Steward
- Evolutions Workshop by Edward J. Larsson
- The Galapagos: a Natural History by Henry Nicholls
- Lonesome George by Henry Nicholls
- Michael Jackson's Galapagos, A Natural History

### **Background reading**

- Jonathan Wiener's The Beak of the Finch, A Story of Evolution in Our Time
- Johanna Angermeyer's My Father's Island for background reading.

## Field Guides

Your naturalist guide will have a selection of field guides but you may want to bring your own. We especially recommend

- Collins Safari Guide to The Wildlife of the Galapagos by Julian & Daniel Fitter & David Hosking (available in Ecuador)
- A Guide to the Birds of the Galapagos Islands by Isabel Castro
- Reef Fish Identification Galapagos by Paul Humann.

For a great *historical novel* giving an account of Darwin's journey to Galapagos – **This Thing of Darkness – Harry Thompson** (it was long listed for the Man Booker Prize)

## Special Interest Books:

For those with an interest in the natural history of the Amazon region, a great book is A Neotropical Companion by John Kricher (he also is author of one of the Galapagos books we recommend). For those with a special interest in birding, The Birds of Ecuador (Field Guide) by Robert R Ridgley and Paul Greenfield is a great book with beautiful plates, though is very heavy and relatively expensive, and you will have access to a copy whilst at most lodges (you can double check with us if it will be at the lodges you visit).

