

## Ecuador and Galapagos Islands Travel Journal – Volume 1



Thursday, January 16, 2025 – Quito, Ecuador

Buenos dias from Quito, Ecuador, our starting point to the Galápagos Islands. We're traveling with our son Michael and his new bride Jade, and our daughter Julia. No, we didn't intend to crash Jade and Michael's honeymoon; this family trip was planned before their engagement, and they planned the wedding around it.

We're starting on the equator in the Andean foothills.

At 9,350 feet, Quito is the capital of Ecuador and the second-highest capital city in the world (after La Paz, Bolivia). We arrived in Quito last night and spent today visiting the Old Town, founded on an ancient Inca settlement and one of the largest and best-preserved colonial-era quarters in South America. This UNESCO

World Heritage Site is packed with colorful plazas, magnificent churches, and stately monuments.



We then headed to the 'Middle of the World City,' located about an hour north of Quito, and visited a monument that delineates the imaginary line that is the Equator, taking pictures with one foot in each hemisphere. One side of our body was in winter, and the other side was in summer, but we didn't notice any difference in the climate.



Friday, January 17, 2025 – Quito to Baltra Island

After an early breakfast we took a flight from Quito to Baltra Island, part of the Galápagos Archipelago. There we boarded the Hurtigruten HX expedition ship MS Santa Cruz II on which we'll be spending the next several days sailing around the Galápagos Islands. The Galápagos are an

archipelago of volcanic islands in the Eastern Pacific, located around the Equator west of the mainland of South America. The group consists of 18 main islands, 3 smaller islands, and 107 rocks and islets.

The Galápagos are famous for its large number of endemic species, which were studied by Charles Darwin in the 1830s and inspired his theory of evolution by means of natural selection. If you don't believe in evolution, please let me know so I can remove you from my contact list. The animals rule here, and as such are unafraid of humans and can therefore be observed up close in their natural habitats.





We got our first glimpse of the islands' wildlife on Mosquera Islet. We took zodiac boats ashore for a closer look at a large colony of sea lions, marine iguanas, Sally Lightfoot crabs and other animals. After returning to the ship and having dinner, we collapsed from exhaustion.

Saturday, January 18, 2025 - San Cristóbal Island

After taking zodiacs ashore at



Punta Pitt on San Cristobal, we took an early morning hike to the top of a hill to see two of the three types of boobies in the Galapagos. I'm talking about birds, not boobs. We spotted lots of blue-footed boobies and red-footed boobies, and we were lucky enough to watch a "mating dance" between two boobies. That was all before breakfast!



We returned to the ship for breakfast, then went snorkeling along the shore to view underwater sea life. There were lots of fish and a sea lion swam right past us.

After lunch we went back ashore and visited a reserve and breeding center for the endangered giant Galápagos tortoise. Galápagos tortoises are the giants of the tortoise world and the most iconic of all Galápagos wildlife. They have a lifespan of over 150 years and can weigh more than 500 pounds.

Our expedition guide, to whom we are assigned for

the entire trip, is excellent. She's originally German but has lived in the Galapagos for 18 years. When we asked her what type of work her husband does, she informed us that he's the captain of our ship!



Sunday, January 19, 2025 - Santa Fe and South Plaza



We started the day with a nature walk on the beaches of Santa Fe Island, home to the endemic land iguana and a colony of sea lions. The walk was not challenging; nevertheless, I did manage to lose my balance and grab a cactus to keep from falling. After picking the cactus needles from my hand, I was fine.

We then went snorkeling with a sea turtle, schools of fish, sea lions and a sting ray. And that was all before lunch.

After lunch, we toured the ship's bridge while heading to South Plaza Island off the coast of Santa Cruz. It's one of the smallest islands in the Galapagos archipelago. There were lots of birds, land and marine iguanas, and sea lions everywhere we went. We're getting to the point where we've seen so much wildlife, we don't have to take pictures of every animal we see. Only the ones mating.

That's it for now. Sorry for the length of this journal. We've been so busy I haven't been able to send it out until today.

Love Stephen and Lori



## Galapagos Islands Travel Journal – Volume 2

Monday, January 20, 2025 - Santa Cruz

Today we visited Santa Cruz, the most populated island in Galápagos. Its town of Puerto Ayora has 25,000 residents and is the archipelago's main tourism hub. It's the "New York City" of the archipelago, except with more tortoises and fewer honking taxis. Our first stop was the Charles Darwin Research Station, the largest and oldest science and conservation organization in Galapagos with a breeding program for giant tortoises. Afterwards, we took a bike ride to a sugar cane farm and distillery, where we tasted the moonshine, coffee, and chocolate that they make there. Spoiler: the moonshine won. Lunch was in the



highlands of the island at a restaurant surrounded by dozens of giant tortoises living their best lives: munching on grass, wallowing in pools and one couple (of tortoises) making love. It was quite a scene. We've been really lucky on this trip when it comes to observing the mating rituals of the animals here. Everyone took lots of pictures and videos. Humans never tire of watching animals have sex, and the animals don't seem to mind

having us watch. After spending some time in Puerto Ayora on the main shopping street, we returned to the ship via zodiac.



Tuesday, January 21, 2025 - Española

Española, the southernmost island in the Galápagos, welcomed us first thing in the morning with a

challenging hike. The island is home to a number of endemic species, and since Julia was with us and she's the luckiest person in the world, we saw them all. Even the albatross, which is usually gone from the island by this time of year. Additionally, we saw Nazca boobies, blue-footed boobies, swallow-tailed gulls, red Española lava lizards and marine iguanas. We also checked out El Soplador, a blowhole that shoots water seventy-five feet in the air.



After lunch we headed to the beach of Gardner Bay and nearby Osborn Islet for a stroll along the prettiest beach that I've ever seen, with sea lions casually lounging around like they own the place. If that wasn't enough, we then went snorkeling at two different sites offshore, this time getting up close and personal with the sea lions in the water.

At night, the sharks came out. Attracted by the ship's lights, hundreds of sharks, most over nine feet long, surrounded the ship and fed on whatever sea life was in the water. Fascinating to watch!

Wednesday, January 22, 2025 - Eden Islet and North Seymour

Today's first of many activities was a zodiac ride around Eden Island, observing the islet from the water. Eden is the remains of a volcanic "tuff cone", a type of volcanic feature formed when molten lava meets cold sea water with explosive results. Then we returned to the ship, changed our clothes, and went kayaking around the island. We spotted lots of birds, sea lions and stingrays.



After lunch, we arrived at North Seymour Island, where the snorkeling adventures continued. More stingrays, more fish, and sharks. Then we hiked around and saw frigate birds puffing their chests to attract a mate, along with land iguanas and of course more sea lions.



Our cruise ends tomorrow morning, after which we'll return to Quito for one more day before flying home. As this family honeymoon winds down, it's been a great trip. Incredible wildlife, stunning landscapes, and more boobies than I ever expected to see in my lifetime. I highly recommend Hurtigruten HX Expeditions if you're planning a trip to the Galapagos. Everything was well organized, and their staff was terrific.

Hope to see you soon (after I sleep for a week)!  
Love, Stephen and Lori