

A Safari Report - Ecuador and Galapagos

The Maiden Voyage - Jan/Feb 2001

Oh yes it was an adventure! My maiden voyage, an oil spill, unhappy indigenous people – you name it! It all began with 8 fun loving folks from Ontario, BC and Calgary – and what a



great group they were. As we landed in Quito after a full day of travel, they were buzzing with anticipation! Our expectations of

experiencing a new country, chocked full of the wildlife and people that went with it, were fully met as we encountered one new experience after another. The rainforest was indescribable! The canopy – at least 50 meters up – was teeming with unusual birds and mammals. The Umbrella Bird, often difficult to see, gave us a thrill as we strained to see it's unique build. The Poison Arrow Frog – complete with all his spots was a treat to see. The downpours gave us a whole new insight on what “rainforest” really means. I have never seen rain like that! After 3 full days of walking the boardwalks through the dense vegetation and canoeing through the black water creeks marveling at all we saw, we headed back through Quito to the pristine wilderness of the Galapagos Islands.



Along the way he heard our worst nightmare – an oil spill off the coast of

one of the islands. How had it happened . . . what damage had been done . . . how many animals have been affected . . . were we going to be able to go? I had a very sick feeling and I know the rest of the group felt the same way. It was one thing to be so close and yet so far, but the bigger picture - of nature, being the focus of yet another man made disaster, was too much. As time drew nearer to us getting on that plane to Galapagos, we heard about all the

efforts of the incredible people that had stepped in to help – the Brazilian army, the US Coastguard, the Charles Darwin Research Station and so many individual people – we began to feel some hope. As we flew over, the whole plane was peering through the windows to try and catch glimpse of this horrible disaster. We heard the news was better – the clean up was coming along and with a bit of a current change – the oil that had not been cleaned up had shifted out to sea rather that towards the islands. Whew!!! Still – animals perished and an incredibly pristine environment has been scarred. Why was there such a large tanker there in the first place? I understood the tanker was there to fuel one of the larger cruise ships (holding 200 people – ours had 16 and was



fueled with diesel). Due to this disaster the rules have changed – these large ships will now have to travel to the

mainland - 2 days of sailing - fuel up and then return to the islands. In my opinion – 200 people arriving on these islands is a lot! Hopefully something positive will come out of this yet. So there we were – the water is aqua, the air is pure, the wildlife – prolific! A nature lovers paradise. We boarded our vessel after spending most of the afternoon at the Darwin Research Station, and headed out to sea. For the next 7 days we saw Blue Footed Boobies, Masked Boobies, Storm Petrels, Pelicans, Swallowtail Gulls and Frigate Birds to name a few. We encountered sea lions water dancing and iguanas soaking up the sun. One tide pool afforded us the experience of watching an octopus hunting – incredible!!! We all left with the special feeling that we witnessed the spill **and** the clean up. We will be able to, first hand, spread the word about the need for conserving such a unique and beautiful land. How unlucky and lucky we were . . .