

## A Safari Report Ecuador and Galapagos February 2002 Submitted by Shirley Berry, NETT

Looking for a diverse travel adventure, well this is it. Where else in the world do you find penguins and flamingos on the same island?

Explore Ecuador, a magical country Ecuador! Ecuador is a unique mix of rainforest, Andean Mountains, plains and the most extraordinary islands built by volcanoes with distinct personalities. Our first few days were spent visiting the countryside surrounding Quito with stops for photography, especially the monument advertising we were standing on the equator. The first day we spent time in the town of Otavalo which boasts a wonderful market, more than a few good buys were found. The crafts are so incredible and very affordable. Next, south to Cotopaxi, a volcano that showed us inspiring beauty. It literally took our breath away! The parking lot is over 4500m elevation so moving around and photographing was a bit of an effort.

Part of the magic of travel is the different ways of getting to a destination – our visit to Sacha Lodge was no exception. We flew over the Andes, caught a motorized boat for the trip down the Napo River, walked through the forest and then canoed in small hand carved dugouts to a remote and lovely lodge. Here we spent the next few days

exploring with our very knowledgeable guides Malcolm and Adelmo. The rainforest is truly enchanting with the lush sights and sounds of birds, monkeys and insects. Our first night was a wonderful experience as we silently canoed through a mangrove and palm tree choked creek, listening to the night sounds and catching glimpses of the occasional night visitor. That same creek trip in the afternoon a few days later netted a fabulous experience of three different Red Howler Monkey troops, all wonderfully loud! The first troop had an inquisitive lead male inspecting us and let us catch a glimpse of a mom with baby clutched to her stomach. The final troop was spectacular, crashing and screaming through the trees overhead, traveling with ease through the canopy. The last final glimpse was of the large dominant male moving with such confidence that showed his status!

We also had the delight of seeing a number of different birds that included the rare Agami Heron, Mealy and Blue Headed Parrots, Hoatzin, Smooth-billed Ani, Silvered Antbird, Bat Falcon, Egrets, Striated Heron and the very interesting Lawrence's Thrush which does a remarkable imitation of other bird songs. Amazingly, our guide could distinguish each call and bird it really belonged to! From the top of the tree tower we looked out over the canopy and had a wonderful view of the Many-banded Aracari, a member of the Toucan family. Our guides pointed out interesting insects, a



lovely large toad almost invisible due to its camouflage, caimans and reptiles. As well, we saw many plants and learned about their medicinal uses; a number which remedy a sick tummy. It was fascinating to learn how the local people depended upon the forest for everything, as our guide said, "this is our pharmacy".

It was difficult leaving such a lovely tranquil place



but we were eager to see what the Galapagos Islands would reveal. The first stop at North Seymour Island had us within the first steps on the island snapping photos of Sally light-foot crabs, sea lions and iguanas. When we finally moved along we were in awe

of the Magnificent Frigatebird colony where we watched the females feeding their young and the males soaring overhead showing off their red throat sack trying to impress the females. We snorkeled daily and were treated to a beautiful show of fish, sea urchins, turtles, rays and white tipped sharks. My favorite swim was with the sea lions that would frolic about, swim straight up to your mask, take a good look and then abruptly scoot away. This snorkeling time also allowed us to view some interesting behaviors between them. They would nip each other and grab the others fins as they tussled in the water. It was enthralling! How I wished I could twist and turn in the water as they did.

The landscape of these islands is truly out of this world. Each island was formed from volcanoes at different times in history so the ground was everything from soft green or black sand to hard ropy lava and acres of barren lava flows. One island was formed as recent as 100 years ago. The marine and land iguanas amazed me - every one of them became an individual and presented a unique photo opportunity. The sea lions also joined us with very little shyness. On one island landing, we found a very handsome male sea lion guarding his harem. He roared at us as our panga (zodiac) approached. We backed off a few times until our guides managed to persuade him back into the water with a lot of hand clapping. He definitely had my respect!

A visit to the Darwin Research Centre in Puerto Ayora where Carol presented a donation to support ongoing research that will protect the islands and the giant tortoises. We spent some time with Lonesome George, the one remaining Pinta Island tortoise – a handsome guy without a mate that is unfortunately very close to extinction.

Each day was a different island that was always fun and informative. A treasure of memories!



And one last memory . . . our favorite, patient driver in Quito, Luciano, stopping – PARE – for just one more photo or market to shop in!