

Lead Adventures 3-Week Galapagos program

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<http://charlottesitineraries.weebly.com/1/post/2013/09/isabela-galapagos-lead-adventures-week-3.html>

In the Galápagos, the wildlife is there year-round. If you're at all prone to sea sickness, avoid the rough-sea months of July through October. The dry season (June to December) is also cool and often misty.

Read more: <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/ecuador/weather#ixzz37acZchYv>

Tourist high seasons throughout Ecuador coincide with European, North American and Ecuadorian vacation periods, roughly mid-December through January and June through August. During this time, accommodation rates are highest, and reservations at more popular lodging options are advised.

Read more: <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/ecuador/weather#ixzz37acml4nw>

Quito Before Lead Adventures - Extra Day and Orientation

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0 Comments



Summary: Our Lead Adventures 3-Week Galapagos program began with orientation on a Monday, we flew in Saturday night, and therefore had Sunday free in Quito. There was also some free time Monday afternoon, after orientation in the morning. Although Quito's high elevation left me a bit breathless - and gave me quite the headache - my friend and I enjoyed sightseeing around Ecuador's capital. We visited Mitad del Mundo, the monument marking the Equator, and Quito's historical center, which included gorgeous churches and El Panecillo, a statue of the Virgin Mary atop a hill.

ENTIRE TRIP OVERVIEW

Destination(s): Mainly the Galapagos Islands, 2.5 days in Quito, Ecuador

Total Length of Stay: 3 weeks

Getting There: International flight to Quito, domestic flights from Quito to the Galapagos Islands

THIS PORTION

This Blog Post: Arriving in Quito Saturday night, free day in Quito on Sunday, Lead Adventures orientation on Monday morning and Monday afternoon in Quito

Accommodation: Hostel Andino, pretty central location, near Baca Ortiz station on the Ecóvia red line

Food: Hostel Andino serves breakfast and makes the **best scrambled eggs ever** with onions and tomatoes. Every other meal was on our own and we tried some Ecuadorian specialties, like *cuy*, Ecuadorian guinea pig, and *chicha*, a fermented corn drink. I really liked eating *arroz con pollo*, a typical Latin American dish, and *chaulafan*, Ecuadorian chicken fried rice, both of which I got from a fast food place named Texas Chicken.

SATURDAY

1.) The Most Notable Airport Transfer I've Ever Taken (12-1am)

I normally wouldn't write about landing at an airport, because it's really not that interesting, but perhaps this will help some future Lead Adventures volunteer. We got an airport transfer with Lead Adventures, so my friend and I looked for a sign with our names on it and...my name was spelled wrong. Not a big deal, just kind of funny. The ride to Hostel Andino was about an hour long, taking us through dark and winding roads, which scared me a bit. Not that our driver did anything wrong, but I was overly paranoid because the US Department of State had warned of taxi kidnappings in Quito. It also probably didn't help that my flight had arrived at midnight, so the city was

pitch dark and silent.

When we finally got to Hostel Andino, it was locked and closed for the night. It's a family-owned hostel and does not have a 24-hour reception desk; after hours you have to ring the doorbell to get in. Our airport transfer rang the doorbell for what seemed like forever before someone came out - it was probably only 5 minutes in reality - which given my paranoia about taxi kidnappings described above, only confused and irritated me.

Note: My airport transfer provider was awesome, Lead Adventures is also great, I was just disoriented and paranoid because I got in at midnight.

SUNDAY

1.) Epic Public Transportation Journey to Mitad del Mundo (8:45-10:30pm)

There are organized tours that go out here, and a cab ride costs \$12-15 according to the Internet, but the train and bus only cost 25 cents each! (For some reason the bus on the way back was 35 cents, I swear it was 25 cents on the way there.) I recommend coming here by public transport, simply because you can experience local life in Quito, and the journey goes through crowded, public areas, not shady, deserted ones. I enjoyed learning that snacks are generally sold on Quito trains and buses...and tried to imagine zealous vendors advertising ice cream cones on a San Francisco MUNI bus.

That all being said, the public transport route took an epically long time. The Mitad del Mundo buses (really clearly labeled) leave from La Ofelia bus station, which is the end station of the Metrobus blue line (at the North End). Our hostel owner said the nearest Metrobus station was a 15-20 minute walk away, but it took about 30 minutes, partially because the high altitude made me a little breathless, and partially because we got confused and nearly took the Trole green line. We found the correct train line around 9:15am, got to La Ofelia around 9:45am, and then caught a Mitad del Mundo bus that arrived at the monument around 10:30am...after starting the journey at 8:45am.

2.) Mitad Del Mundo (10:30-11:15am)

Admission: \$3 adults

Yes it's a total tourist trap and the equator isn't even accurate, but the monument is still fun and so is taking cheesy tourist photos. Trying to be original at a common tourist site, I did a back bend. The Ethnographic Museum is located inside the monument, but we didn't go in.





3.) Intiñan Solar Museum (11:30am-1pm)

Admission: \$4 adults

Mitad del Mundo is the equator's location as calculated by a French explorer, an amazing accomplishment without the aid of modern technology. However, GPS technology now shows that his calculation was off by about 200 meters, and the "true" equator is the basis of the Intiñan Solar Museum. There are a few demonstrations of Equator science, like how water draining down a sink swirls in opposite directions on different sides of the equator. In addition to the demonstrations, there was a brief presentation on the culture of some indigenous tribes...and apparently they had a **tradition of taking human heads, sucking out the brains, and then using the shrunken heads as either an amulet or trophy.**



The "true" Equator...I wonder if it'll be proven wrong again in a few years with new technology.



Balancing an egg on a nail is supposed to be easier at the Equator. It's still pretty damn hard.



According to our tour guide, this is a real, shrunken human head.



Solar clock

4.) Eating Guinea Pig for Lunch at Mitad del Mundo (1:15-2pm)

After the Intiñan Solar Museum, we went back to the Mitad del Mundo area for lunch. We had saved our tickets, but the security guard let us in through this back door without really checking. We tried *cuy*, Ecuadorian guinea pig, and it REALLY DID NOT HELP that I had seen the alive and very adorable version earlier. We also tried *chicha*, a traditional fermented corn drink that tasted really, really acidic.



Cute guinea pigs at the Intiñan Solar Museum, which I saw right before lunch...



...how they look when they're roasting...



...so I can't say my appetite was the greatest when this arrived at my table.

My meal would have been more comfortable if the pig's head wasn't so, eh, *visible*. But I posed for a picture with it, and my friend instructed me to kiss it...



After lunch, we tried to hike the nearby [Pululahua volcano](#). [Calima Tours](#), located inside the Mitad del Mundo area, does \$8 tours there but the 3pm one was cancelled due to fog. **If you want to do this hike, go in the morning before the fog sets in, then explore the Equator monuments and museums afterwards.**

6.) Basílica del Voto Nacional (4:45-5:20pm)

We took the bus and train back into Quito, and went a few stops past our hostel to the Basílica del Voto Nacional. I don't even know what to say about it, except that it's SO BEAUTIFUL, and so are the views surrounding it. A Gothic church, several Ecuadorian animals such as Galapagos tortoises and iguanas, are carved into the walls.



Around 5:20pm we decided to head back, because we really didn't want to be out in Quito after dark. For dinner I walked to KFC near my hostel, and **my hostel owner explicitly told me to not take my phone out while doing so, because he didn't want me to get robbed. When I got to KFC, there was a security guard standing outside. Quito's not the safest of places unfortunately.**

MONDAY

1.) Lead Adventures Orientation (10:15am – 1pm)

Well it started a bit late (it's South America), but was an enjoyable process. First Christopher, a Galapagos research scientist, gave a presentation on the geology and ecology of the islands, during which **I developed a massive headache**. This was not due to the presentation being bad, on the contrary it was very interesting, but I was getting dehydrated from Quito's high altitude. Luckily some water and an Ibuprofen pill fixed the problem...and **the moral of the story is to stay hydrated in Quito**.

Following the scientific presentation on the Galapagos, there was information about the logistics of the program. After orientation, we went to lunch with one of the Lead Adventures interns in Mariscal Foch, a touristy area with plenty of dining (and I think shopping) options.

2.) El Panecillo (3:45-4:15pm)

Admission: \$1 to go into the base of the statue

After hanging out in Mariscal Foch for a while, my friend and I caught the Ecóvia red line train to Quito's historical center. From there we caught a cab to El Panecillo, a statue of the Virgin Mary atop a hill. The views of Quito from the hilltop are gorgeous, as is the statue itself. I especially enjoyed looking inside it to see the structural support.





3.) San Francisco Plaza (4:15pm)

We caught a cab from El Panecillo to San Francisco Plaza, a major landmark in Quito's historical center. St. Francis was a pretty epic Catholic Saint who has several places named after him, my favorite of which will always be a certain Northern California city. However, San Francisco Plaza in Quito is also very nice.



4.) La Compañía Church (4:45-5:15pm)

Admission: \$3.00 adults \$1.50 students

I'm fairly sure that the tourist map we had from our hostel was just...completely wrong. This church was totally not where the map said it was. When my friend and I cluelessly stumbled in, the women at the ticket counter asked if we were students, which we weren't. However, they seemed very convinced that we were indeed students, and just didn't have our IDs, because they asked more than once. They then sold us one adult ticket and one student ticket, for a total of \$4.50. My friend and I are both 26 years old, I guess we look young.

Photos not allowed inside, so I only have a picture of the outside. The most notable feature is that the walls and ceilings inside are decorated in gold. Extremely ornate and unique, this church is definitely worth a visit, although I admit I have an inkling for religious sites.



After visiting this church, it was cold, rainy, and getting dark soon, so we quickly headed back. We ate dinner and went to bed early, because we had an early flight to the Galapagos Islands the next day!