



## JOURNEY TO THE GALAPAGOS ISLANDS

### With Burt and Susan Mittelstadt!

### February 4 – 11, 2018



Venture to a treasured World Heritage site – the Galapagos Islands – and witness for yourself Ecuador’s stunning volcanic archipelago. Join like-minded travelers for a blend of learning and fun on a boat that Naturalist Journeys has chartered to insure you a special adventure.

Burt and Susan Mittelstadt of the folk music duo *the Gypsy Carpenters* will host this grand adventure – an unusual treat! They are seasoned Latin American travelers that can help you get the most out of your trip. Expect impromptu evening songs and a trip concert under the stars. The Gypsies currently spend most of their time between Baja California Sur and the Western United States, adding to their music a passion for birding and exploring. They make any trip more memorable and fun. You are guaranteed a fabulous toe-tapping time with them! And there is simply no place like the Galapagos. <http://www.gypsyncarpenters.com>

“The natural history of these islands is eminently curious, and well deserves attention.” So wrote Charles Darwin about the Galapagos in the first edition of his *Journal of Researches*. Eminently curious, indeed. Little did Darwin realize that his brief exploration of only four islands would lead to a theory of evolution that would forever change our view of the natural world.

Retrace a part of Darwin's expedition! We will certainly see what Darwin saw – marine iguanas diving to the bottom of the ocean to feed on algae, courting Blue-footed Boobies high stepping to show off their resplendent sky-blue feet, and giant tortoises stretching their necks to reach the pads on 10-foot tall prickly pear cacti.

There will be time for hiking, wildlife watching, for those that wish kayaking, paddle-boarding, snorkeling, learning and fun. The ship

is the perfect size for an intimate voyage, letting you get to know the islands in detail.

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Galapagos wildlife is truly extraordinary and remarkably tame. Many species are found nowhere else in the world. Don't be surprised if you have to step carefully over a nesting Blue-footed Booby, or wait for a young Galapagos Sea Lion to uncurl from resting on the daypack you left on the beach.

Seabirds are abundant on the outer islands, and you'll have a chance to observe and photograph birds courting, nesting, feeding, caring for young, and in flight. We should see three species of Boobies (Red, Blue-footed, and Masked), the Wandering Albatross, the Galapagos Penguin, the beautiful and nocturnal Swallow-tailed Gull, both Magnificent and Great Frigatebirds, and Red-billed Tropicbirds. In deep water channels between islands we look for Galapagos Shearwater and Galapagos Petrel.

Land birds are also plentiful, including the richly patterned Galapagos Doves. Sorting out many of the thirteen species of Darwin's finches provides a challenge. We also search for Galapagos Flamingo, Galapagos Hawk, and the Galapagos form of the Short-eared Owl.

Other creatures will also captivate your interest. The intense color of Sally Lightfoot crabs contrasts dramatically with the dark lava rock. Marine Iguana are plentiful, their color patterns varying between islands; Land Iguana, on the other hand, are rare and shy. The huge land tortoises that give the islands their name are found in the highlands. Almost every day we can snorkel in quiet coves among active and colorful fish, possibly dolphins and turtles.

So much is said of Galapagos wildlife that other parts of the experience often go undescribed. You can easily observe the islands' fascinating volcanic geology – from the texture of lava and patterns of spatter cones to the stunning moonscapes found on younger islands. Using small boats, we explore the mangrove lagoons. On some islands, prickly pear cactus grow tall like trees. The Galapagos provide habitat for more than 500 species of plants, including some 180 endemics.

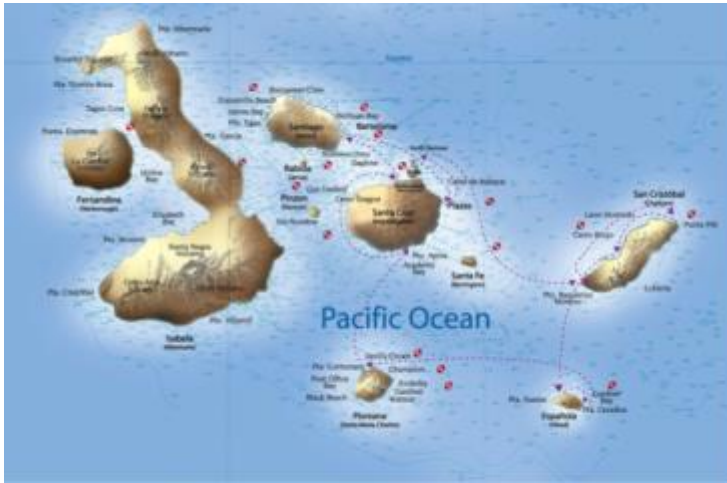
The Galapagos Islands have been protected since 1834; in 1986 the pristine marine environment gained added protection. Responsible tourism is a key factor in promising continued protection – our itinerary is carefully designed with that in mind.



Enjoy a visit to the Charles Darwin Research Station and learn more about conservation efforts, including the control of introduced species such as goats, rats, pigs, and cats.

Today over 30,000 people are residents on four of the islands, mainly living in the two main cities where there are airports on Santa Cruz and San Cristobal.

#### ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND



For many years Naturalist Journeys has worked with the top-rated company, Ecoventura, which has two sister ships, the MV Letty, and MV Eric. These are 20-passenger ships meticulously maintained, committed to sustainability supported by strong conservation practices, and hosting an excellent crew – many of whom have been with the company for years.

The ship you choose makes a real difference! We can assure you an intimate and flexible voyage designed with natural history, birding, snorkeling, and photographic interests in mind. In addition to Burt and Susan, local Galapagos naturalists introduce you to the

geology, geography, history, botany, ichthyology, entomology, evolution, and natural history of the island while on land excursions, sharing experience and knowledge.

Please note: our pricing for the voyage is the same as any departure on the Ecoventura ships. By chartering the ship for these fabulous February dates, we are able to add the value of having Burt and Susan Mittlestadt onboard to share their music and to make sure you do not miss any of the really special elements that make this voyage so memorable.

#### A special offer!

Those that sign on by June 1 receive an added discount of \$100 per person. A \$750 deposit secures your space, your tour fees will be determined by cabin selection (as available), and the balance of payment is due 90 days ahead of your voyage. A \$750 deposit secures your space, your tour fees will be determined by cabin selection (as available), and the balance of payment is due 90 days ahead of your voyage.



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## GALAPAGOS ITINERARY

**Sunday, Feb. 4    Flight to Galapagos / Arrival on SAN CRISTOBAL**  
Puerto Baquerizo Moreno, SAN CRISTOBAL (Chatham)  
Frigatebird Hill (Cerro Tijeretas), SAN CRISTOBAL

Our flight of two hours from Quito takes us to one of the larger islands, San Cristobal, situated on the eastern side of the archipelago. San Cristóbal is the fifth largest island and it is also the first island visited by Charles Darwin on his 1835 visit. We embark our ship at the harbor of Puerto Baquerizo Moreno, capitol of the Galapagos Province. Our ship will have arrived in the morning and will be taking on water and supplies as we check out the National Park Visitor Center. We are soon in the company of Blue-footed Boobies and Galapagos Sea Lions, some of which will be sleeping in fisherman's pangas in the bay.

Upon arrival to Puerto Baquerizo Moreno, SAN CRISTOBAL Island, our crew is waiting at the airport to escort you to your anchored yacht. After the welcome briefing, buffet lunch and safety drill, we travel by bus into the interior of San Cristobal to visit **Cerro Tijeretas (Frigatebird Hill)** situated on the edge a town. This is one of two sites where you can spot the huge red pouches of male frigatebirds (Great and Magnificent) as they sit on their nests. The trail leads to Punta Carola where there are beautiful views. We find lava lizards, one of seven species on the islands, the Medium Ground Finch and Chatham Mockingbird. We return to the yacht for our briefing followed by our Captain's welcome cocktail party and dinner prepared by our well-trained chefs.

Enjoy your first Galapagos sunset from the observation deck, and check out the night skies before retiring to your cabin, where the motion of the boat rocks you to sleep as we motor to Cerro Brujo.



**Monday, Feb. 5                      Cerro Brujo / Punta Pitt / Leon Dormido**

We arrive to **Cerro Brujo**, a breathtaking white coral sand beach, considered one of the most spectacular in Galapagos and perfect for a peaceful walk with expansive views. We have an opportunity to snorkel or kayak from the beach or swim with Galapagos Sea Lions. A zodiac ride takes us through a cave called "The Cathedral".

During lunch, we cruise toward the northeastern tip of San Cristobal to **Punta Pitt**, a tuff formation that serves as a nesting site for many sea birds including all three types of boobies: Blue-footed, Nazca and Red-footed, both frigate species, Swallow-tailed Gulls, Storm Petrels, Shearwaters, Brown Pelicans and a colony of sea lions. The Galapagos Sea Lion breeds only in these islands, and is considered to be a smaller relative of the California Sea Lion. Punta Pitt is a first class site for sea birds. It has a similar mix of species as the northern island of Genovesa (Tower), both being located on the edges of the archipelago where upwelling creates conditions for rich feeding areas.



Here we can snorkel at Pitt Rock with sea lions and colorful fish such as King Angel and Surgeon Fish. Back on board, we cruise around **Leon Dormido (Kicker Rock)**, a vertical tuff cone formation that rises abruptly almost 500 feet out of the ocean. From the sun deck, we spot Blue-footed Boobies, Nazca Boobies and Magnificent Frigatebirds.



You will be very close to these animals so bring plenty of memory space and ample battery with you today if you are a photographer!

Tonight we motor to Espanola (Hood) Island, one of the most spectacular places of the voyage (B,L,D)

#### **Tuesday, Feb. 6 ESPANOLA: Punta Suarez and Gardner Bay**

This morning we disembark at **Punta Suarez, ESPANOLA (Hood)**, where we witness the highest rate of endemic species in Galapagos. Sea lions noisily greet us as we land on their beach. Curious Hood Mockingbirds peck at our shoelaces.



There are other seabirds to admire here, too. Colonies of Blue-footed Boobies engage in "sky-pointing" to show off for potential mates. Nazca Boobies busily care for their young. Sublime Swallow-tailed Gulls are the only nocturnal gulls in the world and fish at night. Red-billed Tropicbirds take shelter under the cliffs. We also find three species of Darwin's finches, Galapagos Doves and Galapagos Hawks. Observe the most colorful sub-species of Marine Iguana, identified with traces of red and green colorings. Brilliant orange Sally Light-foot Crabs crawl along the dark shoreline near the famous "blow hole".



After lunch we have a wet landing on **Gardner Bay, ESPANOLA (Hood)**, and walk along a seemingly endless stretch of a white sandy beach where you'll find large colonies of sea lions. There is no trail to follow so this is a chance to explore or take a long walk. You may find a Galapagos Hawk, the top natural predator on the islands, Darwin's finches or the Hood Mockingbird. Swim with sea lions right from the beach, explore the bay and islets by kayak or just relax on the beach. There's an excellent snorkeling site off Gardner Islet with a colorful diversity of sea life near Tortuga Rock. If you don't wish to swim, there are always other options, such as exploring caves covered with invertebrates by Zodiac. We return to the yacht for a briefing followed by dinner..



Enjoy happy hour back on board serenade by the sound of sea lions.

**Wednesday, Feb. 7 FLOREANA: Beach Walk / Snorkeling / Historic Post Office Bay**

Step ashore at **Punta Cormorant, FLOREANA (Charles)**, one of the few populated islands in the Galapagos. Floreana presents a rich human history with mystery and intrigue. Set foot on a green-sand beach alive with the sounds of Galapagos Sea Lions, Lava Herons, Yellow-crowned Night Herons, Blue-footed Boobies and Galapagos Penguins. Follow a trail to a brackish lagoon, home of the Bahama Duck, Common Stilts, Galapagos Flycatcher, Yellow Warblers and the Greater Flamingos, the pinkest in the world. Wind your way past a rich variety of plants including Morning Glory, Cut Leaf Daisies, Black, Red and White Mangroves, Palo Verdes and Scalesia. The trail leads to a beach with powder-soft sand where sea turtles lay their eggs in the dunes and rays swim in the shallow water. After the walk, we have an opportunity to snorkel at **Devil's Crown or Champion**, a shallow sunken crater colonized by a brilliant array of colorful fish and coral. Today lunch is served on the sundeck, weather permitting. After lunch, we visit **Post Office Bay**, not the most scenic, but one of the most famous sites in Galapagos where a post barrel was erected and put into use in the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century by English whaling vessels. There is a chance to swim from the beach with sea lions. You are invited to leave a post card and to pick up any mail from your home area. Late afternoon, we take a Zodiac ride at Baroness Point where we spot sea turtles and rays. We return to the yacht for a briefing followed by dinner.



**Thursday, Feb. 8 SANTA CRUZ: Highlands Walk / Tortoises in**

Today we have the full day on Santa Cruz, accessed from the main port city of the islands. It is a lively atmosphere and you can see homes of the early residents, including the family featured in the wonderful novel, *My Father's Island*.

We travel by bus to the **highlands** of **SANTA CRUZ** Island. We visit the highlands to experience a very different natural history excursion, one in lush forests. The scenery gradually changes as we wind our way through all seven vegetation zones found in Galapagos, driving through an elevation range of 2,700-4,500. Enjoy a walk near "Los Gemalos," the Twin Craters, and Media Luna, where we may find Woodpecker Finch and Vermilion Flycatcher. At this elevation, the Miconia Zone, a seasonal mist called the "*guara*" cloaks the forest, producing lush vegetation. We then visit a private farm "Las Primicias", where Giant Tortoises can be seen in the wild, grazing on the lush pastures.

After lunch, we visit the **Centro de Crianza Fausto Llerena (Charles Darwin Research Station)**, including the tortoise corals and the breeding center with new hatchlings and miniature tortoises not yet ready to be repatriated. Scientists from all over the globe work at the station and conduct biological research from anatomy to zoology. We stop at Van Straelen Hall where there are exhibits and a presentation. Visitors can see the tortoise and land iguana corrals.

Puerto Ayora is the social heart of the islands with the largest population of 24,000. This evening you have the option to return to your yacht for a buffet dinner or remain in town on your own account. Those who return to the yacht will be provided a water-taxi ride to return to town to shop for souvenirs, enjoy some people watching, or to stop at an ATM or internet café. Return shuttle service by water-taxis will be provided for your return to our yacht.



**Friday, Feb. 9 BARTOLOME / SANTIAGO**



This morning, we disembark at **BARTOLOME**, where it seems like we are walking on the moon. This young Island is inhospitable to most plants and animals, but we will see several pioneer plants, such as the *Brachycereus* cacti. After a dry landing, we climb 30 minutes up stairs leading to the summit of a once active volcano. Along the way, we pause to marvel at lava bombs, spatter cones and cinder cones. From the top of the wooden stairs, we can gaze out across the island for a panoramic view of the island and "Pinnacle Rock", an eroded tuff cone. Crystal clear water is an invitation to snorkel from the beach with schools of tropical fish and Galapagos Penguins or take a Zodiac ride.

After lunch, we visit **Las Bachas**, (Spanish for “barges”). There is a long stretch of a soft white sand beach and interior lagoons where we find the Greater Flamingo.

There is also a wonderful chance to snorkel here from the beach. Located off the Southern tip of **SANTIAGO** is **Sombrero Chino (Chinese Hat)** that owes its name to its shape. After a wet beach landing with sea lion colonies, the trail gives way to a primeval landscape of volcanic rubble including cracked lava formations and lava tubes. We find Marine Iguanas and pairs of Oystercatchers. You can choose to snorkel at a site that is frequented by Galapagos Penguins.

There is a briefing followed by dinner while we anchor in a calm protected area. After dinner, a sky full of stars beckons one to go out on deck and observe the galaxy. (B,L,D)



### **Saturday, Feb. 10 SOUTH PLAZA / NORTH SEYMOUR**

Today we visit **SOUTH PLAZA**, a small geological uplift with tall cliffs offering spectacular views. After a dry landing, the trail leads us through a stunning forest of Prickly Pear (*Opuntia*) and Sesuvium. Here we can find the Galapagos Land Iguana feeding on the cactus pads. Abundant Galapagos Sea Lions are found here. Toward the end of the hill, we encounter a colony of bachelor sea lions. The dominant bulls are in various stages of recovery from battles lost over prime beach territory. We also find Swallow-tailed Gulls, Shearwaters and Red-billed Tropicbirds, which build their nests along the cliffs.

After lunch, we have a dry landing at **NORTH SEYMOUR**, a small geological uplift. We will follow a trail that leads us to Swallow-tailed Gulls, Blue-footed Boobies and the endemic Land Iguanas. The largest colony of Magnificent Frigatebirds found in Galapagos is here. And, as we stroll along the beach, we find Marine Iguanas, as well as sea lions that may be body surfing the northern swells. We return to the yacht for the Captain’s Farewell cocktail party and dinner as well as a special slide show presentation by the Galapagos guides.



### **Sunday, Feb. 11 SAN CRISTOBAL: Interpretation Center**

We end our cruise of the world’s most famous archipelago this morning with a visit to the Interpretation Center opened on San Cristobal Island in 1999. Here we gain a more complete understanding of the natural and human history of the Islands. Afterwards, we spend some time in port before heading to the airport for our flight back to the mainland departing at noon.

*Photo: The Upper Deck, great for lounging between islands, and magical at night with the stars!*



## COST OF THE JOURNEY

The cost of the main tour is that of our cruise company, Ecoventura, and ranges from \$4700-\$5600, based on cabin category of the vessel. The price is based on double occupancy, from San Cristobal, Galapagos. It includes 7 nights aboard the M/Y Letty, all meals during the voyage including wine with dinner, airport assistance at the gateway city for Galapagos flights, all excursions with professional Galapagos guides, and miscellaneous program expenses. Single supplements on the yacht are at additional cost on a space-available basis only and are extremely limited – please inquire.

## OUR SHIP - the M/Y Letty

This is our ship! The added value of that is tremendous, joining like-minded travelers for fun and learning, with music and fun – what better way to see Galapagos!



Our 2018 Galapagos Island cruise is aboard the M/Y Letty of Ecoventura, a top-rated Galapagos operator. Their signature fleet includes two identical expedition yachts custom-designed for Galapagos cruising: the M/Y Eric and Letty. Built in 1991 and refurbished annually, these identical superior first-class sister yachts accommodate no more than 20 guests and feature three decks of spacious staterooms with polished teak interiors trimmed with shiny brass fittings. Accommodations include ten double outside-facing cabins with a window or porthole view, one double bed or two twin lower beds, fully air-conditioned with private bathroom (hot and cold water showers), bio-degradable soap/shampoo dispensers, hair dryer, closet, drawers, intercom and separate climate controls for your comfort. There's a

dining room, well-stocked bar and conference area with a flat screen TV, library and panoramic picture windows. Or you can relax in a lounge chair on the sun deck, enjoying sea breezes and a sky full of stars.



loungers

### Cruise features

- 7-night expeditions depart every Sunday from San Cristobal
- 20-guest superior first-class motor yacht
- 10 fully air-conditioned outside staterooms with private bathrooms, featuring two lower twin beds or one double bed, hairdryers, soap/shampoo, separate climate control
- Delicious, varied cuisine, wonderfully prepared by our culinary school-trained chefs
- Fully-stocked bar and boutique, 24 hour coffee & tea station
- Lounge for briefings with TV, DVD, games and library
- Wildlife observation areas, open and shaded sun deck with

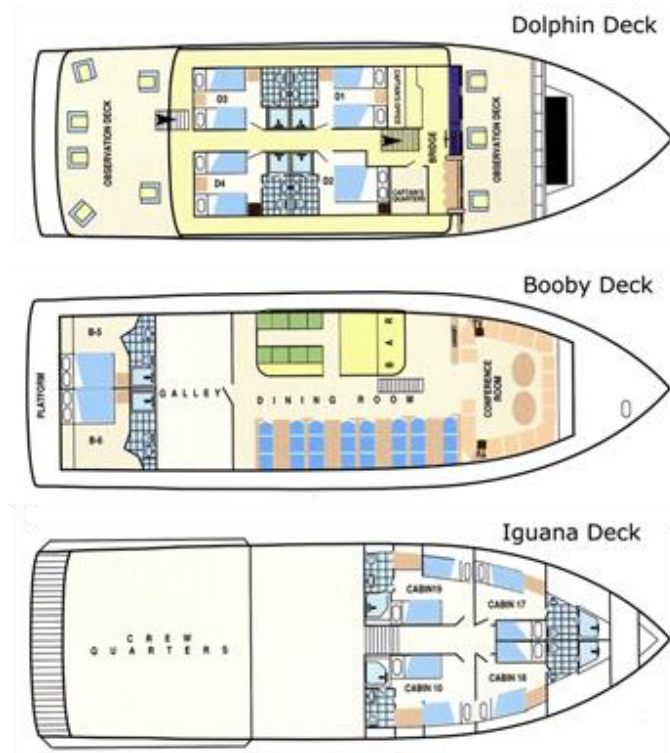
## Enjoy with our compliments

- Three meals served daily, after-excursion snacks and non-alcoholic beverages
- Captain's welcome and farewell cocktail parties
- House wine and local beer served during dinner
- Guided excursions and daily briefings with English-speaking expert naturalists
- Low guide to passenger ratio (max. 10 guests per guide)
- Complimentary mask, fins and snorkels, 3mm custom full wet suits
- Multiple kayaks and paddleboards



**Please note:** This itinerary and pricing are for the Cruise portion of your journey. You will want to plan for arrival in Ecuador at least a day early, in order to be ready to meet your flight out to Galapagos the morning of February 4 – come early and don't let winter weather make you miss your departure! The Cruise company will have a representative at both airports, Quito and Guayaquil, to assist passengers that day. They can also book your air to Galapagos and return, at an additional cost.

### CABIN OPTIONS AND RATES: M/Y LETTY and M/Y ERIC



#### Dolphin Deck

Cabins #1,3 & 4 have two twin lower beds or one double bed and picture windows.

Cabin # 2 has one double bed and picture window.

(Cabins average 95 square feet / 8.8 square meters)

#### Booby Deck

Cabins # 5 & 6 cabins have one double bed and picture windows.

(Cabins average 90 square feet / 8.4 square meters)

#### Iguana Deck

Cabins #7 & 8 have two twin lower beds and port lights.

Cabins # 9 & 10 have two twin lower beds and one upper berth with port lights and can be sold as triples.

(Cabins average 110 square feet / 10.2 square meters)

Deck	Double	Triple
Iguana deck	\$4700.00	\$4500.00
Booby deck	\$5100.00	
Dolphin deck	\$5600.00	

**Cruise rates include:**

Cabin accommodation, all meals and snacks, non-alcoholic beverages, bottled water, Captain's welcome and farewell cocktail, house wine and local beer served complimentary during dinner, guided shore excursions, use of wet suits, snorkel equipment, sea kayaks and stand up paddle boards, transfers in the Islands between the airport and dock.

**Cruise rates do not include:**

International airfare, flight from Quito to the Galapagos (approximately \$425.00 - can be booked by the cruise operator if you wish), Galapagos entrance fee (park tax), transit control card, gratuities to guides and crew, purchases on board, travel insurance, or items of a personal nature such as: laundry, telephone charges, optional activities, alcoholic beverages.

**Galapagos Park Tax:** The entrance fee to the National Park is \$100 for adults and \$50 for children 11 and younger and is not included in the cruise rate.

**Transit Control Card (TCT)** – A TCT card or *tarjeta de control de transito* is \$20 per person and is required by INGALA for all visitors to Galapagos to control migration to the Islands.

The Park tax and TCT will be added to your invoice and prepaid by Ecoventura for your convenience you're your guide from Ecoventura will register and pay your fees for you. Only those passengers flying to Galapagos on Sunday on Avianca can pre-pay the park tax and TCT but this is a really nice convenience that keeps our time in the airport short. Rates are subject to change at any time until day of departure.

**Gratuities to guides and crew** – Aboard our vessels, gratuities are not included. We prefer that our guests reward our crew based on their performance. Tipping is a personal matter and passengers are encouraged to tip an amount they find appropriate. For those passengers who inquire, Ecoventura suggests international guidelines of US \$25-\$30 per passenger per day (many plan on \$250 per voyage) and cash is the preferred method of payment for gratuities, though your shipboard account can be settled by credit card. Gratuities are divided among all eleven crew members including naturalist guides. We advise so you can plan ahead for a gratuity for local guides and the ship crew, this is at your discretion.

## TRAVEL PLANNING

In addition to the voyage, you will need to plan time in Ecuador around the voyage. We can help!

We recommend that you arrive in Ecuador at least a day early to make sure you are in Quito to make our flight to Galapagos on the morning of February 4th. With winter weather back home to worry about, you don't want to miss the boat! To inspire you to get there with time to spare, Burt and Susan plan to spend several nights ahead of the trip at a lovely hacienda north of Quito at Otavalo, where there is a great mix of markets, hikes, birding, optional horseback riding, music and fun. If you would like to join them ahead of the voyage please ask for details.



You will also need lodging in Ecuador the night you conclude the voyage, unless you depart that day on an evening overnight flight, stay on in the islands, or book a further travel in Ecuador.

#### FROM THE WEBSITE OF THE LETTY – WHAT ABOUT THE FOOD?

**As we know our clients love to not only eat but dine, here is the dining description and philosophy of the ships we offer this amazing voyage on – see what you are in for!**

*While cruising in the Galapagos, you will look forward to each thoughtfully prepared meal. From breakfast through dinner the kitchens or galleys focus on using only the freshest ingredients, with fully 60% of the food used are sourced from these islands. Many fruits, meats and dairy products come from farms on islands blessed by rain. Organic fruits and vegetables thrive on San Cristobal and meat and dairy come from Santa Cruz. And of course the region is famous for fish and seafood. Minimizing the need for food that has to be shipped from the mainland helps protect the islands from invasive plant species, insects and even animals that can be unwelcome.*



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*Ecoventura's clientele are often drawn to this fleet because of the company's commitment to environmental issues. Therefore it makes sense to align the kitchens with the sustainable philosophy. As you discover how fragile life is in the Galapagos, and as you experience the enormous effort that helps keep tourism possible in this region, you will appreciate even more the creative culinary presentations that appear as if by magic from small galleys on these expedition yachts.*

*Because you are on an adventure cruise and several times a day will be snorkeling and hiking, you don't have to worry about calories. Also the chefs are watching out for you with reduced-calorie, health-conscious preparations (avoiding fried and heavily sauced foods) that are also low in fat and sodium content. Special-needs diets can be accommodated: vegetarian or vegan, gluten free and low sodium/low fat. Plus your chef thoughtfully presents desserts in small servings that you can enjoy without feeling guilty. House wine (red or white Chilean) and local beer (Pilsner) are served at dinner with no limit and at no additional charge.*

*Lunch buffets and dinner entrees offer creatively prepared chicken, fish, seafood, beef, pork or vegetarian. Lunches featuring local fish and ceviches can be served with music on the sun deck. Favorite starters include hand-rolled sushi, salmon carpaccio and seafood bouillabaisse with crostini and Pernod. Salads range from Caesar to avocado with hearts of palm. Seafood lovers enjoy grilled langostinos (giant prawns) in garlic and a pistachio-encrusted mahi mahi or tender grilled octopus. Other signature dishes are chicken Cordon Bleu and beef tenderloin in red wine. Ecuadorian and Mexican specialties are also on the menu. Desserts run the gamut from crème brulee to passion fruit mousse.*

*At breakfast, a few early birds may already be savoring the first cup of coffee or hot chocolate (a specialty of Ecuador). Soon everyone is lined up for the self-serve buffet: fresh fruits of the season, fruit juices, including delicious berry and tropical fruit blends, granola and nearly every day a Swiss oatmeal (muesli) along with*

*assorted breads and cheeses. Hot dishes vary daily and range from quiche Lorraine to eggs Benedict to ham and cheddar cheese omelets, or even stuffed crepes with Nutella. A surprise one morning is the possibility of choosing a local dish, yucca dumplings stuffed with cheese and served with honey, and on another day green plantain dumplings with cheese. Young and old enjoy pancakes, bacon and ham. After returning from the morning shore excursion, our server will greet you when you return the yacht with a warm hand towel, delicious snack and fresh juice or water.*

*Lunch is always anticipated and indeed is often heartier than dinner because of the active afternoons to come. Served buffet-style either in the dining room or on the sun deck, guests often come back for second helpings. Fresh salads abound along with savory cold and hot presentations. Among the robust presentations look for a tuna tartar and tapenade along with chicken lasagna, a shrimp ceviche paired with a local fish en papillote, and international flavors in a bouillabaisse served with chicken Cordon Bleu, a Cuban-style shredded beef stew “ropa vieja” or Jamaican jerk chicken. One lunch goes local with a green plantain ball soup, sautéed shrimp with garlic, more plantains with potato cakes, refried white corn, a pork dish and a flan called queso de leche. At some time during lunch, a staff person will share with each guest the menu for that night’s dinner and ask whether meat or fish is preferred. A lingering memory of an on-board dinner is a Basque-style preparation of octopus, grilled langostinos (giant prawns) or Pistachio crusted Mahi. Another night goes Oriental with a pork and vegetable stir-fry. A creamy Ecuadorian potato soup may send some scurrying for the recipe. It is hard to choose on some nights between a roasted pork tenderloin or turkey roulade or preparations of a seafood fettucini or eggplant Parmesan.*

*Because the chefs play a deft hand with international and classical variations, and because so much of the regional cuisine focuses on fresh fruits and vegetables, the vegetarian fare here is equally creative. You can savor the menus while anticipating your cruise; but only when you’ve sampled the soups (hallmarks of really good chefs) do you really begin to understand the how creative and delicious these meals are. There is also no pre-arranged seating, thus encouraging guests to mix and mingle and get to know each other by the end of the cruise.*

