

## 2016 Peru & Ecuador Trip – Day 1 – Tuesday February 9<sup>th</sup> – Depart USA



Today Marie, Kal, Marcia, and I (Jim) depart on a 28-day tour in the South American countries of Peru and Ecuador. Marie and Marcia are sisters and this will be the 19<sup>th</sup> international trip the four of us have taken together over the past 12 years. We enjoy traveling together!



Peru and Ecuador are two Spanish-speaking countries located on the West Coast of South America.

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Peru, shown at left, is a large country covering 500,000 square miles in area with a population of 30 million folks. It is bordered by Ecuador on the North, the Pacific Ocean on the West and the countries of Colombia, Brazil, Bolivia and Chile. Its geography varies from coastal plains to the Andes Mountains running down the center of the country to the Amazon rainforest and the tributaries of the Amazon River in the East. Peru's most famous tourist attraction is the Inca ruins at Machu Picchu. The four of us had previously toured Peru and visited Machu Picchu in August of 2005. We said, "let's see it again while we're in the area"! Here is a link to our Trip Report from our excellent 2005 visit to Peru. It was the second trip the four of us took together: <http://theelvings.com/Peru.pdf>



Ecuador, shown at left, is a smaller country of 110,000 square miles and 16 million folks located just to the North of Peru. The Equator runs right through Ecuador, hence the name of the country. Ecuador also has varied geography; coastal plains, the Andes Mountains and Amazon rainforests and river tributaries. We will be spending most of this trip in Ecuador where we will visit the Amazon Rain forest and tributaries, the Andes Mountains and perhaps the highlight of this trip, an eight-day cruise and visit to Ecuador's Galapagos Islands, 620 miles off the coast of the country (visible as a small dot on the map to the west of Ecuador).

Around mid-day today Marie and Kal will fly out of Dayton, Marcia, and I out of Pittsburgh. We will meet in Atlanta and at 5:45 PM depart on a Delta Boeing 767 for a 6 hour and forty minute flight to Lima Peru.

We will be writing a daily Trip Journal and inserting photographs. When we have internet connections on our trip we will be e-mailing to you a link for you to access to read the daily journals and view the pictures.

Below is a calendar showing where we will be and what we will be doing on each day of the tour.

	<p><b><u>Tues. 2/9</u></b>  <b><u>Depart USA</u></b>          -11:25 AM          Leave Pittsburgh          -5:45 PM          Depart Atlanta          Htl: <u>Britania</u></p>	<p><b><u>Wed. 2/10</u></b>  <b><u>Arrive Lima Peru</u></b>          -12:25 AM Arrive          Lima          -Free Day          Meals: B          Htl: <u>Britania</u></p>	<p><b><u>Thurs. 2/11</u></b>  <b><u>Cusco Peru</u></b>          -9:20 AM Fly to          Cusco; Ar: 10:40          -<u>Qoicancha S.T.</u>          Meals: B, L &amp; D          Htl: <u>Jose Antonio</u></p>	<p><b><u>Fri. 2/12</u></b>  <b><u>Cusco Peru</u></b>          -Sacsayhuaman &amp;          Kenko Ruins          -Home Host Lunch          Meals: B, L &amp; D          Htl: <u>Jose Antonio</u></p>	<p><b><u>Sat. 2/13</u></b>  <b><u>To Machu Picchu</u></b>          -Train thru Andes          to Machu Picchu          -Tour MP Ruins          Meals: B &amp; L          Htl: <u>El Santuario</u></p>	
<p><b><u>Sun. 2/14</u></b>  <b><u>Machu Picchu</u></b>          -Tour MP          -Sun Gate Hike          -Train to Cusco          Meals: B &amp; L          Htl: <u>Jose Antonio</u></p>	<p><b><u>Mon. 2/15</u></b>  <b><u>Quito Ecuador</u></b>          -8 AM Fly to Lima          -12:25 PM fly to          Quito; Join Tour          Meals: B          Htl: <u>Reina Isabel</u></p>	<p><b><u>Tues. 2/16</u></b>  <b><u>Quito Ecuador</u></b>          -<u>Sinamune DA</u>          Kid's Concert          -Quito Tour          Meals: B &amp; D          Htl: <u>Reina Isabel</u></p>	<p><b><u>Wed. 2/17</u></b>  <b><u>To The Amazon</u></b>          -Fly to Coca          -Boat to Amazon          Tributary Lodge          Meals: B, L &amp; D          Htl: <u>Yasuni Kicha</u></p>	<p><b><u>Thurs. 2/18</u></b>  <b><u>The Amazon</u></b>          -Wildlife boat          rides and walks -          Canopy View          Meals: B, L &amp; D          Htl: <u>Yasuni Kicha</u></p>	<p><b><u>Fri. 2/19</u></b>  <b><u>The Amazon</u></b>          -School Visit          -Cooking Class &amp;          Community Lunch          Meals: B, L &amp; D          Htl: <u>Yasuni Kichwa</u></p>	<p><b><u>Sat. 2/20</u></b>  <b><u>To Quito</u></b>          -Canoe to Coco          -Fly to Quito          -Home Dinner          Meals: B &amp; D          Htl: <u>Reina Isabel</u></p>
<p><b><u>Sun. 2/21</u></b>  <b><u>Quito Ecuador</u></b>          -Optional Tour to          Andes Towns or a          Free Day          Mls: <u>B&amp;L (w/tour)</u>          Htl: <u>Reina Isabel</u></p>	<p><b><u>Mon. 2/22</u></b>  <b><u>To Galapagos Is.</u></b>          -Fly to Islands          thru <u>Quayaquil</u>          -Board Small Ship          Meals: B, L &amp; D  <u>Archipel 1 Ship</u></p>	<p><b><u>Tues. 2/23</u></b>  <b><u>Galapagos Is.</u></b>          -Cruising, island          visits, and          snorkeling          Meals: B, L &amp; D  <u>Archipel 1 Ship</u></p>	<p><b><u>Wed. 2/24</u></b>  <b><u>Galapagos Is.</u></b>          -Cruising, island          visits, and          snorkeling          Meals: B, L &amp; D  <u>Archipel 1 Ship</u></p>	<p><b><u>Thurs. 2/25</u></b>  <b><u>Galapagos Is.</u></b>          -Cruising, island          visits, and          snorkeling          Meals: B, L &amp; D  <u>Archipel 1 Ship</u></p>	<p><b><u>Fri. 2/26</u></b>  <b><u>Galapagos Is.</u></b>          -Cruising, island          visits, and          snorkeling          Meals: B, L &amp; D  <u>Archipel 1 Ship</u></p>	<p><b><u>Sat. 2/27</u></b>  <b><u>Galapagos Is.</u></b>          -Cruising, island          visits, and          snorkeling          Meals: B, L &amp; D  <u>Archipel 1 Ship</u></p>
<p><b><u>Sun. 2/28</u></b>  <b><u>Galapagos Is.</u></b>          -Cruising, island          visits, and          snorkeling          Meals: B, L &amp; D  <u>Archipel 1 Ship</u></p>	<p><b><u>Mon. 2/29</u></b>  <b><u>To Quito Ecuador</u></b>          -Fly from the          Galapagos Islands          to Quito          Meals: B &amp; D          Htl: <u>Reina Isabel</u></p>	<p><b><u>Tues. 3/1</u></b>  <b><u>Riobamba</u></b>          -Drive thru          Andes to          Riobamba          Meals: B, L &amp; D          Htl: <u>Abraspungo</u></p>	<p><b><u>Wed. 3/2</u></b>  <b><u>Train to Cuenca</u></b>          -Riobamba Tour          -Devil's Nose          Train in Andes          Meals: B, L &amp; D          Htl: <u>Carvallo</u></p>	<p><b><u>Thurs. 3/3</u></b>  <b><u>Cuenca</u></b>          -Cuenca Tour          -Park and <u>Turi</u>          Hill View          Meals: B &amp; L          Htl: <u>Carvallo</u></p>	<p><b><u>Fri. 3/4</u></b>  <b><u>Cajas Nat. Park</u></b>          -Tour Park and see          Andes Tundra,          plants and animals          Meals: B, L &amp; D          Htl: <u>Carvallo</u></p>	<p><b><u>Sat. 3/5</u></b>  <b><u>Cuenca to Quito</u></b>          -Panama Hats          -Museum &amp; Ruins          -Fly to Quito          Meals: B &amp; D          Htl: <u>Reina Isabel</u></p>
<p><b><u>Sun. 3/6</u></b>  <b><u>Quito</u></b>          -Free Time          -Museum &amp; Mkt.          Meals: B</p>	<p><b><u>Mon. 3/7</u></b>  <b><u>Return to USA</u></b>          -12:30 AM Depart          Quito          -10:51 AM-Home</p>					

## 2016 Peru & Ecuador Trip – Day 2 – Wednesday February 10<sup>th</sup>

### Arrive in Lima Peru



We decided to go on an organized small group tour of Peru and Ecuador rather than trying to arrange everything on our own and traveling independently. We felt this would allow us to see more, learn more, avoid travel complications and probably save some money.

We booked our tour with Overseas Adventure Travel (OAT). They are a Boston based company that specializes in small

group “adventure” travel, primarily for Americans 55 years and older. We traveled last year with OAT all around Australia. In August of 2010 my sister, Judy, and brother-in-law John took the same OAT trip to Peru and Ecuador that we are now starting on and highly recommended it. We picked OAT for this trip due to the content and the long length of their itinerary.

We are on OAT’s “Ultimate Galapagos & Ecuador’s Amazon Wilds Tour”. We have added both their pre-trip extension in Peru and their post-trip extension into Ecuador’s Andes Mountain region. As shown at the lower part of the above map we will start with a five-day pre-trip to Lima, Cusco and Machu Picchu in Peru. There will be only six people (including the four of us) on this part of the tour. We will then fly from Lima to Quito Ecuador where we will start the fifteen-day main part of the tour. There will be a total of fourteen folks on this main segment. Highlights will be the Amazon rainforest and river tributaries and then the small boat cruise and landings on several of the Galapagos Islands. We will finish with a six-day post-trip into the Ecuadorian Andes Mountains. There will be a total of eight travelers on this last part of the trip.

Two weeks ago we received informative e-mails from two of our OAT Tour Directors (we will have three on this trip, all young ladies and South American natives; Corina Duran in Peru, Silvia Ordonez in Ecuador’s mainland and Jennifer Prado in the Galapagos). The e-mails contained more contact information and links to sites with lots of information on what to expect on the trip and what to pack. It does appear that this will be a really “active” trip with a lot of physical activity most every day.

With a travel day at the end and beginning of this trip, we will be away from home for 28 days. This will be the longest trip we have taken but we will miss a good part of our USA winter! We have had to pack

for a range of weather. About half of our trip will be at sea level (Lima, the Amazon region and the Galapagos) where we should experience humid weather with highs in the mid-80s and lows in the mid-70s. The other half will be at high altitude, 8000 feet to 13,000 feet. Here highs should be in the mid-60s and lows could be in the 40s. We will be traveling close to the Equator, so sunrise will always be around 6:30 AM and sunset 6:30 PM. Time will be the same as our North American Eastern Standard Time.

Yesterday our 6-1/2 hour flight to Lima Peru left Atlanta at 5:45 PM. Marcia's and my flight from Pittsburgh to Atlanta was delayed by 1-1/2 hours due to snow in Pittsburgh and Atlanta but we had plenty of time to catch the flight in Atlanta. Marie and Kal's flight from Dayton was similarly delayed and they almost missed the flight to Peru as they had tighter connections. They arrived at the departure gate in Atlanta at 5:15 PM as they were boarding the last passengers for the 5:45 PM flight!



Our full Delta 767 lands on time today in Lima at 12:20 AM in the morning. We quickly clear Passport Control but retrieving our luggage takes almost an hour. Unfortunately, the new suitcases that Marcia and I got for Christmas did not survive their first trip in very good shape. Minor nicks and tears and many black stains and marks. Now I know why folks like black luggage. We meet the OAT representative that will accompany us to our Lima Hotel and also the other couple, Leanne and Ken from

Rapid City SD. They will be with us for the first five days of this trip in Peru and also with us for the remaining 21 days in Ecuador. We sense that they will be great traveling companions.

We arrive at our hotel, The Britania, at 2 AM. The rooms are small and basic but are comfortable with good air-conditioning and Wi-Fi. We finally are able to get to sleep at 2:30 AM.



We are staying for two nights and one full day in the Miraflores neighborhood of Lima. This neighborhood, bordering the Pacific Ocean, is considered the nicest and safest in the Lima area and is where we stayed in 2005.

To the left is an aerial photo of the huge city of Lima. It is the capital of and the largest city in

Peru and has 10 million inhabitants. This makes Lima the third largest city in Latin America after Sao Paulo, Brazil and Mexico City. We have learned that Lima was founded by the Spanish conquistador Francisco Pizarro in 1535. The majority of the population of Lima are Mestizos (Amerindian and European mixed bloodlines), followed by those of mostly European ancestry (primarily from Spain, Italy and Germany), Amerindians (Aymara and Quecha), a large population of Asians descended from the Chinese and Japanese and blacks descended from slaves. 38% of Lima's current residents have migrated to that city from the Peruvian countryside.

We all get a short, spotty night of sleep. This morning we decide this will be our day to recover from yesterday's semi-greuling travel day. We plan to explore Miraflores on our own. Tomorrow we leave very early for Cusco in central Peru where we will meet our Peru Tour Guide.



We first walk down to the ocean stopping at some parks. We end up at popular Lover's Park, right on the ocean. There are a large number of police patrolling the Miraflores district. One is posted in front of each ATM and bank. Traffic Police are at nearly every intersection to control traffic and help pedestrians.



We enjoy walking along the top of the cliff facing the beach and watching the waves and the surfers. It almost never rains in Lima. During their "winter" the cold Humbolt Current sweeps up Peru's coast and causes a mist/fog that envelops the coast and Lima. The sun is not seen for months. This is what we experienced in August of 2005. We are now here during their summer when the warmer Panama

Current sweeps down Peru's coast. This clears the air and raises temperatures. Today is mostly sunny with highs in the 80s.



We enjoy a leisurely lunch overlooking the coast. This is the first time the four of us have had a chance to really talk on this trip so we enjoy getting caught up.

After lunch we walk perhaps three miles from the coast through the central part of Miraflores to the Huaca Pucllana Ruins in the more northern section. It is an enjoyable walk on crowded sidewalks. It is fun observing the local population, the stores and

parks and trees. Motor vehicle traffic is chaotic and noisy. Much honking of horns.

We arrive at the Huaca Pucllana ruins and enjoy an excellent walking tour with an English speaking native. We learn that the site was built and rebuilt from possibly 300 AD through 700 AD by the "Lima Culture" and not the Incas who pretty much lived in much higher elevations. The Lima Culture dissolved due to infighting, These are most impressive ruins all built from hand made clay bricks.



Later the four of us have a good dinner at a nearby Peruvian restaurant.

Early tomorrow we leave Lima and fly to Cusco; the gateway to Machu Picchu.

## 2016 Peru & Ecuador Trip – Day 3 – Thursday February 11<sup>th</sup> – Cusco Peru



We are up early this morning as we will be leaving the Britania Hotel for the Lima Peru airport. We stayed two nights at this hotel and can only rate it as a Two Star. The staff was always friendly and helpful but the hotel location, stained and worn rugs in the rooms, and constant noise from nearby construction were negatives. I think we were spoiled by our stay at the Five Star JW Marriott “glass tower” right on the shore of the ocean in the best area of Miraflores on our tour eleven years ago!

At 6:20 AM with the assistance of an OAT representative we leave the hotel and drive to the airport. He assists us in checking in. At 9:15 AM we depart on a 1 hour and twenty minute flight to Cusco on a nice LAN-Chile Airbus A320.

As shown on the map on the left we are flying from Lima on the coast of the Pacific Ocean to Cusco deep inside the Andes Mountains. Cusco sits at an elevation of 11,200 feet. As we will be at high altitude for the next several days we have started



taking our prescription medication to prevent Altitude Sickness.

Cusco was the ancient capital of the Incas from the 13<sup>th</sup> thru 16<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The city has a population of 500,000 and receives 2 million visitors each year.

We land in Cusco at 10:30 AM, quickly retrieve

our luggage and meet our OAT Tour Guide for this segment of the trip, Corina Duran.

The six of us board a comfortable twelve passenger mini-bus and head off for our hotel. Corina tells us she is a native of Cusco and has worked for OAT for twenty years. We are delighted when she describes the program for the rest of the day, designed to get us acclimated to the high altitude. We are surprised at the weather for this time of year; sunny and in the mid-70s. Corina says it may be due to El Nino.



We arrive at our hotel for the next two nights, the Jose Antonio Cusco. Corina gets us checked in quickly and gives us an hour to relax and unpack in our rooms. The rooms and the view are very nice; a definite improvement over the Britania hotel in Lima.

At 12:30 PM we meet and walk a short distance to a nearby restaurant, Yuraq. We enjoy a light meal of Peruvian cuisine while Corina gives us more good information.

After lunch we have a half hour of rest time and then meet for our walking tour of Cusco's historic central city. Corina arranges for two taxis to take us to that district as the route is all uphill. She says we will then be able to walk downhill back to our hotel and see some shops on the way. The driving styles here are something to see. The taxi I am in barely avoids a bad collision with another vehicle racing through an intersection with no stop signs. Fortunately, both drivers see each other just in time and lock their brakes, avoiding a T-bone accident by inches.



It has now started to rain lightly and we are glad we have all taken Corina's advice and brought along our rain gear. We start at the Plaza de Armas, a UNESCO Historic Site, and view two cathedrals built by the Spanish in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. Corina reminds us that Pizarro's small army overwhelmed the Inca army at Cusco in 1538 due to Inca infighting and superior Spanish weapons and tactics. Then the European diseases like smallpox soon caused a massive reduction in the Inca population.



We walk through backstreets to see other attractions like the Dominican Dome, built on and near Inca ruins, the Inca Sun Garden and the Inca Qorikancha Sun Temple.



Corina describes with passion the many gold items, including statues and the gold plaques, that occupied the interior and covered the exterior walls of the Sun Temple (so named by the Spanish when they first saw it in bright sunlight). The Spaniards melted down all of the gold for transport back to Spain.

We walk downhill back to our hotel, peering in the many shops. Time, tomorrow, for shopping.



We meet at 6:30 PM for an excellent included dinner in our hotel restaurant. Much fun talking with Corina about her experiences over her twenty years of leading OAT tours. We have determined that she will be a most excellent TD! We all have fun recounting some of our travel adventures. We are very much enjoying traveling with Leanne and Ken. They have been to many more

places than us. This is their seventeenth trip with OAT!



### **2016 Peru & Ecuador Trip – Day 4 – Friday February 12<sup>th</sup> – Cusco Peru**

Today we leave our hotel at 9 AM for more exploration in Cusco. On the way to our first stop Tour Director Corina gives us information on Cusco and Peru. The main industry in Peru is mining. Copper, gold and silver are the main minerals extracted. The second industry is farming with much of the organic produce exported to the USA. The official unemployment rate is 8% but the real rate is around 30%.

Our first stop is a shopping district used primarily by locals. It covers a large area. We first walk some of the streets and see many small shops selling mostly food items. There are many people from the

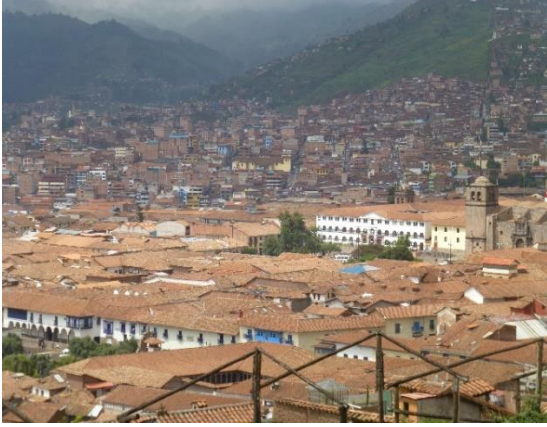
countryside sitting in front of the shops selling their farm grown produce. This is only allowed on Monday, Wednesday and Fridays. Corina explains what the strange (to us) items are.



We next go to the massive Cusco Municipal Market. It is perhaps 100,000 square feet in size. The first area we visit is set up with many tables where folks are sitting down and having breakfast served by vendors behind the long tables. Corina tells us that breakfast and lunch are the two main meals here with dinner normally being more of a snack. We also see areas with stalls selling all kinds of produce, meats, flowers, fruits, breads, clothing and toys.



At 10 AM we leave the marketplace and drive to a view point. Corina takes a picture of the six of us. We are told today's weather is typical for this time of year in Cusco; a mix of sun and showers. It is in the low 70s when the sun is out and somewhere in the 60s when it is cloudy or raining.



At 10:30 AM we arrive at the ruins of the massive Inca fortress of Sacayhuaman. It was built by the Inca king on a 12,000 foot high hilltop overlooking the city. It was made from massive stones and used for religious and other ceremonies. Accomodations were built for visitors from other parts of the Inca Empire. Only the outer walls remain. The Spainiards dismantled the inner buildings and used the smaller stones for construction of their buildings and churches. Unlike our visit eleven years ago, where we just visited the immediate area around the ruins, Corina has us start above the ruins on a part of the ancient Inca Trail. After meeting a grandma with her Alpaca we start down the muddy, slippery trail in the rain.



Yes, I slip. We see more Llamas and Alpacas including a three-week old baby. We view the walls of Sacsayhuaman from a distance. We next walk down to the walls and admire them from close range.



We next visit Kenko, the burial site of the mummies of the Inca elite. We now drive to the Cristo Blanco overlook.



At 1 PM we arrive at a local home for our Home Hosted Lunch. This nice home houses four generations: Great-Grandmother, Grandmother, single Mother (a mining engineer away for an extended period of time at a mine in Southern Peru), and four young children. All present today in the family speak only Spanish or the native Quecha language so all conversations go through Corina whom they all know well.

First Corina and the Grandmother show us how they prepare guacamole in Peru. We pretend to help!

We all sit down for a great lunch of authentic Peruvian food. We start off with a fruity drink made from black corn and apples. Appetizers include corn on the cob, cheese and the guacamole sauce. A delicious

corn soup followed by the main course of Peruvian tortillas, corn, rice, and the roasted guinea pig! Desert is a peach melba. A most enjoyable time with great food and company.



The children sing and dance for us. We give the hostess small gifts; Leanne an apron she had made, Marie a small replical of the Wright Flyer and a Pittsburgh souvinier key chain and pen from us.



We arrive

We are back at our hotel after 3 PM with time for shopping or rest. Marie, Marcia and Kal go to the nearby Artisian Market while I enjoy working on this journal.



At 6:45 PM we meet in a section off of the hotel bar and watch an excellent NOVA documentary on the possible building techniques used by the Incas to create huge structures like Machu Picchu and Sacsayhuaman. We enjoy some liquid refreshments and order a delivery pizza. Another great day. Tomorrow we travel to Machu Picchu!



## 2016 Peru & Ecuador Trip – Day 5 – Saturday February 13<sup>th</sup> – To Machu Picchu



We check out of our nice Cusco hotel, the Jose Antonio, after a comfortable two-night stay. We are headed to Machu Picchu and will stay there for one night and then return for another night at the Jose Antonio in Cusco. We leave our large luggage and backpacks at the Jose Antonio and just take a small day pack and duffel for the one night we will stay near Machu Picchu.

Tour Guide Corine is a native of Cusco and her husband and son have come to the hotel to visit with her this morning.

At 7 AM we six travelers and Corine board a huge standard size tour bus...we have plenty of room!



We leave the city, observing the flea markets, and drive through the country side and small towns. We enjoyed our time in Lima and Cusco but the four of us really like scenery and mountains.





We make several stops. At one stop Corine shows us how potatoes are grown and tells us that Peru has 4000 varieties of potatoes. We stop and get a great view of the town of Urubamba. We visit the clay pottery studio of Pablo Seminario and meet the artist. Marie and Marcia each buy small vases from his factory's store. It is so nice traveling and boarding and unboarding a motor coach with just six travelers.



We continue our drive through the Sacred Valley traveling along the gorge of the Urubamba River with towering mountains on both sides. We reach Ollantaytambo where we view Inca ruins built between 1300 and 1540 AD. We visit an ancient Inca house complete with Guinea Pigs.



At 11:15 AM we board the train that will take us to the town of Aguas Calientes just below Machu Picchu. The Urubamba River is surging. This is the rainy season. When we were here in August 2005 it was the dry season and the river ran clear and low. Our hour and forty-minute train ride is scenic and uneventful. The train is the only way to reach the town and Machu Picchu. There is no road.



We arrive in the town of Aguas Calientes at 12:45 PM. Our overnight bags are immediately taken from us to be transported to our hotel and a second OAT Tour Guide, Joe, joins the six of us travelers. I think they do this in case some folks can't keep up with the rest and they'd then split into two groups.

We now board a nice air-conditioned park bus for a half-hour ride up a switch-back dirt road to the ruins, rising 2000 feet to a height of 8400 feet. The weather is great. Sunny and in the mid-70s.

We exit our bus and enter the "Lost City of the Incas". Corine tells us there are many theories about the Inca's purpose for Machu Picchu but the prevailing thought today is that it was built around 1470 as a sacred religious sanctuary for the elites. It was never discovered by the Spaniards but was abandoned by the Incas in the 1540s when diseases (such as smallpox spread by the Spaniards to which the Incas had no immunity) reached Machu Picchu. Locals knew about the ruins but the first "scientific" discovery was made in 1911 by Yale archaeologist (and later, U.S. Senator) Hiram Bingham.



We first view Huayna Picchu, the massive mountain towering over the ruins that Marie, Kal and I somehow climbed when we were here in 2005. The park is more crowded that we remember. In 2005 daily admissions were limited to 1500. Today the ruins are a UNESCO World Heritage Site and at their

insistence admissions have been raised to 5000 a day. It really is not too crowded. We spend several hours exploring the ruins and getting expert commentary from guides Corine and Joe.



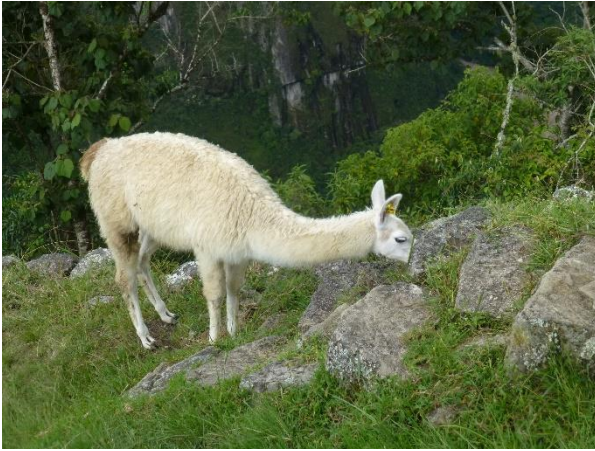
Jim and Marcia stand in a famous archway with Huayna Picchu in the background. Marie and Kal exit from the Sundial and get ready to descend.

At 3:15 PM it starts raining lightly and we put on our rain jackets (that Corina insisted we bring along to the ruins).

Outside of the ruins, the surrounding mountainous scenery is spectacular.



We see many Llamas and a huge Chinchilla.





At 4 PM we jump on a bus and descend the mountain. We check into our hotel at 4:30 PM.

At 4:45 PM it really starts pouring; a deluge. From the hotel lobby window, I watch the hikers (those that did not want to pay for the bus down) stumble into town muddy and soaked.

Dinner is on our own tonight but Corine takes us all to a nice restaurant and we enjoy a meal together.



## 2016 Peru & Ecuador Trip – Day 6 – Sunday February 14<sup>th</sup> – Machu Picchu



We are up early today in our modest hotel in Aguas Calientes, the El Santuario Machu Picchu Hotel. There are not too many really nice hotels here. Our rooms have no air conditioning or windows; just a patio door that opens on an area where workers pass by. It is OK for one night. Our traveling companions, Leanne and Ken are on the other side of the hallway and have a balcony looking out on the surging river. But hey, this is their 17<sup>th</sup> trip with OAT!

We leave our hotel at 7:20 AM and are at the ruins at 8 AM. All residents of the province of Cusco, not just the city folks, get free admission to Machu Picchu on Sundays. Many of the rural folks are dressed in the colorful traditional clothing. The weather this morning is outstanding, and this is the rainy season.



We climb up to the Guardhouse to get the classic shot of Machu Picchu.



Rather than hike to the Sun Gate the group decides to climb and hike to the Inca Bridge. This is a climb up several steep sets of old Inca stairs but mostly a walk through the tropical forest to the viewing point of the bridge. The bridge is a few wooden planks spanning a gap on the trail that hugs the side of the mountain. The bridge could be easily destroyed if enemies were invading.

We pose for pictures with the Inca Bridge in the background.



At noon we leave the ruins on a bus down the narrow, winding dirt road, We descend 2000 feet.

Marcia and I think Machu Picchu is just how we remember it from eleven years ago except the trails are much longer and the Inca stairway steps have really grown in height!

Today is a festival day throughout Peru. We watch the dancing and

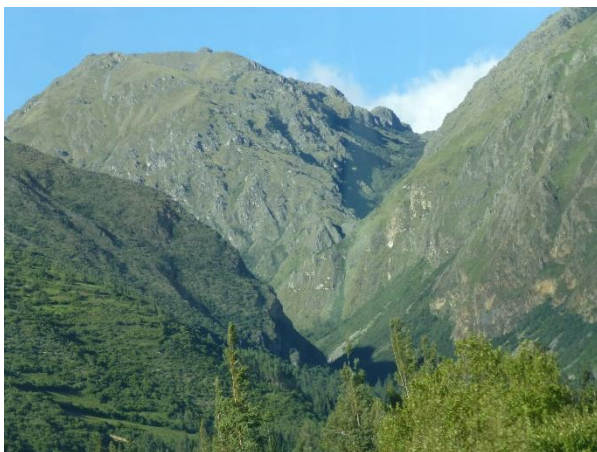
celebrations at the main square in Aguas Calientes. Leanne from our group poses with a club ready to go on and perform.



We go to a restaurant off the square for an included lunch and watch more locals parade down the street.



We catch our train at 2:30 PM and then our motor coach at 4 PM. Great stops for photos on the way.





I take a picture of our tour guide, Corina, and a picture of Marcia with kids.



We return to Cusco and have a good farewell dinner. Tomorrow we fly to Quito Ecuador and join the main tour.



## 2016 Peru & Ecuador Trip – Day 7 – Monday February 15<sup>th</sup> - To Quito Ecuador

Today we leave Peru and fly to Ecuador for the balance of our vacation. We are up early and leave our hotel at 6 AM for the Cusco airport. We liked our stay at the Jose Antonio Hotel.



We really enjoyed all of our time in Peru. Corina is an outstanding Tour Director. The people are uniformly friendly and courteous. The Peruvian cities are relatively clean. I think that is because they employ large crews of street cleaners. One thing we found sad and a bit annoying is the large number of dogs running loose (here Kal is letting a “sleeping dog lie). These dogs are mostly not strays but their owners don’t want to feed them anymore so they let them loose to forage. Not the way we like to see dogs treated! We see very few cats.

One other slightly annoying thing: Corina explained that Peru is reaching the conclusion of a Presidential Election campaign. Voting will be held April 11 and everyone must vote. There are nineteen candidates on the ballot for president. A runoff is predicted. To gain name recognition candidates have their names painted on walls and just about any other flat surface; frequently, we are told, without the property owners permission.



Our flight from Cusco to Lima takes off at 8.25 AM. We change planes and land in Quito Ecuador at 2:50 PM. The weather is nice. It is sunny and in the mid-70s.

We meet our Tour Director for the land portions in Ecuador (non-Galapagos), Silvia Ordonez. She tells us that she is a native of Quito. She states that Ecuador has four regions: the Coastal Plains, The Andes Mountains, The Amazon Basin, and the Galapagos Islands, 600 miles west of the mainland. We will see all four. Quito sits at an altitude of 9350 feet. It is just sixteen miles south of the equator. It is the capital of Ecuador and the second largest city in the country with a population of 2,700,000. 60% of

the population is Mestizo (mixed Indian and White) 20% Indian, 10% White and 5% is black. It was



conquered by the Spanish in 1534.

Quito sits in a valley surrounded by volcanic mountains. Here is a picture from the internet showing part of Quito and the largest volcano Pichiuca. We see it today but the snow is all gone.

We drive for an hour from the airport into the city of Quito. It appears very modern and exceptionally clean.

Silvia takes us to our hotel for the next two nights, the

Reina Isabel. We will be staying here a total of six nights (in two, two night segments and two one-night stays). First impressions are that this may be the best hotel we've stay in on this tour. Nice rooms and views.



The six of us meet at 6 PM and enjoy our first Ecuadorian pizza.



## 2016 Peru & Ecuador Trip – Day 8 – Tuesday February 16<sup>th</sup> - Quito Ecuador

After breakfast our complete group of fourteen meets for the first time. There are the six of us that have been touring Peru and eight new folks that are joining us for the main part of the tour in Ecuador.



Ecuador.

At 8:50 AM we board a full size motor coach and start to drive to the south side of Quito. The city appears very modern and clean. There are no stray dogs.

Tour Director Silvia explains that the main export of Ecuador has always been oil but the current low market price has hurt the economy and many new taxes are proposed to meet the shortfall in funding for the government. Other big exports are roses, bananas, shrimp and cocoa. Tourism is huge. Many middle class Americans are retiring to communities in

Sylvia is very energetic and we sense that she will be a great trip leader. She tells us that her 40<sup>th</sup> birthday is approaching although she looks much younger. She and her husband have no children. They have fourteen dogs that they have rescued from bad situations. Those are their children she says.



Our first stop is at the Sinamune Disabled Children's Center, an organization that OAT's parent company offers financial assistance to. We next watch a forty-five-minute musical performance by their orchestra, dancers and singers. Most of the performers have Down's Syndrome, Autism, brain damage or are blind. The study of music is said to help them in their other learning, primarily language skills, math and painting. The performance is moving and of excellent quality. Some in our group get up and dance with the students.

Below is a picture of Marie dancing to “When The Saints Go Marching In” and tour director Sylvia introducing two of the performers. After some shopping in their gift shop we leave the Center.



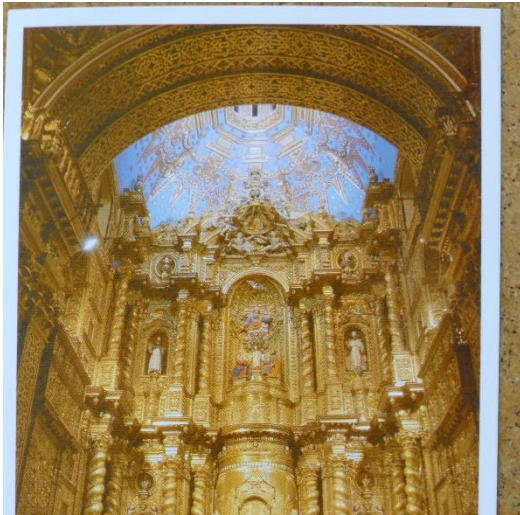
Sylvia tells us that Ecuador abandoned its own currency, the Sucre, in the face of escalating inflation in 1999, and adopted the US dollar. Ecuadorians are very happy with the USD (harder for their politicians to loot or devalue) and have no desire to change.

We start a walking tour of the historic old city of Quito and first see the San Domenico church built in 1535. Next is Independence Square and the Presidential Palace. It is a great weather day.





A real highlight is the Society of Jesus Church built by the Jesuits between 1605 and 1765, built in the Moorish and Baroque style. The beautiful interior is all covered in gold leaf. No photographs are allowed. The pictures below are from postcards I bought. This may be the most beautiful church I have seen.



We all have a relaxing late lunch on the town square.

Late in the afternoon we all get together with tour guide Silvia for an overview of the days ahead and then walk to a nearby restaurant for a good welcome dinner.

## 2016 Peru & Ecuador Trip – Day 9 – Wednesday February 17<sup>th</sup> – To The Amazon



Today we travel to the Amazon River basin. We depart the Reina Isabel hotel at 5:40 AM. We leave most of our luggage and large backpacks behind. We take with us only one small day pack per couple and a couple of small hand-held soft sided carry-ons as we will be traveling on a motorized canoe with limited storage to our rain forest lodge.

Shown in yellow on the map at left is the Amazon River Basin, that land area where water drains into the Amazon River and eventually the Atlantic Ocean. We will be staying at a lodge on the Napo River (shown in pink on the map) just inside the Ecuadorian border with Peru. The Napo drains into the Iquitos River which joins with the

Amazon to make one of the longest if not the longest river systems in the world.



Our forty minute flight to Coca leaves Quito at 8 AM.

The town of Coca is shown on the left side of this photo while the Napo River is on the right side.

Coca grew to a town of 45,000 people during the oil boom of the 1990s. It has the region's only major

airport and is a hub for tourists visiting the Ecuadorian Amazon region. It is warm, humid and cloudy when we land in Coca but not terribly hot due to the clouds and recent rain.

Silvia gives us a briefing on what to expect. She says that OAT uses another lodge, Yarina, owned by a Quito businessman that is on the Napo River but outside the National Park. It is now full with two other OAT groups. They are now also using the Yasuni Kichwa Ecolodge. It is inside the National Park and surrounded by an indigenous community of 185 folks, all Kichwa Amerindians. They run and maintain the lodge. She has used the new accommodations and thinks we may get a more authentic experience.

It has now started raining heavily. Our motorized canoe arrives with the side curtains down to keep out the rain. We board our boat at 11 AM for a two hour and twenty-minute trip down river to our lodge.



Our boat is powered by twin 100 horsepower outboard engines and cruises at a speed that I estimate at between 35 and 40 mph. The pilot has to slow and change directions frequently to avoid debris like logs in the river. The padded seats recline and are very comfortable. We are served a box lunch from the lodge. The rain stops and they raise the side curtains. We pass petroleum and gas extraction facilities. Most of them are now mothballed due to the low market price of oil and gas.







We get our first glimpse of the Kichwa village that surrounds our lodge. We disembark from our boat and enter the grounds of the village and then the Yasuni Kichwa Ecolodge.

Tour guide Silvia is happy that the Kichwas, who built and have operated this lodge for four years, have recently taken her suggestions and now have the electricity running 24 hours a day (instead of 18), have installed safety deposit boxes in all rooms (good, because we have had to bring all of our money and passports with us and there are no locks on our room doors), and Wi-Fi has been pretty much extended to the lodge rooms. She reminds us that this is not a luxury lodge but an Eco-Lodge,

We check into our rooms and are surprised at how large and comfortable they are. No TV or air conditioning of course.



At 4:30 PM we take an orientation walk around the village. We see their water purification system (although we will drink only purified water brought in from Caco in big jugs). We see the houses that the village has built to house the teachers brought in from the outside. We visit the Power Plant fueled by solar panels and diesel generators. We see some of their residences. We visit the area used to make wood planks for construction. They have supplied us with rubber boots, mainly to protect us from poisonous ants and spiders; they also help out with the mud. We must go barefoot or just wear socks in the dining room/lodge and in our rooms. They are really big into recycling and we see their composting area and their recycling area. We meet our three local guides from the community, Maria, Gabriel and Poncho. Silvia translates for us. While the Kichwa's native language is Kichwa, they converse in Spanish with her.





At 6 PM we meet for a great dinner in the dining room of the lodge. Our guides from the community Poncho (in the red shirt on the left) Gabriel (across from him) and Maria (to Gabriel's right) will have all meals with us. I learn to my amazement, through translator Silvia, that the residents built the lodges we are staying in, the main lodge, and even the beautiful mahogany tables and chairs in the dining room. The

workmanship is outstanding.



We retire for the night and find that the mosquito netting has been secured around our bed while we were at dinner. Yes, we have been taking our anti-malarial medications. We have a ceiling fan running and the curtains pulled from all of the screened windows but our room is very hot. By midnight it has cooled down and we get a good night's sleep.

Oh Oh.....in the morning we find evidence that a wild animal has been in our room overnight. No more food in the rooms. We are in the jungle!

### **2016 Peru & Ecuador Trip – Day 10 - Thursday February 18<sup>th</sup> – Amazon Basin**



Today we will spend the day in the rain forest. We are up early for a 6:30 AM breakfast and 7 AM departure. Right on time it starts to rain but we are well equipped with ponchos from the lodge and their rain boots. Marie shows off her special "disco" edition boots. Marcia is wearing her insect repelling hat from Australia.

We wave goodbye to the school kids waiting to walk to the community school.



The fourteen of us board the large motorized canoe along with our driver, Tour Director Sylvia and the three local guides from the community.

We motor to a “clay lick” along the side of the river. The rain has stopped. We learn that Green Parrots come to the clay lick every morning. Their favorite fruits contains seeds that they disperse in their droppings. So that the seeds are not chewed by the parrots and destroyed, these fruits have developed a natural toxin for their seeds. The parrots have learned that by eating some clay they will neutralize the toxins in the seeds.



A Blue Headed Parrot joins the Greens (above).

We continue up the river and see many more types of birds, the most striking being a pair of Hoatzin Turkeys. We have never really been “birders” but this is fun.



We beach our boat and start our walk in the Rain Forest. We are walking on a paved path so as to not damage the environment. Our guides point out the meat-eating ant nests, numerous insects and caterpillars, plants yielding natural medicine or paints and all varieties of plants and trees.

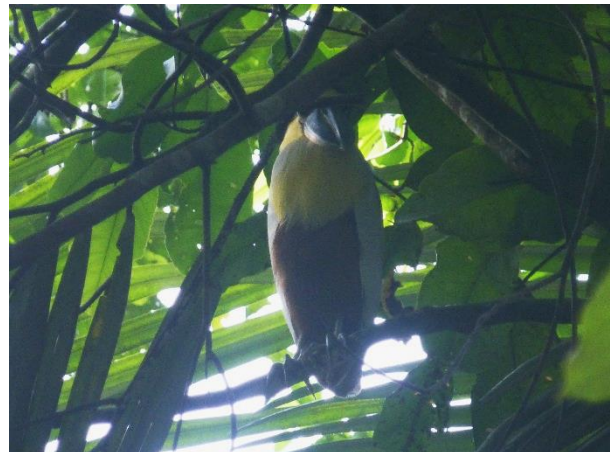


It rains off-and-on. We reach the end of the trail and relax with a snack in a small pavilion looking out on a water hole. We see Sunout Monkeys and McCaws but the real attraction is the mass of Green Parakeets circling overhead and perching in the trees. After a while they finally all come down to the water hole to drink. What a sight.



We retrace our steps on the trail, reboard our boat and return to our lodge at 1:10 PM for lunch.

At 3:30 PM we meet again. The sun is out and it is hot. We travel for fifteen minutes to a tributary of the Nago River, the Ayango Creek. Here we board two para-canoes, paddled by our guides and staff from our lodge and head up the creek. We travel up the creek for a couple of hours occasionally spotting birds. We do see a Sloth and monkeys but too far off to get any decent photographs.





We now turn around and head back downstream. The sun sets and it is pitch black. Quite an experience going down this narrow stream in the dark!

We return to our motorized canoe at 7 PM and are back at our lodge at 7:30 for dinner.

We continue to enjoy traveling with all of the folks in our group of fourteen. All are very well traveled and fun to be with.

Now this has been another long and somewhat grueling day but Marcia and I remember Marie's comments at breakfast this morning. "It's good to get out of your routine every once and a while and do something different." This is different!

Our room is cooler tonight and we get a very good night's sleep. Note from Marcia: Travelling down a pirana filled river in the dark is way beyond my comfort level. I was not a happy camper after the sun set.

### **2016 Peru & Ecuador Trip – Day 11 – Friday February 19<sup>th</sup> – Amazon Basin**

Today we will spend what OAT advertises as a "Day In The Life". On many of their trips they try to get you into deep interactions with the locals. It should be easy today as we are living in the middle of an Amerindian village of 185 people! Yes, we will spend most of the day with the Kichwa in their village.

Breakfast is at 8 AM and we get a de-briefing from the eight folks that went on the 6:30 AM bird watching session. They saw lots of birds and monkeys and enjoyed the view from the 100-foot-high observation tower that the village folks built.



We walk to the school which is only about fifty yards from our dining area. We are told that the village built the school and the housing for the teachers. Public school is free in Ecuador. The Federal

Government pays for books and supplies and pretty much mandates what will be taught and how it will be taught. They also pay the teacher's salaries. This school serves the village and surrounding area and covers K through High School. There is no air conditioning but the roofs are built very high to moderate temperatures. School is in session from September through June. There is no library or rest rooms. The kids and staff go into the woods. The parent company of OAT will hopefully be helping to address one or both of these issues through their Grand Circle Foundation.

We first spend forty-five minutes in the high school English class. We meet the teacher a very articulate twenty-seven-year-old gentleman from Guayaquil who spent some time at a college in New Jersey. His English class focuses on Tourism so draws students from a fairly wide area who want to learn English and then get jobs in the tourism industry. English classes at other schools focus on English and other skills. The students seem a little reticent to talk with us. They may be intimidated and not want to display any poor English. On the other hand, they probably have never seen anyone as old as all of us!

We next spend time in a class for students in the first through third grades. All of these students are from our village as every village and town has an elementary school. The young students seem happy to see us. The teacher says, per the government, he emphasizes Kichwa language skills, math, culture and the environment. Schools can no longer offer English training until the eighth grade level. The students stand and sing the Ecuadorian National Anthem in Kichwa. As in the previous classroom many in our group leave gifts for the teacher to distribute to the students.



Next is our Home Hosted Lunch. We walk to the home of Maria's Mother and Father. Maria is one of our Kichwa Local Guides and is away today on village business. They tell us that three generations and nine people live in their home including Mom and Dad, and older daughter and Maria and her husband and daughter.





Above, on the left, we are entering the building that the family uses for cooking and eating meals. On the right is one of three houses that the extended family lives in.



The picture on the left shows an interior of their cooking building. Dad is in the middle, Mom on the right and older daughter on the left. Someone asks Dad, through interpreter Silvia, who the oldest person in the village is. We have not seen many old people. He thinks for a while and says someone is 67 years old and that he is 65.

They take us behind the cooking building, past their chicken coop, to their garden area and show us some of the items they grow and harvest.



Bill assists in pulling edible Yuca roots out of the ground.

We now go inside and they show us how they prepare what will be today's main course, Maito. They take a Tilapia fish, season it with ginger and spices, and garnish it with chopped Heart of Palm. The key step is wrapping the fish in banana leaves that impart a unique flavor. The wrapped fish is then grilled over an open fire. After the demonstration Leanne and Bill from our group volunteer to prepare the Maito for us.



Ugg...now for the appetizer. The Kichwa uncover a bowl of live, squirming grubs. They consider these grubs a delicacy. The grub's necks will be broken, then they will be placed on skewers and then on the grill. Ken assists. Local Guide Poncho can't wait and eats a live grub, leading Bill to do the same.





Here is my main course, I think my fish is looking at me! We eat with our hands. It is really quite delicious. We are served the local drink Chicha.

After lunch we move to the backyard where Dad shows us the Kichwa blow gun. It was used sixty years ago to hunt monkeys. Monkeys are no longer hunted.

Dad sets up a target, takes one shot and hits the center of the bullseye. Guide Poncho takes a shot and hits just above the bullseye. Many of us take turns and do not hit the target, although I stuck my shot into

the piece of wood holding up the target!

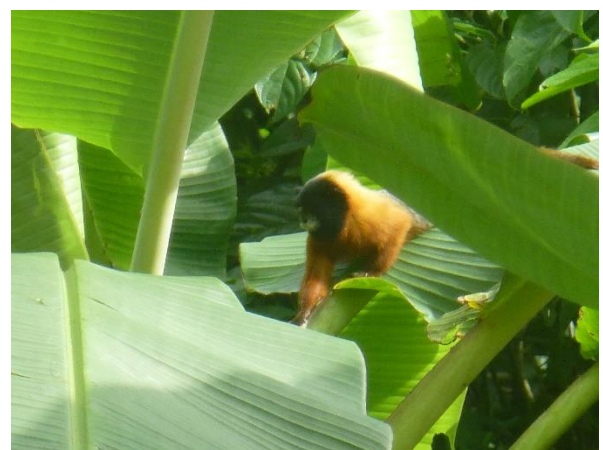


We now walk to another part of the village and visit the Women's Cooperative Workshop. They make crafts for sale to visitors. They first show us a traditional dance and then we dance with them.



I buy some necklaces and ear rings for Marcia and Jaime and a beautiful miniature mahogany canoe paddle modeled like the ones the Kichwa used to paddle our canoes yesterday. I find out later that our local guide Maria carved and finished my paddle.

I return to our room. Marcia had not been feeling a 100% today so did not go on "A Day In The Life". She is sitting on our front porch watching the tiny, cute Golden Mantled Tamarin monkeys.



Interestingly, OAT has asked their Tour Directors, specifically, to discuss controversial issues with their clients; politics, religion, economics, etc. At 6:15 PM we meet in the dining area and Silvia presents a

PowerPoint presentation, and we then have a discussion, about the controversy surrounding oil and gas extracton in Ecuador’s Amazon region. She also discusses Ecuadorian resentment towards Peru for the little known war in 1941 in which Peru invaded Ecuador and took and kept nearly half of Ecuador’s territory, all in the Amazon region.



We have our final dinner tonight at the Yasuni Kichwa Ecolodge. After dinner the entire staff that has been serving us comes out for a big thank you, the local guides, housekeeping, restaurant and kitchen staff. What a uniformly polite, helpful, cheerful and talented group!

### **2016 Peru & Ecuador Trip – Day 12 – Saturday February 20<sup>th</sup> – To Quito**

Today we leave our Amazon Basin lodge, after a most enjoyable three-night stay, and return to Quito Ecuador. We have breakfast at 8:15 AM and our last chance to admire the workmanship that went into building our dining hall and the mahogany furniture in it, all done by the Kichwa people of the village.





We board the lodge's motorized canoe at 9 AM for the two-and-a-half hour ride up the Napo River to Coca.

The weather at the lodge is cloudy but the sun comes out and it is hot when we get to Coca.

We dock at Coca at 11:25 AM. We say goodbye to our three local guides from the lodge, Maria, Gabriel and Poncho. They are the best; helpful, knowledgeable, and friendly.

We transfer to the Coca airport for our 1 PM flight to Quito. A problem confronts me as we progress

through the check-in process. The beautiful replica canoe paddle that I bought in the village is about twenty-eight inches long. It is too long to pack in the small hand baggage we check. I have it stowed in the day pack that I am taking on the plane. The top four inches of the handle of the paddle stick out from the top of my day pack. At the gate area the airline lady says I can't take the paddle on the plane. It must go in my checked baggage. However, it is too long to go in our checked bags and that stuff has most probably already been loaded into the storage hold on our plane. So, I go into the rest room and stuff the handle partway down my pants leg and the blade up under my vest (against Marcia's dire warnings of not visiting me in my Ecuadoran jail cell). I waddle onto the plane and save my paddle!



Back at the nice Reina Isabel hotel in Quito Tour Director Silvia has arranged for an outside company to do any laundry that we need washed for a good price. We have been traveling now for twelve days and have some. We bring our dirty laundry down to the lobby at 6 PM. It will be returned tomorrow at 6 PM.



shirts!

We now head off for a Home Hosted Dinner. We are split into two groups of seven. The four of us and three others go to Mary's house. She is a vivacious lady. Three or four generations of her family live in a block of units in her apartment building. We enjoy oat meal soup, a main entree of chicken, mixed vegetables, yucca and rice and a nice desert.

However, I think Marcia and I were placed in the wrong group. The other seven folks report that when they met their host and hostess both he and she were dressed in Pittsburgh Steelers

### **2016 Peru & Ecuador Trip – Day 13 – Sunday February 21<sup>st</sup> - Quito**

Today is our free day in Quito. We are told to rest up before we travel tomorrow to the Galapagos Islands for a week.

We have all decided that we would like to take the Gondola up the slope of an extinct volcano that overlooks the city. Silvia arranges for a small bus to transport all of us to the Gondola at 9:30 AM. She helps us buy our tickets and accompanies us up the mountain. We rise from Quito's height of 9,250 feet above sea level to 13,287 feet. We then hike a little higher up the mountain. We get great views of the city and all of the mountains surrounding Quito.





We return to our hotel at 1 PM and we all go to a local restaurant, The Monkey Bean, for lunch. Unfortunately, the service was slow and the food only OK but lunch was saved by the good conversations.

We spend the rest of the afternoon consolidating our stuff into one suitcase for our week in the Galapagos Islands. We will leave our other suitcase in storage at our hotel.

The four of us have a light dinner of Italian food at a nearby restaurant and retire early.





## 2016 Peru & Ecuador Trip – Day 14 – Monday February 22<sup>nd</sup> – To The Galapagos

Today is the fourteenth day of our tour. We are halfway through our trip. We enjoyed our second two-night stay at the Reina Isabel hotel in Quito. We will have two one-night stays there when we return from the Galapagos Island in a week and resume travels on mainland Ecuador.



We depart the hotel for the Quito airport at 7:45 AM. The rush hour traffic is very heavy. Our flight takes off on time at 10:10 AM.

After a short flight we land in Guayaquil Ecuador to refuel and take on more passengers. Guayaquil is Ecuador's largest city with 2,700,000 people. It is on Ecuador's coast and is its main port.



We now fly 600 miles west over the Pacific Ocean towards San Cristobal Island in the Galapagos Islands.

We have learned that the Galapagos Islands were formed by volcanic activity and were first discovered by the Spanish Bishop of Panama in 1535 when the currents and winds took his ship off course. It was a sanctuary for Pirates and Whalers in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries.

The islands were made famous by Charles Darwin and his chronicle "The Voyage of the Beagle" published in 1835. His observations on the plants and wildlife of the Galapagos led to his famous book "Origin of the Species".



At 12:30 PM we sight the harbor at San Cristobal from our airplane. We clear Galapagos immigration controls and find our local guide, Jennifer Prado.

We transfer to the harbor and enjoy getting our first look at the wildlife. Many sea lions and red crabs.



We are driven a short distance to the harbor where two zodiacs pick us up and take us to our home for the next week, the good ship Archipel 1.

This catamaran will host just our happy group of fourteen travelers.

We have a briefing from Tour Director Jennifer who tells us we will be served all of our meals on board and experience a snorkeling opportunity most days and normally a couple of landings for explorations on land. We

are meeting in the lounge in the air conditioned center section of the ship. This area also includes the dining area. We are shown to our air conditioned cabins. They appear small but comfortable.





We have a great lunch and then take the zodiacs into the small town of San Cristobal, population 6000.

We go to the Interpretive Center. Jennifer does a great job of explaining the volcanic formation of the islands and the unique wildlife of the Galapagos and how it got here. Her geology and biology knowledge appear to be excellent! She explains that all of the Galapagos is a National Park and access is closely controlled by the Park Service. Only registered and approved boats can sail the waters and each must have a certified Naturalist, like Jennifer, if they are to host tourists. Boats on a seven day tour, like ours, are assigned one of four routes. This is to insure that the most popular routes are not overwhelmed. They even dictate the time and duration of all shore landings. I am delighted to find out that we will be on the "A" route which my research tells me may be the very best route. We will see the best islands and have the best landing opportunities.

We have some time for shopping in the town before we return to our ship. We see we have some visitors.

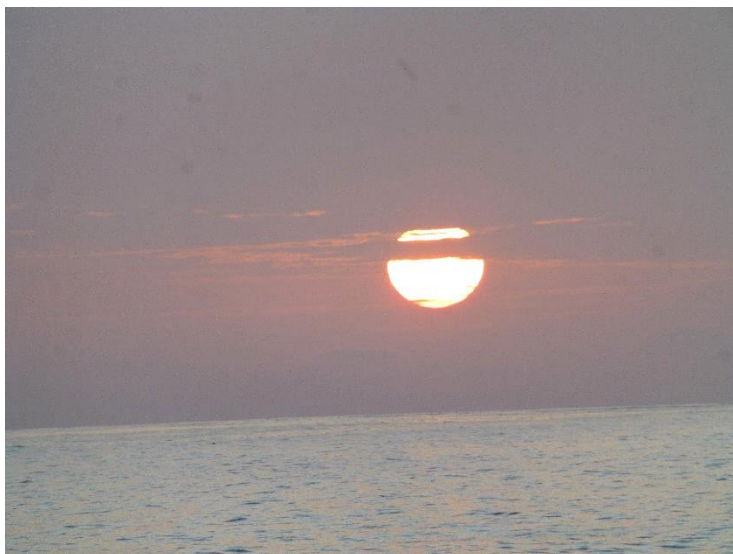


Back on board I go to the top deck and check out this partially shaded and partially open area. It looks like a great place to relax.



Prior to dinner we have a welcome drink with the crew, all dressed up in their whites. Jennifer tells us that in most all cases crew members are residents of the Galapagos Islands. Employers have to make a case as to why they cannot employ residents before they can hire someone from the mainland of Ecuador.

We enjoy the sunset and then a great dinner. We go up on the top deck after dinner to enjoy the full moon.



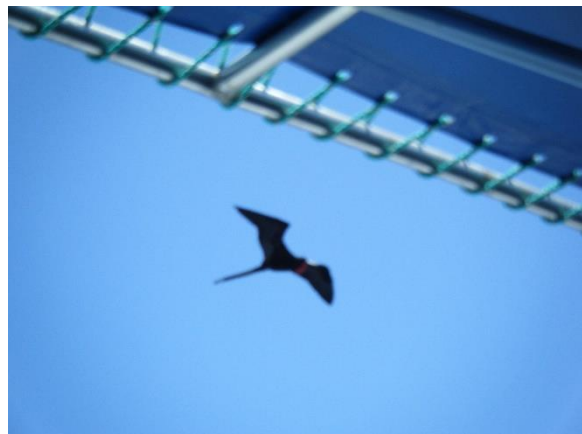


At 8 AM we board our zodiacs and make a dry landing on Santa Fe island where we hike for two hours and observe the wildlife.

It is hot already. Jennifer says that it rained a lot here in December and January. That is why everything is so green. There has seemed to be no major effects from El Nino. We see many Iguanas, including two females fighting for the use of a burrow to lay their eggs in. None of the animals or birds are afraid of humans so we can always get very close to them. We cannot touch them and must stay on the trail.



We are back on board at 10 AM and we weigh anchor for another area of Sante Cruz Island. We go up on top and enjoy the breeze. Frigate birds glide towards us and land on our roof. We spot two dolphins.





After lunch we get fitted for our snorkel gear. Although the water is warm we all opt to rent shorty wet suits for \$40 for the week. They say some areas may have colder water and the suits will give us some extra buoyancy and protection from jelly fish.

Kal has quite a time getting his suit on correctly. First he puts it on backwards (zippers to the back, please), then he somehow puts it on inside-out. The third try is a charm.

The snorkeling is outstanding. Thousands of fish with the Sea Lions swimming through them. My waterproof camera captures some good shots.



We are back on board at 3:15 PM. At 4 PM we head out in the zodiacs to land on the island. On the way we pass White Spotted Rays and Sea Turtles. We have a wet landing on a beach covered with Sea Lions. Many of them are youngsters only two or three months old. We hike around the island looking for a type of Iguana unique to this island. We find them; the Santa Cruz Iguanas.



name, Santa Maria, at the southern side of the map).

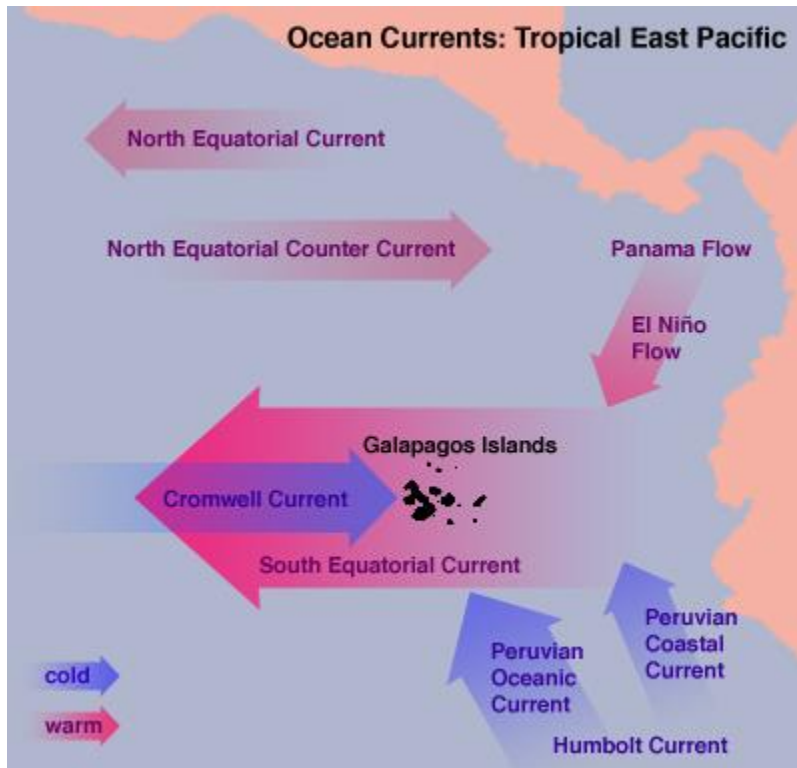
Tonight before dinner Jennifer shows us a few slides to reinforce her talk about issues with foreigners luring fish from Galapagos waters and capturing them. She also continues to show us segments of a DVD about folks moving to Floriana Island in the 1930's, primarily from Germany, trying to flee civilization.

We have another great dinner. A busy day. We predict that we will sleep well tonight.

Overnight we will cruise to and then anchor off of Floriana Island (shown by its other



**2016 Peru & Ecuador Trip – Day 16 – Wednesday February 24<sup>th</sup> – Galapagos Is.**



Last night Tour Director Jennifer explained to us the currents that effect the Galapagos. May through November the cold Humboldt (Peruvian) current sweeps north from Antarctica up the west coast of South America and cools the island waters to an average of 65 degrees. This current is rich in nutrients and is important to the fish, birds and wildlife of the Galapagos. From December through April the warm Panama current sweeps down from Central America and warms the water to temperatures as high as 75 degrees.

We traveled overnight to Floriana Island (also known as Santa Maria Island) and are anchored off the island when we awake. It is a

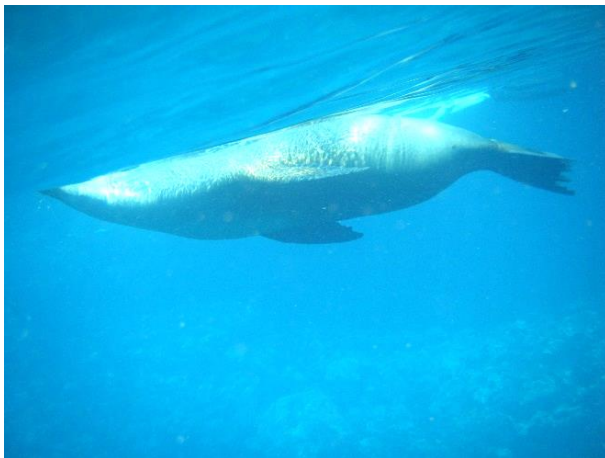
beautiful setting.

After breakfast, at 8 AM, we board our two zodiacs for a sightseeing trip around nearby Champion Island. It is a small island. At the island we spot many Sea Lions, Marine Iguanas and our first Nasca Boobie birds. Riding back to our ship we see Manta Rays jumping out of the water.





At 9:45 AM we depart for the second snorkeling adventure of our tour. We snorkel right off Champion Island where we had earlier seen many fish on our zodiac trip. We are dropped into an area teeming with thousands of fish. I had never seen so many fish at one time. We also see Sea Lions in the water and Star Fish including a Chocolate Chip Star Fish.



I get shots of Marcia and Kal, expert snorkelers. We thought yesterday's snorkeling was great. Today's is even better.



We raise anchor and motor along Floriana Island. We pass an interesting rock formation rising out of the sea. It is another beautiful hot day with very calm seas. About half of our folks are taking sea sickness meds as a precaution but none of us has had any problems including Marcia and I who have taken no medications.

After lunch we land at Puerto Velasco Ibarro. It is a small settlement of a couple of hundred people. We see it is still siesta time for the Marine Iguanas and a Sea Lion.



Jennifer tells us we are going up a mountain, Cerro Allieri. It is 1300 feet high and I assume she's planning to make us climb it. Then she takes us to a unique vehicle, a Winbrel. We drive for 20 minutes up a rough dirt road.



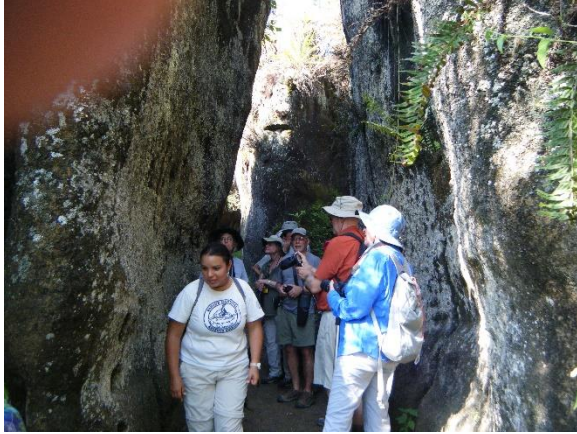
We then start hiking up and soon come to our objective, Giant Tortoises.



We watch one try to mate with another. Jennifer explains that this could be quite a long process as the top turtle has approached the bottom turtle from the wrong end and that the bottom turtle is another male! There are twenty-six Tortoises in this preserve and we see seventeen of them.

We proceed up the trail to the island's only water source. It is a small stream, fed by rainwater and dew, flowing from the top of the mountain. The small amount of

water is piped to the town where it is available to residents for three hours three times a week. In the 1600s Buccaneers stopped at this island to fill their water casks at this water source. Later in the 1930s the original German “Hermit” settlers relied on this source. The Buccaneers dug caves into the rocks so that they could sleep here overnight, high up on the mountain side, as their water casks slowly filled.



One of the early German settlers, the Wittmers, used these caves as their initial dwellings and their son was born in the cave to the right.



We return to our boat at 5:30 PM. Tonight before dinner we say goodbye to our crew. The Archipel crews work for six weeks then get three weeks off. Tomorrow morning our crew will go on break, the crew from Archipel 2, currently hosting another OAT group, will transfer to our boat and a third crew will take over on the Archipel 2. The food on board has been great. Normally Lunch and Dinner start with a soup course served to us. Then the appetizers and main course are served buffet line style. Then desert is served.





## **2016 Peru & Ecuador Trip – Day 17 – Thursday February 25<sup>th</sup> – Galapagos Island**

Last night at 11:30 PM the Archipel 1 raised anchor and motored to the town of Puerto Ayora on the southern shore of Santa Cruz island dropping anchor at 3:30 AM.



We are up early and get a nice view of the sun rising at 6:15 AM and then of the town, population 18,000. It is the largest town in the Galapagos.

After breakfast Tour Director Jennifer Prado rallies us for our first shore excursion of the day. She has told us that she is thirty years old, a native of the Galapagos and lives here with her brother, who we have met. He is also a tour director for OAT.

We take the zodiacs to town and board an air conditioned mini-bus a little after 8 AM. We are headed for the highlands of Santa Cruz. We drive on a rough dirt road for about twenty-five minutes and arrive at a private ranch, Rancho El Manzanitto.

We are here to see the giant tortoises but first Jennifer acquaints us with the life cycle and habits of these large reptiles. She tells us that they can survive three to four months without water and also go for a very long time without food. Pirates and Whalers would capture Giant Tortoises and take them alive on to their ships insuring a fresh food supply for long journeys. An estimated 10,000 Galapagos Giant Tortoises were killed in the 1700s for oil for lamps on the mainland. We now walk into the fields to see the tortoises.



It is extremely warm and humid. We enjoy getting back into our air conditioned mini-bus for the ride back to town.

Shortly before we arrive in town we stop and hike a short ways to a huge Lava Tube. Lava

tubes are formed as escape tubes for lava from the central core of a volcano.

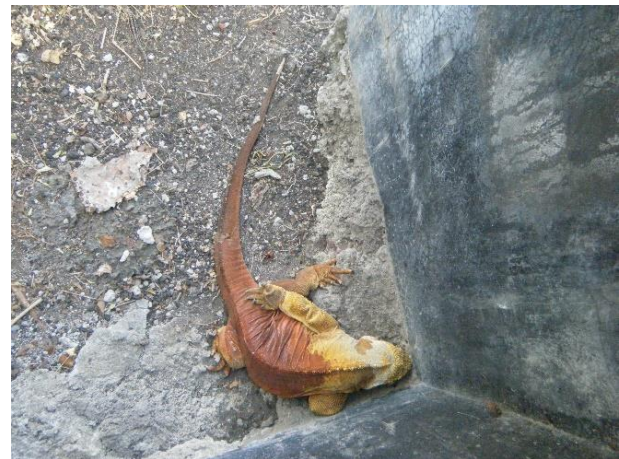
We are picked up by the zodiacs and transported back to the Archipel 1 for lunch.



After lunch we all take a water taxi to town and then an air conditioned mini-bus to the Charles Darwin Research Center and Research Station.

We walk about a mile to get to the actual Center, which is all outside. It is terribly hot and humid. Jennifer finds a spot of shade for us to sit in and explains the role of the Darwin Center. It grows native plants and gives them to

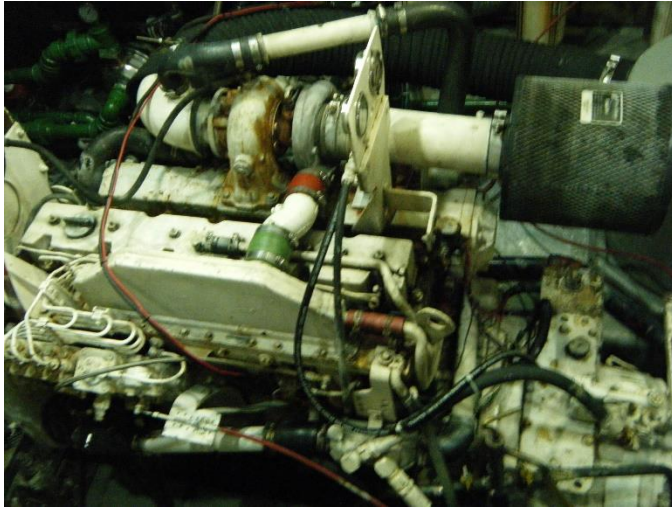
residents. They also try to raise endangered species of Tortoises and Iguanas for eventual release into the wild. We now view more Tortoises and Iguanas.



We walk out of the center. Jennifer directs the four of us to an Internet Café about thirteen block away near the town pier. She takes the rest of our travelers to a local fish market. We find the internet spot and enjoy connecting with civilization over a few drinks. We are glad that we have a fast connection and are able to send links to day twelve through sixteen of the Trip Journal to friends and family back home.



At 5:30 PM we walk to the town pier and check out the wildlife guarding it.



At 6 PM we are offered a tour of the engine room. We see the two 240 horsepower Cummins diesel engines. Top speed is 10+ knots. Cruising speed is 7 to 8 knots. There is no rudder. Steering in the catamaran is accomplished by varying engine speed.

Just before dinner we have a short ceremony introducing the new crew. We enjoy an exotic drink with them.

Overnight we will travel to the island of Isabela, the largest in the Galapagos.



## 2016 Peru & Ecuador Trip – Day 18 – Friday February 26<sup>th</sup> – Galapagos Islands

Overnight we motor from our anchorage south of Santa Cruz island to one south of the large island of Isabela. The seas are rougher during this transition than we have experienced and there is a bit of rolling around in our beds.

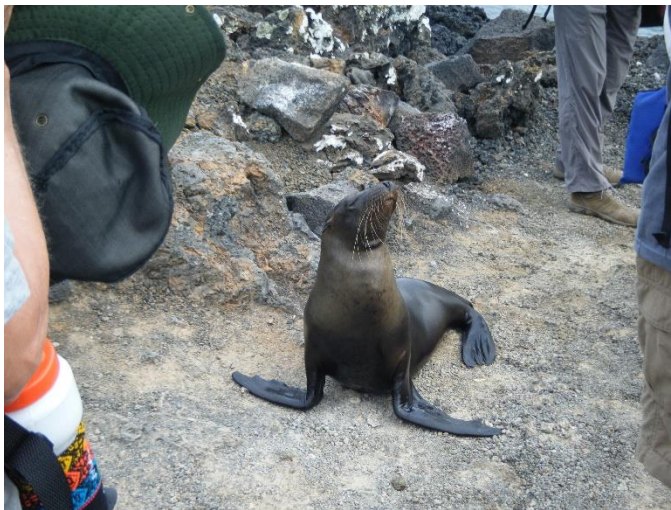


Tour Director Jennifer has asked that we get up early this morning and go on a wildlife spotting excursion prior to breakfast. We are all set for the 6:30 AM departure from the Archipel 1. We first enjoy watching the small white tipped sharks and other fish circle our boat. Bill and Laurie don their snorkel gear and get in with them.

We board the zodiacs and spend about half an hour cruising slowly around some of the small rocky islands off shore of Isabela island. We see our first Blue Footed Boobies. They are famous for flying high into the air and then diving into the sea perpendicular to the surface, going deep for fish. We also see our first Galapagos Penguins, the second smallest Penguin species in the world.



We land on small Tintoreras Island and walk around seeing hundreds and hundreds of Marine Iguanas. They are excellent swimmers and feed exclusively on algae below the water's surface. The island resembles a moonscape with almost no vegetation. We see baby Iguanas and mothers trying to dig nests to lay their eggs. We actually spot an Iguana who has just deposited her eggs in a burrow. We watch a Shark and a Ray swim back and forth in a narrow channel.



We walk back down the trail to the zodiacs and see we have a greeter.

Two other tour groups have just landed. Jennifer made a great call in having us start early. We had the island to ourselves.

We motor back to the Archipel 1 for breakfast. Our boat was specifically designed for this type of cruising. It was built in 2004 and refurbished in 2010. It is perfect for small groups of fourteen or sixteen people. I cannot think of a single thing that I could recommend to improve it.

At 10 AM we board the zodiacs and motor towards the beach near the small town of Puerto Villamil, population 8,000. The plan is for us to spend some time relaxing on the beach and snorkeling around the rock formations off the beach. When we get to the area it is apparent that at low tide the area off the beach is too shallow for snorkeling. Jennifer now leads us on a raised wooden walkway through a Mangrove Swamp. We end up at a beautiful lagoon.



We have a great time snorkeling. Most of us do not wear our shorty wetsuits. The water is wonderful; most refreshing. We see fish, Marine Iguanas and Star Fish.





We return to the Archipel in our zodiac and our driver takes us right under the boat, between the pylons, bow to stern. It is tight. We are all ducking as low as we can.

We find unique “towel art” in each of our rooms. Ours are swans making a heart. The women have fun going room to room to see what others have.

Prior to lunch our Head Chef demonstrates for us how they prepare Cevich, a unique seafood salad, in Ecuador. Lunch is served with a delicious Cevich as the appetizer.

At 2 PM the zodiacs take us to the town of Puerto Villamil where we board a Winbrel to take us to the Giant Tortoise breeding facility. We first stop and view the native Flamingos. This species lives in the Galapagos year around. They are related to the Caribbean Flamingos.



We arrive at the Giant Tortoise Breeding Facility. It is run by the National Park Service. It is very hot and humid. Jennifer explains that this area of South Isabela Island used to have thousands of Giant Tortoises but now has only forty. This is due to the two active volcanos, the harvesting for tortoise oil in the 1800s, and eggs being eaten by pigs and dogs.

The breeding facility collects recently laid eggs from the captive adult tortoises,

incubates them, keeps the babies “inside” until they are two years old, then outside until five years old and then releases them to the wild. We see the adults, the youngsters and the babies. They can live 150 years. A very interesting visit.





We leave the Breeding Center and go on a forty minute nature walk through a mangrove swamp and a forest. Jennifer describes many of the plants and trees. We see more wildlife.



At the end of the trail we see a female Marine Iguana with all of her little ones. We have some time for shopping and relaxing in town. It is great meeting the locals. Everyone is most friendly.

We are back on the Archipel at 6 PM. As usual Jennifer briefs us at 6:30 PM on tomorrow's activities and we enjoy a good dinner at 7 PM.

Most of us are off to bed early.

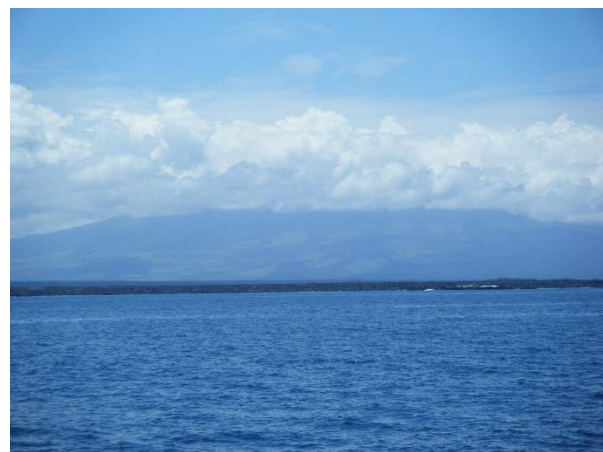
## 2016 Peru & Ecuador Trip – Day 19 – Saturday February 27<sup>th</sup> – Galapagos Islands

Overnight the Archipell 1 motors to Punto Moreno on the western coast of southern Isabela island. The wave motion is not as rough as predicted.

We have breakfast early this morning, at 6:30 AM, as Jennifer wants to get an early start on our activities.

By 7:30 AM most of us have landed on one of the island's huge lava fields. Marcia, Marie and two others have opted to go on a zodiac wildlife sighting excursion.

On the lava fields we walk for two hours, on very, very rough ground, with Jennifer explaining the geology and the plant and animal life. This lava field is hundreds of thousands of years old. Yes, it is hot and humid with little breeze.



Our lava field is between two active volcanos. The one on the left last erupted in 2005 while the one on the right erupted in 1997. There are five active volcanos on Isabela island. One erupted just a year ago. Our visit to the lava field is a little grueling but interesting as we learn how the Galapagos Islands were originally formed.

We return to our boat at 9:30 AM. Marcia and Marie are already back and report that they saw a nice variety of wildlife.

At 10:30 AM we take the zodiacs to near the shoreline for what we believe will be some most refreshing snorkeling. It is. I see some interesting fish including a bright orange one. The highlight was spotting a Sea Turtle. There is a lot of wave action where we snorkeled so the water is not crystal clear. We are glad we wore our wet suits as the water here is cooler than we have experienced.



We motor to Elizabeth Bay on the west side of Isabela Island. At 2:30 PM we all take a two hour zodiac exploration of the bay and a nearby mangrove swamp. We see some wildlife, flightless commorants, Penguins, Blue Footed Boobies, Iguanas, Pelicans and Sea Lions but not as many as we had hoped for.







At 4:30 PM the Archipel 1 weights anchor and motors north through the channel between Isabela Island and Fernandina Island. It has become overcast.



At 6:30 PM Jennifer gives her nightly briefing on tomorrow's activities. Tomorrow will be our last full day in the Galapagos. We anchor in the very calm Tagus Bay for the night.

## 2016 Peru & Ecuador Trip – Day 20 – Sunday February 28<sup>th</sup> – Galapagos Islands

Last night we docked in the very calm Tagus Bay. The ship was totally stable. Today will be our last full day in the Galapagos Islands. It looks like this will be another beautiful sunny day. Temperatures (and humidity) are forecasted to be in the mid-90s.

Breakfast has been moved up to 6:30 AM so that we can get an early start on our activities. At 7:30 AM we take the zodiacs to shore. This is to be a “dry” landing on some stone stairs.



We have a total of thirteen travelers in two zodiacs ready to be landed. Only six folks make it ashore, including Marcia, Kal and myself. The other seven decide to go on a wildlife spotting trip around the bay in one zodiac. The problem is strong ocean “surges” that catch the zodiac and lifts it two to five feet while we are trying to disembark. I think the real problem is my “inelegant” landing where I almost didn’t make it (nor did the crewman trying to pull me ashore). I think that scared the rest of our folks.

The six of us travelers and two guides now start hiking up. Our objective is Darwin’s Lake. After about forty minutes we reach a great lookout point and gaze down on Darwin’s Lake and Tagus Bay. Both the Lake and the Bay are collapsed volcano cones. It is hot with no breeze. We make it back safely to the Archipel 1.



Now I should say a few words about Mary Lou. She is in the forefront of the picture on the right. This young lady (she’s a young looking 38 years old) has been with us from the start of the Galapagos portion of the trip. A native of Montreal she has lived in the Galapagos for twelve years. She has two sons. She

recently took a position with OAT as Program Director for Peru and Ecuador. As such she will be reviewing activities for improvements. She is on our cruise to acquaint herself with the Archipel 1 and the crew. She is not a Naturalist like Jennifer but she is very knowledgeable about the Galapagos and has accompanied us on most of our excursions and has meals with us. It is almost like having two guides.

At 10 AM we go on our last snorkeling event. We snorkel near the edge of the bay. The water is churning so the underwater views are a little murky. I do see two sea turtles, many fishes and some Star Fish. Once again the snorkeling is most refreshing.



At 11:00 AM we are back on the Archipel 1 and underway motoring towards Fernandez Island.



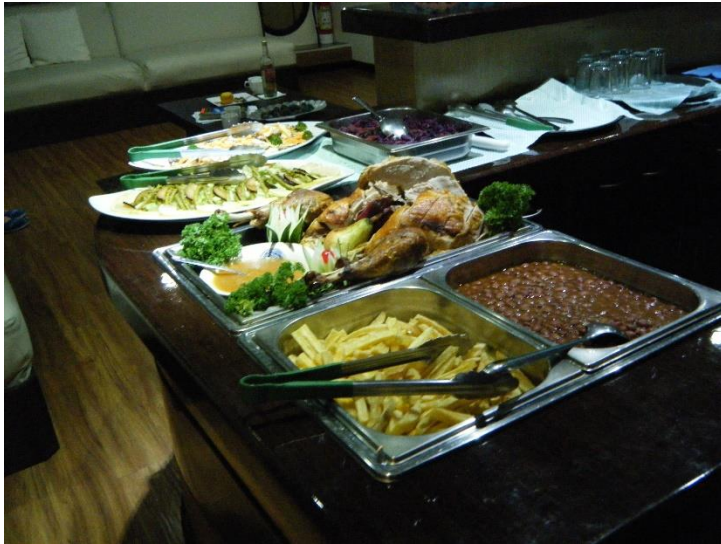
At 1:00 PM, after lunch, the zodiacs land us at Espendoza Point. Here we have an enjoyable two hours roaming a huge Marine Iguana nesting ground. Unfortunately, we also see many iguana carcasses and skeletons. We also see Sea Lions and a Galapagos Hawk. It is very hot but there is a nice breeze when we are near the shoreline.



We are back on board the Archipel 1 at 3 PM and immediately get underway to travel around Isabela. We go up to the top deck and get some great views of extinct volcano cones.



About 5 PM the Captain invites us to the bridge to be present when we cross the equator. We view the GPS as it registers "zero" longitude.



Tonight is our farewell dinner. Tomorrow we will disembark from the Archipel 1 and leave the Galapagos Islands.

We enjoy a special Ecuadorian cocktail with the crew and then sit down to a great dinner. Numerous salads, a full cooked turkey, beans, french fries, wine and ice cream.

## **2016 Peru & Ecuador Trip – Day 21 – Monday February 29<sup>th</sup> – Fly To Quito**

Fellow travelers Mike and Chuck are up early this morning for the last excursion. They leave on a zodiac with Jennifer and Mary Lou at 5:45 AM, before sunrise. They travel to a beach where Sea Turtles are busy digging borrows and laying eggs. The rest of us opt to stay on board and finish our packing.



Breakfast is at 7 AM. Bags out by 7:30 AM and at 8 AM we leave the Archipel 1 via their zodiacs for the pier at Baltra Island. We wave our last goodbyes. We have resumed taking our altitude meds as our next destination is at 9000+ feet.

We will be flying out of the the Baltra airport a little after 10 AM. This is a different airport than the one we landed at seven days ago. Our plane will land in Guayaquil for refueling and to pick up more passengers and then get us to our destination of Quito Ecuador by mid-



afternoon.

As this will be mostly a travel day I will take an opportunity to review our seven days in the Galapagos Islands.

-Our itinerary was the best. The “A” itinerary that we were on covered all of the main islands and a nice variety of sites. We were lucky. The Archipel 1, by National Park Service mandate, must alternate between “A” and the “D” loop that only covers

the southern islands. If we had been here last week or next week we would have been on the "D" itinerary.

-The Archipel 1 ship is perfectly designed and equipped for small groups like OAT. It is comfortable, spacious and a good cruiser. The ship is very clean. Snorkeling equipment is in good shape. The food is always good. On their rating card I stated "I cannot think of a suggestion that I could make that would improve on the design or operation of the Archipel 1".

-We had a crew change on the Archipel 1 mid-way though the week. In both cases our crews were excellent. They always looked out for our safety first and then our enjoyment. They really worked like a team.

-Tour Director Jennifer Prado was excellent. Her knowledge of geology and the wildlife of the Galapagos is first rate. She is a hard worker and a very nice person.

-The shore excursions were also very good. Always well planned and a nice variety. The snorkeling was a real treat.

-The weather was great. No real rain and a lot of sun. High temperatures were in the mid-80s to low 90s with high humidity but the air conditioning on our ship always kept us comfortable once we returned from excursions.

-Fellow OAT travelers were great. We had fourteen different personalities but we all got along just fine. I was not looking for any but I cannot recall a single incident of selfishness on anyones part. We were always helping each other out. Probably helped that all are experienced travelers.

-The people of the Galapagos. With the exception of our crews (who were 100% residents of the Galapagos) and tour guides we did not have a chance to interact with many natives. When we did they were most friendly and hospitable.

-Surprises:

---The number of towns. I was expecting more isolation but we enjoyed seeing the towns.

---The large amount of wildlife; more than I expected.

---The beauty of the land.

We are at our Quito Hotel, the Reina Isabel, by 4 PM. They have already delivered to our rooms the luggage we had left behind.

At 6 PM we arrive at a nearby museum and have a quick tour of their pre-Columbia and Columbia period replica artifacts.



After the museum tour we have a very good farewell dinner right at the museum. It is a farewell dinner as the main portion of the tour is now ending and six of our fellow travelers, Nancy, Denise, Vicki and Chuck, and Jean and Mike will be leaving for home tomorrow.

The other eight of us will be extending our tour with a six day post trip extension traveling through the Ecuadorian Andes.



## **2016 Peru & Ecuador Trip – Day 22 – Tuesday March 1<sup>st</sup> – Drive To Riobamba**

Today at 8:30 AM eight of us (Marie, Kal, Marcia and I plus Laurie and Bill and Leanne and Ken) along with ace Tour Director Silvia depart Quito for our six-day post-trip extension in the Andes. We expect to see some nice scenery and many indigenous folks. We drive south on the Pan American Highway past farms, volcanos and the Andes Mountains.



We take a rest stop at a 300-year-old Hacienda, La Cienega, and enjoy some hot chocolate.



The weather is overcast and cool. A nice break from the hot and humid Galapagos. Silvia blames the clouds on a nearby volcano that erupted on Sunday. She tells us that Ecuador has forty active volcanos.

We next stop at a local farmer's market, Latacunga Market. Silvia gives each couple one dollar and instructs us to bargain with the vendors and buy something unique to take to today's home hosted lunch.

At noontime we stop at the Naranjo Rose facility. Growing roses is a big industry in Ecuador. The export 50% of their roses to the USA and 50% to Russia and Europe. We first watch the workers cut the roses to size and package them for export and then tour the massive greenhouses. They have 160,000 plants



generating blooms year round. They grow 69 varieties of roses. They give us each a rose which we will take to lunch for our host.



At 1 PM we reach the beautiful adobe house of Aida Perez. This interesting woman is a former journalist and an active artist. Her home is like an art studio. We are served an outstanding lunch.



We next stop at the old train station at Urbina. We visit some recreations of the original types of homes that the indigenous Ceschi Indians built and then a demonstration of Tagna nut art..... the resulting product feels like ivory.



At 5 PM we reach the city of Riobamba. It sits at an elevation of 9000 feet. Towering above the city is the highest volcano and mountain in Ecuador, Chimborazo at 20,564 feet. It is very cloudy, so I have borrowed the picture at the left from the internet.

We check into our hotel for the night, the beautiful Hacienda Abraspungo. Our rooms (below) are huge and beautiful.

We have a great included dinner in their restaurant.



### **2016 Peru & Ecuador Trip – Wednesday March 2<sup>nd</sup> – Day 23 - Drive To Cuenca**

We have a good night's sleep on our one-night stay at the Hacienda Abraspungo near Riobamba. There is no heat in our room but after dinner they light fires in the small wood stoves in our rooms and that makes things quite comfortable.

At 8 AM we leave for a driving tour of Riobamba. We stop at the first Catholic Church in Ecuador, Balbanera Church. It was built by the Spanish in 1535 on the ruins of an Inca holy place that they destroyed.



We drive south on the Pan American Highway past great scenery and the prosperous looking farms of the indigenous people. Tour Director Silvia tells us that many of the lower class indigenous (Indians) left the country for the USA in the late 1990s when the currency collapsed. Many had lost everything. They mostly settled in Queens and Brooklyn NY. Many did very well and sent back money to family members who built big houses or expanded existing houses and bought more cows. Some have now returned.



A little after 10 AM we stop in Alausi for our ride on the “Devil’s Nose” section of the Trans-Andean Railroad. Back in the late 1800s it took two days to travel the 170 miles (and 9000-foot change in elevation) between the two major cities of Ecuador, Quito and Guayaquil, by mule. Ecuador’s President brought in engineers from England, France and other European countries to study the problem of building a railroad through the Andes Mountains. They all said there was no way to get past the Devil’s Nose without removing the mountain. On a trip to



the USA the President met American engineer Archer Harman who agreed to come to Ecuador and study the problem. He quickly said he had a solution and work on the railroad commenced in 1901. His ingenious solution is shown in the picture at the left. The train would descend on the upper track (left to right) pulling all the way to the right of the photo. Then it would reverse direction and go downhill backwards (right to left)

on the lower track. It would reverse again at the bottom and pull into the station at the lower left. 3000 Jamaicans and 1000 other Caribbean Islanders were brought in to do the largely manual construction. 2000 died. The route was completed in 1908. We will be traveling over this section of the railroad on part of today’s train journey.

We board the train at 11 AM. The weather is good. Temperatures are in the 60s and it is clearing.



We stop for fifteen minutes at the bottom so that we can take pictures of the Devil's Nose.



We now stop for an hour at the Sibambe Station. We visit the small museum and enjoy the Indian folk dances. We return, going back up 1200 feet, to the Alausi Station at 1:30 PM.



We now have a long drive on the Pan American Highway to our destination, the city of Cuenca.

Silvia tells us an amusing story about when she was a young tour guide for another company. "I pulled up in front of a hotel in my small car to pick up three clients. I went to the front desk to contact them and when I turned around four Gorilla-sized men were picking up my car and moving it. I ran outside and said what are you doing? They said young lady do you know who is staying here. I said no. They said, Hugo

Chavez (the long time socialist dictator of Venezuela, now deceased). I said, "but he does not live in Ecuador so please return my car to where I left it so that this Ecuadorian woman can do her job".

Later in the afternoon we drive through clouds, mist and rain and arrive at 5 PM at our hotel in the Old City section of Cuenca. We are at 9,000 feet. Cuenca is a city of 600,000. It is said to maybe be the nicest in Ecuador. It may have the highest percentage of middle-class residents of any city. Many middle-class Americans have retired to Cuenca or come here for the winter. Living costs are very low and a luxury condominium with three bedrooms and access to a fitness center and pool goes for \$165,000.



We check into our hotel for the next three nights, the Carvallo. The rooms are huge but we have no window to the outside, just to a hallway.

We meet at 7 PM for an excellent included dinner.

## 2016 Peru & Ecuador Trip – Day 24 – Thursday March 3<sup>rd</sup> – Cajas NP

We all enjoy a very good night's sleep and the hotel's buffet breakfast.



At 8:30 AM we leave our hotel and board our mini-motor coach for a tour of Cajas National Park. Tour Director Silvia tells us that we will have the “best” guide in the park, Juan.

We pick up Juan and continue to drive out of Cuenca up into the mountains. He tells us that the park covers 65,000 acres and contains 759 Glacier Lakes. We will see some of the lakes and walk in the High Mountain Cloud Forest. Outside of the park most of the cloud forest has been cleared for farming or grazing. Admission to the National Park is tightly restricted to prevent overuse.

We stop at a glacier lake and spend two hours walking around the lake, mostly through the cloud forest, as Juan explains the plants, trees and birds that we see.



We spot many birds including an Andean Turkey and a Ruddy Duck.

The weather has held. It is in the 60s with no wind or rain. We have noticed that uphill climbs at this altitude have us panting more than usual.

We now drive up the mountain, above the 12,000 foot "tree line" to view a glacier lake at 13,500 feet.



We stop at an excellent country restaurant for a good included lunch. Very nice views around the restaurant (see below).

We return to our hotel at 3 PM and have some free time. Many shopping opportunities right around our hotel as the streets are crammed with small shops selling all kinds of clothing, shoes and jewelry.

At 7 PM we meet and walk a few blocks to a fancy restaurant for a great dinner.





## **2016 Peru & Ecuador Trip – Day 25 – Friday March 4<sup>th</sup> – Cuenca**



Today's excursions start at 8 AM with a walking tour of historic "Old Cuenca". As we are staying in the old city, we start from our hotel lobby.

We learn that Cuenca was considered a second Inca capital (after Cusco).

In 2000 Cuenca's old city was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

We walk by Cuenca's first cathedral, started by the Spanish in 1557. Then we see the Court Building built in the late 1800's with French architectural influence.



Our next stop is the Cathedral of Cuenca, built in 1888. With a capacity of 10,000 it is considered the second largest cathedral in South America. Tour Director Sylvia tells us that many people in Cuenca are deeply religious and that we should expect to see folks inside the cathedral deep in prayer. We do.



We spend some time at the Flower Market and then the Cloister for Nuns right next to the market. We walk towards the Tomebamba River that divides the old from the new city, passing flea markets. We walk along the river and view many old houses. This is a favorite area for retirees from the USA.



At 9:40 AM we meet our motor coach and driver, Edgar. He drives us to the Pumapungo ruins and History Museum. Silvia first walks us through a museum exhibition covering the many Ecuadorian Indian sects. Much like the native Indians in the USA there are a couple of dozen Ecuadorian sects and in ancient and colonial times they did not get along with each other very well.



We next go outside and walk the grounds of the Pumapungo Inca ruins. It is a pleasant and interesting walk. Unlike Machu Picchu, here 99% of the walls are reconstructions, easily differentiated from the more solid and better built Inca originals.

We also tour the gardens where they have tried to duplicate the crops grown by the folks of that era. We enjoy seeing more Llamas close up.

We now drive to the Homero Ortega Panama Hat factory. We have now been told several times that "Panama" hats were first made in Ecuador and that all Panama hats, today, are made in Ecuador. Apparently, a hundred years ago, Ecuador started shipping hats to Panama for sale to all the folks crossing the isthmus or docking at Panama ports. When president Teddy Roosevelt visited Panama

during the digging of the Panama Canal he returned to the USA with several hats that the press proclaimed "Panama Hats".



We tour the factory and see how the hats are woven from the internal fibre of the Toquilla Palm, how the hats are dyed, cured, and finally shaped. This was actually a nice tour as ace Tour Director Silvia conducts the whole tour for us. Above she is showing us a hat "hot off the press". We next go to their showroom.



Marie buys a hat and Marcia buys a visor and some jewelry.

At 1:30 PM we enjoy lunch at a beautiful resort. Weather today has been nice with temperatures in the 60s. There is some occasional rain but always it seems to fall when we are inside.

We next go to an Orchid Facility where we learn how they are grown. I especially enjoyed seeing the "Monkey Face" Orchid.





Our last stop of the day is at a facility that weaves decorative cloth. It is great interacting with the local people. They are always so nice and Silvia encourages them to talk and then she quickly translates for us. Laurie and Bill buy a nice runner for a table.

We return to our hotel at 5:30 PM. Dinner is on our own tonight. We have enjoyed the many included meals at the restaurants OAT has taken us to on this tour. Many good soups for appetizers, typically a trout, pork, chicken or beef entrée with vegetables and rice and then ice cream or cake for desert. Anyway, we

are ready for something different tonight. At 7 PM us eight travelers meet and walk next door to a Pizzeria that Silvia recommends. We have great pizzas and an enjoyable dinner. We have really liked traveling with Leanne and Ken (from the very start of our trip in Lima/Machu Picchu) and Laurie and Bill (from the start of the main trip in Quito). They are great people.

## **2016 Peru & Ecuador Trip – Day 26 – Saturday March 5<sup>th</sup> – Fly To Quito**

Today we will fly from Cuenca to Quito Ecuador as we approach our return to the USA on March 7<sup>th</sup>.

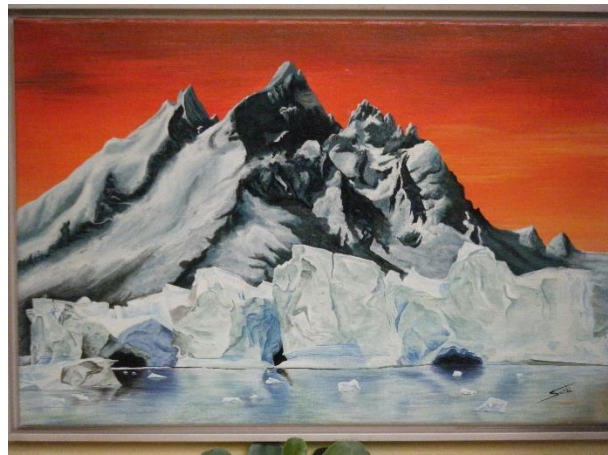
We leave our hotel at 8 AM, The Carvalho, after a comfortable three-night stay. We first drive to an overlook and get good views of Cuenca.



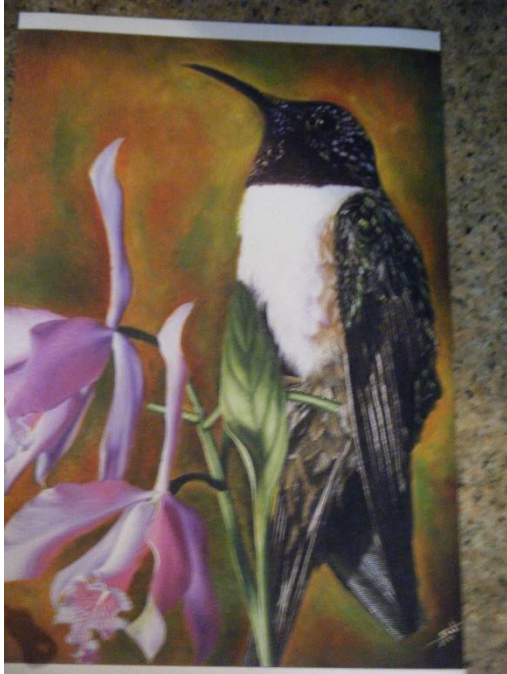
Now Tour Director Silvia announces that she has a surprise for us. She is going to take us to the home of a famous Cuenca artist for a brief visit. We arrive at the home of Santiago Guillermo and are welcomed into his studio by his wife. We start to realize that he is disabled.

Through Silvia we learn that he has been partially paralyzed since birth. He has no use of his hands or arms and only limited use of his legs and feet. Through diligence and hard work, he has become a respected artist.

Through Silvia he answers our questions. He paints with oil paint. He tries to paint realistic looking paintings rather than impressionistic. He has won many awards and has had many showings and exhibits. He shows us how he paints. As you may have guessed he holds the brush in his mouth.



We admire the paintings displayed in his studio. Marcia buys a print of one of his paintings (a hummingbird, of course). Santiago signs it for her with a pen held in his mouth.



A most memorable visit with an inspiring young man.

Our flight to Quito is uneventful and at 1 PM we check into the very good Reina Isabel hotel yet again. The view from our room is nice, depending on which way you look.



At 7 PM we meet in the hotel restaurant for our farewell dinner. Laurie and Bill fly home tomorrow earlier than the other six of us. This will be the last time all eight of us are together for dinner.

Marie and Kal report that they had a nice twenty-five minute walk to the Botanical Gardens this afternoon and enjoyed the flowers and plants.

Bill and Laurie report that they were on the same route, a little later than Marie

and Kal, when they were attacked by two punks attempting to rob them in front of the Marriot Hotel. Bill fought them off and summoned two nearby police with whom he had a hard time communicating. No police action was taken.

Dinner was great.

## **2016 Peru & Ecuador Trip – Day 27 – Sunday March 6<sup>th</sup> – Quito**

Today is our last day in Ecuador. We will fly out of Quito bound for the USA just after midnight.



Check out time is noon. The four of us have a light lunch at our favorite nearby Italian (pizza) restaurant.

We then walk about a mile to a public park and view artist's paintings, the merchandise in the flea market stands and watch Quito families enjoy a Sunday afternoon.

At 2:30 PM we return to our hotel lobby and meet Tour Director Silvia. We board a mini-bus and arrive at a Farmer's Market. Silvia points out to us some of the fruits and other foods unique to Ecuador.







At 3:45 PM, on our way north to the Equator, Silvia has us stop at the “best hand made ice cream” shop in Ecuador and buys us each a cone. My Passion Fruit and Fig is excellent.

The owner shows us how Paila Ice Cream is made....still using his Grandmother’s recipe.

Next we visit the Intinan Museum at the Equator. We have a great local guide and enjoy their (sometimes a little hokey) displays. Especially interesting was the “sink” that showed water going “straight down” when the sink was right over the

Equator line but would swirl counter clockwise (like a toilet) if moved just a few feet north of the equator and clockwise if just a few feet to the south! You can also balance an egg on a nail head at the equator!



Another highlight...a shrunken head from the Amazon region!



We now drive through an upscale Eastern suburb of Quito and stop for a photo from an overview spot.

We stop at a great restaurant near Silvia's home and the airport and enjoy a menu with North American offerings for dinner.

We arrive at the airport at 9 PM for our midnight flight and say our goodbyes to Silvia, who is certainly one of the best Tour Directors we have ever had.

### **2016 Peru & Ecuador Trip – Day 28 - Monday March 7<sup>th</sup> – Going Home!**



Our Delta Airlines Boeing 757 takes off from Quito Ecuador at 12:15 AM and lands just five hours later at the nice Atlanta airport. We catch connecting flights for Dayton and Pittsburgh. Marie and Kal are home by 10 AM and Marcia and I by 11:30 AM.

Pepper, our dog, is happy to see Marcia. Our daughter, Jaime, took great care of Pepper in our absence.

Marie and Kal pick up their two Westies from the very good kennel they have recently started using. Their dogs are in great shape.

We very much enjoyed this trip. Twenty-Eight days is a long time to be away from home, however. Maybe we will keep future vacations to the three-week time frame we have mostly used in the past.

The three young ladies that we had for Tour Directors, Corina, Silvia and Jennifer, were truly exceptional and made this a memorable trip.



Here are the souvenirs that we brought back from South America (along with many great memories).

Best, Jim