



Ecuador

Snow-capped volcanoes, Amazonian rainforest and giant island tortoises are just some of Ecuador's diverse delights. Read on for details of the country's highlights

Slightly larger than the UK, Ecuador attracts around 30,000 British visitors a year. Most of these will visit the glorious Galápagos islands, but the mainland also has varied wonders on offer. One day you could be in the Amazon jungle monkey-spotting, and the next day climbing through the snow and ice on Cotopaxi volcano. A two-week trip to Ecuador plus a week in the Galápagos will do justice to its natural gems (including 1,640 bird species) and the World Heritage cities of Quito and Cuenca.

\$0.25. At Cuenca, a taxi to the centre costs \$3; at Guayaquil, it costs \$5.

Tour operators

- **Bales Worldwide** www.balesworldwide.co.uk
- **Cox and Kings** www.coxandkings.co.uk
- **Geodyssey** www.geodyssey.co.uk
- **Journey Latin America** www.journeylatinamerica.co.uk
- **Kuoni** www.kuoni.co.uk
- **Last Frontiers** www.lastfrontiers.com
- **Naturetrek** www.naturetrek.co.uk
- **Select Latin America** www.selectlatinamerica.co.uk
- **Sunvil Traveller** www.sunvil.co.uk

GETTING AROUND

GETTING THERE

Airlines

There are no direct flights from the UK to Ecuador but the following carriers offer flights from London Gatwick or Heathrow.

- **American Airlines** (www.aa.com) flies to Quito and Guayaquil via Miami.
- **Continental Airlines** (www.continental.com) flies to Quito via Houston or Atlanta.
- **Delta Airlines** (www.delta.com) flies to Quito and Guayaquil via Atlanta.
- **Iberia** (www.iberia.com) flies to Quito and Guayaquil via Madrid.
- **KLM** (www.klm.com) flies to Quito and Guayaquil via Amsterdam.

From the airports

At Quito, a taxi to La Mariscal district costs \$6 (\$8 to the old town). The frequent Metrobus costs

By plane

- **Aerogal** www.aerogal.com.ec
- **Icaro** www.icaro.aero
- **Tame** www.tame.com.ec

NOTE On domestic arrivals, airport staff will need to see the printed luggage label on your collected luggage (and your receipt) before allowing you out of the terminal, so keep it attached. A return flight from Quito to the Galápagos typically costs around £300.

By tour

We don't recommend renting a car, as signage is poor and driving by others can be erratic. Most tourists travel around on tours and many operators are based in Quito. We used (and can recommend) Metropolitan Touring (www.metropolitan-touring.com). Happy Gringo Travel (www.happygringo.com) was also recommended to us by tourists.

By train

There are only two main railway lines in Ecuador – from Guayaquil and Cuenca to near Quito. The section from near Quito to Riobamba was closed for maintenance on our visit in January 2009 – this may be reopened by the middle of 2009. A ticket for the public train from Riobamba to the Devil's Nose (Wed, Sat, Sun) costs \$11.

■ Chiva Express

www.chivaexpress.com

We took the three-day tour (MT-3530), booked through Metropolitan Touring. The all-inclusive cost was £468 (including a single supplement). Group sizes are around 15 and the guides speak English. On the first day, the tour included visits to a hacienda (one of many colonial ranches in the country and a dairy farm where we saw cowboys lassoing) and a rose plantation. On the Chiva Express, we admired the landscapes from seats on the roof of the moving bus, but the authorities has since banned people from roof riding on safety grounds. There's an onboard toilet.

Quito

Taxis are plentiful in Quito – all should be yellow, licensed and have a taxi-meter (although they rarely use them, so agree the fare before stepping inside). Most trips within the city (eg La Mariscal to the old town) cost \$3, depending on traffic. The Trolebus and Ecovía (www.trolebus.gov.ec) link the old town with La Mariscal. Each ride is only \$0.25.

NOTE Keep an eye on your belongings – if carrying a backpack, it's best to carry it strapped to the front of your body rather than on your back.

For the full magazine report on Ecuador, see p48 of the April 2009 issue of Which? Holiday

THINGS TO SEE AND DO

QUITO

In the old town, every important cultural site has a bilingual plaque outside.

Intiñan Museum

Calacaly Road, 200m from Mitad del Mundo.

Open daily 9.30am-5pm (last tour 4pm)

Admission \$3

Mitad del Mundo

Av Manuel Cordova Galarza

Twenty minutes (by taxi \$15) north of the centre.

Open Mon-Thu 9am-6pm, Fri-Sun 9am-7pm

Admission \$2 (+ \$3 for the informative, bilingual Ethnographic Museum)

Cathedral (museum)

Plaza Grande & Venezuela

Open Mon-Fri 10am-4pm, Sat 10am-2pm

Admission \$1.50

El Sagrario

García Moreno

Admission free

La Compañía de Jesús church

García Moreno & Sucre

No photos permitted inside.

Admission \$2

San Francisco Monastery Museum

(Fray Pedro Gocial)

San Francisco plaza

Open Mon-Sat 9am-6pm, Sun 9am-12.30pm

Admission \$2

Museo de la Ciudad

García Moreno 572 and Rocafuerte

Displays are only in Spanish.

Open Tue-Sun 9.30am-5.30pm

Admission \$2; guided tour (in English) \$4

Museo Nacional del Banco Central

Casa de la Cultura

Ave 6 de Diciembre & Patria

Open Tue-Fri 9am-5pm, Sat-Sun 10am-4pm

Admission \$2, free tours (in English Sat and Thur)

Other suggestions

For a great view over the city centre, climb to the belfry of the neo-gothic, twin-spired Basilica del Voto Nacional (\$2). If Quito isn't cloaked in cloud – and it often is – consider taking a Teleférico cable car (\$4 per person round trip) up the steep, grassy foothills of Pichincha volcano to around 4000m. Here, the mountain and city landscape vista is far-reaching, but at this altitude, be prepared to get easily short of breath.

CRAFT TOWNS AND SHOPPING

When buying souvenirs without price labels, bargaining is expected, but the maximum discount you're likely to get is 20-25% off.

OTAVALO

The Otavalo market begins at dawn. One of the best ways to explore the craft towns around Otavalo is on a private guided tour. Our guide (booked from Hacienda Cusin) was very knowledgeable – we paid \$15 per hour.

Museum of Textiles El Obraje

Calle Sucre 608

Luis Maldonado doesn't speak English but has a printed leaflet that helps explain things.

Open Mon-Sat 9am-12noon & 3pm-6pm

Admission \$2

At Cotacachi leather jackets cost \$80-\$100 and handbags are around \$40. You may get a 10% discount by offering cash. At San Antonio de Ibarra, wood carvings at Luis Potosi's shop cost \$16 for a dolphin or \$6 for a candlestick. Several shops are closed on Sundays.

Calderón (in the north of Quito), known for its painted 'masapan' dough figures and sold in a handful of shops. In Quito itself, La Mariscal district has two main areas to visit for indigenous souvenirs. The covered 'Mercado Artesanal' (on Juan León Mera and J Washington streets, open until 7pm) and at Parque El Ejido on weekends, there's a low-key crescent of stalls, while outside the gates, artists display their paintings along the pavement.

VOLCANOES

Cotopaxi National Park

Many companies offer day tours from Quito – Cotopaxi is a two-hour drive away. Typical price is \$95, including park entrance fee.

If you're keen to climb a volcano such as Cotopaxi, ensure the guide specialises in mountain climbing, and be prepared for a six-hour, overnight climb with ice picks. There are hiking trails around the base of the volcano and some companies such as the Biking Dutchman (www.bikingdutchman.com) also offer cycle tours. Admission \$10

Cuicocha crater (12km southeast of Cotacachi)

The rim trail (nearly 14km) takes roughly four hours to hike around. There are also 30-40-minute boat tours around the crater lake. Admission \$1

AMAZON BASIN

Yasuní National Park

To visit the clay licks here near the Napo Wildlife Center, pay \$20 per person which goes to the Añangu community who manage the licks. The parrots usually appear between 7am and 9am. If you are staying at Sacha Lodge for three nights, this may not be promoted, so you will need to request it from your guide early on. Admission \$5

TIP Bring several bags to put damp clothes in. Clothes rarely dry in the light humidity.

CLOUD FOREST

We only visited Bellavista Reserve (see 'Good places to stay'), but the main town in the cloud forest is Mindo, 24km away and home to the bizarre-looking, crimson cock-of-the-rock bird. January is nesting time, so not so good for bird-spotting. May is the best month to see orchids and the dry season (May to October) is a preferable time to visit.

TIP Be prepared for night walks and rain by packing a torch and overtrousers.

CUENCA AND AROUND

New Cathedral

Corner of Mariscal Sucre & Benigno Malo

Admission free

Old Cathedral

Mariscal Sucre 7-78 & Luis Cordero

Don't miss the realistic statue of Christ lying in Mary's lap, the French pipe organ and bygone photos of the city in an adjoining courtyard.

Admission \$2

Homero Ortega Toquilla Hat Factory

Gil Ramirez Dávalos 3-86

www.homeroortega.com

Admission by tour or prior arrangement. Hats in the shop range from \$15 to well over \$100.

Ingapirca

Two hours north of Cuenca.

Admission \$5 (museum \$6). Guides 10am-6pm

GALAPAGOS

At the mainland airport, you must buy a transit control card (\$10) before checking in. 20kg maximum for check-in luggage. On arrival at Baltra airport, you must pay the \$100 per person National Park fee in cash.

Most visitors to the Galápagos see the islands by cruise yacht or ship, and this is definitely the best way – either on a four- or seven-night trip. Some visitors prefer the comfort and space of a large (100-passenger) ship, but we would recommend the intimacy of a smaller yacht cruise of 8-20 people. Five-day cruises typically range from around £600 to £1400 per person (based on two people sharing), eight-day cruises range from £1250 to £2600 per person.

It's also possible to stay in a hotel in Puerto Ayora on Santa Cruz and visit a few of the other islands on day trips. Guided excursions are available on most islands – by law, no one is allowed to enter the national park areas—97% of the land—without a guide on an organised tour.

One of the best ways to appreciate the wildlife is in the water. Many cruise ships include snorkelling gear. It's a popular area for diving as well and there are several dive schools based at Puerto Ayora such as Galápagos Sub-Aqua (www.galapagos-sub-aqua.com) and Nauti Diving (www.nautidiving.com).

Cruise prices usually include everything except alcoholic drinks and gratuities. Many boats do not

accept credit card payment so have enough cash to hand. Put your camera in a plastic bag for protection during the dinghy rides.

■ Charles Darwin Research Station

Puerto Ayora

Santa Cruz

www.darwinfoundation.org

Open daily 6am-6pm

Admission free

GOOD PLACES TO STAY

In Quito you'll find most hotels in the Mariscal district (along with a multitude of souvenir shops, tour agencies, bars and restaurants). But to escape the crowds, there are a handful of hotels in the old town. Few hotels cater for wheelchair users and lifts are rare. Many hotels add 12% tax and 10% service charge to your bill, so ensure you check whether this has been included or not. Some will charge extra for payment by credit card. Prices shown are for the cheapest room for two people, including breakfast and taxes in November 2009, unless otherwise stated.

AMAZON BASIN

■ Sacha Lodge

Napo River

Tel 02256 6090

www.sachalodge.com

It takes a lot of effort (plane, then motor boat, then a hike, then a dugout canoe) to reach this jungle lodge by the Napo River, but this will be a memorable experience, cut off from the outside world (no TV or even mobile phone signals). Elevated boardwalks lead through the jungle to appealing, spotlessly cleaned timber cabins with balcony hammocks and monkey-spotting through windows. Everything is organised seamlessly, and there is an excellent choice of Ecuadorian food at meal times. The price includes all meals, juices and hot drinks, guided walks and boat trips at dawn, before lunch, late afternoon and at night. Expect wake-up calls as early as 5.30am. Tours are in groups of just six people, ponchos and rubber boots are thankfully provided, as are fishing rods if you want to fish for piranha. It's also worth buying the \$12 guidebook to tick off the many birds you see. They own a butterfly farm, so you can get up close to species such as big, iridescent blue Morpho butterflies. There is little chance to go on your own self-guided walks though, and there are few wet-weather activities in the lodge.

Three-night package £501 per person, including flights to/from Quito

CLOUD FOREST

■ Bellavista Cloud Forest Reserve

Tel 02211 6232/6047

www.bellavistacloudforest.com

This modestly furnished lodge in a 700-hectare reserve is a unique hideaway, 12km from the

nearest tarmac and around 80km northwest of Quito. The road winds around hills cloaked in lush forest, and up into cloud mist. The facilities are basic within this sustainable lodge, but the rooms have hot showers, a heater, Andean blankets and picture windows and balconies looking right onto the mossy forest trees. Meals are served in the palm-thatched, geodesic dome with panoramic windows. We found the service a little ad hoc, but our volunteer guide was very informative as we walked some of the many muddy trails. Transfers from Quito are usually included in the price, otherwise a taxi from Quito costs around \$50. Ponchos and rubber boots are provided.

One night package £113 per person, including guided walks and all meals

CUENCA

■ Hotel Santa Lucía

Antonio Borrero 8-44 & Sucre

Tel 07 282 8000

www.santaluciahotel.com

Right in the centre of the old town (near the New Cathedral), this boutique hotel has a delightful facade with wrought iron balustrades, grand wood doors. The focal point is the lovely, garden style courtyard, but other notable rooms include the palatial first floor lounge (with fireplace, frescoes and murals). Some of the smart rooms are small and without windows, but there are plenty of mod cons. Free internet access. **£88**

OTAVALO

■ Hacienda Cusin

San Pablo del Lago

Imbabura

Tel 06 2918 013 / 316 / 317

www.haciendacusin.com

Set down a cobbled lane in the quiet village of San Pablo (six miles from Otavalo), this 17th-century estate in extensive, beautifully tended grounds is the equivalent of a sumptuous country house hotel. The grand public rooms include log fires, parquet flooring, tapestries, and religious antiquities. More than half of the cossetting rooms feature a log fire (lit while you're at dinner), along with artworks, novels, beams and a welcome folder. **£106**

QUITO

■ Hostal de la Rábida

La Rábida 227 & Sta María

La Mariscal

larabida@uio.satnet.net

Tel 02222 1720

This welcoming little hotel with only 11 rooms stands on a quiet street close to La Mariscal's restaurants and bars. Staff are personable and the public areas have a homespun charm (a fireplace, photos of Quito scenes, classical music), so you can easily overlook the little faults (such as chipped shower room tiles). A pet rabbit is often in the sweet little grassy garden. Bedrooms are modest with whitewashed rattan furniture and small shower rooms. Free internet access. **£106**

■ Mansion del Angel

Wilson E5-29 & Juan León Mera

La Mariscal

Tel 02 255 7721

www.mansiondelangel.com.ec

This lavishly decorated townhouse is the perfect, top-notch Quito bolthole. It sports big vases of exotic flowers, wood-panelling, rugs on parquet floors and a chaise longue in the main lounge, while breakfast (with home-baked croissants) is in the airy, top floor conservatory. Tea and cookies are served every 5pm but no dinner here. The 11 bedrooms may feature antiques, armoires, paintings and coronets. **£85**

■ Patio Andaluz

García Moreno 6-52

Old town

Tel 02 228 0830

www.hotelpatioandaluz.com

Right in the heart of the old town, this neo-classical building with cherubic mouldings was founded way back in 1534. Despite the doormen dressed in colonial garb, the ambience isn't stuffy. Bedrooms are set around two attractive atrium courtyards – one is home to the restaurant (the menu here is fairly priced) and a hidden lounge area, while the other has a Moorish bar area – come here for a free welcome cocktail. Elegant rooms are sizeable. Free internet access. **£177**

■ San Francisco de Quito

Sucre 217 & Guayaquil

Old town

Tel 02 295 1241 / 228 7758

www.sanfranciscodequito.com.ec

For a cheaper option in the old town, consider this low-key 17th-century guesthouse, just a two minute walk to Plaza Grande. Overlooking the lovely central atrium, gallery walls are lined with charming old black and white photos of Quito, although elsewhere, décor looks somewhat tired. There's a great view from the otherwise drab roof terrace and the simple, good value rooms are kept clean with smallish shower rooms. **£30**

RIOBAMBA

■ Hotel Abraspungo

Tel 03294 4299

www.abraspungo.com.ec

This hotel in lawned grounds is on the outskirts of Riobamba and a base on the Chiva Express tour. Its public areas sport bags of rustic charm, with beams, stone walls and terracotta tiled floors, and bygone photos of indigenous locals. Some of the spacious, upmarket bedrooms face onto an internal courtyard with saddles on balustrades. There's a superb breakfast spread. **£69**

GOOD PLACES TO EAT

Ecuadorian markets teem with exotic fruits, and towns have several juice stores selling tasty concoctions, tree tomato, *guanabana* (soursop) and *mora* (blackberry). Guinea pig (*cuy*) is still an

Ecuadorian delicacy and some restaurants serve them whole and grilled. *Locro* is a filling, thick potato and cheese soup, while another Andean speciality is *llapingachos* (potato pancakes or patties made with cheese and onions). Snacks include *humitas* (maize-based cakes) and *empanadas* (wheat flour pasties stuffed with cheese or meat). The greatest delicacy of coastal cuisine (also found in the inland cities) is *ceviche* (marinated fresh fish or shellfish). Most menu prices don't include a service and tax charge, but 22% will be added to the end of your bill.

CUENCA

■ Villa Rosa

Gran Colombia 12-22

Right in the heart of the old town, this elegant restaurant (weekdays only) has an indoor patio setting, surrounded by an upper balustraded gallery: ancient maps and a grandfather clock add to the upmarket ambience. The fixed price menu (around \$25) might include *empanadas*, beef tenderloin and passion fruit mousse.

QUITO

■ La Choza

12 de Octubre N24-551 & Cordero

La Mariscal

www.lachozaec.com

If you're looking for traditional and good quality Ecuadorian cuisine, then we'd highly recommend this great value restaurant on the outskirts of La Mariscal. Enter at ground level and down into a spacious halls. You may be serenaded by folkloric musicians as smart, attentive waiters serve perhaps *locro* with cheese, tender pig's foot with Andean spices or pork with corn *humitas*. Leave room for dessert such as guanabana ice-cream, figs with cheese or *tres leches* (a very sweet sponge moistened by coconut cream and honey). Starters \$2-\$7, most mains \$8-\$9.

A half bottle of wine is \$13.

■ La Boca del Lobo

CaLama 284 & Reina Victoria

La Mariscal

This over-the-top, lively eatery is one you'll either love or hate. It's a funky bar-cum-restaurant, popular with a young crowd in the heart of La Mariscal. There's a distinctly European (especially Swiss) emphasis to the varied menu, with plenty for cheese fans. Dishes (\$4-\$15) include clams au gratin, raclette or stuffed mussels with spinach and gruyere sauce on tumeric mash.

■ Mama Clorinda

Reina Victoria 1144 & Calama

La Mariscal

www.mamaclorinda.cjb.net

If you've been dying to try *cuy*, it's on offer (fried in breadcrumbs) at this modest restaurant which teems with tourists. Other specialities include *llapingachos* or beef tongue with peanut sauce. Prices are cheap and portions are sizeable, but it's more fast food than quality cooking, and we

found the waiters rather overstretched. Starters \$3-\$5, mains \$6-\$10. Last orders are at 9pm.

■ Mea Culpa

Archbishop's Palace,

2nd floor, Chile & Venezuela Streets

Old town

www.meaculpa.com.ec

Within the refined setting of the 16th-century Archbishop's Palace, Mea Culpa has a suitably formal ambience (the dress code is smart casual). Chandeliers and tapestries adorn the swanky dining room and classical music plays as dapper waiters serve Mediterranean and international dishes. Dishes include jumbo shrimp wrapped in bacon, ostrich fillet, and several pasta options. Only five tables have splendid window views over the Plaza Grande so consider booking one in advance. Starters \$5-\$13, mains \$9-\$19. Bottles of wine are pricey, starting at \$40.

■ Vista Hermosa

José Mejía 453, near García Moreno

Old town

www.vistahermosa.com.ec

The main reason people flock to this secretive, old town restaurant is for the magnificent panoramic view over the city. Dine out on the sixth floor roof terrace (beside gas heaters in the cool evenings) and see all the religious buildings lit up and thousands of speckled lights on the hillside. The food is fine, if nothing special such as *empanadas*, filet mignon or corvina fish in seafood sauce. Starters \$2-\$6, mains \$6-\$16.

USEFUL INFORMATION

■ Time difference

Mainland: GMT-5; Galápagos: GMT-6

■ International dialling code 00593.

■ Climate

Ecuador has two seasons (wet and dry), although the periods and intensity of these vary depending on the region. In most places, the dry season is June till November, and the wet season is December to May – during this period, Quito and the 'avenue of the volcanoes' are commonly blanketed in cloud. The wettest months in the Amazon basin are April to July.

Temperatures vary depending on altitude.

Along the coastal plains, the humid Amazon basin and Galápagos, temperatures are usually mid 20s-32°C. Cities such as Quito have a daytime average of 13-22°C, dropping to 7°C at night. Rainfall tends to come in the late afternoon.

Galápagos Overall December to June is preferable. Rainfall is very low year-round except on the hilly, larger islands such as Santa Cruz where rain is most likely from January to April. At other times, you may get light drizzle or mist. The waters are surprisingly cool, particularly from July to December, when you'll need a wetsuit for snorkelling, though diving is best in this season.

■ **Language** Spanish, English is usually spoken by those working in the tourist industry.

■ **Entry requirements** Visas are not required for stays of less than 90 days for UK passport holders.

■ Health and safety

Malaria exists in the coastal regions, the Amazon basin and in other rural areas below 1500m, so if visiting these areas, take a course of tablets as well as insect repellent (with DEET). A yellow fever jab is also needed if you intend to go to the Amazon basin. Consult www.nathnac.org and visit your GP six weeks before your departure date. Avoid drinking tap water. You may also suffer from mild altitude sickness and shortness of breath on your arrival in Quito.

Thieves target tourists in Quito especially, so be wary here. Police often patrol the main squares of the old town, as well as the centre of La Mariscal. It is advisable not to walk at night along quiet streets away from the centres in Quito, and do leave valuables in the hotel safe. Visit the travel advice pages on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website www.fco.gov.uk/travel or call them on 0845 850 2829.

■ **Money matters** At the time of going to press, the exchange rate was £1= US\$1.38.

Visa, MasterCard are commonly accepted, and withdrawing cash is easy as ATMs are readily available at airports, cities and towns. But cash machines won't accept UK debit cards. Save some US dollars in cash for the return flight. The departure fee is \$40.80 at Quito airport and \$27.75 at Guayaquil airport.

■ **Tipping** In most restaurants, a 10% service charge is included in the bill, but people often give an extra 5% if the service is good. It is customary to give a \$1 tip to hotel and airport porters. Tipping taxi drivers isn't expected, but rounding off the fare is often appreciated. Naturalists and other expert guides should be tipped \$5-\$10 per person per day, drivers about \$2-\$3 per person per day.

TOURIST INFORMATION

QUITO

■ Palacio Municipal, Plaza Grande (old town)

Bilingual tours of the old town start from here every day at 10am & 2pm (\$12 per person).

Open Mon-Fri 9am-8pm, Sat 10am-8pm, Sun 10am-4pm

■ Reina Victoria & Luís Cordero (La Mariscal)

Open daily 9am-5pm

Also look out for the handy free booklet *This is Ecuador*, available in most city hotels.

■ www.purecuador.com

■ www.quito.com.ec

■ www.galapagostour.org

GUIDEBOOK & MAP

■ *The Rough Guide to Ecuador*, £14.99, 2007 (ISBN 978-1-84353-694-9)

■ *International Travel Maps: Ecuador*, scale 1:700,000 £8.50 (ISBN 9781553411949)





Photo Album

A PERSONAL ACCOUNT Jonathan Mitcham's all-inclusive eight-day cruise aboard the *M/Y Samba* in January 2009 was booked through Select Latin America (Tel 0207 407 1478 www.selectlatinamerica.co.uk). It cost £1477 for a twin-share cabin and return flights from the Ecuador mainland, excluding drinks, gratuities and US\$100 national park fee.



Above: On the lookout for turtles and white-tipped reef sharks from our panga at Black Turtle Bay, Santa Cruz island. Picture taken soon after sunrise at 6am, a typically early start to try and see wildlife at its most active.

Below: The *M/Y Samba* moored just off tiny South Plaza island. Here, carpetweed covers the land which slopes down from a cliff top to a shore of sea lions and sally lightfoot crabs. From the cliff edge, we saw a great variety of bird life, from sociable shearwaters and gliding, red-billed tropic birds to swallow-tailed gulls with their distinctive red eye rims.

Right: One of many giant tortoises we saw in the verdant pastures of Rancho Mariposa, Santa Cruz. They supped from ponds beside white-cheeked pintail ducks.



Below: Surprisingly approachable Nazca boobies in a courtship display at Punta Suarez, Española. Potential mates will interlock beaks as well as raise their wings in tandem.



Below: Sea lions having an early-morning paddle at Gardner Bay, Española island. There were hundreds of them on the beach – the adults were nonchalant about us, but a few pups played with our bag straps and swam beside us in the aquamarine waters.



Above left: The aptly named blue-footed booby, Black Turtle Bay, Santa Cruz

Above: Land iguana on South Plaza island. We also saw some at Urbina Bay, Isabela island.



Above: Fearsome-looking marine iguanas at Punta Espinosa, Fernandina island, home to thousands of them. Some were basking on gnarled driftwood while others dived off rocks to swim for food like a baby crocodile.

For the full magazine report on Wildlife holidays, see p32 of the July 2009 issue of Which? Holiday