ECUADOR/GALÁPAGOS
ISLAND AND VILLAGE IMPACT
A 21-Day Service Learning Program

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

• Kayak and Explore the Biologically-Diverse Galápagos Islands
• Snorkel Alongside Sea Lions and Sea Turtles in the Galápagos’ Crystal Clear Waters
• Assist with Much Needed Infrastructure Improvements in a Rural Village Community
• Whitewater Raft Through the Lush Amazon Rainforest
• Partner with Andean Locals on a Community Improvement Project
• Zipline Through the Mindo Cloud Forest
• 45 Hours of Community Service

SPOTLIGHT PROJECT: QUITUGO DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

In rural communities in the Andean highlands of Ecuador, most families live with dirt floors in their homes, lacking any type of hard flooring. In addition to being uncomfortable, this living environment poses health risks for families, especially young children, and can lead to a host of preventable diseases. Dirt floors are impossible to clean and become even more of a risk during the rainy season, which turns the floors to mud. For our spotlight project, we work alongside local families to install concrete floors in their homes, providing them with a clean and healthy living environment that will transform their lives.
SAMPLE ITINERARY

**DAY 1  TRAVEL DAY**
Participants meet at the Miami International Airport (MIA) in Miami, Florida. After a brief orientation, we have a light dinner together before boarding our group flight to Quito, Ecuador. Upon landing in Quito, we are greeted by our South American partners and head to our hostel to get some rest after a long day of travel.

**Accommodations: Quito Hostel**

**DAY 2  QUITO**
We spend the day orientating to life in South America and getting to know each other. At 9,350 feet above sea level, Quito is the second highest capital city in Latin America and surrounded by forested mountains and volcanoes. While exploring the cobblestone streets of the Old City we may climb atop El Panecillo to view the city from above or visit a local museum to learn about the delicious history of chocolate in Ecuador. Through games, team-building activities and eating our first meal together, the adventure truly begins. We also introduce the role of “Leader of the Day” which is an essential component of every ARCC trip.

**Accommodations: Hostel**

**DAY 3  COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT PROJECT IN THE AMAZON BASIN**
We journey to a small, rural village in the Amazon Basin where we will begin our service work. For the next few days, we will work alongside community members. Past projects have included constructing eco-tourism cabins and making much-needed improvements to different structures, such as the local school or community center. We also have the opportunity to interact with the local children, tutoring English, and playing soccer on the community field. There will be time to take a refreshing dip in a nearby natural spring and learn from friendly community members about medicinal plants in the area on an interactive jungle walk.

**Accommodations: Community Center**
Day 7 Visit a Cacao (Chocolate) Farm & Hike Lake Cuicocha

We spend our remaining days in the community celebrating the work we have accomplished. We meet with farmers and learn about how chocolate is produced from organic cacao beans. We hike to the pristine Lake Cuicocha (“Lake of the Guinea Pigs”), which fills the ancient, but still thermally active crater of Cotacachi Volcano. Hiking around the crater wall, we hop in a boat that takes us to the islets in the center of the lake.

Accommodations: Community Center

Day 9 Visit a Cacao (Chocolate) Farm & Hike Lake Cuicocha

Today’s adventure takes us to the Rio Napo for an exhilarating rafting trip. This fun, high-volume river flows off the coastal side of the Andes Mountains. With our experienced professional guides, we paddle down the river and check out the lush jungle as we ride the rushing rapids.

The next day we continue our outdoor adventures as we explore local Amazonian waterfalls and hike through the breathtaking Rio Pastaza Canyon, in awe of the natural beauty that surrounds us. Lastly, we have the chance to swing at “the edge of the world” from a famous treehouse with beautiful mountain views, which include the impressive Tungurahua Volcano on a clear day.

Accommodations: Hotel

Day 11 Spotlight Project: Quitugo Development Project

We set out for Imbabura, known as the “Province of the Lakes.” During our drive, we may catch a glimpse of Cayambe or Cotopaxi, two of Ecuador’s picturesque, snow-capped volcanoes. In search of bright colors and hand-made textiles, we visit the famous native market of Otavalo, one of the most important and largest markets in South America. The stalls teem with vibrant colors and handicrafts, including weavings, paintings, jewelry, and traditional Ecuadorian clothing. The majority of the items are made locally and we have the opportunity to try our hand at bargaining with the merchants.

Our final community service project takes place in Quitugo, an indigenous Kichwa community located at the base of the Imbabura Volcano just outside the city of Otavalo. Throughout the next four days, we work directly with members of this colorful Andean community. We bring in much-needed supplies, split into groups, and get to work. Overseeing each project from start to finish, we immediately see the transformation of our work. During our downtime, we help out with additional community tasks, including household chores, tutoring children through English and art classes, and assisting in preparing meals. After an amazing four days in Quitugo, we say farewell to our new friends with dinner, celebration, and dance.

Accommodations: Community Center
Day 15  Visit the Equator & Zipline through the Mindo Cloud Forest

This morning we depart for the breathtaking Mindo cloud forest. Cloud forests have great biodiversity, with a profusion of native and endemic plants and wildlife. The Mindo forest alone is home to over 300 different species of tropical birds and numerous other animals. We put on a harness and clip in for an exhilarating zip line canopy tour of the surrounding sights. We keep our eyes peeled for toucans, owls, quetzals, hummingbirds, and other beautiful birds as we explore the forest canopy. A series of thirteen zip lines connected by built-in tree platforms allows us to journey over two miles across the upper level.

Late this afternoon we travel back to Quito. On the way, we stop along the equator at the Middle of the World Monument, Mitad del Mundo, and have the chance to stand in two hemispheres. As we arrive back in our starting city, we take time to continue our exploration of the Old City of Quito, where we view the South American colonial architecture and wind our way through the steep cobbled streets. The Old City is full of stunning churches and amazing vistas of the volcanoes in the distance. We close our day with dinner in the city, reflecting on all our mainland adventures so far.

Accommodations: Hostel

Day 16  San Cristobal, Galapagos Islands

The next five days of our adventure prove to be the experience of a lifetime! From sandy secluded beaches to the azure waters rich with unique marine life, our discovery of these islands is one that will not soon be forgotten.

We begin our time on the island of San Cristobal. This easternmost island is where Charles Darwin first set foot during his historic voyage. We set out in two-person kayaks and explore the rocky island coastline, which is teeming with wildlife like blue-footed boobies. Be prepared to get a little wet, as playful sea lions are sure to give you a splash! We hike along the coast to a secluded bay and snorkel in the crystal clear waters among the harmless reef sharks, sea turtles, and stingrays. We continue our hike to a resting place for sea lions and home to some of the biggest marine iguanas in the Galapagos.

Accommodations: Hotel
DAY 18  SANTA CRUZ, GALAPAGOS ISLANDS
Our next adventure takes us by boat west to the island of Santa Cruz. We hike to a remote beach at Tortuga Bay where we can kayak or swim in the calming waters, surrounded by wildlife. Traveling through the various habitats of the Galapagos, we hang out with the iconic Giant Galapagos Tortoises in their natural habitat. We continue our education of the renowned islands with a stop at the Charles Darwin Research Station, where we learn about the late Lonesome George, the last known individual of the Pinta Island tortoise species, as well as the continued efforts and projects for conservation of the Galapagos ecosystems. We end our time in the Galapagos with dinner along the shoreline.

Accommodations: Hotel

DAY 20  RETURN TO QUITO
After our unforgettable experiences in the Galapagos Islands, we board our flight back to mainland Ecuador and Quito for our final evening together in South America. We pause to reflect on our time together and relive happy memories as we celebrate an incredible journey with a delicious final feast and closing festivities.

Accommodations: Hostel

DAY 21  DEPARTURE DAY
Eventually, all good things must come to an end. We say adios to Ecuador and begin our journey back to Miami, where everyone connects with flights back home, ready to share stories of our incredible adventures with family and friends. The memories of the experience and the group will carry us through to next summer!

Accommodations: Hostel

WANT TO LEARN MORE? CONTACT THE REGIONAL DIRECTOR:

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