

FITNESS LEVEL QUESTIONS ANSWERED

In Ecuador:

- The haciendas we stay in are all very easy to walk and negotiate (no cobbled walks).
- The Inca Market in Otavalo is in the paved streets, no problem here.
- The "optional activities" at the Hacienda La Alegria could be challenging for some. Horseback riding is fairly obvious. The hike through the cloud forest of orchids could be muddy, slippery, and is a forest trail. I'd say not for those who have walking difficulty.
- The walking tour of Quito is with good sidewalks and not like Antigua - not difficult, though it will be a half day of walking and touring with several stops, resting along the way.
- **Altitude.....** Quito is a city situated high up in the Andean mountains at an altitude of approximately 3,000 meters. It is surrounded by some mountains that are of an even higher altitude. Flying into Quito from sea level, you will experience a rather extreme change in altitude, which can lead to some mild symptoms of altitude sickness in some. Symptoms of altitude sickness typically include headaches and insomnia, as well as nausea or an upset stomach. Feeling lightheaded or dizzy is another symptom, as is feeling a bit short of breath climbing the stairs. A loss of appetite is common too. These effects are usually mild and are likely to last for a day or two. If you know you are prone, or are concerned about it, check with your doctor about medicine to protect against altitude sickness. Diamox is a medicine that will help. The usual recommended dosage is 125 mg twice a day, taken once in the morning and once at lunch. This medicine decreases and eliminates the majority of unpleasant symptoms from the radical decrease of oxygen levels in your body that occurs from visiting Quito.

•In the Galapagos Islands:

- Passengers able to walk a few hours a day unassisted will be able to fully enjoy Galapagos. Some of the excursions require more physical activity than others involving short steep climbs or long walks in hot weather or on uneven rocky trails. However, most excursions require moderate activity and the walks are at a leisurely pace. Entering and exiting the Zodiacs require that you need to be sure footed. If you are concerned about your ability to do any particular day hike, please consult with the naturalist before disembarkation.
- There will be a Doctor on board the MV Santa Cruz (24/7) with a fully equipped infirmary, free of charge.
- Probably the daily boarding onto the dingy (inflatable zodiac type) is the most challenging aspect for some older folks. The guide and staff are there to help board on and off, but if one is too weak, too heavy, and/or unable to bend over to get on, it could be challenging. Guests who participate on excursions will get in and out of small rubber landing boats (Zodiacs®) with some assistance. You should be capable of walking over uneven and slippery terrain ashore including rocks.
- As an alternative to the Zodiacs, there will be a glass bottom boat that will allow for underwater exploration for those unable or not wanting to snorkel.
- Each evening, the staff will review the next day's activities so that you may determine your interest in participating.
- In each activity in which you participate, you will always be accompanied by a Galapagos National Park-certified guide. These folks have gone through extensive training and study in order to become your hosts in this magnificent location. They are familiar with all the wildlife and terrain you'll see throughout the expedition and, should you suffer any injury, they have first aid training to help take care of you until you can be seen by the onboard medical officer.

Kathie, the fitness level thing is somewhat subjective and difficult to nail down. I'm adding a couple of quotes from past travelers:

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- Ever since I was a little girl, the Galapagos fascinated me. Thank the universe, I found a long-time friend who was also interested. The ship, the team, and the daily itineraries were perfect. There was something for everyone. The cabins were attended throughout the day; each meal had beef/pork, fish, and protein for the vegans; activities were for both active and somewhat limited, though understand you need to be somewhat agile to maneuver between the pangas and the ship. The ship's team does everything to achieve your safety! The professional naturalists are educated and fully committed to each guest and the integrity of the Galapagos. Last year, as I began reading about the Galapagos, I began to worry about the tourism impact on the Galapagos and wondered if I should even go, but as I read about the Santa Cruz II, and learned about its effort to mitigate human impact, I felt much better. While some folks may find the trip expensive, it is a value trip and worth the effort to save! I'm already attempting to recruit another friend to join me next year for the eastern side. :)
PS -- they even have a professional photographer on board to provide a FREE DVD of the trip. Felix is highly talented and captures many animals underwater so you don't need to buy an underwater camera.
PSS -- Ecuadorians are wonderful.