

MY TRIP TO THE GALAPAGOS ISLANDS

Season 2, episode 15

Twelve years ago, in the year 2013, I had the opportunity to travel to Ecuador with some students. Visiting the nation of Ecuador was an incredible experience. We flew from Denver to Miami and from Miami to Quito, the capital of Ecuador.

In Quito, we visited churches and old buildings with Spanish architecture. We visited the equator line inside the Intiñan Museum. We put one foot in the northern hemisphere and another in the southern hemisphere while we looked at indigenous artifacts. We saw artwork about the process of making shrunken heads, and we even saw some shrunken heads!

In Ecuador we ate food that doesn't exist in the United States. We ate the fruit guanábana and we drank the famous Inca Kola. We went to a restaurant that serves guinea pig. It is strange to see a pet in the United States as a food, but I have to admit that guinea pig is very delicious.

Our time in Quito was interesting. We visited the Cotopaxi Volcano and we went shopping. But we didn't go to Ecuador only to see the capital. We went to Ecuador to go to the Galapagos Islands. The Galapagos Islands are a province of Ecuador and form a protected national park. They are located about 850 miles (1000 kilometers) from the coast of Ecuador. You can only arrive on the islands by boat or plane.

My students and I went by plane from Quito to the island of Baltra. Baltra has an incredible and different airport. It is the first ecological, or "green", airport in the world.

The island of Baltra is not very touristic, so we went to a hotel on the island of Santa Cruz. We went from the airport on a boat. They put all the luggage on the roof of the boat. We were nervous with the luggage on the roof. We were afraid that a suitcase would fall in the water, but nothing happened. We arrived without problems at the island of Santa Cruz. And on the way, we saw a lot of animals, especially sea lions.

We arrived at the hotel in Santa Cruz and we immediately went to the Charles Darwin Research Station. There we saw the main attraction of the Galapagos Islands: the Galapagos tortoise. The tortoises are big and fascinating. They can be as big as 5 feet (150 centimeters) long and 500 pounds (225 kg). The tortoises live 100 years or more and they can live a whole year without food or water. On another island, we had the opportunity to be next to the tortoises. It was a little like being next to a dinosaur.

I liked seeing the tortoises, but there are a lot of animals on the Galapagos Islands, not just the Galapagos turtles. There are iguanas, big lizards, small lizards, crabs and a lot of birds, including pelicans, flamingos, oystercatchers, blue-footed boobies, and penguins.

The most fun animal to see was the sea lion. Sea lions were all over the place. They were on boats and docks and beaches. I took a lot of photos of the sea lions. They seemed cute and docile, but I know firsthand why they are called "lions".

Our group did a snorkeling trip on the island of Floreana. We put on our snorkel gear and jumped in the water. Under the water we saw all types of marine life. I saw a blowfish that got big when it passed me. I saw a sea turtle calmly swimming. I saw a lot of fish and I saw a sea lion.

My first experience with a sea lion in the water was magical. I saw the sea lion in the distance. It was far away and seemed to dance on the water. I didn't move, I just observed the sea lion. The sea lion saw me and swam in my direction. I still didn't move. I was fascinated by the sea lion that was swimming my way. The sea lion stopped a few centimeters from my face. We looked at each other for a moment and suddenly, the sea lion moved its head back a little and blew bubbles in my face. Then it turned around and returned to the sea.

After that experience, I loved sea lions even more. Not only were they cute and docile, they were fun and playful. Why were they called "lions"? They should be called "puppies".

The next day, I had a completely different experience. Once again we went to an island to snorkel. This time we went to Isabela Island. It is the biggest island of the Galapagos and there were a lot more people. They parked the boat and we divided into groups. We put on our snorkel equipment and jumped in the water.

I immediately had a problem. Water was coming in my mask and I couldn't see under the water. I had to float and fix my mask. While I did that, the rest of my group was swimming to some rocks. I finally fixed my mask and swam quickly to my group. I passed fish and other people, but I was focused on getting to my group.

The group carefully passed over a wall of volcanic rocks under the water. I also passed over the wall, but I wasn't careful because I was going quickly because I was behind.

On the other side of the wall of volcanic rocks, I saw a small sea lion close to me. It was a baby. I thought of my experience from the other day and I was happy to see the cute sea lion. But sea lions are called "lions". They can be fun and playful, but they are also wild animals and the mothers protect their babies.

I was too close to the baby sea lion. Suddenly, a big sea lion swam in my direction. She opened her mouth and growled. I saw her sharp teeth and angry face and I was scared. I screamed in my snorkel tube. Luckily, the baby swam to its mom and the two went in another direction.

My heart was beating quickly while I looked for my group. I didn't want another experience with a sea lion in the water. I just wanted to go to the boat and the hotel. I saw my group next to a canal of black rocks. They were moving slowly and I finally caught up to them.

The leader of the group gave instructions to move through the canal with our hands on the rocks and not to swim or kick our feet. He told us to move calmly and not make any unnecessary movements. I passed through the canal with my hands on the rocks. I didn't pay attention to what was in the water because the image of the sea lion's teeth was in my head. I tried to breathe and calm down and focus on the present. I moved slowly and focused on the forms below me. When I finally focused on the forms, I realized that I was swimming in a canal of sharks.

Now I know that the sharks were small and couldn't kill me, but in that moment I was already scared by the sea lion and seeing and thinking about the sharks just scared me more. I wanted to go home.

When I left the canal of sharks, I swam directly to the boat. Other people from the group paused to see a blowfish and a sea turtle, but I swam to the boat.

The rest of the time on the Galapagos Islands was fun for my students and I. We went to a club and sang karaoke and danced. We bought T-shirts and bags. We walked on white sand beaches and black sand beaches. We walked on volcanic rocks and we saw penguins, pelicans, flamingos, and a lot of blue-footed boobies. Their feet are very blue!

On the trip to Ecuador, our guide said that a person who travels lives many lives. I like to travel and remember my other "lives" and I am happy that the sea lion didn't end my life on the Galapagos Islands.



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