



## Galapagos!

**Sunday, June 22, 2014**

A strange air of preparedness set in as we did the final loading of the car. It lacked the usual flailing about with self-flagellations of “what else have we forgotten.” Most of the packing had been done the weekend before, and we were able to obsess at a more leisurely pace for days rather than hours before departure. But we were all done, and it seemed things were going so smoothly that the only possible change was downhill from here. However, first we had to go up.

Tampa International Airport was our initial destination after stopping to pick up Trish who was standing at the end of the driveway waiting, bags in hand. The miles melted slowly away as we cruised along the highway to Tampa. A wreck by Martin Luther King drive delayed us about 10 minutes, but we still arrived more than 2 hours early. The ladies and luggage were dropped at the Delta check-in entrance, and I took the car to the remote parking. They had barely noticed my absence when I returned.

We waited in line rather than do the self check-in at the Kiosk since it was an international trip, and we wanted to be sure things went right. (If we had a donkey, we would name it “Kiosk” so we could properly say: Kiosk, my ass.) After a bit of a wait, an attendant left the adjacent kiosk counter and cheerfully helped us on our way. We proceeded without a hitch to security, and with the security

precheck approval, breezed right through. Wow! Things were going really well, but I couldn't help wondering what awaited us the next 24 hours during our meandering trip to the Galapagos

After departing Tampa, our flight plan coursed north rather than south via Atlanta, and after a 3-hour layover, it headed back south, right past Ocala and Tampa and on to Quito, Ecuador for a scheduled 10 PM arrival. The next morning another flight would take us to Puerto Baquerizo Moreno on San Cristobal Island in the Galapagos for a week-long cruise aboard the Majestic motor yacht. Friends, who had departed several days earlier to tour Machu Picchu in Peru, would join us in Quito. As we boarded the plane, I mused over the irony of flying north to get to our southern destination, and wondered if our trip could possibly go as planned.

As expected, we landed in Atlanta on time and then loaded onto our flight to Quito on schedule. They prepared for departure, but then announced that someone noticed a problem with the right wing that needed repair before takeoff. Big deal, they have two of them, don't they? I learned quickly not to kid anyone in my group in such situations. At any rate they fixed the problem, and we departed about 45 minutes late. The fix must have worked since we made it to Quito ok. I did notice Ocala passing under the left wing of the aircraft around 8 PM and marveled that we had left there just 9 hours earlier on our trip north to go south.

The plane approached the 9000+ foot elevation airport hot and steep to clear surrounding mountains, and then landed without incident in Quito a little after 11 PM. We made it through immigration and customs ok, and a fellow named Jonathan helped us to our taxi to the hotel. The taxi driver roared through the highways and streets and around corners like a NASCAR hopeful,



skillfully avoiding speed bumps, potholes, and breezing through some red lights as well. Judging by the speedometer and the posted speed limits, he seldom exceeded the limit by more than 50%.

The roads carried us steeply downward to town and then wound around cobbled streets past more desperate surroundings. The streets seemed all but deserted save for an occasional pedestrian keeping a wary eye on scruffy dogs lurking about. Finally, the road leveled out, and then on the right our hotel appeared.

We turned through a guarded entrance, past high walls topped with electrical wires, into a pleasant, though rough courtyard, and claimed our luggage and checked in. Spanish architecture highlighted with dark wooden beams, plaster-like walls, and tiled floors appeared in subdued lighting. We met up with others from our Galapagos group, mingled, and then followed our hosts down a long walk with beautiful veranda on the left and indoor dining area on the right. We went through an archway to a small room where some stairs led upward to an open second story walkway, and others led downward and around a corner to our suite of rooms. Fairy and I settled into room 108, small, plain, but enchanting with the Spanish architecture.