



To: Josh Klaus
Ecology Project International
P.O. Box 9192
Missoula, MT 59807

Dear Josh,

This coming Wednesday, our crew of fourteen students will be presenting a program to the rest of the student body featuring our EPI trip to the Galápagos Islands and cloud forest of Ecuador. Over the past couple of months as we have shared photos and stories and organized our thoughts for our presentation, it has been clear that our trip was the single greatest experience of a lifetime for many of us. While our destination certainly played an important role in making the trip so significant, it could not have been so without the exemplary efforts of the EPI staff, from Montana to Quito to Puerto Ayora.

What first drew us to using EPI rather than one of the companies specializing in student trips was its non-profit status and its focus on education, both scientific and cultural. The trip was not simply a glorified vacation; instead, it promised to be a field biology course with significant cultural exchanges included. As teachers experienced in the value of field courses and the knowledge gained by living around the clock in the environment being studied, we very much wanted our students to experience that as well.

EPI has lived up to our initial impression in every regard. In the early stages of negotiating our commitment to work with them, Josh Klaus and the rest of the staff were prompt and thorough in responding to questions from us and from the parents of our students. Receipt of the big information packet, including the Participant Handbook and medical forms, in October, further emphasized how much thought, care and practical experience went into the planning. Every stone had been turned. Most impressive at this stage of the game were the personal phone calls made by EPI staff to the parents of all students who had even the most minor medical issues, about management, prescriptions, and the like.

As the time of departure drew closer and we began meeting regularly with our students, we used the detailed packing guide to review equipment needs and avoid last-minute panic. The “Educators’ Trunk”, with its large, detailed map and its natural history materials, helped us trace routes and compare our itinerary with what we were watching in the various documentaries we had purchased.

The real test, of course, was the trip itself, and if anything, it augmented our already-positive impressions. The people that EPI had selected to work for them on our behalf were magnificent. We could not have thought of all the characteristics that made our various guides so ideal had we spent days trying! From our overnight guide in Quito who helped track down a misplaced passport, to the EPI site director in Puerto Ayora who retrieved from our hotel and mailed overnight a forgotten camera, to our two full-time group leaders/teachers, we were blessed with the very best in professionalism, creativity, and calm under duress. All the local arrangements -- buses, boats, guides, dining, and lodging -- were ready and welcoming when we needed them. Our two full-time group leaders were amazingly competent in a wide range of demands, while still remaining creative, kind, funny, and charming. Teaching units were cleverly done and varied in approach.



Our students were especially impressed with the freshness and excitement with which lessons were presented and happily engaged in the research projects, tackling them with the same curiosity and seriousness shown by our leaders. From our two high school visits, it was obvious that ours were not the only students who admired our leaders; the local students had found them equally impressive during their own courses.

Because of the competence of EPI, we were able to fully enjoy the beauty and wonder of the Galápagos Islands and the Andean cloud forest. Our trip was made richer by being able to fill it with just our students, which enabled us to extend the experience by several months on both ends of the trip. Even in our small school, the sixteen of us have a special connection beyond what is typically found. We have no hesitation recommending EPI to any school considering a group trip to the Galápagos. We are confident they take the same kind of care on all their trips.

Warmest regards,

Martha Friedlander
Science Department Chairman

Tom Friedlander
Advanced Biology and Natural History Teacher

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