LOCATION
The Galapagos Islands are a chain of volcanic islands located approximately 600 miles off the coast of Ecuador.

Characterized by a variety of ecosystems, the Galapagos Islands are a treasure of stunning desert landscapes, active volcanoes, hardy cacti, shrubs, and well-adapted animals and insects. The islands are internationally-renowned for their biodiversity, and people flock from around the world to see whales, dolphins, sharks, rays, sea lions, and endemic species like the marine iguana, Galapagos penguin, and flightless cormorant.

EPI’s Galapagos Island Ecology Program takes place on the islands of Santa Cruz and Isabela. When traveling to and from Ecuador, students spend one night in Tababela, a small town located on the outskirts of Quito, near the airport.

ACADEMIC CONTENT
During EPI’s field ecology course, students complete 30 hours of classes in the following subjects:

- Marine ecology and biology
- Comparative island ecology
- Scientific process
- Identifying environmental issues
- Conservation and protected-area management
- Reptile ecology and biology

SERVICE
Blackberry is one of the many invasive plant species in the Galapagos. It has invaded the agricultural area and vast tracts of the National Park, threatening native and endemic plants critical to the survival of animal species native to the Galapagos. Students help park rangers eradicate blackberry in sensitive areas, such as Los Gemelos on the island of Santa Cruz.
FIELD RESEARCH PROJECTS
We invest deeply in the communities where we work. Our in-country field offices, located at each of our program sites, allow us to form partnerships with researchers, national parks, and local communities. For us, local connections are central to our mission of strengthening conservation efforts around the world. For you, it means a deeper, richer course experience.

Every EPI program provides hands-on field experience. While each of our sites has a unique focus and theme, they share a common DNA: meaningful field science and thoughtful engagement in local issues.

GIANT TORTOISE MONITORING
Research Partners: Galapagos National Park, Dr. Washington Tapia (Galapagos Conservancy)

The Galapagos National Park is using data collected by EPI students to assess tortoise survival rates on Santa Cruz Island. Students will also collect data for Dr. Tapia from the Galapagos Conservancy. Dr. Tapia studies the ecology, anatomy, and biology of the 11 remaining tortoise species in the archipelago, and leads tortoise restoration projects. Students will collect data on two tortoise species for Dr. Tapia: *Chelonoidis porteri* and *Chelonoidis donfaustoi*.

Data collection techniques:
Students follow a standardized protocol to collect data and minimize the stress that this process can cause for the tortoises. Groups of four students will use a metric tape to gather carapace length, carapace width, and plastron length from each tortoise. Additionally, students will weigh the tortoise with a scale, document any injuries, and record GPS data. EPI instructors will insert a PIT TAG between the tail and the left rear leg of each tortoise.

Highlights:
- EPI students are given an exception to the Galapagos National Park visiting rules and are allowed to approach giant tortoises in their natural habitat to collect important data.
- This research will help scientists better understand the survival and mortality rates of tortoises in the wild.

Expected student contribution: approximately 4 hours

More information available here:
https://www.galapagos.org/conservation/conservation/project-areas/ecosystem-restoration/tortoise-restoration/
SEED DISPERAL STUDY
Research Partner: Dr. Steven Blake (Galapagos Giant Tortoise Ecology Movement Program)

As the largest herbivore on the Galapagos Islands, tortoises may act as important seed dispersers by depositing seeds through their dung. This research looks at the effectiveness of tortoise dung as a seed scatter vector and assesses the potential impacts of seed dispersal on the vegetation dynamics of the Galapagos. Dr. Blake is particularly interested in the spread of nonnative species such as guava and passion fruit.

Data collection techniques:
EPI students will analyze dung samples that have been collected from different parts of Santa Cruz Island by Dr. Blake’s field team. Students will dissect the sample following a washing protocol in order to identify and count the seeds.

Highlights:
• EPI students will experience firsthand the realities of field science: feces data collection.
• Students will learn about the ecological roles that tortoises play in the ecosystem including as a vector for spreading invasive species.

Expected student contribution: 4 hours of data collection
More information available here: http://www.gianttortoise.org
LODGING
While on course, EPI students will stay in rustic, but comfortable accommodations. Rooms are separated by gender, and students typically stay 3 to 4 to a room.

PAJARO BRUJO RESERVE
The reserve’s field research station is located in the highlands of Santa Cruz Island. You’ll stay in tents during this portion of the course.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Room type</th>
<th>Students per room</th>
<th>Running water</th>
<th>Hot water</th>
<th>Electricity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tent</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>✓</td>
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HIGHLAND VIEW
Highland View is also located in the highlands of Santa Cruz. You’ll stay on tent platforms located near a covered meeting and dining space, surrounded by a highland forest.

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<tr>
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<th>Electricity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tent</td>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>✓</td>
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CORAL BLANCO
On the second half of your course, you’ll head west to Isabela Island by boat, where a cozy and colorful hotel awaits you in the town of Puerto Villamil.

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hotel</td>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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AIRPORT GARDEN HOTEL
You’ll stay at the Airport Garden Hotel on the first and last nights of your course. It’s a beautiful rural location, halfway between the airport and central Quito.

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<th>Running water</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hotel</td>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SAFETY IN THE FIELD
Risk management and student safety always come first on an EPI course. EPI operates all programs to minimize the risk of injury or illness. Our goal is to provide a physically and emotionally safe environment on course. Risk management is addressed at every level in our organization: participant preparation, instructor selection and training, program design, and administration.

PROGRAM DESIGN
- Program activities are selected with careful consideration of risk.
- EPI hires professional outfitters to guide us during certain higher-risk activities. We contract outfitters with excellent safety records.
- Third party vendors (transportation, lodging, food services, etc.) are reviewed to ensure quality of service and appropriate attention to safety.

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT
- Medical protocols, first aid kits, and emergency action plans are developed in consultation with a U.S. based physician, a wilderness medical advisor, and our local partners. These processes are evaluated and revised every year.
- We have an established Emergency Response System which is reviewed and updated annually.
- Instructors carry a communication device in the field, and each program location operates a 24-hour contact phone while participants are in the field.
- An additional 24-hour contact phone is operated by our U.S. headquarters staff throughout our operating season.
- EPI has a Child Protection Policy that is built from internally recognized standards based on the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child.

INSTRUCTORS
- At a minimum, all instructors are trained and certified in Wilderness First Aid and CPR.
- All courses have at least one instructor with a higher level of training, either Wilderness Advanced First Aid or Wilderness First Responder.
- Instructors are trained in risk management on-site, with program-specific training prior to each season.
- Each instructor’s performance is reviewed after each course and at the end of each season.
- All staff and adults in a leadership role with groups must pass a background check.

PARTICIPANTS
- All participants are required to provide a detailed medical form signed by a licensed medical professional which is then reviewed by EPI’s medical review team.
- Participants are provided with a risk management briefing before activities.
INCREASING ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY

In order for our participants to become stewards of conservation, they need to understand and value nature, have the necessary and relevant skills to take appropriate actions, and have the right dispositions to guide their behavior. In other words, they need to be environmentally literate.

While there are many definitions of environmental literacy, EPI draws upon the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO) original concept and the North American Association of Environmental Education (NAAEE) revision to define an environmentally literate person as someone who demonstrates the knowledge, dispositions, competencies, and behavior to actively engage, individually or as a group, in addressing environmental challenges. The EPI curriculum is built around addressing these four components to increase environmental literacy in youth:

**KNOWLEDGE**
Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the environment and the circumstances and conditions affecting it, particularly in relation to biodiversity and ecosystems.

**DISPOSITIONS**
Demonstrate the interest, sensitivity, responsibility, and intention to act for the sustainable use of natural resources.

**COMPETENCIES**
Demonstrate the skills and abilities to investigate and analyze environmental issues and make accurate conclusions about effective solutions.

**BEHAVIOR**
Take individual and collective action towards addressing environmental challenges (participating in global actions, designing solutions that inspire action on environmental issues, etc.)

EPI’S FOUNDATION
To build our educational framework, we researched best practices, lessons learned, and the latest developments in environmental and science education. Our framework integrates and builds upon components from:

- UNESCO Belgrade Declaration on Environmental Education (1978)
- Framework for Assessing Environmental Literacy from the North American Association of Environmental Education (2011)
- Framework for K-12 Science Education from the National Resource Council (2012)
- North American Conservation Strategy from the Association of Fish and Wildlife Services (2011)

WHAT MAKES EPI UNIQUE:
While there are many initiatives that contribute to gains in knowledge and shifts in dispositions towards conservation, there are very few that contribute significantly to these attributes and also to the development, application, and transfer of competencies. This approach is exactly what sets EPI apart. Our curriculum places a strong emphasis on competencies related to scientific inquiry as a process to increase critical thinking and creativity in our participants.

www.ecologyproject.org