



A beautiful wooden Galápagos tortoise welcomes visitors to the Origenes Museum on Charles Darwin Avenue in Puerto Ayora, Santa Cruz Island, Galápagos.

ORIGENS

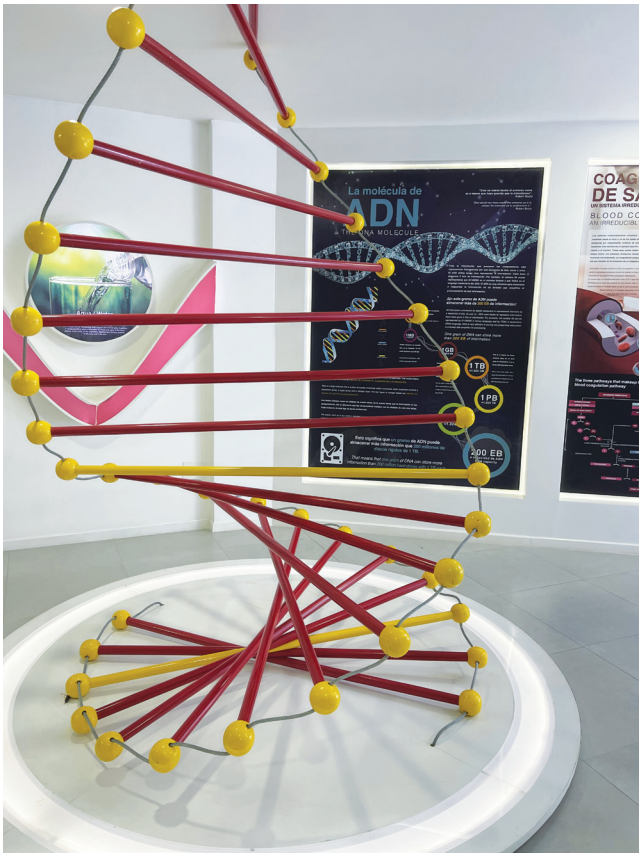
Museum of Nature

BY LAWRENCE T. GERATY

I had never heard of the Seventh-day Adventist Origenes Museum of Nature till I was invited to join a 2021 travel adventure to the Galápagos Islands organized by *Spectrum*. Frankly, before my visit, I thought it would be the height of hutzpah to construct a creation museum on Charles Darwin Avenue, the main street of the islands' largest town, Puerto Ayora, and the headquarters of the Charles Darwin Research Center! I pictured this effort to convince evolutionists of the truth of a seven-day creation, six thousand years ago, to be nothing but a public embarrassment!

But that was *before* my visit. I came away impressed with the Church's presentation, which turned out to be more of a nature walk! There was no mention of time or

mechanism, but rather an appreciation for the intricacies and beauties of nature, together with the importance of environmental stewardship and relating to it in healthful ways. Exhibits, in both Spanish and English, included marine habitats, the most endangered sea creatures, the internal structure of the earth, a map of the Galápagos Islands and how they emerged from a hot spot beneath their moving geological plate, the common types of lava flows, the atmosphere, the different finch beaks on the islands, physical laws, the history of the universe, spectroscopy, the Fibonacci sequence and other examples in nature, the eye of the trilobite, the DNA molecule, blood coagulation as an irreducibly complex system, the sustainable earth, including the imperative for recycling,



DNA comes to life in this Origins Museum display.

etc., and the important values of temperance, sunlight, physical exercise, rest, etc.

Carmen Lau, the chair of *Spectrum's* board, voiced a weakness, however, in the museum's presentation: "While the Origins Museum gave highlights of some of nature's complexities, I did not perceive an adequate acknowledgement of adaptability, a concept that I think would be on the minds of typical Galápagos travelers. The Charles Darwin Research Center, just down the street, showed ways that the most adaptable change to survive, asserting that the only thing we can be sure of is change."

Nevertheless, Chair Lau was also positive about her experience at the museum; she called it "a tasteful, non-commercial space with a peaceful milieu, offering a quiet

meander, ending with an emphasis on the benefit of good habits. I found this to be calming and comfortable. Upon touring the space, I felt a sense of relief when I realized it did not seem to be an in-your-face push for recent literal creation. I liked the Origins Museum."

Another tour participant, Gerald Winslow, noted ethicist, professor, and research professor, School of Religion at Loma Linda University, agreed, saying, "I was pleased to see the high quality of the various displays. The beauty and grandeur of creation were presented artfully and without the distractions of apologetics or polemics. I could imagine that people visiting this place would enter more deeply into the experience of wonder that is awakened at every turn in the Galápagos Islands."

We met Dr. Maura Brandao, the museum's Brazilian coordinator (and interviewed by *Spectrum* editor Bonnie Dwyer elsewhere in this issue), who told us the Origins Museum had an excellent and friendly relationship with the Charles Darwin Research Center down the street. She said her museum's purpose was to celebrate God's gift of creation and not to enter into controversial arguments about time and mechanisms.

James Hayward, retired Andrews University professor of biology, and arguably the most knowledgeable member of our group, since he had pursued his own research on previous visits to the Galápagos, summarized his reactions to the Origins Museum this way:

The museum is small but professionally designed and attractive. I was impressed by the positive message it conveys—there is no bashing of deep time or evolution. Instead, the scientific information presented on the structure of the earth, plate tectonics, the origin of the Galápagos Islands, various resident organisms, and principles of physics is accurate and

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tastefully presented. The overall theme is one of divine design. Pertinent information, however, about how organisms change, the most valuable contribution these islands have made to our understanding of life, was missing. The museum features a section on conservation and another on healthful living, quietly based on principles highlighted by Ellen White. Overall, the museum conveys a positive message consistent with Seventh-day Adventist beliefs.

A display above Dr. Brandao's desk at the entrance to the museum listed the names of individuals (Hipolito Godelha, Anolio Giannini, Socrates Quispe, Adriana Salguero, Sanson Cotrim) and organizations which had contributed financially to making the new museum possible: the South American Division of the SDA General Conference, the Geoscience Research Institute, Adventist Risk Management, the Brazilian Publishing House and South American Association of Publishing Houses, the Council of Faith & Science, the Adventist Universities of Brazil, Argentina, Chile, and Peru, the Adventist High School of Misiones, Adventist Institute of Paranana, South Ecuadorian Mission, Central Santa Cruz Church (which meets above the Origins Museum), along with two departments of education and two Adventist faculties. This very representative facility, which houses not only the Origins Museum but the local Adventist church and mission offices, is one of the most impressive buildings on the main street. Behind the building is the Adventist high school and its facilities, which serves some 270 students. Doubtless all these financial supporters of the Museum would be pleased with the general reactions of our group.

We learned from LLU biology professor William Hayes, who happened to be living behind the Origins Museum for several days while pursuing his own research project on the islands, that the prime land on which the museum stands was procured by LLU (La Sierra Campus) biology professor Lester E. Harris, Jr., back in the '70s, when he thought it would be ideal to bring his students to the Galápagos on regular research trips. On his first flight to the islands, he happened to be sitting next to a local businessman. Harris shared his dream with the businessman, who then replied that he had some land that he'd like to sell! Then and there, even before landing, the

SHARING THE CREATION STORY

Mauro Brandao arrived in Puerto Ayora on January 15, 2020. A doctoral student at the Adventist University of Brazil, she had been chosen to be the director of the new Origins Museum of Nature that was set to open



on February 29. Inside the uncompleted building, there was much to do. The Faith and Science Meeting for the South American Division would be taking place. General Conference officials were coming, including President Ted N. C. Wilson.

She began the work of installing the exhibits that her mentor, Dr. Marcos Natal, had designed. Natal is the director of the Brazilian branch of the Geoscience Research Institute. On February 29, 2020, the Museum opened. *The Adventist Review* did a feature story about the event, as did newspapers in Ecuador. Two weeks later, the museum had to shut down because of COVID-19.

Like everyone else, Brandao turned to technology. She Zoomed to all the countries in South America and connected with 20,000 students in Adventist schools. Secondly, she worked to make the institution relevant for the community. She says the museum has a friendly relationship with the Charles Darwin Research Center down the road. Visitors say they have never been to a place where science and God are both believed in. She is happy to tell them that she believes that species can change, but they were created by God, and he gave them the ability to adapt.

During the pandemic, Brandao finished her doctoral dissertation. Because of restrictions by the Galápagos, she will soon be returning to Brazil and getting married.

Just like its surroundings, the Origins Museum of Nature will adapt.

By Bonnie Dwyer

deal was made! Hayes, when a student of Harris, himself participated in such field trips and they lived in make-do quarters on the property. Harris retired in the '80s and was not succeeded by anyone who wished to carry on the field station which he co-founded with Ernest Booth, so Loma Linda University donated the property to the South American Division. The division recognized the donation by putting the name Loma Linda on the façade of the new museum building, dedicated at a special ceremony on February 29, 2020, and reported online by Andrew McChesney in "State-of-the-Art Adventist Museum Opens on Galápagos," followed by Pam Dietrich's March 20, 2020, report on *Spectrum's* website, "Origins Museum of Nature Is New Adventist Center in the Galápagos."

Evidently, this association with Loma Linda gave rise to the following passage from Edwin J. Larson's *Evolution's Workshop: God and Science on the Galapagos Islands* (Basic Books, 2001), p. 216:

Galápagos schoolchildren learn the tenets of creation science at Loma Linda Academy, just down the road from the Charles Darwin Research Station. Loma Linda is one of the finest schools on the archipelago, built by the fundamentalist Seventh-day Adventist Church to serve students of all faiths on



On an evening visit to the Origins Museum, the *Spectrum* team met with researchers who had just returned from a field trip. Pictured here are Bonnie Dwyer, Thomas Dwyer, James Hayward, Timothy Standish (of Geoscience Research Institute), Brian Bull, David Grellmann, and Larry Geraty.

Santa Cruz Island. Its pupils include several children of Ecuadorian parents employed by the research station. . . . Dominating Loma Linda's interior courtyard, a building-sized mural depicts Galápagos birds, reptiles and sea lions proclaiming the message in Spanish, "All creation exalts the Creator."

GC President Ted Wilson was present for the opening of the new museum and is quoted by McChesney as saying, "As Seventh-day Adventists, the source of our understanding of our origins, our reason for being here, and our purpose in helping nature to be preserved is found in our relationship with God. May many people come to know more about origins and God through this museum." The new museum also made national headlines, with Ecuador's largest newspaper, *El Universo*, publishing a March 2, 2020 report, with three photos, under the headline "Origins, a New Interactive Museum on the Galápagos." In an interview reported by McChesney, the South American Division president (now GC Secretary), Erton Kolher, described the Origins Museum as "an invitation to think about something different. Our idea is not to confront people who think differently but to show them some viewpoints that perhaps they haven't seen. After visiting, they might start to realize that a special hand must be behind the processes of nature."

No one in our *Spectrum* group of sixteen travelers has thought more about the relationship of science to faith than Brian Bull, Loma Linda University physician, professor, published author, and former key administrator. I asked him to summarize his thoughts about the museum:

I am a museum junkie! Whenever I travel and a visit to a museum is a possibility, I almost always manage to fit it in. Creation museums are my favorite. They are, understandably, quite uncommon. I suppose I like them because I have written, edited and/or co-authored several books on Genesis. In the process I have come to appreciate how markedly our world differs from that in which the Genesis creation narrative was first heard. I am always curious as to which part of that story is going to be presented and exactly how it is going to be done.

If dioramas are going to be used, there is always the tricky question of how to present Adam and Eve. They are described in the Genesis account as “They were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed” (Genesis 2:25, KJV). In static pictures, a tree branch or large tame animal can always be drawn into the picture to ensure modesty, but in a 3-D diorama, which can usually be viewed from many angles, that often fails as a solution. I vividly remember one such depiction of the couple. They were life-sized, up to their waists in a lake with critically placed magnolia blossoms floating on the water surrounding Eve. To finish off the scene there was a cheerful-looking, clearly non-meat-eating dinosaur the size of a large St. Bernard, surveying the scene from a bank nearby!

Given an opportunity to visit the recently opened SDA Creation Museum in Puerto Ayora, Galápagos, I did not hesitate. It was both pleasant and rewarding. The museum displays included no dioramas, no Adam and Eve, and no 3-D dinosaurs! Instead, perhaps as a stand-in for dinosaurs, there were pictures of the fierce-looking, dragon-like, marine iguanas that live in the Galápagos and nowhere else in the world. The museum proper consisted of professionally prepared posters of the physical laws, mathematical equations that characterize the natural world, as well as many of the unique plants and animals that are to be found in these islands. The information was presented with a mixture of pictures and text in both Spanish and English. Several of the presentations towards the end of the exhibit introduced the creation theme unobtrusively, almost hesitantly, by posing the question, “What seems most reasonable, that this unique creature, plant, bird, etc., came into existence by chance—or that it was created by God?”

One of the last displays definitely caught my eye. It was a large, poster-sized explanation of the clotting cascade: that aspect of physiology

that keeps us all from bleeding to death. It too was very professionally presented. Since I, as an MD, spend most of my time seeing patients with disorders of the clotting mechanism, I was both surprised and delighted to find it in a creation museum. This was truly a first! This display, like the others before it, referred to the awe that the intricacies of the created world create in those who study nature thoughtfully. This response of awe can be almost overwhelming in places like the Galápagos where, surrounded by animals that appear completely oblivious to human presence, it is inevitable that the “peaceable kingdom” of that better world comes to mind. Still, since defects in the clotting system will eventually kill about one out of every four of us (strokes, emboli, heart attacks, bleeding disorders) I was left with mixed emotions by that particular exhibit.

All in all, however, I liked the approach of this unusual creation museum and enjoyed it sufficiently so that, when a second opportunity presented itself three days later I returned to the museum to experience it once more.

According to AdventistWorld.org (September 2021), as part of the 2012–2013 Global Church Member Survey, members around the world were asked if they were spiritually moved by the beauty of God’s creation. The response from 24,828 participants indicated that 75% answered “often,” and only 1% answered “never.” Clearly, the hope in founding Galápagos’ new Origins Museum is that that 75% number will even increase for those who pay it a visit, like our appreciative group from *Spectrum*!



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