

WESTERN ISLANDS GALÁPAGOS ITINERARY

Wednesday to Monday – 6 days /5 nights
Effective from 20th January 2012



WEDNESDAY

Baltra Island

Morning arrival to Baltra Island by plane and immediate transfer to the dock to board the M/V Santa Cruz. Welcome introductory briefing and lunch.

North Seymour Island

Afternoon disembarkation (dry landing) for a walk along the coast and the interior of the island, observing bird colonies of blue footed boobies, two species of frigate birds, swallow tailed gulls and also sea lions and marine iguanas. Opportunity for snorkelling or coastal exploration. Expedition plan for Thursday, welcome cocktail and dinner.

THURSDAY

Punta Vicente Roca (Isabela Island)

Since there is no landing site at this location, the coastal exploration is by panga, while the naturalist guide explains the dramatic geology of the area with remains of lava flows and tuff stone layers. This is the nesting place for flightless cormorants, the only existing marine birds in the world other than penguins that have changed their condition of flying birds to diving birds. Wildlife here also includes sea lions, Galápagos fur seals, Galápagos penguins, blue-footed and Nazca boobies and noddy terns. Depending on the conditions of the ocean, it will be possible to schedule a snorkelling outing along the cliffs of partly-sunken Ecuador Volcano, near the northern tip of Isabela Island. This area has a very rich marine life, and is seasonally visited by green sea turtles and oceanic sun fish (Mola mola). Lunch on board.

Punta Espinoza (Fernandina Island)

Afternoon visit to the youngest island of the archipelago, Fernandina. Disembark (dry landing) for a one-mile walk over dark lava. Punta Espinoza has an amazing combination of barrenness and a lot of wildlife. Having no introduced mammals, Fernandina boasts a very unique environment with the highest density of marine iguanas, sharing their space with sea lions, sally light-foot crabs, hawks, penguins and the flightless cormorant. Snorkelling off the shore. Expedition plan for Friday and dinner.

FRIDAY

Tagus Cove (Isabela Island)

After breakfast, dry landing on the northwest of Isabela. Secluded Tagus Cove provided a favourite anchorage for pirates and whalers over the centuries. Old graffiti is still found carved on its walls. The vegetation in the area includes the fragrant palo santo trees. These white-barked trees are leafless and look dead most of the year. They leaf and spring back to life in the wet season. An uphill hike takes guests to the back of Darwin Crater, filled with salt water. The view at the end of the trail is worth the climb. Darwin is one of Isabela's six volcanoes, a remarkable contrast to the lower islands to the east of the archipelago. We include a panga ride along the volcanic shore of the cove to see boobies, penguins, flightless cormorants, terns, and sea lions. Possibilities to swim or snorkel. There is no beach in the area, so these activities are done from the pangas. Lunch on board.



Urbina Bay (Isabela Island)

After lunch (wet landing) disembark at Urbina Bay, located at the foot of volcanoes Alcedo and Darwin, western Isabela Island, the result of an uplifting of the ocean in 1954. Here you can find corals, shells and many other calcareous organisms exposed above water. This area is also home to large and very colourful Galápagos land iguanas, giant tortoises (occasionally); a good spot to observe Darwin's finches. Along the shoreline, after the hike, guests may encounter flightless cormorants and see penguins while snorkelling in this beautiful cove. Expedition plan for Saturday and dinner.

SATURDAY

Puerto Ayora and the Charles Darwin Research Station (Santa Cruz Island)

Morning disembarkation (dry landing) to visit to the Charles Darwin Research Station and the giant tortoise pens, including tortoise celebrities like "Lonesome George" within an impressive giant prickly-pear cactus forest home to many land birds. These are the headquarters of scientific investigation, conservation and the National Park administration. Lunch at the poolside of the Finch Bay Eco Hotel.

Highlands of Santa Cruz Island

After lunch, a 30-minute bus ride to the Highlands of Santa Cruz Island to enter the famous Giant Tortoise Reserve, and witness the impressive migrations these giant reptiles must endure every year for feeding and reproduction. Santa Cruz hosts one of the largest tortoise populations in Galápagos. The enclosure is framed with lush vegetation and many unique land birds can be seen, such as the rare woodpecker finch, one of the world's few tool-using species. Return to Puerto Ayora and back on board. Expedition plan for Sunday and dinner.

SUNDAY

Post office Bay and Baroness's Tower (Floreana (Charles) Island)

Morning visit to Post Office Bay. A short walk leads us to the historic barrel where mail can be left for other guests from other vessels to be hand-delivered to its destination. This tradition of over two centuries is unique. Near Post Office Bay, we explore the north shore of Floreana along narrow channels teeming with life. Rays, turtles and sea lions can be seen gently swimming next to our pangas. After a wet landing and a short walk up to a volcanic cone, we reach the Baroness's Tower, from where the entire northern shore of the island can be seen. Learn more about the fascinating past of this island. Lunch on board

Cormorant Point (Floreana Island)

Disembark at Cormorant Point (wet landing) on an olivine-crystal beach for an easy walk that includes a brackish water lagoon where bird species like greater flamingos, pintail ducks, common stilts, herons, sandpipers, and others may be observed. This outing also includes a white-sand beach where sea turtles emerge from the sea at night to nest (from December to May). Possibility of snorkelling or a glass-bottom boat ride close to Devil's Crown. Farewell Cocktail, departure briefing and dinner.

MONDAY

Baltra Island

Disembark at Baltra Island. Transfer to the airport to take the flight back to the continent.

IMPORTANT NOTES:

The itineraries and programme are subject to change without prior notice, due mainly to adjustments in the policies and regulations of the Galápagos National Park, weather conditions, seasonal changes and safety reasons.

- Dry landing: guests step from the dinghy onto rocks or a dock.
- Wet landing: as the dinghy edges onto a sandy beach, guests step into knee-deep water and wade ashore