

Day by day itinerary

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DAY 1 Baltra Island, Las Bachas Beach (wet landing)

Fly from the Ecuadorian mainland to the islands on an early morning 90-minute flight. As you prepare to land in Baltra, peer out the window. The landscape below will seem otherworldly - and it is for you have come to a place like no other. The Galapagos Islands are unique to the world and you are about to see why. Your bilingual naturalist guide will greet you at the airport and assist you through customs. During lunch he/she will introduce you to the islands and specifically the flora and fauna you will encounter at our first destination, Las Bachas Beach.

On the sandy white beaches of Las Bachas we will get a close look at a sea turtle nesting area and a lake frequented by leggy pink flamingos and other migratory birds. Afterward, we cool ourselves off with our first dip in the deliciously blue Pacific Ocean. As this is our first evening together, the crew will invite us to a pre-dinner cocktail on the yacht before the welcome dinner. If the night is clear, as it usually is, the stars above will bedazzle; look for the Southern Cross, the Big Dipper (turned up-side down!) and Orion.

DAY 2 Genovesa Island: El Barranco (dry landing) / Darwin Bay (wet landing)

Early in the morning we will take breakfast and later we will disembark at Genovesa (Tower) Island that is located in the northeast portion of the Galapagos (less than half a degree north of the equator). Tower is an outpost for many sea birds (as Española is in the south). Interestingly, there are no land reptiles on Tower, only very small marine iguanas. This is attributed to the direction of the ocean currents, which evidently wouldn't have carried the terrestrial animals here. Visit El Barranco during the morning then return to the boat for lunch, and later arrival to Darwin Bay.

The anchorage at Darwin Bay, located on the southern portion of the island, is actually the caldera of an extinct, partially-eroded volcano, with the surrounding cliffs forming the inner portion of the rim. While the origin of the name Tower is not known, one can imagine it had something to do with these towering cliffs. The tour will be a long, fairly-easy walk, but it is usually hot and dry here, so you may want to carry some water. After a wet landing on a coral beach the trail begins in an area where there are several swallow-tailed gulls. As you walk back from the beach, there is a mixture of Opuntia cactus and mangroves.

DAY 3 BARTOLOME / SULLIVAN BAY / CHINESE HAT

Bartolome Island, which at its highest point (114m) has one of the most photographed vistas in the archipelago. This island is quite young and quite volcanic. Therefore, it's relatively unpopulated; only a small handful of die-hard plant and animal species have survived long enough to call this otherworldly lava-land home.

After our visit to Bartolome island we will visit nearby Sullivan Bay, at the turn of the century a huge lava flow spilled forth and right down to the sea; today you can stroll across this black volcanic expanse admiring its time-frozen ripples, bubbles and ropes.

After lunch we will have a short navigation to Chinese hat or Sombrero Chino, a small volcanic cone by the coast of James island, Sombrero Chino has a beautiful beach for snorkeling with sea lions as well as a small trail along the coast of this cone where we can spot lots of coast life and shore birds.

DAY 4 DAPHNE / BLACK TURTLE COVE / CERRO DRAGON

Early in the morning we will arrive to Daphne island, a tuff cone formed by the accumulation of volcanic ash which is home to thousands of birds such as blue footed boobies, frigate birds, tropic birds and many more, we will not go ashore but we will navigate around this volcanic cone, binoculars are recommended to get a good look at the birds, Daphne has been a great research site on which many scientists have spent years studying the behavior of Darwin's finches.

After this visit we move on to our next site, Black Turtle Cove, a red mangrove lagoon on Santa Cruz, is a nursery for many sharks and rays. It is also a great location to observe mating turtles around this time of year. We saw large groups of resting white-tip reef sharks, schools of golden rays and spotted eagle rays, and a few juvenile scalloped hammerhead sharks and black-tip sharks. The water is nearly mirror-calm and we often used paddles instead of the loud panga engines to move around the area.

After lunch we will navigate for a couple of hours to Cerro Dragon, we will have a dry landing on lava rocks, Cerro Dragon is a small bay on the west coast of Santa Cruz and got its name from the many land iguanas that live in the area, land iguanas are endemic to the Galapagos islands and have made of this place a good mating and nesting area.

DAY 5 Santa Cruz Island (dry landing)

Charles Darwin Station, Upper Region. After breakfast we sail to Santa Cruz Island, where we visit the world-famous Charles Darwin Station, a non-profit institution that dedicates itself to studying and protecting Galapaganean flora and fauna. This is one of the best places to see land tortoises, including Lonely George, the last survivor of his subspecies.

We will visit the station's Tortoise Rearing Center. Here we can find itty bitty tortoises, hand-sized between the ages of one and five, and marvel at how they achieve such a large size as adults (500 lbs. or more!). Galapagos tortoises are believed to have a lifespan of over 100 years, so the young ones have a long life ahead of them as long as they receive the protection they need.

Aside from the Station headquarters, Santa Cruz boasts the largest town and economic center of the Galapagos, Puerto Ayora. In this port-side town we can buy souvenirs of the islands (postcards, t-shirts, books, etc.). Check-out the uniquely Galapagean ceramic shop near the entrance of the Charles Darwin Station.

After shopping in Puerto Ayora and lunch on the boat (guests may dine in town if they desire), we will explore the upper region ('parte alta') of the island, a moisture-rich area with fertile volcanic soils. We will learn about the vegetation and animal life of this zone, often strikingly different than that found at lower elevations.

Darwin finches, yellow warblers, and bright red vermillion flycatchers will flit in and out of the moss-covered trees. From this high vantage point we are treated to beautiful views of the surrounding archipelago.

In the late afternoon we return to town. For those who wish to familiarize themselves with Galapagean nightlife, this is your chance: the boat will be docked in port most of the night.

DAY 6 Floreana Island: Cormorant Point (wet landing), Corona del Diablo (wet landing), and Post office bay (wet landing)

Today when you awake and peer out your porthole you will see Floreana, one of the greenest islands in the archipelago.

Ask your guide to tell you about its mysterious history laden with rumors of witches, murderous baronesses, blackmail and dubious disappearances.

Our first stop is Punta Cormorant, where we follow a footpath to a lagoon inhabited by flaming-pink flamingos. We will also pass by Carolina Beach, a sea turtle nesting area and a superb spot for watching sea birds and sea rays.

Back on our yacht, we skirt the island's coast until we arrive at La Corona del Diablo (the Devil's Crown), a sub-marine crater that offers some of the most spectacular snorkeling in the Galapagos. This is a great spot for seeing the wide array of tropical fish endemic to the islands as well as purple sea stars and spiky sea urchins. The crater's most thrilling undersea creatures, however, are the white-tipped sharks. As with most of the creatures in the Galapagos they are unperturbed by your presence, so you can swim in their company freely and without fear.

After returning to the boat for lunch we will sail on to Post Office Bay, where the island's original post office - really only a wooden barrel - was established in 1793. The current system still functions as it did three centuries ago: visitors drop off unstamped letters and postcards AND pick-up whatever mail they can hand deliver themselves when they return home! (Try it, it actually works!).

DAY 7 Española Island: Suarez Point (dry landing) & Garner Bay (wet landing)

Espanola is one of the most magical of all the islands. It is a place where the animals reign supreme and we humans are merely guests. As your dingy brings you to shore you will see sea lion pups sunbathing with marine iguanas and blue footed boobies nesting in between. Nearby may be a Galapagos Hawk. If it is boobie mating season watch the bonded pairs do the infamous boobie dance (if it's not mating season ask your guide to demonstrate - after all it's his job to teach you about the local fauna).

As we follow the foot path around the island, we will pass hundreds of boobie nesting sites including one colony of masked boobies.

There is a good chance we will see the thief-like frigate bird (which has the habit of stealing other birds' food), as well as the stunning red-billed tropicbird and the nocturnal swallow-tailed gull. If it is the right time of the year (mid-April to December) we will also encounter the giant waved albatross. Apart from a few pairs that breed on Isla de Plata off the Ecuadorian mainland, all of the world's 12,000 waved albatross breed on Espanola Island. At the end of the breeding season, the entire population leaves the island and heads out to sea, where they spend years without touching land. Astonishingly, four or five years may pass before the fledglings return to Espanola.

As we make our way around the island we pass by El Soplador, a giant blowhole that explodes to heights reaching 70 feet. In the nearby tide pools you can often find lounging sea lions enjoying the blowhole's misty spray. Following lunch on board the yacht, we will visit Garner Bay, a great place for sunbathing, swimming and snorkeling. Lion fish, flycatchers, and Galapagos hawks will keep us company as we relax under the rays of the evening sun. Dinner on the yacht completes our day.

DAY 8 SAN CRISTOBAL, KICKER ROCK / INTERPRETATION CENTER / ISLA LOBOS

On our 8th day of visiting the Galapagos we will arrive early in the morning to San Cristobal, the capital of Galapagos ,our first visitors site will be Kicker rock or Leon Dormido, a tuff volcanic cone which has been eroded by the wind and marine currents giving it the shape from the distance of a sleeping sea lion, now home to blue footer boobies and frigate birds amongst many others which have made of this their nesting site, after navigating around kicker rock we continue on our way to Isla Lobos.

A very small islet made of volcanic rocks on which we will disembark, Isla Lobos gets its name from a small colony of sea lions (lobo de mar in Spanish) where we can observe the behavior and interaction of sea lions living in a small community.

Following the visit to Isla Lobos we head to Puerto Baquerizo Moreno, the main town in San Cristobal where the airport is located, before taking the airplane back to the mainland you will have some time to visit the town on your own for last minute shopping or just getting to see how people live in the Galapagos.

For those of you arriving that that day, we will go from the airport straight back to the boat show you to your accommodations and after lunch we will go to the interpretation center, the local branch of the Galapagos National park service where your guide will explain to you about the formation of the islands, how the flora and fauna arrived and got established in Galapagos as well as visiting the corrals where we have several species of giant tortoises under the care of the National park service.

DAY 9 SANTA FE / PLAZAS

After breakfast on the yacht, we continue to Santa Fe Island, upon arrival to the island, we will be treated to a noisy welcome by the local sea lion colony. Following our naturalist guide on the island paths we will come to Santa Fe's main attraction, a towering forest of giant cacti. Scattered around the cacti trees you will see a number of the island's indigenous sun-seekers: marine and land iguanas, the rainbow-streaked lava lizards and, if you are lucky, land tortoises - the namesakes of the islands. After our walk we will plunge into the salty sea and snorkel in the company of sea lions, lion fish and sea turtles. Finally, we will return to the yacht for lunch.

After lunch we will navigate to Plazas Island, where a large colony of sea lions lounges daily in the equatorial sun. Soon you will notice their subtly diabolic grins and wonder what they find so humorous; you only hope the joke isn't on you! Plaza also boasts excellent examples of typical Galapaganean flora such as the towering cacti "trees" that form the principal diet for both the land iguanas and the cactus finch. Other birds that may flutter by include lava gulls, yellow warblers and red-billed tropicbirds with their elaborate tails.

DAY 10 SANTA CRUZ / DARWIN CENTER / EL CHATO (Highlands)

Here we can find itty bitty tortoises, hand-sized between the ages of one and five, and marvel at how they achieve such a large size as adults (500 lbs. or more!). Galapagos tortoises are believed to have a lifespan of over 100 years, so the young ones have a long life ahead of them as long as they receive the protection they need. Aside from the Station headquarters, Santa Cruz boasts the largest town and economic center of the Galapagos, Puerto Ayora. In this port-side town we can buy souvenirs of the islands (postcards, t-shirts, books, etc.). Check-out the uniquely Galapaganean ceramic shop near the entrance of the Charles Darwin Station. After shopping in Puerto Ayora and lunch on the boat (guests may dine in town if they desire), we will explore the upper region ('parte alta') of the island, a moisture-rich area with fertile volcanic soils. We will learn about the vegetation and animal life of this zone, often strikingly different than that found at lower elevations. This area in the highlands is called EL CHATO which is a giant tortoises reserve, one of the few places open to visitors where giant tortoises are found in their natural habitat interacting with the rest of the Galapagos life.

DAY 11 ISABELA ISLAND / PUERTO VILLAMIL / HUMEDALES / MURO DE LAS LAGRIMAS / CENTRO DE CRIANZA.

Our first visit in the morning will take place in Puerto Villamil, one of the smallest towns in Galapagos, located right in front of a white sand beach is one of the most beautiful locations in the islands, after a dry landing we will go to visit the humedales which is a mangrove area with

small brackish water lagoons that create the perfect environment for a small type of shrimp which serves as food for flamingos making it easy to find them in this site.

Following this visit we will be transported to El Muro de las Lagrimas or the wall of tears, when the Ecuadorian government took possession of the islands their main purpose was to harbor Ecuadorian prisoners, since there wasn't much for them to do they were forced to carry rocks to a far location and build a wall which nowadays is known as the wall of tears.

After this visit we return to the beach for relaxation before lunch on the boat.

In the afternoon we will visit the local branch of the Galapagos park service which main purpose is to take care of the many species of giant tortoises that inhabit Isabela island so we can see the efforts made by the national park service to protect and increase the decaying population of giant tortoises in this island.

DAY 12 PUNTA MORENO / ELIZABETH BAY

After a whole night navigation we arrive to Punta Moreno on the west coast of Isabela, a dry landing on a lava field. The vegetation found in the area is small and concentrated mainly in the mangrove area and around the lakes. It should be noted that the three kinds of cacti are found here.

The main attractions at Punta Moreno are coastal lagoons amid black lava flows where there are several species of birds. It has a panoramic view of three volcanoes, the most active of the Galapagos that are Sierra Negra, Cerro Azul of Isabela Island and La Cumbre of Fernandina Island.

After lunch on board we continue on our way to Elizabeth bay, Located on Isabela Island's west shore, this is extremely interesting for observing marine life. You can motor past a few islands where you usually see Galapagos penguins. One of the best areas to take photos. A colony of these magnificent birds inhabit a rocky islet at the entrance to Elizabeth Bay.

We let our boat drift through a small passage lined with mangroves you emerge into an enclosed cove. We will turn the motor off and look in the sheltered waters for marine turtles, rays, flightless cormorants, sea lions, and, circling overhead, Galapagos hawks.

DAY 13 ISABELS CALETA TAGUS / FERNANDINA PUNTA ESPINOZA / ISABELA PUNTA VICENTE ROCA

The visitor's site of Tagus Cove is located west of Darwin Volcano on Isabela Island. The route of the trail is about 1800 meters. This was a favorite spot for pirates and whalers, a tradition is still observed that has continued since that time: the inscription of the names of boats. At the start of the walk, going up and passing the staircase, is a small cave where we find inscriptions dating to the 1800s. Its name originated from a British warship that went through the islands in 1814 looking for Galapagos Tortoise for food.

The road, mostly gravel, leads into the interior, along Darwin Lake. During the walk, you can see various land birds; we can identify the characteristic vegetation of the arid zone. Finally, we observe the lava fields of Darwin Volcano.

Back on board for lunch and short navigation to Elizabeth Bay on Fernandina Island

Punta Espinoza is a narrow ledge of lava and sand that extends from the base of the volcano to the sea. There is a vivid description given by Captain Benjamin Morrell that from its anchorage at Bay Banks witnessed and recorded an eruption of Fernandina in the decade of the 1820s that

probably gave rise to the Point. In 1975, there was an uprising, about 90 cm, which is why the pier built for landing can only be used during high tide.

Punta Espinoza is a place famous for its large colonies of marine iguanas and as the habitat of unique species like the flightless cormorant, Galapagos penguin, Galapagos hawk, Galapagos snake, among others. It is an ideal place to observe the lava cactus (*Brachycerus nesioticus*), which grow on young lava and survive with little water.

After visiting Fernandina we will start our navigation to the central part of the Galapagos and on the way we will see from the Boat Punta Vicente Roca, a part of a mostly eroded and destroyed volcano which now is a great site for seeing blue footed boobies, frigate birds and other marine birds from the boat.

DAY 14 JAMES BAY / RABIDA ISLAND

James Bay is a black sand beach located on the west side of James Bay and northwest of Santiago Island.

South of the beach is Sugarloaf Volcano, which has deposits of volcanic tuff, the same that has favored the formation of the black sand beach. El Cráter is just north of this site, it has a saltwater lagoon, which during the summer dry season becomes a salt mine. Between 1928 and 1930, there was the first exploitation of salt; there were no major achievement. Then in 1964 a new attempt was made that lasted for some time.

After lunch on board we navigate to our next destination, Rábida

Rábida Island, consists of a red sand beach, a coastal lagoon behind the beach, and a loop trail. The approximate distance of the trail is 1.1 kilometers.

The color of the rocks and sand on the beach is due to the very porous volcanic material, which with the help of environmental factors (rain, salt water and sea breeze, has acted as an oxidizing agent.

The main attraction of the place is the red sand beach, scenery, aside from the vegetation of the arid zone and the presence of native and endemic species.

DAY 15 North Seymour Island (dry landing) / Santa Fe Island (wet landing)

After an early breakfast we will disembark at North Seymour Island. Here we will see frigatebirds, the clownish blue-footed booby, and of course the ubiquitous sea lions. With luck we will witness the striking courtship display of the male frigatebird, in which he inflates a red balloon-like sac below his throat and struts his stuff for all of the young females. Seymour North, Plaza Sur and Plaza Norte, Baltra, northeastern Santa Cruz, Santa Fe and part of Española, were formed by uprisings of underwater volcanic lavas. They were part of a volcanic lava table deposited in sheet form along cracks located on the ocean floor. The uprisings occurred sporadically and lasted more than a million years to reach its current level.

All marine fossils found in the archipelago are found in these islands and the best example is the North Channel side of Baltra. The fossils date from the Pleistocene, and specifically in the case of Baltra, one can say that these volcanic tables were close to the surface about a million years ago.

Please note that itineraries are always subject to change without previous notice due to operational purposes, policies of the Galapagos National Park authorities, weather conditions and for comfort of your passengers.