



GALAPAGOS ISLANDS

The Enchanted Natural Wonder

Three to five million years ago, the Galapagos Islands emerged from the depths of the Pacific Ocean as various volcanoes, and today they form the Archipelago of Columbus or Galapagos. There are 19 islands and approximately 42 small islets covering an area of 8006 km². They are located 970 kms (600 miles) west of the South American coast, and are part of the territory of the Republic of Ecuador.

When Charles Darwin, was on Santiago Island in October 1835, he wrote: *“Seeing every elevation crowned with its crater and neighboring still clear lava flows, we tend to believe in a recent geological period; the unaltered ocean was set apart from here; one seems to be transported in time and space to the great act, the mystery of mysteries, the appearance of the first living beings on earth.”*

We invite you to experience the same sensation as Darwin had, exploring the islands with us.

Each day we will have the opportunity to make two explorations - one in the morning, and the second mid-afternoon. The yacht will make most of the navigations during the night while everyone is sleeping.

The Islands offer incredible opportunities for hiking, viewing the native birds and animals (most of which are not found anywhere else on the planet), snorkeling, exploring the unique geography, of course, taking amazing photographs.

This sample itinerary is one that we like the most; will show us the best of what the Galapagos has to offer.....

Sample Itinerary

8 days – 7 nights cruise

Day1:

We will fly from either Quito or Guayaquil to the Islands leaving very early in the morning.

When we arrive at the airport in the Islands, the guide from the Yacht will meet us and accompany the group to the harbor of Baltra where the yacht will be anchored and waiting for us.

In the afternoon, our first visit will be to Bachas on Santa Cruz Island. We will make a wet landing on a white coral beach. From here, we will take an easy walk to see the lagoons and sand dunes where we will likely see flamingos, black-necked stilts, whimbrels and white cheeked pintail ducks. The sand dunes are off-limits (for climbing) because they are a favorite nesting site for sea turtles. After the hike, we can swim, snorkel or just relax on the beach.

Day 2:

This morning we will visit the island of Mosquera, which has one of the largest sea lion colonies in the Galapagos. It is the perfect spot to observe their behavior. In addition, there will be the possibility of seeing the endemic lava gulls and other coastal birds. On the lava rocks of Mosquera, we find marine iguanas, sally light-foot crabs, and under the rocks, (sometimes) scorpions.

In the afternoon, we will go to the island of Cerro Dragon. The name means Dragon Hill, and it's a great spot for observing the scenery around us. Our hike will pass first a flamingo lagoon behind the beach vegetation, and then head into an impressive forest of prickly pear cactus. A loop trail goes to a small hill where land iguanas live and nest. The view from this small hill over the surrounding landscape is spectacular.

Day 3:

Tagus Cove on Isabela Island is our destination for this morning. This protected cove was a favorite resting site for pirates and whalers who carved and painted their names in the high cliffs of the cove (you can still see them). Our scenic hike will lead uphill through a dry zone of vegetation to Darwin Lake, a saltwater crater lake. At the end of the hike, we will go up to a "parasitic spatter cone" and have a wonderful view over the lava fields of Darwin Volcano. (You will find out what a "parasitic spatter cone" is, if you do not know.) Here we will board our dinghies to float along the cliffs to look for the Galapagos Penguins and the flightless cormorants. If the water is clear, Tagus Cove is an incredible place to snorkel and see the colorful marine invertebrates on the vertical walls of the cliffs.

Punta Espinoza on Fernandina Island is one of the highlights of our cruise and where we will be in the afternoon. On our hike, we will see huge marine iguanas in large groups. We must take care to stay on the pathways because the sand dunes are nesting areas for these marine iguanas. On the lava coast, close to the shoreline are the nesting places of the flightless cormorant. Lava lizards, the Galapagos Hawk, marine turtles and the Galapagos Penguins are often seen on our hike. On this lava flow are the largest groups of the unique endemic lava cactuses.

Day 4:

This morning we will explore Urbina Bay on Isabela Island. It is an area that was uplifted out of the sea at the foot of the Alcedo Volcano. Here along the shore, there are usually flightless cormorants and marine iguanas. On the trail leading inland, we will find the colorful land iguanas. Sometimes it is also possible to see a Galapagos Tortoise along the pathway. If the sea is quiet, we will snorkel.

In the afternoon, we will be in our dinghies in Elizabeth Bay floating into the protected mangrove cove. The entrance is through a very narrow channel and can be tricky depending on the tide. In the furthest small corners, we will turn off the motor of the dinghy and row noiselessly to observe the marine turtles. In Elizabeth Bay, we find the tallest red mangrove trees in all the Galapagos.

Day 5:

Very early in the morning we will visit Punta Moreno on Isabela Island. Here we will hike on a rough lava field. We will see all three species of cactus: candelabra, prickly pear, and lava cactus. Surprisingly here in the middle of this surreal black lava we will find brackish water pools with flamingos, common gallinules, white checked pintail ducks and paint-billed crakes. A little later again in our dinghies, we will see flightless cormorants, Galapagos Penguins and huge marine iguanas.

Returning to the yacht in mid-morning, we begin our long navigation along the Shoreline and around the Volcano Cerro Azul to Puerto Villamil. At times, this navigation can be a little rough. It is the time to watch for dolphins (which may follow us for miles) and whales. Just before the dark, we arrive in the small harbor of Puerto Villamil.

Day 6:

This morning we will board a bus in the harbor and see a very different Galapagos. We head up hill to the caldera of the Sierra Negra Volcano, a magnificent "shield volcano". Here we will have the opportunity to observe different climate zones in a very short timeframe. Often it is raining or misty and foggy. We will hike about one hour to the rim of the volcano to see the huge caldera, which measures 6.2 miles (10 km) from north to south and 5.6 miles (9

km) from east to west. We can also see the huge new lava field from the last eruption in 2005.

In the afternoon, we will return to Puerto Villamil and visit the Giant Tortoises' Breeding Center. Here we will see the giant tortoises and the newborn babies (so tiny when they are born). We will end our time in Puerto Villamil by walking through this picturesque fishing village.

Day 7:

This morning we will be at Punta Cormorant on Floreana Island. We will land on the "Green Beach". Depending on the light conditions the sand shines green because of the high percentage of olivine crystals in the sand. On the easy walk through the arid zone, we will come to a big salt-water lagoon with flamingos, white cheeked pintail ducks, black-necked stilts and possibly migratory shore birds. A short walk further, we will be at the "White Sand Beach" made up of white corals. It is a famous nesting beach for marine turtles, so it is important not to walk on the sand dunes here. Often we can see many stingrays in the shallow water.

In the afternoon, we will visit Devils Crown which is the remainder of a volcano, and looks like a black crown emerging out of the sea. This is one of the most famous snorkeling locations in the Galapagos. There is often a strong current here, so we recommend snorkeling only for experienced snorkelers. Before returning to the yacht, we will visit Post Office Bay.....a famous barrel where travelers leave post cards and notes. If there is a letter or postcard for the country you come from, it is the custom to take the post card with you and deliver it to the addressee (by hand, if possible). The whalers first placed the barrel on the island in 1793. They used it to receive and send letters home and to have contact with each other. In the late afternoon, the yacht will navigate to the island of Santa Cruz and the town of Puerto Ayora. We will have time to walk in town and do a little shopping.

Day 8:

This final morning we will visit Daphne Island, which is a “tuff cone” with very little vegetation. This island is famous for the studies of Darwin finches by Peter and Rosemary Grant. We will make a panoramic navigation around the small tuff cone of Daphne Island.

Our final destination is once again Baltra Island. It is the only island of all Galapagos, which is not included (in its entirety) in the National Park Area. The United States built the airport of Baltra in 1941-1948, and used it as their airforce base in the Pacific during the WWII. The airport and harbor are now an Ecuadorian military territory.

At the end of the cruise, we will all disembark the yacht in the harbor of Baltra and our guide will take care of making sure we all get back to either Guayaquil or Quito for our flights to our next destinations.

