



ITINERARY



8 DAYS / 7 NIGHTS
Tuesday to Tuesday



ROUTE



This exclusive 7-night itinerary primarily explores the remote western islands of Isabela and pristine Fernandina, which are both just recently born out of fire. After navigating clockwise around Isabela we will return to the heart of the archipelago to visit several sites on Santiago and its satellite islets, before finishing on and around Santa Cruz and North Seymour. This cruise itinerary includes two nights of quiet rest at fairly calm anchorage-sites.

HIGH CHANCE OF SPOTTING:



DAY 1 – TUESDAY

AM – Arrival at Baltra Airport

Upon arrival at Seymour Ecological Airport, a check-up is carried out first, to ensure that no foreign plant or animal species are introduced on the islands. Furthermore, your TCC (Transit Control Card) is stamped; this must be kept safe during your trip, as it has to be presented again on your return flight. In addition, entrance to the Galapagos National Park is due for entry (US \$ 100), if this has not yet been paid. Your guide will meet you at the airport, assist you with the luggage and accompany you on the short bus ride to the harbour of Puerto Ayora. Here you will climb aboard the yacht San Solaris. After greeting the crew and the captain, your cabins will be assigned to you and then you will enjoy your first lunch on-board.

PM – Bachas (Santa Cruz)

These two small beaches are located in the west of the Turtle Cove on Santa Cruz. Their sand consists of decomposed corals, which makes it white and soft. This makes it the favorite nesting site for sea turtles. Behind one of the beaches there are small water lagoons, where flamingos and other coastal birds, such as black-necked still birds and rainbows, can occasionally be spotted. On the second beach, which is the wider one, you can explore the remains of two abandoned warships. In the Second World War these were left by the US, as the island of Baltra was used as a strategic point for the protection of the Panama Canal.



DAY 2 – WEDNESDAY

AM – Whitetip reef shark channel (Isabela)

Just outside the harbour of Puerto Villamil a group of islets protrude just above the ocean. The jagged black formations, dotted with mangrove and candelabra cactus, are the remnants of a lava stream that has ended up in the ocean. Marine life gets trapped, including spectacular whitetip reef sharks (called “tintoreras” in Spanish, as is the site’s official name). This species of shark is fairly common in the archipelago, and generally spotted on the seabed when snorkelling, while they rest from their nocturnal hunts. At this unique location you can observe them comfortably from the bank in the crystal-clear turquoise waters. Sometimes turtles and elegant white-spotted eagle rays or golden rays glide back and forth through this calm channel, as well as smaller fish and Galapagos sea lions. Also, this is where the largest species of marine iguanas reproduce. The rocky shoreline with its intertidal life also attracts sally lightfoot crabs, lava herons and Galapagos penguins, which reside on the other (western) side of Isabela.



PM – Wetlands, Wall of tears, Tortoise breeding centre (Isabela)

After lunch aboard you will visit the local tortoise breeding centre, where you can see hundreds of giant Galapagos tortoises of all sizes. The vulnerable hatchlings are not gigantic at all, even smaller than the size of your hand! This project just outside Puerto Villamil was created to rescue the endangered populations of Isabela’s both southernmost volcanoes. In Puerto Villamil and the surrounding wetlands there is the historical ‘Wall of tears’ (national cultural heritage), where prisoners were punished and forced to build this long wall of lava blocks. Also, you might have the chance to see American flamingos. At the end of the afternoon you will have some free time to explore the village and/or its beach.

DAY 3 – THURSDAY

AM – Moreno Point (Isabela)

Punta Moreno is located between the volcanoes Sierra Negra and Cerro Azul, on the north coast of Isabela Island. The trail leads along the lava river Pahoehoe to a complex of several coastal lagoons. The main attraction are various bird species which can be found in lakes and mangrove forests.

PM – Mangle Point (Fernandina) & Tagus Cove (Isabela)

We will enter the Bolivar Channel to Tagus Cove (navigation time: 3h). Meanwhile you can enjoy the delicious lunch buffet before snorkelling and visiting Tagus Cove. Explosive eruptions have blown out a part of the outer rims of both tuff cones, and created their characteristic horseshoe shapes and Tagus Cove. The inner crater rim contains Darwin Lake. Traditionally sailors started to write the names of their vessels on the eastern cliffs of Tagus cove. During the hike along the inner crater ridge of Darwin Lake you can continue to a great viewpoint on the outer caldera rim, with views to the outstretched lava slopes of Darwin Volcano. This arid inland zone is overgrown with characteristic tropical dry forest vegetation including a special variety of palo santo, Galapagos cotton and yellow cordia (muyuyu). During the hike you can spot different Darwin's finches, flycatchers and Galapagos hawks.



DAY 4 – FRIDAY

AM – Espinoza Point (Fernandina)

Espinoza Point is Fernandina's only terrestrial visitors site, and one of the few locations where you will find some bizarre outgrowths of natural selection. The figurehead is the emblematic flightless cormorant that lives exclusively in the remote west of Galapagos, and could be considered as the 'holy grail of evolution'. You will also love the almost unworldly views with the dominating cone of Volcán La Cumbre as a spectacular backdrop. The narrow headland that you walk along is the end of a lava tongue that has reached the coast and solidified upon contact with the cold seawater.



PM – Vicente Roca Point (Isabela)

Whilst having lunch we will cross the Bolivar Channel for the last time to Vicente Roca Point, just at the mouth of Isabela's seahorse-shape. While entering a dark cave below a spectacular arch, roaring echoes of the waves will accompany you. Just around the corner the collapsed amphitheatre of Volcan Ecuador offers another impressive view. The calmer waters of the coves are well-protected against the ocean swell and are a fairly cold, but great place for snorkelling amongst various species of shark, penguins, puffer fish and even seahorses!

DAY 5 – SATURDAY

AM: Espumilla Beach, Buccaneer Cove (Santiago)

Espumilla Beach is a visitor's site at the northern end of James Bay, on the western coast of Santiago. This beach has been revived as an important breeding site for turtles, as it is no longer suffering from digging wild pigs. The turtles return year after year to bury their eggs into the cinnamon coloured sand dunes. The beach ridge hides a mangrove with two picturesque lagoons. The colony of American flamingos and aquatic birds used to be its main attraction, but after the climate phenomenon of El Niño, strong sedimentation altered the brackish water environment, and it no longer contains their food. During the climb of a hill you will be rewarded with a beautiful overview of the transitions from sea into beach into mangrove into dry palo santo forest.

PM: Puerto Egas (Santiago)

At lunchtime we will navigate south to Puerto Egas with its famous fur seal grottos, where you will enjoy another, very different guided walk along the coastline. Its masterly sculptured coastline of black basalts and polished multi-coloured ash-layers forms a photogenic scene with collapsed lava tunnels, natural arches, caves and blowholes such as 'Darwin's toilet'. In a grotto directly below a spectacular rock arch at the end of the beach, a colony of sea lions occupies the shade. Hundreds of sally lightfoot crabs seem even brighter orange against the black rocks.



DAY 6 – SUNDAY

AM: Rabida

After lunch and a 'wet landing' on the remarkable red beach of Rabida, there are two short guided hikes. Oxidised iron particles give the rocks and sand their rusty colour. The beach wall holds a shallow green-fringed lagoon; this oasis is the most fertile place on the otherwise arid islet, which is overgrown with leaf-dropping palo santo trees. The salty pool attracts all kind of aquatic birds, like pintails and sometimes American flamingos. Between the evergreen foliage of the surrounding mangrove bushes many species of songbirds hide and breed. One of the most outstanding attractions is the major breeding colony of brown pelicans, the only ones in the world that plunge-dive. On return you will be picked up by the inflatable dinghies, to get ready for snorkelling.



PM: Chinese Hat

Chinese Hat is a 52m/170ft high volcanic cone, forming another islet off the rocky coast of Santiago, where a small colony of Galapagos penguins has settled. Because its primordial fire has been extinguished recently, this is an excellent place to learn more about volcanism, lava bombs and lava tunnels.

On the beach you can also find curious pillow-type lavas with coral heads on top! These spheres have a submarine origin before being lifted above sea level. Beaches of white coral sand grow, and holes in the eroding lava fields are filled up with lava sand, which enables rooting. Galapagos sea lions and countless marine iguanas contribute to fertilisation. This all together creates more favourable options for newcomers, like saltbush and the discolouring sesuvium carpet. Colonisation of Chinese Hat can occur in a much higher pace than elsewhere, hence Santiago is just a stone's throw away.

DAY 7 – MONDAY

AM: Charles Darwin Station (Santa Cruz)

Our dinghies will bring you to the touristic pier of Puerto Ayora, from where you will be brought to the Charles Darwin Research Station. This is where biological research and indispensable conservation management of this unique archipelago are carried out. The complex houses interpretation and information centres about the National Park and the Galapagos Marine Reserve. The most memorable part of your visit will probably be the successful breeding centre and the enclosures with Galapagos giant tortoises. Afterwards you usually can spend some free time in the cozy town, before having lunch aboard.

PM: Highlands (Santa Cruz)

Because wild Galapagos giant tortoises don't stop at official National Park boundaries, dozens of them also roam on the adjacent woodlands in the populated agricultural zone of Santa Cruz. Thanks to their concentration around their favourite muddy pools, these semi-open pastures and moist scalesia-woodlands are the best place for a quick visit.



DAY 8 – TUESDAY

AM: North Seymour

The tabletop islet of North Seymour is an uplifted part of the seabed. Between the dry shrubs you might perceive a Galapagos land iguana. You can spot lots of seabirds, such as brown pelicans, red-billed tropicbirds, endemic swallow-tailed gulls and seasonally even Nazca boobies. But the main attraction are the archipelago's most extensive breeding colonies of blue-footed boobies and frigatebirds. At the start of the breeding season adult frigatebird-males blow up their vivid red pouches to impressive football-sized balloons. After this tour, the dinghy will bring you and your luggage to Baltra, where we take the airport shuttle.

- Transfer to Baltra Airport

