

Day 1 – Sunday

Programme

This morning you will fly from Quito or Guayaquil to Baltra Airport. After the welcome, check-in, lunch, briefing and the safety-drill we head to our first visitor's site, Dragon Hill. It is located about 25km / 15 miles west of the airport of Baltra (navigation time about 2:30 hours). The 'dragons' that live on this hill are iconic inhabitants of the National Park, therefore this guided walk will be an excellent start of your cruise (Easy level; about 2.4km / 1.5 miles). Before dinner your guide will give the first daily briefing for tomorrow, and will explain the yacht's and National Park rules. The captain and his crew will then present you with a welcome cocktail and make a toast to celebrate your first evening on-board. Because we stay in the heart of the archipelago, we will lift the anchor in the dead of the night and sail about 3 hours northwest to the islet of Rabida.

AM: Arrival at Baltra Airport

At Baltra Airport you will have to pay your Galapagos National Park entrance fee and your luggage will be inspected. After meeting your naturalist guide and fellow passengers in the arrival hall, you will be transferred to the landing dock by airport shuttle. Our inflatable dinghy will bring you the last stretch to the yacht.



PM: Dragon Hill (Santa Cruz)

Dragon Hill boasts two key-species which are very likely to be seen during every visit to the Galapagos, though not too commonly distributed throughout the islands: *Galapagos land iguanas* and *American flamingos*. You will climb a hill with *giant opuntia cacti* where these 'dragons' feed and breed. By 1975 this was one of the last populations of *land iguanas* on Santa Cruz, threatened by wild dogs. A rescue plan was executed and the *iguanas* had to be transferred to nearby undisturbed Venice Islets for over a decade, where they successfully reproduced. In 1990 the population was replaced; just three years before this scenic site was opened to tourism. Although they are quite shy and elusive, you stand a fair chance of seeing the success of this project with your own eyes.



The short walk crosses the coastal vegetation zone, as well as the somewhat higher arid zone with vulnerable tropical dry forest. In the warm and wet season in the first half of the year everything turns green. Evergreen *giant prickly pear cacti* with internal reservoirs used a different survival tactic in this dry climate to the leaf dropping *palo santo* trees; in the end both were successful. This is a very photogenic spot, with breathtaking panoramas over the bay and towards an intriguing steep volcanic spout of red lava that overlooks the area. Dragon Hill has become popular because of its saline lagoons behind the beach; these contain algae and shrimp and attract seasonally foraging *American flamingos*. Dragon Hill is the best location on Santa Cruz to observe them.

Day 2 – Monday

Programme

On a clear morning it could be well-worth getting up early to enjoy an unforgettable sunrise on the flaming red cliffs and beach. After breakfast you will make a wet landing (barefoot) to go on two short guided nature hikes from the remarkable red beach and along the breeding colony of *brown pelicans* (Easy level; about 0.4 + 1km / 0.25 + 0.6 miles). Upon returning you will be picked up by the inflatable dinghies, which will bring you back on-board for a snack and to prepare you for your first time snorkelling or a dinghy-ride.

Before lunch we lift the anchor and continue for about 2 hours to another islet just off the coast of Santiago: Chinese Hat. You might be able to spot some *Galapagos penguins*, which might even show up during today's second snorkelling excursion. During the late-afternoon walk you will learn a lot about the geology on this typical volcano-islet (Easy level; about 0.7 km / 0.5 miles).

After dinner we leave for the longest (about 7 hours) passage to the northern island of Genovesa, and meanwhile will cross the equator.

AM: Rabida

The anchorage-site at the northern headland of Rabida is the only point on its shoreline that is not guarded by a barrier of rocks and armed with *giant prickly pear cacti*. The sharp corner of the bay has a striking red beach which will add colour to your photo album. Walk to the end of the beach, blocked by spectacular brick-reddish cliffs that contain oxidised iron. Shortly after sunrise and shortly before sunset, the colours become more intense, and the rusty sand and rocks look as though they're on fire!



Outside the mating season this remarkable red beach is home to a large bachelor colony of *Galapagos sea lions* that will welcome you. The beach wall on this compact spot holds a small and shallow, green-fringed lagoon. Although the water is salty, this pool is the most fertile place on the otherwise very arid islet, so it attracts all kind of aquatic and wading birds such as *pintails* (or *Bahama ducks*) and sometimes even *American flamingos* (although these seem to have found better foraging places). In the surrounding *mangrove* bushes many different species of songbirds look for places to hide and breed between the evergreen foliage. *Palo santo* trees that drop their leaves in the dry season cover the rest of the island.

An outstanding attraction is the major breeding colony of *brown pelicans*, and one of the best places on the Galapagos to approach them. Their brown plumage becomes strikingly white with chestnut markings on their heads and necks and a yellowish crown in the breeding season (period shifts on our calendar). Both parents breed for about 4 weeks and nurture their young for some 10 weeks more. *Brown pelicans* are the only pelicans in the world that plunge-dive. From the beach you can see their spectacular hunting V-formations. Juveniles don't learn this fishing technique easily, meaning that many of them will starve shortly after fledging. It is interesting to compare the superficial dives of the pelicans with the rocket-like plunge dives of the *boobies*.

PM: Chinese Hat

Chinese Hat is a 52m / 170ft. high volcanic cone, forming another islet off the coast of Santiago. Approaching from the north you will certainly agree with its name. Because the primordial fire has been extinguished recently, you can learn more about volcanism, lava bombs and lava tunnels. On the beach there are also curious pillow-type lavas with coral heads on top! These spheres have a submarine history and were uplifted above sea level.



You arrive just in time to witness the next chapter of colonisation by pioneers! Chinese Hat does not appear to be any more inhospitable than Bartolomé and lunatic Sullivan Bay. This tiny, rusty-coloured islet is just beginning to sprout. Beautiful beaches of white coral sand arose, and holes in the infertile but eroding lava fields are getting filled up with lava sand, facilitating inland places for rooting. *Galapagos sea lions* and countless marine iguanas contribute to fertilisation. This all together creates more favourable options for newcomers, like *saltbush*, which stays at the beach and *sesuvium* which rolls out a discolouring carpet, turning from green to red in the dry season. Colonisation of Chinese Hat will probably occur at a much higher pace than elsewhere; hence Santiago is just a stone's throw away, although its eastern tip is also lifeless. The separating channel with its turquoise waters is about 100m / 300ft. wide. Over at the foot of the cliffs lives a small colony of *Galapagos penguins*, which you might see occasionally during the inflatable dinghy-ride.

Day 3 – Tuesday

Out of the outer islands, Genovesa is well worth the longer trip; it belongs to the more exclusive places that add a lot of value to longer cruises. This bird's and birder's paradise is the only northern Galapagos Island that is open to tourism, and – surprisingly – not frequented too much and quite exclusive. Anchoring is an experience you are not likely to forget. The horseshoe-shaped wall is proof that you are entering the partly collapsed and submerged caldera of a young volcano!

Programme

Today we have a full programme. All the impressions you gather will be nearly too much for one day! After an early breakfast you will make a wet landing on the isolated and peaceful beach of Darwin Bay for a guided nature walk (Moderate level; ca. 3km / 2 miles). Afterwards you can enjoy a snack aboard and a refreshing snorkelling excursion again. You can also ask your guide for the alternative option of a sea kayak-tour. Around lunch-time we will sail to the entrance of the caldera where our second visitor's site is located: Prince Philip's Steps. Here we can enjoy another inflatable dinghy-ride and another spectacular guided nature walk (Moderate level; about 3km / 2 miles). Heading back to Santiago tonight, we will navigate about 6 hours again, and lift the anchor after dinner.

AM: Darwin Bay (Genovesa)

Inside the submerged caldera of Genovesa lies Darwin Bay, with a diameter of more than 1.5 km / 1 mile and almost 200m / 650 ft. deep. Confusingly the beach deep inside the caldera has been called Darwin Bay as well... This quiet site is the



Galapagos in miniature! The small-scale area will never cease to surprise you as you find yourself walking along a coral sand beach, crossing barren lava formations and creeks, passing tidal pools, shrubs and further ahead following the top of some cliffs. In this extremely varied and peaceful ambience, every single species has occupied its own ecological niche (or preferred habitat) without disturbing others.

Whimbrels and *wandering tattlers* forage actively along the surf, next to resting *Galapagos sea lions*. *Herons* wait motionlessly at the tidal pools and creeks behind the *saltbushes*. Impressive *frigate birds* (both species, as on North Seymour and Pitt Point) and *red-footed boobies* nest in the *mangroves*, where you can also spot vocalists such as the *yellow warbler*, *Darwin's finches* and the *Galapagos mockingbird* (although this island is similar to Española, it is relatively poor in songbird species). What's unique is that two subpopulations of the same species of *large cactus finch* sing differently to each other.

Tropicbirds, *Nazca boobies*, *storm petrels*, endemic *lava-* and *swallow-tailed gulls* among others soar along the cliffs. If you have already seen marine iguanas elsewhere, the Genovesa species might not look too impressive. But consider that these are virtually the only reptiles that succeeding in reaching and surviving on this remote, upstream island, and have become endemic.

PM: Prince Philip's Steps (Genovesa)

Genovesa has a royal touch. And that's not only because of its former English name Tower (after the Royal Palace in London). The often used English name of the visitor's site El Barranco commemorates the 1964 visit of the Duke of Edinburgh, a Galapagos lover for many years and patron of the Charles Darwin Foundation. In his footsteps (and in those of Prince Charles) you will be able to admire one of the Galapagos' favourite birding spots with the largest breeding colonies of *Nazca* and *red-footed boobies*.



Before landing you will take an inflatable dinghy-ride along the eastern arm of the caldera. On approach, the massive 25m / 80 ft. high walls become overwhelming, and will give you a better impression of the dimensions of this crater. Sometimes a *Galapagos fur seal* will be resting on one of the ledges at the base. You will see seabirds, although the real spectacle takes place on top and on the outside of the rim, which provide better perching and nesting places.

You therefore have to hike and overcome the steep stairs from the landing dock to a bush of *palo santo* shrubs on top. Tropical dry forest vegetation appears dead during most months of the year, but just drops its leaves to prevent drying out by evaporation. It's a very threatened ecosystem. *Red-footed boobies* with different plumages gratefully use these scarce nesting-places; unlike their relatives, 'red feet' don't nest on the rocky ground.

Upon arriving at the seaside of the rim, the bushes open up and you can enjoy panoramic views, a strong sea breeze and the amazing flying skills of countless seabirds. Following the exposed seaside rim you will first pass the *Nazca boobies* and finally reach the extensive *storm petrel* nesting places, where you might be lucky to see how the well-camouflaged *short-eared owl* hunts for them on foot!

Day 4 – Wednesday

The wild romantic islet of Bartolomé is located just south of the equator, and close to the eastern coast of Santiago. This is the north-western corner of the archipelago, where volcanoes are still active. Today is largely dedicated to volcanism and spectacular geologic ‘moonscapes’, but you will also have the opportunities to observe *Galapagos penguins* again, and to snorkel in a warm, shallow bath full of colourful reef fish. Bartolomé and Sullivan Bay are incomparable to any other visitor’s site. The programmed excursions are extremely rich in contrast and promise to become an unforgettable experience.

Programme

In the early morning, we will enjoy a charming inflatable dinghy-ride along the barren shoreline of this volcanic islet. After breakfast, before it gets too hot, you will follow the steep stairs of the Summit Trail to the top, rewarded by spectacular and panoramic views, hopefully illuminated by the golden, early morning sun (Moderate level; about 800m / 0.5 miles with 114m / 364 ft. altitude difference). Next it’s time for a refreshing swim, snorkelling at the foot of Pinnacle Rock, or just walking around or relaxing on the beach.

After 15 minutes of navigation you can enjoy our delicious lunch buffet again. Bartolomé is right in front of another fascinating place: Sullivan Bay. You will land on the black lava flow for an impressive moonwalk, whilst you will learn more about the distinct forms of volcanism (Easy level; ca. 1.5km / 1 miles). A hot afternoon will be concluded again with another opportunity to explore underwater life.

Before dinner you can enjoy a farewell cocktail with the crew and your fellow passengers. By that time we are already on our way to Puerto Ayora (Santa Cruz), which we will reach before midnight. While floating in the harbour you can enjoy a quiet sleep during your last night on-board.

Additional options scuba-diving: Bartolome or Cousin Rocks (both advanced)

AM: Bartolomé

The National Park authorities are not exaggerating when they call Bartolomé the ‘flagship site of the Galapagos Islands’. Although tiny (just 1.2 km² / 0.46 sq. mi) and lifeless at first sight, this young islet offers you some of the best panoramas and wildest landscapes in the entire archipelago. Surprisingly these warm equatorial waters with coral reefs are even one of the best places in the archipelago to encounter endangered *Galapagos penguins*!



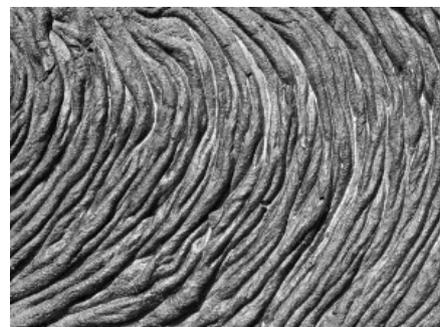
Galapagos’ landmark ‘Pinnacle Rock’ towers prominently over an isthmus with paradisiacal sand beaches on each side, and emerald-coloured bays. Underwater, a second, completely distinctive world opens up to you. The warm, clear and shallow waters are ideal for snorkelling between *surgeon fishes*, harmless *white tip reef sharks* and *Pacific green turtles*. If you are lucky you can even catch a glimpse of fishing *Galapagos penguins*.

To enjoy the postcard view of the idyllic ‘Pinnacle Bay’ you have to cross a third, dramatic type of scenery, climbing the stairs to the viewpoint on top of the island (114 m / 375 ft). During this

geologically and botanically interesting climb, you will find yourself in the middle of several very close spatter cones, craters, and lightweight lava droplets, which were spewed out by spectacular fountains and cooled and solidified in the air. Bartolomé is among the youngest of the islands, and on a geological scale just recently born out of fire. The Summit Trail is ideal to witness how scanty pioneer vegetation such as lava cactus is struggling to cover the lunar-like volcanic landscape of majorly virgin, uneroded lava fields.

PM: Sullivan Bay

Sullivan Bay is incomparable to any other visitor's site; the miraculous bas-reliefs you will observe in the crust of the lava flow are unique to the Galapagos and Hawaii. Those who are interested in geology and volcanology should definitely not miss the opportunity to witness earth formation in process, although it is unlikely that you will notice real fireworks and lava fountains on the spot. The power of volcanic activity will impress you forever. Setting foot at the Sullivan lava stream is like landing on the moon.



The desolate, stretched-out fields seem mostly lifeless, but this doesn't mean that there is nothing to see. Quite the contrary! This can be proved by its popularity amongst photographers, especially those who have a good eye for detail and love close-ups.

And there is even some life! *Pacific green turtles* sometimes use the tiny white sand beach to lay their eggs, and you might also spot a strayed *heron*, *oystercatcher*, or some *crabs*. Behind the beach there is sparse pioneer vegetation such as *lava cacti* and *carpetweed*. If you're lucky you will encounter a *lava lizard*, surprising locusts or the small snake-species *Galapagos racer* hunting for them (or for *turtle* hatchlings on the beach).

The barely eroded flow seems to have been solidified for a short time, and suggests that you are just able to set foot on it. The winding and rippled pahoehoe rope-lava still contains intriguing traces, which tell flaming stories about vaporised leatherleaf trees and miniature cones of volcanic glass. The surface may have cooled down, but the baking sun completes the sensation of heat.

Distinctive tuff cones pockmark the new-formed lunatic landscape. Their rusty, oxidised colours and the vegetation reveal that these cones are from an older generation, and have a very different geological history. Originally these were volcano islets on their own, but have become part of Santiago when a hot flood of ooze filled up large parts of Sullivan Bay during the last eruption of 1897, which in fact is the black crust you walk on. For the time being only the opposite islet of Bartolomé escaped from incorporation. In a certain way the distinctive cones still can be considered as islands, though no longer surrounded by sea, but by wide infertile lava fields.

Day 5 – Thursday

Programme

After an early breakfast it's time to leave the yacht and say goodbye.

Our inflatable dinghy brings you to the harbour of Puerto Ayora, from where we will travel by road to the highlands for our last excursion. In the agricultural zone you can see *Galapagos giant tortoises* in

the wild. We will then accompany you and your luggage to the airport, where you can check-in and return to Guayaquil or Quito.

AM: Highlands (Santa Cruz)

Because wild *Galapagos giant tortoises* don't stop at official National Park boundaries, dozens of them also roam and even mate on the adjacent woodlands in the populated agricultural zone of Santa Cruz. Thanks to the semi-open pastures and scalesia-woodlands, and their concentration around muddy pools, these farmlands are the best place for a quick visit. Armed with a rain poncho and (provided) rubber boots you will get a good chance to approach wild *Galapagos giant tortoises* within just a few metres.



Most of their long lives is spent slowly and silently, except for a warning hiss, or loud screams during mating, which you can hear from afar in the first half of the year. Subsequently, females leave the highlands and descend all the way down to the beaches to dig holes and lay their eggs. It is estimated that in 2015 about 32.000 tortoises lives in the wild in all the islands, mostly in restricted locations on Isabela.

AM: Transfer to Baltra airport

Assisted by the guide and some crew-members, the inflatable dinghy will bring you and your luggage to Baltra, where we take the airport shuttle. Your guide will accompany you to the check-in counter in the departure hall.



You will return home not only with stunning photos, but also unforgettable lifelong memories!