

Day 1 - Sunday

AM - Flight to Baltra Airport (GPS)

Upon arrival at Baltra Airport, you will pass through an airport inspection point to insure that no foreign plants or animals are introduced to the islands, as well as to pay the park entrance fee of \$100 (unless it has been prepaid). A guide will meet you, help you collect your luggage, and escort you on a short bus ride to the harbor.

PM - Dragon Hill (Santa Cruz)

The visitor site at Dragon Hill has been open for visits on 1993. This site is located in northwestern Santa Cruz Island and consists of a trail that lead to a hyper-saline lagoon behind the beach, frequented by flamingos, pintail ducks and other species of birds.

This site has been re populated with land iguanas from Seymour, Isabela and Santa Cruz islands. There is a short walk to the Hill, which offers a beautiful view of the bay.

Day 2 - Monday

AM - Rabida

Rábida Island is unique because the red color of the rocks and sand. The volcanic material in this island is very porous and external factors as rain, salt water and sea breeze have acted as an oxidizing agent. A short walk along a trail lead us to a coastal lagoon behind the beach permits the observation of land birds as finches, doves, yellow warblers and mocking birds. At the lagoon there is a colony of flamingos.

PM - Chinese Hat

Chinese Hat is a 52m/170ft high volcanic cone, forming another islet right off the rocky coast of Santiago, where a small colony of Galapagos penguins has settled. Approaching Chinese Hat from the north, you will certainly agree with its name. 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.

But Chinese Hat does not appear to be any more inhospitable than the almost virgin Bartolomé and lunatic Sullivan Bay. You will arrive just in time to witness how this barren islet gets colonised by pioneer species and begins to sprout! 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, which all together create 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.



Chinese Hat Islet

Day 3 - Tuesday

AM - Prince Phillip's Steps

Before landing you will take a dinghy-ride along the eastern arm of the caldera. On approach, the 25m/80ft 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 shaded ledges.

Although there are also seabirds, the real spectacle will take place on top and on the outside of the rim, which provide better perching and nesting places.

You will 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 threatened ecosystem. Red-footed boobies with different plumages gratefully use these scarce nesting-places; different to their blue-footed relatives 'red feet' don't nest on the rocky ground.

At the seaside of the rim, the bushes open up and you can enjoy wide views, a strong sea breeze and the amazing flying skills of countless seabirds. Following the exposed rim you will first pass a colony of Nazca boobies and

finally reach the extensive storm petrel nesting places, where you might be lucky enough to spot how the well-camouflaged short-eared owl hunts for them on foot!

AM - Darwin Bay (Genovesa)

Genovesa's horseshoe shaped wall is proof that we have anchored inside the partly collapsed and submerged caldera of a submarine volcano! The visitor's site named Darwin Bay is located at the very rear. This compact site shows the extremely varied coastal ecosystems of the Galapagos in miniature.

The trail starts from the coral sand beach and subsequently passes a zone with saltbushes and mangroves, then crosses tidal creeks and barren lava formations, dry shrub lands, and finally turns on the ridge of some cliffs.



In this extremely varied and peaceful ambience, every single species has occupied its own ecological niche (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.

Impressive frigatebirds (both great and magnificent species) and red-footed boobies nest in the mangroves, where you can also hear vocalists such as yellow warblers, Darwin's finches and Galapagos mockingbirds. What's unique is that two subpopulations of the same species large cactus finch differ in their singing.

Tropicbirds, Nazca boobies, storm petrels, endemic lava- and swallow-tailed gulls soar along the cliffs. When you have already seen marine iguanas elsewhere, the small Genovesa species might not look too impressive, but consider that these are virtually the only reptiles that succeeded to reach and survive on this remote, upstream island (and have become endemic to this island).

Day 4 - Wednesday

AM - Bartolomé

The wild romantic volcano islet of Bartolomé is among the youngest of the islands, and on a geological scale just recently born out of fire. Although tiny (only 120ha/300ac) and at first sight lifeless, Bartolomé offers some of the wildest landscapes and best panoramas in the entire archipelago. To enjoy the postcard view of the idyllic 'Pinnacle Bay' you have to climb the stairs to the viewpoint on top of the island (114m/375ft). Suddenly enter a dramatic world of threatening (though extinguished) nearby spatter cones, craters, and lightweight lava droplets that have been spewed out by fiery fountains. The Summit Trail is also ideal for witnessing how scanty pioneer vegetation such as lava cactus struggles to take root in the bare virgin lava fields.

From the summit you will suddenly face a second, paradisiacal world; Galapagos' landmark 'Pinnacle Rock' towers prominently over an isthmus with crescent sand beaches on each side, and dunes with evergreen mangrove bushes in-between.

Underwater, a third, completely distinctive world opens up to you, resembling a tropical aquarium. Its shallow, clear and warm waters are ideal for snorkelling between coral-grinding parrot fish, shoals of surgeonfish, harmless whitetip reef sharks and Pacific green turtles. If you are lucky you might even spot fishing Galapagos penguins.

PM - Sullivan Bay (Santiago)

Santiago, also called James Island, is located in the western-central part of the Galapagos archipelago. It is the fourth largest island in the archipelago (following Isabela, Fernandina and Santa Cruz). Along with some of the large western volcanoes of Isabela and Fernandina, Santiago is also volcanically active, with many young flows and cones to be seen, particularly along the southern, western, and eastern coasts. These can even be seen from the summit of Darwin Volcano and from space. A number of large eruptions have been reported over the last 2 centuries. Santiago actually consists of two coalesced volcanoes: a typical shield volcano on the northwest end and a low, linear fissure volcano on the southeast end.

Day 5 - Thursday

AM - Highlands (Santa Cruz)

The road to the highlands leaves from Bellavista, a small village located a 15-minute drive from Puerto Ayora, and passes through the agricultural zone, near the National Park boundary, the Miconia Zone, and then goes to the Fern and Sedge zone. With clear weather, this area boasts beautiful scenes of rolling hills and extinct volcanic cones covered with grass and lush greenery all year round. Here you will visit the Twin Craters, which are two pit craters, as well as a local ranch where we can observe the giant tortoise of Santa Cruz Island in its natural habitat.

Transfer out to Baltra Airport (GPS)

Assisted by the naturalist guide and some crewmembers, the dinghy will bring you and your luggage to Baltra Airport, where we will take the shuttle back to the airport.



Bartolome