



ITINERARY A5 (2017)

5 DAYS / 4 NIGHTS

Thursday to Monday

(every 14 days)



Our 4-night western route visits some of the most remote corners of the Galapagos. This adventurous route contains longer nightly navigation stretches, but our Sailing Catamaran Nemo I is faster than average, and you will also have two relatively quiet floating nights.

After an introduction at Charles Darwin Research Centre (*Galapagos giant tortoise* breeding centre) you will navigate around by far the largest island, Isabela, and pass by pristine Fernandina, which are both just recently born out of fire. On its way back Nemo I will anchor at Santiago's James Bay (*fur seal* grottos and great snorkelling opportunities) and sail around the *seabird* laden volcano islet of Daphne Major.

Though less frequented than popular central and south-eastern islands, the desolate west is truly exceptional. Become witness to some bizarre miracles of evolution, such as *flightless cormorants*,

huge *marine iguanas* and *Galapagos penguins* close to the equator. Discover how pioneer species conquer barren lava fields and create habitats for new colonist species. En route you will have chances to see emblematic and endemic *Galapagos land iguanas*, *American flamingos* and exciting *whale* watching!

Important notes:

- Itinerary is subject to change in case of force majeure caused by exceptional and natural circumstances.
 - Approximate departure and navigation times are just indicative and depend on the sea conditions and decisions of the captain.
 - Although the Galapagos seldom require you to seek out wildlife, observation of specific species can never be guaranteed.
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Day 1 – Thursday

Upon arrival at Baltra, your tour will start on the adjacent main island of Santa Cruz, where you will cross the surprisingly lush highlands by bus and reach its cosy harbour town, Puerto Ayora. A visit to the Charles Darwin Research Station and the famous *Galapagos giant tortoise* breeding centre is an interesting introduction to this unique archipelago.

Programme:

AM: This morning you will fly from Quito or Guayaquil to Baltra Airport.

PM: After being welcomed aboard S/C Nemo I, check-in, lunch, and the safety-drill you will visit the Charles Darwin Research Station as an introduction to the Galapagos and get some free time to stroll through the cosy town of Puerto Ayora.

Overnight navigation: Before dinner your naturalist guide will give the first daily briefing, and the captain and his crew will introduce themselves and share a welcome toast. The anchor will be lifted early for this route's longest navigation to Moreno Point on Isabela, about 12 hours in a southwestern direction.

AM: Arrival at Baltra Airport

At Baltra Airport you have to pay your Galapagos National Park entrance fee and your luggage will be inspected. See [Getting there](#) for flight and arrival information.

In front of the arrival hall you will meet your naturalist guide and fellow passengers, and the airport shuttle will transfer you to the ferry across the Itabaca Channel. On Santa Cruz you continue by bus through the lush highlands to the harbour of Puerto Ayora. Our inflatable dinghies ('zodiacs') take you the last stretch to the yacht.

PM: Charles Darwin Research Station (Santa Cruz)

The Charles Darwin Research Station (CDRS) and the headquarters of the Galapagos National Park Service share the same location on the outskirts of Puerto Ayora. From here biological research and indispensable conservation management of this unique archipelago are directed. The complex houses a several 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*; even after the death of its world-famous resident,

emphatically called 'Lonesome George' († June 2012; the last known individual of the *Pinta subspecies*, who sadly failed to reproduce offspring). Most remaining adult *giant tortoises* in the corals are former pets and many of them are accustomed to human company.

Day 2 – Friday

In the next few days SC Nemo I will navigate clockwise around Isabela, by far the largest island on the archipelago. Its larger living space seems to mean that evolution is hunting for records over here (although some are disputed). Explore some of the most remote visitor's sites on the Galapagos, offshore rocks with a small colony of *Galapagos penguins*, and penetrate Galapagos' highest mangle in the sheltered creeks of the estuary. Perceive how *pioneer vegetation* progressively converts barren lava fields into lush oases and evergreen *mangle* forests, and is creating new habitats for specific species.

Thanks to major upwellings out off the deep sea (Cromwell Current) the nutrient-rich west coast of Isabela is a magnet to all kinds of marine and birdlife. Bolivar Channel (between Isabela and Fernandina) can be great for *whale* watching.

Programme:

AM: After breakfast we will take an inflatable dinghy-ride along the shoreline, followed by a 'dry landing' (with footwear) and a guided hike that crosses the crumbling, pitch black lava fields of Moreno Point (moderate level; about 2km/1.25mi). After a snack, snorkelling is scheduled.

PM: At noon we will sail for 2 hours to Elizabeth Bay. Meanwhile you can enjoy lunch and a siesta. On arrival a long dinghy-ride is scheduled to both the offshore rocks and sheltered mangles.

Navigation: Before dinner we will continue to Espinoza Point (Fernandina, about 4hrs), while actively looking for *whales*. You will be able to enjoy a relatively quiet floating night.

AM: Moreno Point (Isabela)

Moreno Point tells the continuing story of the famous lunatic lava fields of Sullivan Bay (actually not visited by Catamaran Nemo). This once lifeless lava field becomes dotted with tidal pools and filtration lagoons since parts of the crust have broken and fallen into the undermining lava tunnels.

Pioneer life takes advantage; finally the *lava cacti* get company of two more species of *cacti*, from which the *candelabras* can grow up to 7m/23ft tall, and dominate the rest of the shrubby vegetation. Fringes of *reed*, *sea grass* and *mangrove bushes* transform the picturesque lagoons in lush oases. Your pictures get the perfect finishing touch when bright *American flamingos* forage in the largest lagoon as well. The fresh promising pioneer vegetation seems on the winning hand; just until Sierra Negra volcano spits a new layering cover, and the story starts all over again.

Tidal pools form natural traps and attract scavengers and hunters, such as bright orange *sally lightfoot crabs*, *oystercatchers* and *herons*. During a dinghy-ride along the jagged shoreline, you can spot *marine iguanas* that wait patiently for their turn at lowest tide to graze weeds on the seabed, and a breeding colony of *brown pelicans* in the mangroves.

PM: Marielas Islets & Elizabeth Bay (Isabela)

Although there is no landing point, Elizabeth Bay offers two in one! A prolonged ride by inflatable dinghy combines the Marielas Islets in the mouth of the bay, with the mangles in its innermost heart.

The Marielas islets are an excellent place to spot *marine iguanas* and small family groups of *Galapagos penguins* in the front row of the cliffs. The endangered *Galapagos penguin* is the rarest *penguin* species worldwide (just some 1500 birds over all archipelago; please don't expect vast colonies like in Antarctic regions). Lofty *palo santo*-trees on top of the cliffs provide *magnificent frigatebirds* with a lookout to rob returning *blue-footed boobies*.

Next the dinghy will turn landwards and enter the calm estuary. Whilst exploring lagoons and shallow creeks, the outboard engine can be turned off, to enjoy the sounds of nature. *Brown pelicans* are the only *pelicans* in the world that plunge-dive, though more superficial than the spectacular rocket-like diving *blue-footed boobies*. *Lava herons* and *great blue herons* prefer to wait patiently for what comes along. *Pacific green turtles* swim gracefully around, popping up their heads for breathing (mating season: December-January). You may also encounter *spotted eagle rays* or *sharks*, looking for protected inlets to give birth and leave their young alone. This highest mangrove forest of Galapagos consists of *red mangroves* (with their characteristic prop roots) as well as *black, white* and *button mangroves*.

Day 3 – Saturday

Without any doubt Espinoza Point belongs to the more exclusive sites of the Galapagos National Park. Fernandina harbours one of the world's most virgin, untouched ecosystems. Today you will become an eyewitness of evolution, which is happening right in front of you! Ponder again about bizarre creatures such as the *flightless cormorant, marine iguana* and *Galapagos penguin*.

Before leaving the remote west, Isabela will present you with the latest geological curiosity and the largest *Galapagos land* and *marine iguanas*. While crossing the Bolivar Channel to Urbina Bay, you will have opportunities for great *whale* watching again!

Programme:

AM: After breakfast and a dry landing, the guided morning walk (easy/moderate level; about 2km/1.25 mi) runs over the lava tongue of Espinoza Point. After a snack we will bring you to today's snorkelling site.

PM: While having lunch we will cross the Bolivar Channel for the last time, back to Isabela's west coast. At the geologically interesting site of Urbina Bay you will take a second guided walk, and you can snorkel as well.

Overnight navigation: Before dinner we will start our 10 hour's navigation around the north cape of Isabela to Santiago (crossing the equator twice).

AM: Espinoza Point (Fernandina)

Espinoza Point is Fernandina's only terrestrial visitor's site, and one of the few locations where you will find some bizarre outgrowths of natural selection. The figurehead is the emblematic *flightless cormorant* which lives exclusively in the remote west of the Galapagos, and could be considered as the 'holy grail of evolution'. The *cormorant* had not to fear terrestrial enemies and lets you approach very closely. The next generations gradually lost their flying capabilities to become excellent divers. Together with its neighbour, the *Galapagos penguin*, these are two of the rarest and most vulnerable bird species in the world, with less than 2000 individuals each.

Besides the endemic wildlife, you will also love the almost unworldly views with the dominating cone of Volcán La Cumbre (= the summit) 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. The black rocks are not yet covered by more vegetation than lava cacti and mangroves, but are teeming with hundreds of dragon-like *marine iguanas* that breed and conglomerate in larger groups than on any other island.

PM: Urbina Bay (Isabela)

Urbina Bay presents you with Isabela's latest geological curiosity. In 1954 tectonic forces lifted the former seabed several metres above sea level and formed the present coastal plain. The tilted seabed ran dry at once and 6km/3.75mi of coastline was shifted outward. Pretty far inland you can find marine remnants, such as fish bones, shells, scales from *lobsters*, *urchins* and *corals*.

Far behind you will reach the original coastline and the typical *palo santo*-bush from the arid zone. This very wide beach provides ample nesting places for *iguanas*, *turtles* and even for *Galapagos giant tortoises* that descend all the way down from Alcedo volcano in the wet season. The *marine* and *land iguanas* of Urbina Bay are the largest of the Galapagos.

Day 4 – Sunday

Whilst on the Galapagos, Charles Darwin spent most of his time at James Bay (Santiago), while HMS Beagle continued mapping the archipelago. A highlight of this pearl necklace of visitor's sites are the outstanding *fur seal* grottos on the beautiful sculptured coastline of Puerto Egas, together with other coastal landscapes that could well be exotic film sets; not to forget Buccaneer's Cove crystal clear snorkelling waters.

Programme:

AM: After breakfast you will take a guided walk along the coastline (easy level) to the *fur seal* grottos. Back on-board we will provide you with a snack before snorkelling.

PM: At lunchtime we will navigate 12km/7 mi/45 min north to Espumilla Beach. After a wet landing (bare feet) at the beach, a guided walk leads uphill and inland (easy level; about 2km/1.25 mi). Afterwards you can take a dinghy-ride (or alternatively sea kayaking) along the coastline.

Overnight navigation: Before dinner SC Nemo I will continue along the north coast of Santiago to Daphne Major, where we will arrive after about 4 hrs for a relatively quiet floating night sleep.

AM: Puerto Egas (Santiago)

Dominated by Sugarloaf Hill (395m/1300ft) and named after a former salt mine (1960s), Puerto Egas is the southernmost visitor's site along James Bay. 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 right below a spectacular rock arch at the end of the beach a colony of *Galapagos fur seals* occupies the shade, sheltering from the equatorial sun. Unlike more common *Galapagos sea lions* this smaller species of seal is no beach lover at all, due to their adorable, but insulating coats. This refuge is the very best place to see these endemic, shy and once heavily hunted marine mammals.

Particularly at low tide Puerto Egas teems with an extremely varied intertidal life. You will notice how *marine iguanas* just leave, return cold or warm-up after grazing weeds on the seabed at lowest tide. Ossified *night herons* and *lava herons* keep an eye on the tidal pools that are refilled every flood

again with small fish, *octopuses*, *star fish*, *snails*, *urchins*, *shells*, *green algae* and many other snacks. Noisy *oystercatchers*, *turnstones*, *plovers* and *whimbrels* inspect these pools zealously. Hundreds of *sally lightfoot crabs* seem even brighter orange against the pitch-black rocks (immature are dark-coloured).

PM: Espumilla Beach & Buccaneer Cove (Santiago)

Espumilla 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. About two months later (roughly from February to August) the eggs hatch all at the same time. Sadly the most vulnerable hatchlings never will reach the sea, and form a banquet for predators such as *herons*, *frigatebirds*, *mockingbirds* and *ghost crabs*.

The beach ridge hides a mangle with two picturesque lagoons on the backside. A 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...

As often happens in the Galapagos, different vegetation zones are very close by, providing great scenic contrasts. Upon climbing a hill you will be rewarded with a beautiful overview of the transitions from sea into beach into *mangrove* into dry *palo santo* forest.

At the nearby Buccaneer Cove we have a great snorkelling opportunity.

Day 5 – Monday

On your last morning in the Galapagos you can feel the ocean breeze in your hair while navigating around the characteristic volcanic islet of Daphne Major. A wide range of seabirds will wave you out!

Programme:

AM: Early morning Sailing Catamaran Nemo I will navigate around the characteristic volcanic islet of Daphne Major. Afterwards you will disembark and fly back from Baltra Airport to Quito or Guayaquil.

AM: Daphne Major

The characteristic offshore tuff cone of Daphne Major looks how a child draws a volcano islet. You might have already got a glimpse of it from your airplane window on arrival. Access to the 120m/400ft high islet is restricted because of its fragility and susceptibility to erosion. On your last morning in the Galapagos you will make a dinghy-ride around. You can spot large flocks of *storm petrels* and other *seabirds*.

This islet forms an almost undisturbed semi-closed ecosystem and is therefore of great scientific interest. Coexisting *Nazca boobies*, *red-billed tropicbirds*, *magnificent frigatebirds*, *blue-footed boobies* and 8 other breeding species have nicely distributed different sections of the cone, according to their needs and ecological niches. The caldera contains two craters, both completely white-plastered by the increments of *blue-footed boobies*, which have founded a very large breeding colony in this sheltered place. There is a colony of *Galapagos sea lions* on the only small beach. This islet has also been the location for an important multi-decade study of *Darwin's finches*. This concluded that population fluctuates strongly and *finches* that survived in dryer years were mainly the ones with larger beaks; results that strongly supported Darwin's theory of natural selection and evolution.

AM: Transfer to Baltra airport

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

You will return home with stunning pictures and unforgettable lifelong memories!