

on the *Galapagos land iguanas* that crawl below bizarre *giant prickly pear cacti*. En route you can also observe endemic *marine iguanas*, the 'dragons of Galapagos' and another miracle of evolution. You will also learn more about the successful captured breeding programmes of the emblematic *giant Galapagos tortoises*. An adventurous dinghy ride is scheduled in the thriving cradle and bird-rich mangrove inlet.

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 look for wildlife, observation of specific species can never be guaranteed.
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Day 1 – Friday

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. There is also free time to relax in the cosy Puerto Ayora.

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 you will get some free time to stroll through the cosy town of Puerto Ayora.

Overnight navigation: Shortly before midnight the anchor will be lifted for this route's longest navigation to easternmost Pitt Point, about 8 hours in an eastern direction.

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. 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 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, '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 – Saturday

The longest nocturnal passage of this route will bring you to Pitt Point, the extreme eastern cape of San Cristóbal (and of the entire archipelago). On top of these eroded cliffs you can find *blue-footed*, *red-footed* and *Nazca boobies* breeding together, and also *frigate birds* with bright red, balloon-sized pouches in the mating season! You will land in a bachelor's colony of *Galapagos sea lions*, and stroll along a cute nursery colony at the scenic beach below Witch Hill in the afternoon.

Programme:

AM: After breakfast you will make a wet landing at Pitt Point, from where you will hike to the clifftop seabird colonies (and back). After that snorkelling is scheduled.

PM: During lunch we will navigate along the shore of San Cristóbal to Witch Hill, where various activities can be undertaken including a dinghy-ride, sea kayaking, snorkelling and a beach stroll.

Overnight navigation: This evening we will sail to Santa Fe (4 hrs west), where you can enjoy a comfortable night rest in a sheltered bay.

AM: Pitt Point (San Cristóbal)

Two wind sculptured tuff cones at Pitt Point constitute the easternmost point of San Cristóbal, and thus of the archipelago as well. These cliffs were the first sight of land when HMS Beagle and Charles Darwin arrived on September 15th 1835. On the small green sand beach, you will be welcomed by a cacophony of barking *Galapagos sea lions*. This is a bachelor colony, where males usually recuperate from and prepare themselves for fighting and mating.

From the *saltbush* and spiny shrubs behind the beach, a trail leads up to an area of tropical dry forest vegetation - most of the year leafless *palo santo* trees, *yellow cordia* shrubs, tiny *prickly pear cacti* and *carpetweed* - that turns red in the dry season. After the pretty steep climb through a gully to the clifftop, you can wander around the only colony on the Galapagos that is home to all three species of booby: *blue-footed*, *red-footed* and *Nazca booby*; as well as both species of *frigatebird* (*great* and *magnificent*), famous because of their scarlet balloon-sized pouches during mating season. *Frigatebirds* prefer to attack returning *boobies* and conduct aerial battles instead of fishing for themselves themselves and getting wet.

PM: Witch Hill (San Cristóbal)

To scout out the dangerous reefs, in 1835 HMS Beagle's Captain FitzRoy climbed to the top of the obvious tuff-cone that overlooks this scenic bay. Nowadays it is called Witch Hill and is no longer the main attraction of this site, but part of its romantic coastal panorama. Let your eyes travel from the volcanic cone, over the turquoise bay to the razor-sharp contours of Kicker Rock on the horizon, one of the photogenic landmarks of the Galapagos.

You can walk about 1km/0.6mi along the romantic, crescent-shaped beach and feel the soft and powdery white coral sand on your feet (it is actually pulverised by *parrot fish*, which destruct living coral reefs). Enjoy the *Galapagos sea lion* rookery with its cute babies, or study the rich intertidal and birdlife (mainly *brown pelicans*, *blue-footed boobies* and *swallow-tailed gulls*). Behind the beach and the narrow stretch of dunes, there is a dark lava tongue with several saline lakes that used to be a local salt mine (necessary for the conservation of fish). Here you can find some *coastal* and *wading birds* such as the *great blue heron*.

Day 3 – Sunday

Heading back towards the heart of the archipelago you will visit extraordinary Santa Fe and not to be missed South Plaza which is one of the most popular sites. Below the bizarre *giant prickly pear cacti* you will encounter characteristic land iguanas and other endemic creatures that are unique to this island. Although these ‘Jurassic islets’ are different to every other site in the National Park, at the same time these are so typically Galapagos with their sharp contrasts, amazing diversity and stunning concentration of wildlife. While sailing along Santa Cruz we will look out for *whales*.

Programme:

AM: After breakfast you will take a guided walk from the beach of Santa Fe (wet landing). Your guide will decide whether to follow the easy shorter circuit, or a strenuous longer hike inland (moderate level; about 3km/2mi). Don't forget to retain your energy for excellent swimming or snorkelling opportunities afterwards in the crystal-clear azure waters of Barrington Bay.

PM: Around lunchtime we will proceed to South Plaza (about 2 hrs northwest), possibly escorted by *bottle nose dolphins*. You will enjoy an unforgettable guided walk on this ‘Jurassic islet’ (easy level; about 1.25 km/0.75 mi; avoidable depths on the cliff-edge).

Navigation: While navigating to Black Turtle Cove (2 hrs, before dinner and sunset) we will have some great *whale* watching opportunities. After dinner you can enjoy a relatively quiet floating sleep.

Additional options scuba-diving: Gordon Rocks (Expert/Advanced) or Santa Fe (All levels).

AM: Barrington Bay (Santa Fe)

Practically every animal on Santa Fe is unique; endemic to the Galapagos, or even to this island alone and extremely vulnerable! This extraordinary island is a remnant of probably the most ancient volcano on the Galapagos, and gave evolution enough time and isolation to create its wonders.

Your experience starts before even anchoring, when the contours of its bizarre *giant prickly pear cactus (opuntia)* forests become distinguishable. These largest *cacti* of the islands have extremely thick trunks indeed, and can grow over 10m/33ft tall! You will land right in the middle of a *Galapagos sea lion* colony on the beach. From their outlooks at the beach ridge, surprisingly fearless *Galapagos hawks* are ready to snatch away a *lava lizard*; not worrying that even these are unique...

Almost every visitor to Santa Fe becomes eager to catch a glimpse of the rare *Barrington land iguana*, but this pale endemic version is not as easy to spot as its modelling counterparts on South Plaza. Sometimes this one requires an adventurous quest (rather untypical on the Galapagos); other times it surprises you by waiting next to the trail. Whether you spot it or not, you will keep going from one surprise to the next.

While snorkelling in the azure coloured Barrington Bay between tropical *reef fish*, a curious *Galapagos sea lion* might be willing to play with you!

PM: South Plaza

The southern part of both Plaza islets is the best place to encounter endemic *Galapagos land iguanas*. Watch your step and don't stumble over one of them whilst distracted by the equally bizarre *giant prickly pear cactus*-trees! These *iguanas* are not only ugly as Darwin pronounced, but also very patient and photogenic models with strikingly saffron colours. Overpopulation and severe food competition have affected their smaller size. It is incredible to see how *cactus* spines don't harm them while chewing pads, flowers and fruits. Look out as well for some unique hybrids between a male *marine iguana* and a female *land iguana*.

Arriving at the upper rim, you get to know the other, wild and windy face of South Plaza that provides a complete different habitat. About 20m/75ft downwards, impressively droning waves splash against the foot of massive cliffs. Being talented rock climbers, sun basking *marine iguanas* have escaped the cool shadows of the wall. Clouds of *petrels*, *storm petrels*, *shearwaters* and *brown noddies* make spectacular flights and sometimes appear to walk on the waves. Take your binoculars and don't miss the *red-billed tropicbird* with its graceful long tail and spectacular mating fights. These cliffs are also a nesting place for the endemic *swallow-tailed gull*, the most beautiful *gull* in the world. Its neatly lined eyes are perfectly adapted for its exceptional nightly fishing habits.

Day 4 – Monday

Even at the very end of your cruise the Galapagos keeps surprising. On this last morning you will explore the evergreen mangle forest of Black turtle cove, and feel for a while as if you are in the Amazon rainforest instead of at the north coast of Santa Cruz. These lagoons and adventurous creeks are teeming with marine and birdlife, and (seasonally) with mating *turtles* and *sharks*.

Programme:

AM: Shortly after your wake-up call and a snack you will leave for this farewell dinghy-ride. After breakfast it's time to say goodbye, leave the yacht and continue to the airport (unless you have booked an extension on the [A-route](#)).

AM: Black Turtle Cove (Santa Cruz)

The ancient mangle at Black Turtle Cove has grown out to forest proportions and forms the backdrop for a distinct adventure. You might even feel as if you're in the Amazon rainforest instead of close to sea; though on a closer look vegetation mainly exists of *red mangroves* with characteristic aerial roots that let them survive in salty and brackish water. We will explore the calm emerald lagoon by inflatable dinghy and enter the surrounding shallow creeks of these salt-water marshes. The outboard engine is sometimes turned off, so that you can enjoy the ambience at its fullest. You have to keep your eyes peeled when looking around and staring into the crystal-clear waters to observe all the life that is flying and swimming around.

You can spot silently hunting lava herons on the banks and brown pelicans nesting on top of the mangroves. Various species of ray and shark come to this nutritious cradle to give birth; *scalloped hammerhead sharks* come back to the place where they were born and their babies tend to be close to the surface. *Pacific green turtles* (*black turtles* was their former name) visit this cove in their reproduction season (November-January); if you're lucky you can catch them mating at the surface! Afterwards their eggs are deposited on coral sand beaches along this north-western coastline of Santa Cruz.

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!