



ITINERARY B5
5 DAYS / 4 NIGHTS
Monday to Friday
 (every 14 days)



Our 5-day itinerary combines the incredible *shark* canal off the coast of Isabela with the best *flamingo* lagoons of the Galapagos, and spectacular snorkelling around Devil's Crown. The *albatross* and *booby* colonies and marine iguanas on Española promise to be the next highlight! Most elder islands of the south-eastern Galapagos have azure bays and striking beaches of white coral sand, which are a favourite place for large colonies of *sea lions*. The visit to the Charles Darwin Research Station will be a nice conclusion to your cruise.

Walk at a short distance past *blue-footed boobies*, *Nazca boobies* and *waved albatrosses*, whilst they are courtshipping, mating, breeding, nurturing or learning to fly (depending on the season). Española is the sole option for those eager to admire synchronous courtship dances of the only tropical *albatross* in the world.

These almost extinguished volcano islands in the south-west are geologically the oldest, where evolution has had enough time to create various endemic species. Striking coral sand beaches at azure bays are favourite places for large colonies of *Galapagos sea lions*. En route you can also observe *marine iguanas*, *whitetip reef sharks*, *American flamingos* and – if lucky – even *Galapagos penguins*. In the Charles Darwin Research Centre on Santa Cruz you will learn more about the successful captured breeding programmes of the emblematic *giant Galapagos tortoises*.

For many, Devil's Crown is the number one site on the Galapagos for deep water snorkelling, and one of the very highlights of their cruise. Besides that this route also offers numerous possibilities for optional scuba diving.

Day 1 – Monday

Bachas Beach is a pleasant start to your Galapagos visit, without having to navigate a long stretch to get first contact with the unique insular nature. Along this beach (north coast Santa Cruz), which is popular breeding ground for the Pacific green turtle, you will take a relaxed stroll to an aquatic bird-rich saline lagoon.

Programme:

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

PM: After being welcomed aboard Sailing Catamaran Nemo I, check-in, lunch buffet and the safety-drill you will make your first wet landing (bare feet) at Bachas Beach, followed by an easy stroll along the waterline of this coral sand beach. Filled with impressions you will return on-board for dinner.

Navigation: At dinner time we will lift the anchor and sail about 7 hrs – depending on the sea conditions – south-west to Isabela.

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 be transferred to the landing dock by airport shuttle. Our inflatable dinghy brings you the last stretch to the yacht.

PM: Bachas Beach (Santa Cruz)

Strolling along its coastline, blinding white Bachas Beach appears full of intertidal and bird life. But the symmetrical tuff cone-islet of Daphne Major will pull your eyes to the horizon as well. Look out for *Galapagos sea lions*, *marine iguanas*, a *shark* fin or (seasonally) mating *Pacific green turtles* in the surf! Both quiet beaches have become their preferred nesting site on the main island of Santa Cruz. 'Bachas' refers to the 'minefield of nest holes' in the dunes strip; though others argue that it is a 'Spanglish' mispronunciation of 'barks', referring to two rusty landing vessels that were left on the longer second beach in World War II, when the American US Air Force used BALTRA as a strategic base to defend the Panama Canal.

Sparkling orange-coloured and heavy-armed *sally lightfoot crabs* play hide and seek with you when you want to photograph them on the dark basaltic rocks. A brackish lagoon in the dunes houses different species of *wade* and *shore birds*, including *black-necked stilts*, *white-cheeked pintails* (or *Bahama ducks*) and hunting *herons*. Migratory aquatic birds that spend winter in the Galapagos, such as *whimbrels*, also frequent this pond. As soon as the water level drops and the

lagoon becomes saltier, you might even encounter some *American flamingos* tirelessly filtering water to catch *shrimp* and *algae*!

Day 2 – Tuesday

The first overnight crossing will bring you to Puerto Villamil on Isabela. In the next few days Nemo I will navigate clockwise around this island, by far the largest of the archipelago. Its larger living space seems to mean that evolution is hunting for records over here (although some are disputed).

Huge *marine iguanas* crawl over undisturbed rocky islets just outside the harbour, which also contain a unique tidal channel where *whitetip reef sharks* rest. Saline lagoons in the wetlands house the largest insular colony of *American flamingos* and you will visit the botanical garden of another tortoise breeding centre with native species.

Programme:

AM: Before breakfast (we provide a snack) the inflatable dinghies will bring you to the Tintoreras islets for a guided hike to the tidal channel, following a rough volcanic rock trail (easy/moderate level). After breakfast you can experience some great snorkelling.

PM: After lunch you will have free time to enjoy Puerto Villamil and its striking beach. You will then visit the local tortoise breeding centre and the surrounding wetlands.

Overnight navigation: After dinner the anchor is lifted for navigating the southern lobe of Isabela clockwise to its far west coast (about 6 hours).

AM: Whitetip reef shark channel (Isabela/Tintoreras)

Just outside the harbour of Puerto Villamil (Isabela), a group of rocky islets protrude just above sea level. These are remnants of a lava flow that is demolished by the waves. A collapsed lava tube forms a channel that fills-up on high tide, while the entrance is closed at low tide. Marine life gets trapped, including *turtles* and elegant *white-spotted eagle rays* or *golden rays*. In the crystal-clear water of this unique site you can also observe *whitetip reef sharks* (called *tintoreras* in Spanish, which the islets are named after) resting from their nocturnal hunts. This species of *shark* is fairly common in the archipelago, and often spotted on the seabed when snorkelling, but here you can see them dry and comfortably from the bank.

Unlike the beaches of Puerto Villamil, tiny plaques along these black rocks offer undisturbed breeding places for *marine iguanas*. Over here the largest Isabela subspecies (up to 1.5m/5ft tall!) can reproduce successfully and thrive by hundreds. The rocky shoreline with its intertidal life also attracts *sally lightfoot crabs*, *lava herons* and occasional *Galapagos penguins*. *Galapagos sea lions* occupy the sand beach and complete this stereotypical Galapagos image.

PM: Arnaldo Tupiza Tortoise Breeding Centre (Isabela)

In Arnaldo Tupiza Tortoise Breeding Centre you can see hundreds of *giant Galapagos tortoises* of all sizes. 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.

From the almost incredible estimations of 250,000 *giant tortoises* in the 16th century, by the 1970s there were only about 3,000 individuals remaining. One thing becomes clear on your visit: it's hard work to save these queer creatures from extinction by reproduction in captivity and repopulation. The

good news is that these programmes are successful and have already saved several species from extinction so far. By 2015 their number increased to about 32,000 in all the archipelago.

Don't forget to visit the native botanical garden of this breeding centre. It also attracts colourful *songbirds* such as *yellow warblers*, *Darwin's finches*, *Galapagos* and *vermillion flycatchers*. Finally there is no greater counterpart to the cumbersome *tortoises* than the graceful *American flamingos* which frequently filter the saline waters of the adjacent lagoon for *shrimp* and *algae*. They are joined by a handful of species of *aquatic* and *shore birds*, from which some even migrate from Canada and Alaska.

Day 3 – Wednesday

At midnight Sailing Catamaran Nemo I will drop the anchor at the north cape of Floreana (Cormorant Point), which American flamingos use to forage and breed. Floreana offers some of most spectacular snorkelling sites. For many, Devil's Crown is the Galapagos' number one deep water snorkelling site, and one of the very highlights of their cruise. Historical Post Office Bay seems to be located nearly at the end of the world.

Programme:

AM: After breakfast and a wet landing on the greeny beach of Cormorant Point and walk to a powdery coral sand beach on the other side of the peninsula (easy level; about 1.5 km/1 mi). En route you can observe the *American flamingo* lagoon from different viewpoints.

It's then time for fantastic deep-water snorkelling around Devil's Crown (though sometimes stronger currents). If this is not your thing or if you prefer birdwatching, alternatively you can enjoy a dinghy-ride.

PM: Post your holiday greetings in the historical barrel at Post Office Bay, one of three nearby visitor's sites on Floreana's north coast (short displacement, wet landing) and relax.

Overnight navigation: Around midnight the Nemo I will navigate about 5 hours east to Española.

AM: Cormorant Point (Floreana)

The peninsula of Cormorant Point forms the extreme north cape of Floreana, which is pockmarked by several smaller volcanic cones and covered by tropical dry forest (predominantly *palo santo*). Please don't expect to spot the *flightless cormorant* at Cormorant Point. This emblematic example of evolution lives exclusively in the remote west of the Galapagos on Fernandina and Isabela ([Route A](#)). Instead, its salty lagoon is one of the best places on the Galapagos to observe a breeding colony of *American flamingos*. Although, when breeding is done and the lagoon dries up, these exotic birds tend to be on the move to look for *shrimps* and *algae* from other saline lakes.

At the landing beach you will be welcomed by a small *Galapagos sea lion*-colony. The green sand contains a high percentage of glassy olivine crystals that have been blown out by the surrounding tuff cones. The 'flour sand' beach on the south side of the peninsula feels very smooth on your feet; this is pulverised by *parrotfish*. Schools of *sting rays* in the surf love this powdery sand to hide themselves, and *Pacific green turtles* come ashore to bury their eggs in it at night (first months of the year). The next morning you can notice their tracks from the dunes, or eventually still catch an exhausted, delayed one, crawling back to the sea.

AM: Devil's Crown (Floreana)

The jagged crater rim of Devil's Crown just protrudes sea level and is beaten by the waves. The inner walls of the crater rim are coated with coral formations and protected against the surf. The depth and very transparent waters of this deep-water snorkelling site gives you the sensation of flying once you plunge into this huge tropical aquarium. You will swim amidst schools of thousands of brightly coloured tropical fish, including *yellowtail surgeon fish*, *king angelfish*, and many other species. On

the seabed you can distinguish resting *whitetip reef sharks*, different species of *ray* and *starfish*. A *Pacific green turtle* or *Galapagos sea lion* might swim by, and don't be scared when you encounter *scalloped hammerhead sharks*!

Above sea level the dramatic decor of the jagged crater rim provides living space for lots of *coastal birds*, including *lava gulls*, *blue-footed* and *Nazca boobies*, *brown pelicans*, and *red-billed tropicbirds*. The opposite land head of Floreana is a nesting place for *magnificent frigatebirds*, where you could also head for during an alternative dinghy-ride.

PM: Post Office Bay (Floreana)

Bring your unstamped postcards and post them in the peculiar barrel on this historic site. Together with James Bay (Santiago) this used to be a popular base to complement stocks. The present barrel commemorates the improvised mail service between British 16th century whalers and poachers. Returning vessels also picked-up letters for home delivery. Finally this post box became the termination of the flourishing British whaling industry in this region (Moby Dick), because it let the American frigate USS Essex easily locate and hijack British whalers during the Anglo-American War (1812-1815).

Day 4 – Thursday

The next island, Española, is located in the far south-eastern corner of the archipelago. As one of its crown jewels, this birdwatcher's and photographer's dream offers all that you might expect from the Galapagos. Enjoy the alluring Gardner Bay and walk just a few metres past waved albatrosses, booby colonies, sunbathing marine iguanas and Galapagos sea lions and feel as though you're within an exciting nature documentary! Several endemic species give you the opportunity to become an eyewitness of evolution.

Programme:

AM: Before breakfast (we provide a snack) you will make a 'dry landing' at Suarez Point. During a longer guided walk (moderate level; 4km/2.5 mi/about 2 hours) you will pass awakening *seabird* colonies on top of the cliffs (some short scrambling passages; avoidable depths). Back on-board you will have a well-deserved breakfast and S/C Nemo I will navigate about an hour. Next you can plunge into the alluring turquoise-coloured Gardner Bay for snorkelling.

PM: After lunch and a 'wet landing' (bare feet) on the wide sand beach you can stroll along the *sea lions* colony (easy level), or enjoy a moment of reflection, relaxation, or rolling with *sea lions* in the surf.

Overnight navigation: After dinner we will navigate about 5 hrs north, and anchor just before midnight in the sheltered harbour of Academy Bay, Puerto Ayora, where you can enjoy a quiet floating sleep.

AM: Suarez Point (Española)

Huge ocean waves crash on the southern basaltic cliffs of Suarez Point, and form a spectacular blowhole, where a fountain of seawater sprays metres/feet high into the air (depending on the tide and how strongly the sea breeze pushes the waves). Take a meditative break in silence on this emblematic viewpoint to convert this unforgettable moment into a lifetime experience.

Waved albatrosses soar for most of their lives far out at sea and only come to Española (March-December) to breed and nurture their huge chicks. This spectacular seabird is the only tropic albatross (critically endangered species). Besides some strayed individuals on Isla de La

Plata (off the Ecuadorian coast) it only breeds on Española, where you can witness its synchronous courtship dances, which include bowing, whistling and even a stylised form of 'sword fighting' with their bills (especially in October)!

Suarez Point is also a massive breeding site for *Nazca* and *blue-footed boobies*, *swallow-tailed gulls* and *red-billed tropicbirds*. *Blue-footed boobies* don't bother to breed in the middle of the trail. Especially during the food-abundant garúa-season (2nd half of the year) you can admire amusing courtship dances, mating, breeding, emerging from the eggs, nurturing or first flight-attempts.

Española marine iguanas become bright red with a turquoise-coloured crest and legs at the start of the breeding season (starting from Christmas). *Hood lava lizards* are the largest of the 7 endemic species in the islands, as well as endemic *mockingbirds*, which have turned to carnivorous behaviour!

PM: Gardner Bay (Española)

Take your first 'dive' at the alluring turquoise-coloured Gardner Bay, and admire colourful reef fish, snorkel side by side with a *Pacific green turtle*, or find yourself in the middle of playful *Galapagos sea lions*.

The striking white coral sand beach is an important breeding site for *Pacific green turtles*. But without doubt its main attraction is the *Galapagos sea lion* colony. Females stay year-round in this nursery, suckling their pups up to an age of 3 years, although these already start to learn how to fish after 5 months. During the breeding- and mating season the colony becomes even more populous. The strongest bachelors and elder males return from their secluded bases and start again to conquer and defend their part of the 1300m/4250ft long beach. Pregnant females choose the best territory to give birth, and will mate again with their landlord within a month.

Day 5 – Thursday

This cruise itinerary ends in Puerto Ayora. En route to the airport you will pass the lush highlands of Santa Cruz, where you will get the opportunity to search for the most famous representatives of the Galapagos: a wild population of *Galapagos giant tortoises*.

Programme:

AM: After an early breakfast it's time to say goodbye and to leave the yacht. You will travel by inflatable dinghy and private bus from the pier of Puerto Ayora into the highlands. In the agricultural zone you can see *Galapagos giant tortoises* in the wild before continuing to the airport.

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 their concentrations around their favourite muddy pools, these semi-open pastures and moist *scalesia*-woodlands are the best place for a quick visit. Armed with a rain poncho and (provided) rubber boots you will get good chances to approach wild *Galapagos giant tortoises* within just a few metres! Their dome-shaped shells characterise the Santa Cruz subspecies.

Most of their long lives is spent slowly and silently, except for a warning hiss, or loud screams during mating, which can be heard 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 lived in the wild on all the islands, mostly on restricted locations of Isabela.

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