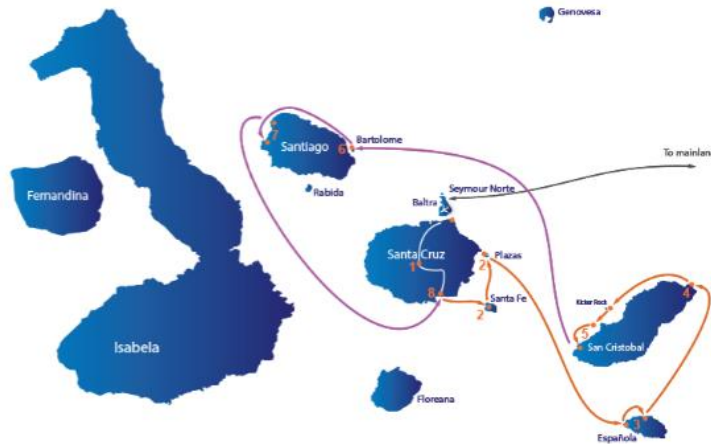


# ITINERARY 8 DAYS C

From Sunday to Sunday



## Day 1 – Santa Cruz Island

This morning you will be transferred to the airport for your flight to the Galapagos Islands. Please note the pick-up time will usually be as early as 4:30 am (a boxed breakfast will be provided), as the airport is a one-hour drive away and you must allow for delays and check-in times. (Your tour leader will confirm this time with you at the Welcome Meeting on Day 1). A US\$20 per person transit card is payable on departure at Quito Airport and a US\$100 per person national park entry fee is payable on arrival on the islands. Please have cash on hand for these transactions as using credit cards can be time consuming.

You will be met in the arrival hall of the airport (look out for 'Queen Beatriz' signs) by a transfer guide and transferred to our catamaran - 'M.Y. Grand Queen Beatriz', anchored on the other side of Santa Cruz Island. Our transfer guide will take you on an airport public bus for a short distance (5-minute drive) to where you board a public ferry across the Itabaca Channel. The ferry crossing takes only 7 minutes. (Please note that all public transportation costs are included). Once you reach Santa Cruz Island, a private bus you board a private bus for a 45-minute drive to Puerto Ayora, the main port of the island. Here, there will be two dinghies to transport you and your fellow travelers to the 'MC. Queen Beatriz'. Once on board, cabins will be assigned and you get to meet our crew members and get to know your naturalist guide while enjoying a delicious lunch. After lunch you embark on your first excursion and head into the highlands of Santa Cruz for a total change of scenery. Beginning at the coast you travel across Santa Cruz through the agricultural region and into the misty forests, where you can see the unique scalesia cloud forest and spend time observing giant tortoises in their natural habitat. Look out for the abundant bird life including different species of Darwin finches, woodpeckers, warbler finches and vermillion flycatchers.

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Director de la operadora turística

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## Day 2 – South Plazas Island

Santa Fe Island is home to many sea lions and these ones are very eager for swimming partners! It's a lovely place to take a dip, offers a dense concentration of wildlife, and is a fantastic place to see many of the stars of the Galapagos in one relatively small area. Expect to see Galapagos hawks, land iguanas, a variety of finches, Galapagos mockingbirds, sea lions, marine turtles, frigate birds, Galapagos doves and lava lizards. It's a naturally beautiful island as well with one of the most attractive coves in the archipelago and the jade-green waters are ideal for snorkeling. A trail follows the coast into the opuntia forest, where you see Santa Fe's trees - the largest in the Galapagos. The island is also home to a unique sub-species of land iguanas. Hiking towards the cliffs on Santa Fe will lead you to a forest of prickly pear cactus. A member of the cactus family, their name comes from the pear-shaped fruit the plant produces. Santa Fe is home to endemic land iguanas. Once back at the beach you will have free time to snorkel back in the lagoon. Playful sea lions pups and florescent fish make for fascinating company.

A small island, Plaza Sur is nonetheless a place of great beauty, where you will get close to sea lions and on to trails past one of the Galapagos' largest land iguana populations, resting amid cacti and volcanic landscapes colored bright red and green by sesuvium. The island's rugged southern cliffs are an excellent place to spot tropicbirds and swallow-tailed gulls, as well as the 'Gentlemen's Club', a gathering of male sea lions either too young or too old to be beach masters!



## Day 3 – Española Island

Today you will cruise to the island of Española - the southernmost island of the Galapagos and one of the most spectacular. Because of its remote location, this island has a large population of endemic fauna. It is the breeding site for nearly all of the world's 12,000 pairs of waved albatrosses and also home to colonies of blue-footed and masked boobies. Trails from the golden beaches, where sea lions bathe and marine iguanas make their way towards the water, will lead you right through the middle of booby colonies, and Galapagos doves and mockingbirds are also often seen. You will also visit the beautiful white sandy beaches at Bahia Gardner, which are great places for swimming and relaxing. The rocks off the coast provide excellent snorkeling opportunities, with reef sharks, turtles and many species of tropical fish, including surgeon and angelfish, often seen. The small white-tipped reef sharks are also often spotted resting under the rocks.

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You will also pay a visit to Punta Suarez, one of the most attractive locations in the Galapagos and home to large and varied wildlife population - a walk along its trails will take you to a cliff top viewpoint, where you'll gain a magical panorama. Boobies line the rocky shoreline beneath you, while frigate birds may be seen overhead; nearby enormous male sea lions can be seen lounging and albatross use the cliffs as their 'runway', helping become airborne by the southeast winds that blow across this part of the island. If you're lucky you'll see the elaborate courtship rituals performed by albatrosses before the female chooses her lifelong mate! Stop at Bahia Gardner (Gardner Bay), which is considered by many as one of the most beautiful beaches in the Galapagos Islands and full of sea lions and hood mockingbirds. Enjoy the beach and do some snorkeling which could be great for playing with sea lion pups and lots of fish. The rocks off the coast provide excellent snorkeling opportunities, with reef sharks, turtles and many species of tropical fish, including surgeon and angelfish, often seen. The small white-tipped reef sharks are also often spotted resting under the rocks.



## Day 4 – San Cristobal Island

This morning you will visit Punta Pitt on the eastern end of San Cristobal Island. Walk to the top of the volcanic hill for expansive views of the sparsely vegetated area. A variety of seabirds nest here, including blue-footed boobies and frigates. On a 'panga' ride you can observe the three varieties of boobies nesting in the Galapagos and enjoy a snorkel from the beach.

Close by you will pass through Leon Dormido (Kicker Rock), which is a magnificent rock in the middle of the sea, the shape resembles a sleeping lion. The rock rises 150 meters above the surface and is divided into two parts by a narrow channel. You cruise through the channel with nesting seabirds on either side of the boat, tropic birds overhead, marine iguanas in the water and many sea lions present including many resting on the rocks. Snorkeling gives us the opportunity to see Galapagos sharks, and possibly a hammerhead shark among sea turtles and an incredible biodiversity of invertebrates on the rock wall. You will also visit Isla Lobos, a tiny island almost touching San Cristobal Island. This is the perfect time to witness the always friendly sea lions as they play in the calm shallow waters here. Blue-footed boobies, frigate birds and marine iguanas are also easily seen.



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## Day 5 – San Cristobal

Visit San Cristobal Interpretation Centre in the morning. This center brings the history and geography of the archipelago to life, from its volcanic origins to the present day. The human history exhibit offers an insight into the discovery and colonization of the Galapagos, and the reality of the problems the islands face today is also explored.

This afternoon you will travel into the interior of the island to visit the highlands site of 'Galapaguera of Cerro Colorado' (Red Hill) where the national park has established a breeding program and information center for tortoises. Here, you will be able to see giant tortoises in their natural habitat and learn all about their origin, evolution and their threatened future.



## Day 6 – Bartolome Island

Isla Bartolomé (Bartolomé Island) is one of the most spectacular volcanic landscapes in the Galapagos, full of parasitic spatter cones, lava flows, Galapagos penguins and lava lizards. It is a relatively new island in the archipelago and traces of its volcanic past can be seen everywhere, as evidenced by the amazing lunar-like landscape. The Pinnacle Rock is one of the most photographed sites in the Galapagos – an abrupt jag of rock protruding from the earth like a tooth, while nearby two golden bays back onto each other.



You can hike to the top of a once-active volcano here, and enjoy superb views across to Sullivan Bay, on nearby Santiago Island. If you are in luck you might catch a glance of the Galapagos Hawk here. You also have the opportunity to go snorkeling with plenty of tropical fish, starfish, white-tipped reef sharks, rays and hopefully penguins. On Santiago's eastern coast sits Bahia Sullivan, also known as James Island. Here you walk on Pahoe-Hoe lava, from an eruption that occurred in 1897, and witness the colonization of plant species since the last eruption. Hopefully see some marine iguanas, Sally Lightfoot crabs, sea lions, finches, turtles, sharks and penguins. On a walk, your guide will explain the geological history of the islands.

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## Day 7 – Santiago Island

Today you will visit some wonderful places. Espumilla Beach, on the northern coast of Santiago Island in James Bay, is one of the most idyllic locations in the Galapagos Islands and is an important nesting site for marine turtles. With large waves, it is also often a favorite amongst beach lovers. Potentially we will see Galapagos hawks up close, ghost crabs, blue-footed boobies (often plunging for fish) and brown pelicans. It is also well known for its palo santo forest and some extraordinary lava formations.



This morning you will also visit Caleta Bucanero (Buccaneer Cove), a natural monument of rocks caused by sea erosion. This cove was used by pirates to careen their ships. It is a place of local legends and stories! It is also where Darwin camped for nine days while making his study of the islands and their wildlife. If conditions are favorable, you can enjoy some further snorkeling. Port Egas is a black sand beach located on the west side of James Bay and northwest of Santiago Island. South of the beach is Sugarloaf Volcano, which has deposits of volcanic tuff. This site is named Puerto Egas, after Hector Egas who last attempted to mine salt here. The walk along the beach offers hundreds of marine iguanas and Galapagos sea lions.

## Day 8 – Santa Cruz Island

As flights to the mainland from Galapagos depart mid-morning, it is an early start for our last morning on the islands. Depending on the time of our flight, our time spent on this final excursion could be limited. The small town of Puerto Ayora is the economic hub of the archipelago and is also home to the Charles Darwin Research Station. The station's visitor center and museum offer a great insight for anyone interested in the archipelago's natural and human history, and keen to learn more about conservation efforts to preserve the unique ecosystems of the Galapagos. It also offers our best chance for close-up encounters with giant tortoises, and we can see many newborn and young giant turtles - part of the breeding program to reintroduce them to their natural habitat.

This will be your final excursion before you return to the airport in Baltra for your flight back to Quito. As you will be leaving the boat this morning, please remember that if you have enjoyed the services provided by your guide and crew, a tip would be very much appreciated by them. As a guideline we recommend each passenger consider US\$15 per day for the crew and US\$10 per day for your guide. You can leave tips in envelopes that are placed in your cabin on this last day of your journey.

**END OF TOUR**

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