

Frigatebird Spotting

Puerto Ayora

The Tortoises Of Charles Darwin Research Station

Sullivan Bay's Black Lava Field

The Galapagos are not only a world-famous haven for wildlife, but an incredible archipelago of diverse islands that each offer different experiences. From close-up wildlife experiences with the weird and wonderful local inhabitants to walks along secluded beaches and up to the summit of volcanic outcrops to enjoy stunning views, there is plenty for nature lovers to savour. This comprehensive journey is the perfect overview and showcases the eclectic mix that combines together to make up the panoramic Galapagos mosaic.

Itinerary

**Day
1**

Quito

Your trip starts in Quito today. No activities are planned; however there is a meeting at the joining hotel at 6:00 pm with our local representative, where you are briefed on the arrangements for your adventure in the Galapagos. Quito is located at 2850 metres above sea level and at this altitude you may possibly experience some effects from the high altitude, so we suggest that you avoid any strenuous activity on this day. Declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1978, this charming colonial centre offers a wealth of things to see and you could lose yourself for hours meandering through the narrow, winding cobblestone streets and exploring the lively Plaza Grande and Plaza San Francisco. The city is filled with Baroque art and architecture, as exemplified by magnificent churches, monasteries and public buildings. If you feel like exploring further afield, you might like to head for one of the many viewpoints over the city. El Panecillo (The Little Bread Loaf) offers sensational views of the city's white houses and surrounding volcanoes. The 30-metre high statue of La Virgen de Quito sits atop this small hill and can be seen from all over the city. Incredible vistas can also be enjoyed from La Cima de la Libertad, the site of Ecuadorian independence from Spain.

**Day
2**

Baltra – Las Bachas

We are transferred to Quito Airport for our early morning flight to Baltra in the Galapagos Islands. A US\$100 national park entry fee and US\$10 transit card, per person, is payable upon arrival at Baltra Airport. This is best done using cash, as using credit cards can be time-consuming. We are met in the arrival hall and then transferred to our boat, anchored a short distance away. We are met in the arrival hall and then bussed to the M.V. Darwin, anchored a short distance away in Baltra's small port. Once on board we are assigned our cabin before we set sail. Our stop this afternoon is the beautiful beach of Las Bachas on Santa Cruz Island. This beach is a major egg-laying site for sea turtles. Marine iguanas can be found ashore whilst pink flamingos are commonly seen in the lagoon. Remnants of a floating pier can still be sighted and is a testimony to U.S. presence in the Galapagos during World War II. (B, L, D)

**Day
3**

Las Plazas - Santa Fe

A small island, Plaza Sur nonetheless possesses abundant life and beauty. From our dry landing, we walk among resting sea lions and on trails that get us amid one of the Galapagos' largest land iguana populations, resting in the cacti and volcanic landscapes coloured 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 'beachmasters'! Our afternoon stop is Santa Fe, located 2 ½ hours southeast of Santa Cruz. This small island 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 the Galapagos hawk, land Iguanas, a variety of finches and the Galapagos mockingbird, sea lions, marine turtles, frigatebirds, Galapagos doves and lava lizards. It's a naturally beautiful island as well, with one of the most attractive coves in the archipelago, the waters jade green and wonderful for snorkelling. . Our trail follows the coast into the Opuntia Forest Santa Fe's trees are the largest in the Galapagos. Hiking into the island you can see a forest of giant cacti and palo santo trees. (B, L, D)

**Day
4**

Espanola

Today we cruise to Espanola, the southernmost and one of the oldest islands of the Galapagos group. Due to its remote location, Espanola has a high variety of endemic fauna. It is the breeding site of 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, lead us right through the middle of booby colonies, and Galapagos doves and mockingbirds are also often seen. The trail takes us to a cliff-top viewpoint, where we gain a magical panorama. Boobies line the rocky shoreline beneath us, while frigatebirds 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 we're lucky we'll see the elaborate courtship rituals performed by albatrosses before the female chooses her lifelong mate! In the afternoon we visit Gardner Bay, where our wet landing taking us to one of the archipelago's longest stretches of white sand. It's a great beach to relax on – just look at the many resting sea lions for proof! The rocks in the bay provide excellent snorkelling opportunities, with reef sharks, turtles and many species of tropical fish, including surgeon, parrot and angelfish often seen. (B, L, D)

**Day
5**

Floreana

This morning we visit the island of Floreana in the south of the archipelago. It's one of the most beautiful islands and is also interesting in terms of human history as it was one of the earliest to be inhabited. In 1793 a post office barrel was erected for mariners to post their mail and assist in delivery of mail to the United States and Europe. This custom continues today with Galapagos visitors leaving letters and postcards to be collected by the next passing boat – send one of your own and check if there are any you can deliver back home! Afterwards we explore the island's magnificent geography, with particularly impressive lava tubes found a little inland from Post Office Bay. The marine life in the bay is also spectacular and is one of the best sites for swimming with turtles. The wet landing at Punta Cormorant leads to a hike that reveals the wonderful and unusual colours present in nature in the Galapagos. You land on a greenish-coloured sand beach and then hike a well-marked trail beginning in black mangrove beds before heading towards a lagoon where many flamingos gather - their vivid pink contrasting

splendidly against the water. The island's endemic plant life here is also noteworthy and, on our walk, we pass Galápagos millwork, passion flower and the unique button mangrove. Just off Floreana's northeast tip is the Devil's Crown, a ringed craggy outcrop of volcanic rocks that is undoubtedly as fine a snorkelling site as any in the Galapagos. Tropical fish surround you as you swim in the water, while starfish line the seabed and playful sea lions approach you. Whitetip reef sharks are often spotted here as are rays, turtles and many other species of marine life. Mirador de la Baronesa is located north of Floreana Island, in Bay La Olla. It is a tuff basalt formation between Cormorant Point and Post Office Bay. The ascent of the trail is fairly easy, except for the last 33 metres where the gradient is steep; however, steps have been built in this final stretch. The panga ride to the Mirador is excellent for viewing marine life with opportunities to see golden eagle rays, sea turtles, sea lions and Galapagos penguins. As we walk the trail, our guide informs us of the interesting mangrove formations nearby as well as the important human history of the area. From the viewpoint, the sweeping views take in the coastline from Enderby Island to Post Office Bay, including Cerro Straw and the pool of flamingos at Punta Cormorant. (B, L, D)

**Day
6**

Santa Cruz - Charles Darwin Station

Today we visit Santa Cruz itself, the second largest island in the Galapagos. 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 centre and museum are essential stops 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 visitors their best chance for close-up encounters with giant tortoises, including 'Lonesome George', the last of his sub-species. We also see many newborn and young giant turtles – part of the breeding program to reintroduce them into their natural habitat. Afterwards we take a bus to the Santa Cruz highlands, where the lush humidity makes it seem worlds away from the island's arid coastal regions. The interior of the Santa Cruz contains inactive volcanic cones, the rich soil home to many crops, miconia bushes and scalesia, a species that has been called 'the Darwin's finches of the plant world'. We visit the largest lava tunnels in the Galapagos and observe great local bird life, including the vermilion flycatcher, Galápagos rail, Galapagos dove and paint-billed cake. The highlands are also the natural habitat of the Galapagos tortoise and there's a good chance we may see them here. (B, L, D)

**Day
7**

Puerto Egas - Espumilla Beach - Buccaneer Cove

Today we visit some great sites on and around Santiago Island. We start at Puerto Egas, a black sand beach located on the west side of James Bay. South of the beach is Sugarloaf Volcano, which has deposits of volcanic tuff. The walk along the beach gives us many encounters with the locals: hundreds of marine iguanas, fur seals and sea lions, and we also see amazing tidal pools formed from ancient lava flow, home to sponges, snails, hermit crabs, barnacles and fish. Our next stop, Espumilla Beach, is a well-known beauty spot. Located on Santiago Island's northern coast, in James Bay, this idyllic beach is an important nesting site for sea turtles. Nearby are fine lava formations, and the beach is backed by mangrove, through which a short trail leads to a lake where flamingos, pintail ducks and stilts can be seen. Turtle nests are often found under the mangrove trees in the sand. Our third site for the day is Caleta Bucanero (Buccaneer Cove), a natural monument of rocks caused by sea erosion, and a place of local legends and stories, where pirates used to careen their ships, and where later Darwin camped for a few days while making his study of the islands and its wildlife. (B, L, D)

**Day
8**

Bartolome – Sullivan Bay

Beautiful Bartolome is one of the youngest islands in the archipelago and is home to spectacular lava formations, wonderful beaches and rich wildlife - both on land and among its waters. Upon arrival, the evidence of the island's volcanic past is immediately evidence with lava bombs, spatter and cinder cones. The summit trail leads us to the iconic view of the Galapagos: looking out towards Pinnacle Rock, the twin beaches of the island backing on to each other, the turquoise waters lapping the shores. During the ascent we see a large colony of marine Iguanas and lava lizards. Red mangroves and various cacti all add to the diverse landscape. After our hike we cool off with a snorkel, where we swim among Galapagos penguin, turtles and white tipped reef sharks! Opposite Bartolome on Santiago's eastern coast sits Bahia Sullivan which we visit in the afternoon. We walk across a 100-year old lava flow, a black carpet of intricate markings and patterns, where iguanas and Sally Lightfoot Crabs crawl. On a walk across this lava field and along white sand beaches, our guide informs us of the geological history of the islands as we enjoy the view back across to Bartolome. (B, L, D)

**Day
9**

North Seymour – Baltra – Quito

North Seymour is probably one of the Galapagos' most visited islands. A short loop takes one along the sandy beach with good views of Daphne Major and Minor. The trail takes us inland into a palo santo forest and low, bushy vegetation. Enjoyable for both its wildlife and views from the beach, the island is also the nesting ground for the magnificent frigate bird. Also look out for blue-footed booby, sea lion and marine iguana. We then cruise back to Baltra, where we say goodbye to the amazing Galapagos Islands and take our return flight to Quito. As you will be leaving the boat today, 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\$10 per day for the crew and US\$6 per day for your guide. You can leave tips in envelopes that are placed in your cabin on this last day of your journey. Upon arrival in Quito Airport we are transferred back to our hotel for an overnight stay. (B)

**Day
10**

Quito

Our adventure ends today after breakfast. (B)

Itinerary Variation

While the information presented here details our planned itinerary, including routes taken, activities included, accommodation and meeting times, please accept that unforeseen changes may occur. We are constantly on the lookout to improve our program and further enhance your experience. Naturally, we will keep you up to date with any last minute amendments to your tour.

About The Imaginative Traveller

Our aim has always been to provide exceptional travel experiences. We believe that adventure travel should be stimulating, and that it should give you an authentic experience of a place. We want our travellers to relish the amazing diversity of countries and cultures the world has to offer. Our focus is on innovation, not imitation.

Obsessed with quality

One of our strengths has been our obsession with quality. We've always believed that our commitment to you doesn't end as soon as you've paid for your holiday. On the contrary, it is just beginning. Whilst most operators simply get a local company to handle the day to day operation of their tours, we do it all ourselves. We have managers for each of our **key destinations** around the world and all our small groups are escorted by our own leaders. Our local teams include guides, drivers, administration staff and contacts in the local community who help us ensure that our adventures are active and involving.

For comparability, all prices in this dossier are quoted in one currency. We use the US Dollar since that is familiar to most. However, once on tour you will need to pay for all goods and services in the local currency. See your Country Dossier for details of exchange rates.

Trip Grade

Cruising

Camp on the Nile's banks or jump off your junk into Halong Bay. Chill out on the Mekong or explore Kerala's hidden channels. The perfect mix of relaxation and exploration, spending time on the water turns a holiday into an adventure, a chance to get closer to locals and see countries in a unique way. And there's one place if you want to explore you really must go by boat: the Galapagos. Only boats get you to uninhabited islands and the best snorkelling spots; only by boat can you get closer to all the amazing animals of these fabulous islands.

Wildlife

Take your pick: hunt for tigers in northern India, listen to monkey chatter and birdsong in the jungles of Costa Rica and Peru or gawp at the Galapagos' diversity. And of course, there's the big one: Africa. The names alone evoke images of wildlife: the Serengeti, Masai Mara, Kruger. And the reality's even better. Africa's got the lot, so go beyond the Big Five by hiking to close encounters with gorillas in Uganda's forests, walking with lions at Zimbabwe's Antelope Park, or canoeing past crocs on the Okavango Delta. From the Cape's loveable penguins to Egypt's loping camels, Africa's animals await.

Fitness

Galapagos Voyage

No particular level of physical fitness is required for our Galapagos voyages, although you should be reasonably agile and enjoying good health. Please keep in mind that there are a number of shore excursions on your cruise. This involves boarding a small dingy or zodiac from the rear transom of the cruise boat. Disembarkation at some locations will be at steps or a small pier, whilst at other locations you may be required to disembark on the beach. This can involve having to wade ashore a short distance through shallow water. A degree of agility will be required for this. Once you are on shore you will undertake several walks, some across volcanic rock. For this a reasonable level of fitness is beneficial, as is a pair of good walking shoes or boots.

Included

- Gecko's expert English-speaking naturalist guide on board the Gecko's boat.
- Return flights from Quito to the Galapagos Islands.
- All meals and accommodation onboard the Gecko's boat. Accommodation in one of just eight well-appointed, air-conditioned, twin share, bunk-bed cabins with private facilities.
- Excursions during the voyage: Las Bachas, Plaza Sur, Santa Fe, Gardner Bay, Puerto Suarez, Floreana, Santa Cruz Highlands, Puerto Egas, Santa Cruz Highlands, Buccaneer Cove, Bartolome, Sullivan Bay, Sullivan Bay and North Seymour.
- Visit to the tortoise research and breeding program at the Charles Darwin Research Station.
- Transfer to and from Quito Airport on Day 2 and Day 9.

Not included

International flights, arrival and departure transfers, departure and airport taxes, visas, entrance fees, US\$10 Galapagos transit card, US\$100 Galapagos National Park fee, other meals, drinks, optional tours or activities during free time, snorkel hire US\$30, wetsuit hire US\$30, transfers outside of the tour program, travel insurance, tips and items of a personal nature.

Meals

9 breakfasts, 7 lunches, 7 dinners

Accommodation

7 nights Cruise boat, 2 nights Hotel

Single room supplement

Most of our travellers like the thought of travelling with a few like-minded souls. There are NO compulsory single supplements on most tours as we simply arrange twin shared accommodation for you and another tour member of the same sex. But don't worry if that doesn't appeal. We do understand there are times when you just want a bit of privacy and 'me' time so we are more than happy to arrange a private room upon request when you book.

Transport

Boat, Bus, Plane

Optional excursions

*prices below are guide only

Quito - City tour

- US\$30

Quito - Otavalo Market

- US\$45

Other information

On arrival in the islands you must pay the US\$100 national park fee to enter Galapagos National Park.

The itinerary and supplementary information has been compiled with care and provided in good faith. However it may be subject to change, and does not form part of a contract between the client

and The Imaginative Traveller.

Responsible Travel - Travellers' Guidelines

At Imaginative Traveller we love helping our clients experience the beauty and cultures of the destinations we visit. However, hand in hand with this we have always been aware that we have a responsibility to minimise any negative impacts that tourism can bring.

Responsible Travel is twofold. It's about taking people to the places they want to go in a safe and responsible manner but also about respecting and maintaining the natural and often delicate balance of the destination. Economic gain from tourism is often fundamental to a country, but should never be at the expense of its culture or the environment.

Our Aims

It is our aim to provide journeys that have minimal negative and maximum positive impact on the places we visit.

We do not believe that, as visitors, we should impose our own cultures on others; rather that we should experience foreign cultures and appreciate them for what they are.

Whilst it is our aim to show destinations and cultures in a positive light, we do not believe in papering over the cracks or shielding visitors from the realities of life. This does not mean, however, that we condone or endorse certain situations or regimes that may be in place.

Our guidelines are meant not as rigid instructions but rather as suggestions to make our holidays more enjoyable – for everybody. As cultural and environmental sensitivities vary from country to country more specific guidelines can be found in our individual country and trip dossiers.

Travellers' Guidelines

✓ Before you depart try to spend some time familiarising yourself with the destination you will be travelling to – their culture and customs. The country dossiers on our website offer detailed information about all the regions we visit. They also include some useful phrases in the local language for you to use on your trip! A few words of the local language can open up many more opportunities for you to interact with the people you will meet.

✓ Although it is tempting to give out pens, sweets and money to people begging, and particularly tempting to give to children, we feel that this encourages a begging mentality and has a long-term negative impact on communities. If someone begging earns more than someone in the same community who works this can discourage local employment. If children regularly bring home money it may discourage their parents from sending them to school. It is of course your own personal choice but you could consider giving to registered charities or contributing to our Responsible Travel fund instead. Money donated

through our fund to our worldwide projects is matched pound for pound by Imaginative Traveller and used to help local grassroots projects.

- ✓ Always ask permission to photograph local people and respect their decision if they would prefer not to have their picture taken.
- ✓ Respect local dress codes, especially at religious sites. Our tour leaders are always on hand to give you advice about this.
- ✓ In many of the countries we visit you might see examples of animal cruelty (for example dancing bears, performing monkeys and snake charmers). Please do not take photographs of this or offer money as it encourages the activity.
- ✓ Respect the environment you are in. It sounds obvious but do not throw litter, take it with you or use rubbish bins! You may see locals throwing rubbish on the street but do not follow their example!
- ✓ When shopping in countries where haggling is the norm – enjoy it and only pay what you feel is a fair price for the goods you are purchasing. However, remember that the shopkeeper does have to make a living so do stop once you have reached a price you are happy with. Bargaining should be fun but always remember that a small amount can mean much more to the vendor than to you.
- ✓ Endeavor to take home souvenirs made locally; the money you spend can be very important to the local communities. However, do use your common sense and don't buy anything that you think might be made out of endangered animals or plants.
- ✓ To help keep as much money as possible in the host country - try to eat in locally owned restaurants and order local drinks and produce rather than international brands.
- ✓ In hotels do be conscious of how much water you are using. Many of the areas we visit regularly have shortages; try not to have hour long showers! Don't leave lights, air conditioners or fans on when you leave the room – you wouldn't at home!
- ✓ Respect the environment you are in, especially when in national parks or reserves. Pay attention to rules about keeping on paths, keeping a distance from animals and not removing any of the natural habitat.
- ✓ Relax and immerse yourself in the differences of the culture you are in – you'll be back home in the familiar soon enough (and wishing you were still on holiday!). These cultural differences are part of what makes your experience special.

If you would like to offset the carbon dioxide that will be produced on your flights you can do this on our website ([on our Responsible travel page](#)). We work with climatecare, who will reduce the equivalent amount of carbon dioxide that you produce in another part of the World through their emission reduction projects. These projects are low carbon efficient technologies in developing countries and not only serve to reduce emissions but also help to spread the adoption of low carbon technologies and



improve the quality of life for local communities. Details of climatecare's projects can be **found on their website**.

If you would like to contribute to our Worldwide projects, helping communities all over the World, you can also do this on our website or with a sales consultant. Please refer to our **responsible travel page** on the website for details of our current projects. Any donation you make will be matched £ for £ by Imaginative Traveller (up to a maximum of £1000).

Have a great trip!

Please do let us know if you have any comments about responsible travel at **rto@imtrav.net**

The Imaginative Traveller & Gecko's Adventures This trip is operated by our partner company, Gecko's Adventures. Gecko's is an Australia based company with more than 10 years experience in adventure travel and they share our ethos for offering unique holiday adventures. As this is a code shared departure you can expect there to be both Imaginative Traveller and Gecko's travellers on your trip.
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