

Ultimate Galapagos - Central Islands (Daphne) - Trip Notes



General Trip info

Map

Trip Code: IGMDD

Trip Length: 10

Trip starts in: Quito

Trip ends in: Quito

Meals: 9 Breakfasts included

8 Lunches included

7 Dinners included

Accommodation: Hotel (2 nights), Overnight boat (7 nights)

Transport: Boat, Plane, Bus, Zodiac (Panga)

Daily Itinerary

Day 1

Quito

Bienvenidos! Welcome to Ecuador. This country might be smaller than its heavyweight South American neighbours, but this audacious land stakes a legitimate claim as the continent's most complete package, blessed with perfect beaches and the remarkable Galapagos Islands. Your adventure begins with a welcome meeting at 5pm or 6 pm on Day 1. You can arrive at any time during the day as there are no activities planned until this important meeting. Please check with the hotel reception or notice boards for where and when it will take place. If you can't arrange a flight that will have you arrive at the hotel by early evening, you may wish to arrive a day early so you're able to attend. We'll be happy to book additional accommodation for you (subject to availability). If you're going to be late, please inform the hotel reception. We'll be collecting your insurance details and next of kin information at this meeting, so please ensure you have all these details to provide to your leader. If you arrive early, get out and explore Quito (2,850 m), one of South America's most attractive cities. Stroll around the Old Town, and be sure to visit the majestic Monastery of San Francisco if you have time. Alternatively, check out Cotopaxi volcano, the Cloud Forest, the local hot springs or the Equatorial Monument.

Day 2

Isla Santa Cruz

Transfer to Quito Airport for your early morning flight to the Galapagos Islands. You'll leave the hotel as early as 4:30 am. A boxed breakfast will be provided. A transit card (USD20 per person) is payable on departure at Quito Airport, and a national park entry fee (USD100 per person) is payable on arrival on the islands. Please have cash on hand for these transactions, as credit cards can be time consuming. On arrival in the Galapagos, you'll be met in the arrivals hall and transferred to your boat, Daphne. Once on board, you'll be assigned a cabin, meet the crew and get to know your naturalist guide and fellow travellers over a delicious lunch. Sail from Baltra to Las Bachas (approximately 30 minutes; 4 nautical miles). The lush sands of Las Bachas, on the north shore of Santa Cruz Island, are a nesting site for the Pacific green turtle. Marine iguanas are also commonly spotted. The sand here, made of decomposed coral, is particularly white and soft. The rocks make for excellent snorkelling and are populated by Sally Lightfoot crabs which are plentiful on the island. A saltwater lagoon just near the beach is home to flamingo and whimbrel – you might also see a great blue heron. Remnants of a floating pier, a testimony to the US presence in the Galapagos during World War II, can also be seen.

Day 3

Isla North Seymour - Isla Bartolome

Sail from Baltra to Isla North Seymour (approximately 45 minutes; 5 nautical miles). This is one of the most visited islands of the Galapagos. First up is a solid walk, the highlight of which may well be blue-footed boobies and swallow-tailed gulls. Boobies and frigates have an interesting relationship, sharing the same nesting area on North Seymour. Blue-footed boobies nest on the ground while the frigate birds nest just above them in the saltbushes. As you walk, look out for land iguanas, marine iguanas, Galapagos sea lions and the endemic incense tree. After the walk, go snorkelling and encounter a great variety of fish – perhaps white-tipped reef sharks, rays and sea lions. Next it's off to Isla Bartolomé (approximately 2.5 hours; 18 miles), one of the most spectacular volcanic landscapes in the Galapagos, full of parasitic spatter cones, lava flows, Galapagos penguins and lava lizards. Bartolomé is a relatively new island in the archipelago. Put on your walking shoes and climb over 360 wooden steps to the summit, where an amazing view of Pinnacle Rock awaits. This is one of the photographed sights in the Galapagos: an abrupt jag of rock protruding from the earth like a tooth, near two back-to-back golden bays. Hike to the top of a once-active volcano and enjoy superb views across to Sullivan Bay on nearby Santiago Island. If you're in luck, you might catch a glimpse of the Galapagos hawk. There's also the opportunity to go snorkelling among the colourful tropical marine life.

Day 4

Isla Santiago

Head to Puerto Egas (approximately 4.5 hours, 35 nautical miles), a black-sand beach on the west side of James Bay, northwest of Santiago Island. It's home to some amazing volcanic tuff formations. Take a stroll along the beach where marine iguanas, pelicans, finches, mockingbirds, oystercatchers, Galapagos sea lions and Galapagos fur seals are known to frolic. You can see the amazing tidal pools, formed from ancient lava flow, providing a home for sponges, snails, hermit crabs, barnacles and fish. Snorkelling in the midst of seals always offers the possibility of thrilling encounters. After Puerto Egas, sail to Espumilla Beach (approximately 45 minutes; 5 miles), located on the northern coast of Santiago Island. Experience the texture of its unique soft sand on your feet. The waters are tranquil, yet can also form large waves, making it a favourite among beach lovers. The vegetation is a vivid green. Not only is this island a nesting site for marine turtles, it's also a place to see ghost crabs, blue-footed boobies (often plunging for fish) and brown pelicans. There's also the chance to see Galapagos hawks up close. It is also well known for its palo santo forest and some extraordinary lava formations. Next you will visit Buccaneer Cove (approximately 15 minutes; 2 nautical miles) and witness its spectacular geology of volcanic ash (tuff). Here you might find the remains of objects used by pirates in centuries past. This is where Darwin camped for nine days while making his study of the islands and their wildlife. If conditions are favourable, you can enjoy some more snorkelling.

Day 5

Isla Isabela - Isla Fernandina

Visit Tagus Cove, where pirates and whalers used to collect turtles for their travels. Enjoy a short visit here (approximately 2 hours), perhaps snorkelling or checking out the ancient graffiti on the walls (the oldest of which is from 1836). Witness flightless cormorants, blue-footed boobies and a variety of waterfowl and penguins (the most northerly penguins in the world). You will walk to a lookout point for a stunning panorama of the north of Isabela Island and the Wolf volcano. This morning you will also visit nearby Fernandina Island, the youngest of the Galapagos Islands. It's also volcanically active and the most westerly island, making it one of the least visited. The third largest in size, it erupted most recently in 2009. The absence of introduced mammals gives it a unique landscape, and it boasts the highest concentration of marine iguanas on the archipelago. The northeast tip, Punta Espinosa, is a narrow ledge of lava and sand extending from the base of La Cumbre volcano. You will take a walk around the beautiful peninsula, which boasts such wildlife and plant life as lava cacti, marine iguanas, barking sea lions, tiny penguins and Sally Lightfoot crabs. Keep a lookout for that marvellous Galapagos predator hunting from the treetops – the Galapagos hawk. Top-notch snorkelling opportunities await in the clear waters, and turtles and sea lions can be seen swimming around and feeding on the shore. This is a great spot to see flightless cormorants drying their atrophied wings amid the volcanic landscape. Estimated travel time/distance: Buccaneer's Cove to Espinoza: 45 mins (6 nautical miles) Espinoza to Elizabeth Bay: 4.5 hours (37 nautical miles)

Day 6

Isla Isabela

Today you will land at the archipelago's largest island – Isabela. The island is located in one of the youngest geological areas in the world, having formed less than a million years ago. Here you will take a Panga ride along Elizabeth Bay, which is located on the west coast of Isabela Island and does not permit landings. Keep your binoculars and camera at the ready to photograph the second-smallest penguins in the world. You might also spot blue-footed boobies perched on the islets or diving for their next meal. Then you'll head for the mangrove forest, which is quite unique in the Galapagos, to see sea turtles, sea lions, penguins, lava herons, rays and plenty of colourful fish – pompanos, dorados and mullets. Your destination is Punta Moreno (approximately 2.5 hours; 18 nautical miles) on the south west coast. You'll spend the afternoon here. This coastline has some of the most beautiful blue lagoons and rocky terrain in the Galapagos, with a backdrop of three active volcanoes, myriad flamingos and incredible lava formations. Landing is impossible here too, due to the delicate ecosystem. Go for an amazing walk on top of the black lava field with the majestic view of Sierra Negra and Cerro Azul in the background. Depending on the season, you can see brown pelicans nesting on top of the mangroves, lava and candelabra cactus, plus lava lizards. You'll pass brackish water lagoons, covered with several different plants, where pink flamingos, ducks and black neck stilts rest. Then jump aboard once again and head out for a snorkel and look out for the elusive sea horse. An overnight sail takes us to Puerto Villamil (8 hours, 64 nautical miles).

Day 7

Isla Isabela

This morning, visit Las Tintoreras, a little peninsula at the entrance of Isabela Island's Port. Here there's a viewing walkway from where you can look down into the narrow channel to see a colony of white-tipped reef sharks swimming and sleeping – and the occasional sea lion among them. Blue-footed boobies, penguins, marine iguanas and crabs also make their home here. Enjoy a nice long walk on a gravel path, heading through lava flows and spotting plenty of marine iguanas. The natives of the islands call white sharks 'tintoreras', hence the name of this spectacular site. This is where everything comes together for one big marine and wildlife party. Without trying you will see sea lions, penguins and frigate birds. After breakfast you will take a bus up to Sierra Negra Volcano where you will see the crater and explore the area. This volcano last erupted in 2005. In the afternoon you will visit the Interpretation Center and Humedales, the wetlands of Isabela. You'll reach them via a complex trail which winds around for some six kilometres. Upon arrival you'll find an intriguing spread of flora and fauna (including flamingos) and some spectacular scenery. Tonight, sail to Cerro Dragon (5 hours 45 minutes, 45 nautical miles).

Day 8

Isla Santa Cruz

Wake up this morning on Santa Cruz's north coast and visit Cerro Dragon aka Dragon Hill. From the dry landing, walk to a brackish lagoon that's frequented by birds such as stilts, pintail ducks, sandpipers, sanderlings and occasionally flamingos. Further inland, the trail offers a beautiful view of the bay and the western area of the archipelago. This area is a nesting site for land iguanas and is constantly monitored by the Charles Darwin Research Station. The arid-zone vegetation makes for some fine birdwatching. Darwin's finches, Galapagos mockingbirds, Galapagos flycatchers and yellow warblers are all regulars here. The path can be challenging, but the reward is a spectacular view of the bay. In the afternoon you will visit Punta Carrion in north-eastern Santa Cruz. First sail to the Baltra dock (approximately 2.5 hours; 18 nautical miles), then to Punta Carrion (approximately 1 hour; 6 nautical miles). This is a shallow and protected cove, ideal for snorkelling and swimming. Wildlife is plentiful here – keep your eyes peeled for blue-footed boobies, Galapagos herons and great blue herons. Go swimming among the rays and white-tipped reef sharks. Afterwards, sail from Punta Carrion to Puerto Ayora (approximately 4 hours; 30 nautical miles).

Day 9

Isla Baltra - Quito

Flights to the mainland from Galapagos depart mid-morning, so it's an early start for your last morning on the islands. You will visit the Santa Cruz Highlands. Travel through the agricultural region and into the misty forests where you can see the unique Scalesia cloud forest, dome-shaped giant tortoises in the wild, different species of Darwin finches and possibly the world-famous woodpecker and warbler finches. You might also glimpse a vermilion flycatcher. Then it's time to bid farewell to the archipelago and head to the airport for your mid-morning flight back to Quito for the last night of the tour. This flight takes approximately 2.5 hours with a transit in Guayaquil. Upon arrival at Quito Airport, at about 4pm, you'll be transferred back to your hotel for an overnight stay. A local Intrepid representative might stop by the hotel this evening to get your feedback on the trip.

Day 10

Quito

There are no activities planned for the final day so we are able to depart our accommodation at any time. If you have not spent time here before, we recommend you stay on a few days as there are many fascinating things to do in and around Quito, such as the Cotopaxi volcano, the Cloud Forest, hot springs, the Equatorial Monument or perhaps city tour of the fascinating Old Town. Please speak to our customer service representative about any optional activities that might be of interest. They can also assist you in booking a departure transfer to the airport.

Additional Information

Included Activities

Isla Santa Cruz - Bachas Beach Walk (1 hour) - Wet Landing
Isla North Seymour - Walk (2 hours) - Dry Landing
Isla Bartolome - Snorkelling (1.5 hours)
Isla Bartolome - Walk (1.5 hours) - Dry Landing
Isla North Seymour - Snorkelling (1 hours)
Isla Santiago - Puerto Egas - Walk (1.45 hours) - Wet Landing
Isla Santiago - Puerto Egas - Snorkelling (1 hour)
Isla Sanitago - Espumilla Beach - Walk (1.5 hours) - Wet Landing
Isla Sanitago - Espumilla Beach - Snorkelling (45 mins)
Isla Sanitago - Buccaneer's Cove - Sail (15 mins)
Isla Isabela - Tagus Cove - Walk (1.45 hours) - Dry Landing
Isla Isabela - Tagus Cove - Snorkel (1 hour)
Isla Fernandina - Punta Espinosa - Walk (2 hours) - Dry Landing
Isla Fernandina - Punta Espinosa - Snorkel (1 hour)
Isla Isabela - Elizabeth Bay - Panga Ride (2 hours)
Isla Isabela - Punta Moreno - Walk and Panga ride (2 hours) - Dry Landing
Isla Isabela - Punta Moreno - Snorkel
Isla Isabela - Las Tintoreras visit (1.5 hours) - Dry Landing
Isla Isabela - Sierra Negra Volcano Crater Walk (3.5 hours) - Dry Landing
Isla Isabela - Interpretation Center Visit
Isla Isabela - Los Humedales (Wetlands) - Dry Landing
Isla Santa Cruz - Cerro Dragon - Walk (1.5 hours) - Dry Landing
Isla Santa Cruz - Punta Carrion - Snorkelling (1 hour)
Isla Santa Cruz - Highlands Visit (1 hour) - Dry Landing

Notes for Ecuador

Ecuador has everything an outdoor enthusiast could wish for - crisp blue skies, cloud-covered peaks, thick green rainforests with an abundance of wildlife, and some of South America's most fascinating colonial cities. Adventure through the Amazon jungle enjoying the sounds of the birds and crickets, and enjoy some exhilarating rafting and trekking near the town of Baños. Explore the stunning architecture and museums of the mountainous city of Quito and discover its delightful Old Town. Trek through the beautiful rolling hills and canyons of Chugchilan. Meet local villagers and barter in the markets of Otavalo, and explore the atmospheric cobbled streets of colonial Cuenca.

Citizens of the UK, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, USA, Canada and all EU countries will not need a visa to visit Ecuador as a tourist for up to 90 days. Citizens of other countries should check with the relevant consulates as to whether a visa is required. If a visa is required, you will need to obtain it in advance. Only a very small number of nationalities will require a visa. A valid yellow fever vaccination certificate is required from travellers coming from areas with risk of yellow fever transmission (including transiting through an airport in an area of risk).

Important Notes

The routes, activities and places visited as described in these trip notes are intentions and are meant as a rough guide only.

These trip notes have been compiled to help you prepare for your journey once you have booked. They include the full itinerary and dates, and information about kit lists, meeting hotels, insurance, vaccinations, visas, and other information that will help you get ready for your trip.

These notes are updated regularly, so please ensure you have an up-to-date version of these trip notes.

The planned route and itinerary is the intention, but exact night stops and inclusions cannot be guaranteed. It occasionally happens that there must be a change to our planned itinerary - this may be for a variety of reasons, such as climatic, road or bureaucratic conditions. By their very nature, adventure travel needs to be approached flexibly and some regions can be unpredictable. Some Imaginative Traveller journeys go through off the beaten track areas, which often have poor infrastructure and less stringent safety standards than we are used to at home.

Our Groups

Our groups are made up of people from around the world and are usually an interesting mix of nationalities and ages. On average there is a pretty even split, males to females and between solo travellers, couples and small groups of friends. We believe that adventure travel should be open to as many people as possible and so although some trips have a minimum age limit, as long as you are fit, healthy and passionate about travel, we are happy to take you. One of the highlights of group travel is the camaraderie and friendships that are formed along the way, and as well as the variety of people that you will meet.

The maximum group size depends on the operator and the style of transport, but will usually be a maximum of 15-16 or up to 21-22 on our overland journeys.

Accommodation

Imaginative Traveller trips are designed for shared accommodation, whether staying in hotels, hostels, homestays or campsites, and therefore do not involve a single supplement. Single travellers will share with people of the same sex for the duration of the trip and those that book together will usually be able to share accommodation.

The type, variety and standard of accommodation will vary greatly depending on what options are available in the region you are travelling; hotels can vary from very basic rooms without electricity or running water to high standard hotels with good facilities! Generally in hotels most rooms will be twin-share. Hostels, gers and yurts are nearly always multi-share.

Many trips will feature a stay in a local homestay or community tourism initiative, allowing us to experience a slice of local life in the areas we travel through. On our overland trips, we will sometimes camp in campsites ranging from rather basic or even wild camps to those with excellent facilities, including swimming pools, restaurants and bars.

Dietary Requirements

If you have any dietary requirements please tell us at the time of booking and also remind your leader at your welcome meeting. Our crew will try to cater for any particular dietary requirement or food intolerance whenever possible.

Health

You need to be in good physical health in order to participate fully in our trips. When selecting your trip

please make sure you have read through the itinerary carefully and assessed your ability to cope with the style of travel on that trip. We are always happy to give extra advice if you have additional concerns. Please note that if, in the opinion of our leader, you are unable to complete the itinerary without undue risk to yourself and/or the rest of the group, Imaginative Traveller or our partner operators reserve the right to exclude you from all or part of the trip.

You should consult your doctor for up-to-date medical travel information prior to travel, particularly if you have a pre-existing medical condition. We also advise you to declare any pre-existing medical conditions to your travel insurers upon purchase.

Altitude

Imaginative Traveller offers some trips that travel to above 2,800m altitude above sea level - it is imperative at high altitudes to drink lots of water to stay hydrated, be careful not to get burned by the sun, and try not to exert yourself too much. Some pre-existing medical conditions are known to severely worsen at high altitude and be difficult to adequately treat on the ground, leading to more serious consequences. It is imperative that you discuss your pre-existing medical condition/s with your doctor. We understand certain medications are reported to aid acclimatising to high altitude; please discuss these options with your doctor.

Yellow Fever

A valid international certificate of vaccination against Yellow Fever is required in many countries. You may need to present this on arrival at the airport or border crossing. Some countries will refuse entry if you are unable to present your certificate - please see each country's note above for details. It's also quite common for your home country to request a Yellow Fever certificate on your arrival back home.

It is your responsibility to check with your doctor well in advance of leaving home about the Yellow Fever requirements for the countries you'll be visiting.

Malaria and other mosquito-borne diseases

Some areas we travel to have the risk of contracting malaria. If this applies to your trip, please get expert advice before travelling about types of malaria pills and take them as instructed. Recommended types do change from time to time and from area to area. Consult your GP / travel clinic for the most up-to-date requirements and to find the right option for you. If advised by your doctor to take a course of anti-malarial tablets, please complete the course as instructed as malaria can often manifest itself upon your return home if the course is not followed.

Other mosquito-borne diseases such as Dengue Fever, Chikungunya and Zika are continuing to spread and becoming a bigger problem around the world. Bite prevention is vital to avoid contracting any of these diseases as there are no vaccines or specific treatments available. Health professionals have issued warnings for pregnant women travelling to areas affected by the Zika virus.

The mosquito usually bites between the hours of dusk and dawn and so covering up by wearing long-legged and long-sleeved clothing, preferably light coloured and buttoned at the wrists, can help. Do not sleep without closing windows, use a mosquito net where possible and use mosquito repellent applied directly to your skin or soaked into your clothing.

Vaccinations

Recommended vaccinations and other health protection vary according to different regions and recent bulletins issued by health authorities. It is essential to get the latest advice on the region(s) you are planning to travel in so please check with either your doctor or travel clinic in good time before you travel.

We also recommend you check out any specific health advice for the country you are travelling to either via your GP or the following websites: www.nathnac.org or www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk

In the UK, we have been working with Nomad Travel for many years and their website has comprehensive,

up-to-date vaccination and health information. You will receive a 10% discount off all vaccinations given at Nomad Travel clinics.

Activities

Included activities are listed in the day-to-day itinerary, all other activities are optional and at your own expense. If you choose not to participate in the included activities on this itinerary, the cost will not necessarily be refunded; this is something you will need to check with your leader.

A selection of optional activities is listed in the day-to-day itinerary. This list is designed to be a helpful guide as to what is commonly available in each location, and is neither an exhaustive list, a guarantee that the activity is available, or an endorsement or recommendation. Please note that certain activities may not be available on your particular visit if they are overbooked, underbooked, out of season, or for any other reason - the list of activities is made according to our latest information and in the best faith, but please be aware that things may change between our last visit and your arrival. Please also note that it may not be possible to do all the activities listed in the time available at each destination, and it is recommended to give yourself extra time in your joining or ending city if you would like to participate in some optional activities there.

If you do any optional activities, you do so at your own risk and it must be clearly understood that your participation is your own decision and does not form part of your contract with Dragoman. You may be required to sign/complete a waiver form or optional activity form for some optional activities.

Insurance

It is a condition of booking that you have comprehensive travel insurance. Without evidence of valid travel insurance you will not be allowed to start the trip. This can be arranged by Imaginative Traveller through our website or by contacting our team of travel consultants.

If you prefer to arrange your insurance independently, it should have a minimum medical (including repatriation) cover of £2,000,000. We recommend that any policy also has a minimum level of cover for Personal Liability of £2,000,000 and for Cancellation and Curtailment of £5,000. Cover for loss of baggage, personal effects, money and other inclusions are down to personal choice although please bear in mind that personal effects are more likely to go missing whilst travelling and you should ensure that your policy is adequate to cover the value of your personal effects e.g. cameras, tablets, phones etc. Please note that Imaginative Traveller and our partner operators are not responsible for your personal effects and are not insured for their loss.

If you prefer to arrange your insurance independently, it should cover you for any activities that you may wish to participate in, such as white-water rafting, trekking, horse-riding, etc. and the 24-hour Emergency Assistance Company must be experienced in handling situations in developing countries if applicable (e.g. they have the ability to arrange repatriation from remote areas such as the Sahara or trekking in the Andes). If you are travelling to high altitude (such as embarking on a trek to the summit of Kilimanjaro), please make sure that this is also covered.

Please double check if you have annual travel and/or credit card policies to ensure they have the cover you require, as many of these policies are not suitable with adventure travel to remote areas. Many credit card medical insurance policies are not valid for travelling outside your country of residence or outside the EU.

Please also check the age limits on any policy you wish to take out and make sure that you thoroughly inform the insurance company of any pre-existing conditions.

Passports

Check that your passport will still be valid for 6 months after the end of the trip - this is important as some countries WILL refuse entry to anyone whose passport is due to expire. A temporary or emergency passport is not valid on our trips. You will need to provide us with your passport details prior to departing for your trip. If you change your passport please remember to inform us.

Pre and Post Trip Accommodation and Transfers

At Imaginative Traveller we believe you should make the most of the places you visit, so if you would like to see more of the joining or finishing point cities, why not book additional accommodation to extend your stay? We can take away the hassle of time zones and language barriers by making the booking for you. This accommodation is only available at the joining or finishing city of your trip, immediately before or after the trip you are travelling on. Please note our rates do not reflect last minute walk-in rates or internet specials.

We can also book arrival airport transfers for you as long as we have your flight arrival details. These are normally payable in cash upon arrival; however we do have pre paid transfers in a few destinations.

Please contact our reservations team for details of the accommodation and transfers that we can offer, as not all hotels offer this service.

Responsible Tourism

Imaginative Traveller is committed to ensuring that we have a positive impact on local communities and that we implement policies to minimise any negative impact on the local environment. We recognise that we are guests of local communities and strive to make them benefit directly from our visit. You can find full details of Imaginative Traveller's responsible tourism policy on our website.

Issues on the trip

While we always endeavour to provide the best possible holiday experience, due to the nature of travel and the areas we visit sometimes things can and do go wrong. Should any issue occur while you are on your trip, it is imperative that you discuss this with your group leader or our local partner straight away so that they can do their best to rectify the problem and save any potential negative impact on the rest of your trip.

We recognise that there may be times when your group leader may not be able to resolve a situation to your satisfaction. If this is the case please contact our customer relations department on

customer-relations@imtrav.net

You may also choose to provide details in your feedback questionnaire which we ask you to complete at the end of your trip, but we do ask you to be aware that it is very difficult for us to provide any practical help after the trip is complete.

Feedback

After your travels, we want to hear from you! We rely on your feedback. We read it carefully. Feedback helps us to understand what we are doing well and what we could be doing better, and it allows us to make improvements for future travellers.