



CNHTOURS - Helpful Guides

Artwork © by Magno Bennett

10 Things To Do On Your Free Days in Puerto Ayora, Santa Cruz Island, Galapagos

Puerto Ayora was my hometown for 4 years. When you live in a small town, on a small island, you quickly get to know just about all the things to do on a weekend.

Here is a list of what I consider are some of the most interesting, quirky, refreshing things you can do on a lazy day in Puerto Ayora.

10. Hike out to Tortuga Bay beach

Tortuga Bay is a beautiful 1.5 km long white sand beach with nice waves rolling in. It's a popular day outing for Puerto Ayora residents, especially on the weekend. Bring sunscreen and watch out for the currents. You may find nobody there at all if you go on a weekday morning. If you are seeking a more tranquil swimming area, walk to the far end of the beach (turn right at the trail's end), go around the corner and you'll find a peaceful and inviting lagoon – watch for small spotted eagles rays swimming near the surface, a nice spectacle.

How to get there: Ask for the Tortuga Bay trailhead – a taxi driver can take you there, or you can walk from your hotel (15 minutes). It's about a 30 minute walk along a volcanic rock wall/trail (what was a rough trail when I arrived was soon improved into a extensive stone walled trail 2 years later, prompting my husband to call it “the great wall of Galapagos”) to the beach. You might even run across a tortoise on the trail from time to time

cnh tours

Cultural and Natural Heritage Tours
www.cnhtours.com

“Proud of our unmatched personalized service”

9. Downhill cycling from the highlands of Santa Cruz to Puerto Ayora
Hire mountain bikes from a local bike shop (make sure the brakes work – these bikes are not always in top condition) and hire a taxi (pick-up truck variety) to take you to El Cascajo (a small farming settlement) area. Take in the nice vistas of the coast below, the cool highland air, small coffee and pineapple plantations, and pass by the occasional donkey. Stop at Bellavista for lunch, where the air is cooler. Bellavista has seen a proliferation of “mom & pop” eateries serving chicken and rice dishes and typical Ecuadorian soups in recent years (but usually only on Sundays). Watch for local traffic!

One side option is to head to the collapsed crater at the end of the road in El Camote (as the taxi driver). You can walk around the crater for beautiful vistas and a small lagoon there attracts a variety of birds. This is a dirt road (for now). A good idea would be to start the ride at El Camote, head over to El Cascajo, then use the more scenic route to Bellavista.

8. Go beachcombing at Garapatero Beach

This smaller, isolated beach had been inaccessible by land until a road was built to within 200 metres of the coast in 2001. The beach isn't enormous, but it is remote, offers more shade than Tortuga Bay, and the waters are calmer. There is a small lagoon nearby (ask around) where you could maybe spot some flamingos and other lagoon birds. During high season, it may be overrun with school children (Feb-March).

How to do it: Take a taxi to the beach trailhead (be sure to arrange for a return pick-up) and then begin the 5 minute hike to the shore.

7. Go on a 2 tank diving day trip.

There are plenty of good diving sites that can be reached on a day trip out of Puerto Ayora. If you're lucky, you can spot that elusive school of hammerheads. My husband saw killer whales feeding on rays just 5 metres away! (ok, it was from the boat deck, and not while he was diving). Conditions are very variable – you might want to talk to the outfitter first.

How to do it: There are 2-3 scuba outfitters in town. We usually use Scuba Iguana (they supported the Charles Darwin Research Station activities) but others such as Sub-Aqua can also help. Drop in on the afternoon the day before and find out what is planned for the next day.

6. Take a tour of Academy Bay.

There is always an eclectic collection of ships moored at Academy Bay – the usual cruise ships in for re-supplying, some of the long-in-the-tooth fishing boats used by locals, possibly the Galapagos National Park's marine patrol vessels. You might even find some luxury private yachts, a U.S. research vessel or other unexpected surprises. It can be quite relaxing to take a 1-2 hour slow tour of the Bay on a hot afternoon, and check these ships out more closely. While you're at it, check out the shoreline and see more wildlife.

cnh tours

Cultural and Natural Heritage Tours
www.cnhtours.com

“Proud of our unmatched personalized service”

How to do it: Ask at the town dock for a Bay Tour (9AM – noon or 2PM – 6PM). The cost is US\$ 25 – 30 per person and this includes a snack and snorkeling gear. The best spot to go to: The Loberia on Camanyo Island.

5. Venture to “Las Grietas” – the local swimming hole on “The Other Side” of Academy Bay:

Puerto Ayora is really 2 distinct communities – the main town, accessible by road, and “the other side” (*el otro lado* in Spanish). The other side is accessible by boat only, and residents there tend to appreciate being away from the hustle and bustle of the main town. This is where you’ll find the Finch Bay hotel (with a small beach nearby). Following a circuitous 1km trail past the hotel, you can reach “Las Grietas”, Spanish for the caves, of the crevasses. In fact, what we have is a long narrow cool-water swimming hole among a jumble of small cliffs and tumbled boulders. Locals come here for a change of pace, youth enjoying showing off their diving skills. On the way to Las Grietas, you might spot some interesting birdlife among the landlocked shallow water bodies around here.

How to do it: One of the difficulties for residents living on “the other side” is transport. To get there, it’s relatively easy to find an aqua-taxi at the main Puerto Ayora dock. Cost: About US\$ 1.00 for the 4 minute crossing.

4. Visit the Tunnel of Love!

It sounds a little corny, but it’s a fun outing. Just outside of the town of Bellavista, in the highlands (about 7 km from Puerto Ayora), this long lava tunnel is well worth exploring. The local farmer on whose land it’s located has developed a pretty kitsch interpretation centre. He’ll charge you a small fee, and even rent out a flashlight for you. The tunnel is about 600 metres long, and is a great example of geological formations resulting from lava flows. After you’re done, you can consider walking back to Bellavista (10 minutes) for lunch, taking advantage of the cooler highland air.

How to do it: Hire a taxi to take you to “Los Tuneles del Amor” – outside of Bellavista – they should know where it is. You can find taxis easily in Bellavista, to take you back to Puerto Ayora.

3. Commune with giant tortoises “in the wild” at Steve Devine’s Farm.

Steve Devine’s farm lies right next to a popular wild giant tortoise hangout. As a result, these lumbering reptiles often enter his farmland, taking advantage of a few water holes. This place is popular with tour groups, but you can go on your own too.

How to do it: Hire a taxi to take you to Steve’s farm located in the highlands of Santa Cruz. There is a small entrance fee. Make sure you arrange your return trip.

2. Hike to Media Luna (half moon) hill.

cnh tours

Cultural and Natural Heritage Tours
www.cnhtours.com

“Proud of our unmatched personalized service”

This is a popular outing for the more active locals – getting out of town, taking in fresh air and nice vistas. About 2 hours uphill hike from Bellavista. Again, you might want to consider lunch at Bellavista after the hike. It's named halfmoon after the shape of this semi-circular ancient volcanic crater. Don't forget to bring water!

How to do it: Take a taxi to Bellavista to the Media Luna trailhead, approximately 300-400 metres behind town (the taxi driver should know, if not ask locally for directions "el sendero hasta media luna").

1. Go horseback riding in the highlands of Santa Cruz Island

How to do it: Horseback riding can be arranged upon request. Ask your hotel manager for information.

When planning your free days in Puerto Ayora, don't forget, you are on the equator. The sun sets at about 6PM each and every night.

cnh tours

Cultural and Natural Heritage Tours
www.cnhtours.com

"Proud of our unmatched personalized service"