

South East Itinerary - Oceanic Forces and Island Diversity

Some highlights: Visiting 10 different islands; swimming with sea-lions and spotting sharks, all three booby species, waved albatross (Apr - Nov), great landscape diversity.

TOUR-AT-A-GLANCE – Cruise only (full itinerary details are found below)

Tuesday: Travel to Galapagos. Santa Cruz Island: Highlands. B, L, D.

Wednesday: Floreana: Punta Cormorant / Champion / Post Office Bay / The Baroness Lookout. B, L, D.

Thursday: Española: Punta Suarez / Gardner Bay. B, L, D.

Friday: San Cristobal: Kicker Rock / Punta Pitt . B, L, D.

Saturday: Santa Fe: Barrington Bay / South Plazas. B, L, D.

Sunday: Santiago: Sullivan Bay / Bartolome. B, L, D.

Monday: Rabida / Santiago: James Bay. B, L, D.

Tuesday: North Seymour / Cruise ends. Santa Cruz: Highlands / Free afternoon - evening in Puerto Ayora. B, L.

B = Breakfast, L = Lunch, D = Dinner.

DETAILED ITINERARY

DAY 1 – TUESDAY, SANTA CRUZ (INDEFATIGABLE)¹

AM: FLIGHT TO BALTRA ISLAND, GALAPAGOS EMBARKATION

PM: SANTA CRUZ HIGHLANDS

Up early this morning - a quick breakfast before the transfer to the airport. At the Quito airport, you'll take your bags through the bio-control inspection - please don't bring any organic matter to the islands (fruit etc...). The flight usually stops in Guayaquil, before heading off to Galapagos. Total transit time is about 2.5 hours. Upon arrival at Baltra Airport, you will pay your US\$100 National Park Entrance Fee. Your hand luggage will then be checked by the local Inspection and Quarantine staff again to ensure you have no organic matter. Exiting the arrival area, you will be met by the Samba's naturalist guide, who will assist you with the collection your luggage and will accompany you to the Samba.

The journey will have you take a short bus ride to the narrow channel that separates Baltra island and Santa Cruz island. Keep your eyes open for some land iguanas on Baltra - these had disappeared soon after the establishment of the World War II military base there, but have been painstakingly re-introduced since, and are now doing very well - particularly after the successful eradication of wild cats, which liked to dine on baby iguanas!

After the 3 minute ferry ride, we'll head up to the Highlands of Santa Cruz. At 1800 feet (550 metres), this will be your best opportunity to witness the original highland old growth forests of Galapagos. Here, the smallish broccoli shaped Scalesia trees decorate a couple of extraordinary geological formations. Known as "Los Gemelos", these twin collapsed craters and their surroundings are the home of many Darwin's finches, mocking birds, vermilion flycatcher and a wonderful diversity of indigenous plants. We'll have lunch between various highland visits / activities.

We'll proceed to the Samba later in the afternoon to settle in and get underway.

Before dinner every night, your Naturalist Guide will re-cap the day and give a briefing on the next day's activities. During this briefing they will be describing the visitor sites you will see the following day, the wake-up call time, the types of landings, difficulty level, the required equipment (Eg hiking shoes and extra water), and approximately how long each activity will be. Feel free to ask questions during this time, in order to best prepare for the new day of your Galapagos adventure! Dinner is then served on board.

¹ Islands have both English and Spanish versions for their names. We highlight the Spanish versions here as these reflect common usage today.

DAY 2: WEDNESDAY, FLOREANA (CHARLES)

AM: PUNTA CORMORANT & CHAMPION

PM: POST OFFICE BAY & THE BARRONESS LOOKOUT

Following a four-hour navigation from Puerto Ayora (at night) we will do a wet landing on a volcanic olivine beach. Punta Cormorant lies on the northern shore of Floreana and consists of fundamental habitat for greater flamingos and sea turtles. On one side, the point is partially flooded with a brackish lagoon where flamingos nest and feed. Whimbrels, herons and stilts are other common shore and migratory birds found here. On the other side, sea turtles use every corner of a white sand beach to lay their eggs. We often see stingrays and reef sharks from the shore, along with basking turtles if we're lucky.

Around mid morning we sail for 25 minutes to do a dinghy ride and snorkel at Champion Islet. This small piece of land is one of two places where the Floreana mocking bird survives after its extinction on the big Island. While trying to find the rare bird from our dinghies, we will enjoy a beautiful landscape full of fairy tale cactus and terracotta rock formations. Soon sea lions will invite us to enjoy the water. The snorkeling around the island is extraordinary, with lots of fish, rays, sharks and playful Galapagos sea lions.

Adventure, survival, mystery and murder are the main ingredients for our next stop. Post Office Bay has left a legacy of pirates, whalers, scientific expeditions and fascinating stories. After a wet landing, we walk a very short distance to be part of the most important Galapagos tradition (the post office). Don't forget to bring your postcards and addresses with you so you can take part in this age old tradition! Later, we'll kayak or ride our dinghies to the west. We'll go through a small set of islets with a sea lion colony, boobies and mangroves. Finally, following our ride we will land at the Baroness lookout. On top of this eroded spatter cone we'll embrace the mysterious enigma of the human history of "Las Encantadas".

Evening briefing with your Naturalist Guide.

DAY 3: THURSDAY, ESPAÑOLA (HOOD)

AM: PUNTA SUAREZ

PM: GARDNER BAY & GARDNER ISLAND

Hood is the oldest Galapagos Island, the Queen. Her Majesty has travelled 100 miles (160 km) away from the volcanic hotspot over which she was originally created; she sets an example of splendor and wisdom. When landing on her western tip, Punta Suárez, you'll be amazed at the most colourful marine iguanas in Galapagos, at the plentiful sea lions leisurely wandering around you, at blue-footed boobies and Sally light-foot crabs coating the rocks with their brilliant colours.

The long walk leads you to one of the finest illustrations of ancient sea bird colonies on the planet. The endless cliff shaped by strong wave action and the force of the wind is the home of the only tropical albatross on Earth². This mythical elegant glider shares the precipice with many others sea birds like the tropicbirds, the swallow tailed gull and the Nazca booby.

Depending on weather conditions, either at the end of the morning or early in the afternoon, we'll snorkel or kayak around Gardner Island. Its calm waters and attractive landscape give you a great experience above and below the water line.

Located on the north coast of Española Gardner Bay beckons with its tranquil snow white sand beach. The fine grains of sand make perfect terrain for a soft walk and a late afternoon "zen" time by the sea... though you won't be alone, sea lions and Hood mockingbirds will keep us company. The mockingbirds here have the reputation for a certain cockiness. So, don't drop your camera lens cap - they may make off with it!

Evening briefing with your Naturalist Guide.

DAY 4: FRIDAY, SAN CRISTOBAL (CHATHAM)

AM: KICKER ROCK

PM: PUNTA PITT

We navigate by a dramatic tuff cone formation, Kicker Rock. The eroded structure has vertical walls of over 450 feet and has great numbers of sea birds nesting and resting on it. We will circumnavigate the rock to admire its magnitude, soon after that we will jump in the water to swim with Galapagos sharks, sea turtles, and eagle rays. The underwater cliff face is also full of colorful fish and invertebrates.

On Punta Pitt we do a wet landing late in the afternoon to climb a tuff cone and enjoy the sunset. This is the point in Galapagos that is closest to mainland South America. Nazca boobies, red-footed boobies, frigate birds and storm petrel nest in the area. The ochre color beach is perfect for a relaxing plunge after the walk and great for picture taking.

Evening briefing with your Naturalist Guide.

² The Waved Albatross is present only from mid-April to December

DAY 5: SATURDAY, SANTA FE & PLAZAS

AM: SANTA FE

PM: SOUTH PLAZA

A more picturesque inlet could not have been created by the world's best artist. The white sand floor of the seabed of Barrington Bay reflects the light, turning the calm waters turquoise. A small forest of gigantic prickly pear cactus grows on a peninsula that keeps the bay sheltered. Conditions are ideal for a large sea lion colony. Santa Fe is an ancient extinct volcano and it has been isolated from other islands long enough to have an endemic land dragon. Paler in color than its relatives, the Barrington land iguana has a primitive morphology. Galapagos Hawks, mocking birds, finches and endemic rice rats provide company to this yellowish monster.

A two-hour navigation north will take us to South Plaza. The dry landing transports you to a brilliant combination of life and colors. Land iguanas wandering through bright red carpet weed, Swallow tailed gulls nesting around the overhang tops and red-billed tropicbirds and shearwaters flying with dancing displays. Mind the pirates of the sky; they will strike if you drop your guard. This 13 acre (5 hectare) island is one of the best spots in the archipelago to see land iguanas and swallow-tailed gulls, both indigenous to the Galapagos. There are iguana nests scattered all over the hill. The sheer cliffs of the southern shore are a perfect bird habitat, making it an unparalleled bird observatory especially for swallow-tailed gulls, Audubon shearwaters, and red-billed tropicbirds. You'll also have the chance to spot the only marine - land iguana hybrids in the islands. Evolution in the making?

If we have enough time and good weather we will swim or snorkel in Punta Carrion. A great way to end an active day!

Evening briefing with your Naturalist Guide.

DAY 6: SUNDAY, SANTIAGO & BARTOLOME

AM: SULLIVAN BAY

PM: BARTOLOME

The genesis of the islands is easy to acknowledge at Sullivan Bay. The coiled shiny structures of the pahoe-hoe lava appear as if they were formed yesterday. Located on the east shores of Santiago Island this lava was formed in 1879 and maintains intact dribble cones. Older cinder cones were flooded by later rivers of lava and are a great example of aging igneous rocks. The contrast of colors and shapes of the basalt, and the distinction of rust and shine of its surface will take you back to Mars, if you've been there before.

Bartolome Island offers an explosive volcanic landscape. Get ready to climb above 270 feet to admire the dramatic spatter cones and the view of Pinnacle Rock that distinguishes Galapagos from other oceanic archipelagoes. Later, take a walk on magical golden beaches where sea turtles nest (December to March). Don't forget to take time to swim near penguins, sharks, giant rays and sunken lava tubes.

Evening briefing with your Naturalist Guide.

DAY 7: MONDAY, RABIDA & SANTIAGO ISLANDS

AM: RABIDA

PM: JAMES BAY (Santiago Island)

Galapagos offers a diversity of geological formations without boundaries. The island of Rábida has lavas rich in iron and after millions of years of exposure to air they have turned it red. The rusted volcanic material has eroded to form a beautiful crimson sand beach, lovely for a walk. The protected shore provides excellent conditions for wildlife. Brown pelicans use the nearby saltbushes as a resting and nesting area. Hawks and mocking birds are common visitors of the lowlands. Furthermore, you'll find that snorkeling off the beach can be very exciting as sharks, rays and many colorful fish are often visible.

Following a two-hour sail northwest we will do a wet landing at Puerto Egas also known as James Bay. The magical shorelines of the west of James Island are a combination of tuff cone, lava flows and organic sand. A rocky coast with a very gentle slope is used by a great number of shore birds and reptiles. Oystercatchers, whimbrels, sanderlings, turnstones, tattlers and other waders are mixed with marine iguanas and bright painted crabs to feed by the rich littoral zone. Grand, partially collapsed lava tunnels house a Galapagos fur sea lion colony. The snorkel can be one of the best in the archipelago. Sea turtles feeding, parrot fishes, damsel fishes, white tipped reef sharks and many more... Charles Darwin spent most of his Galapagos land time near this spot.

Your last evening briefing with your Naturalist Guide.

DAY 8: TUESDAY, NORTH SEYMOUR & BALTRA AIRPORT

AM: NORTH SEYMOUR

PM: SANTA CRUZ AND PUERTO AYORA

Following a dry landing at sunrise we will walk amongst the largest blue-footed booby colony of the Islands. If breeding, you will enjoy their dancing and singing to find a mate. Not far from the dancers we'll spot great and magnificent frigate birds nesting. The males inflate their pouches to attract the ladies that fly above them. Swallow tailed gulls and tropicbirds decorate the large basaltic walls of the island.

We will be back on board for breakfast at 8:00 and we have to be ready to check out at 9:00.

Those of you staying on with the full CNH Tours Active Galapagos trip will take the trip over the Puerto Ayora and check into your hotel (Hotel Fernandina - a modest but well managed family owned and operated establishment). You'll have a free afternoon to explore this quirky town at your leisure. Why not see if you can catch a game of "Ecuavolley"?