

# ISABELA II

## Central Galapagos Itinerary



Itinerary is a guide only. Our route and programme varies according to National Park policies and regulations, weather conditions, seasonal changes, safety reasons and the wildlife we encounter.

### **Monday**

#### **Los Gemelos – Twin Craters (Santa Cruz Island)**

Arrival by plane to Baltra Island and transfer overland to Santa Cruz Island and the town of Puerto Ayora. En route visit the highlands of Santa Cruz Island, with their impressive Scalesia forest and the geological formation of the twin pit craters known Los Gemelos. From December to mid-April a visit to see the giant tortoises in the wild may be included, if weather conditions are good. Continue on to Puerto Ayora for lunch poolside at the Finch Bay Eco Hotel.

#### **Puerto Ayora and the Charles Darwin Research Station**

After lunch visit to the Charles Darwin Research Station and the giant tortoise pens, including tortoise celebrities like "Lonesome George" within an impressive giant prickly-pear cactus forest home to many land birds. These are the headquarters of scientific investigation, conservation and the National Park administration. Late afternoon stroll along the main street of Puerto Ayora before embarking on Yacht ISABELA II. Next day's expedition plan and dinner.

### **Tuesday**

#### **Santa Fe Island**

After breakfast, a wet landing on a sandy white beach with many sea lion harems. Bulls vie for the right of "Beach Master", while smaller males masking as females make stealthy mating moves. Galápagos hawks are often easily observed, perched atop salt bushes. The giant prickly pear cactus found here live up to their name with tree-sized trunks! The endemic land iguana, unique to this island, may be spotted during the afternoon walk. Snorkelling and swimming from the beach rounds off the rewarding experience. Lunch on board.

#### **South Plaza Island**

Disembark (dry landing) in the channel between North and South Plaza Islands, where the island tilts toward the water, the approach makes for a lavishly colourful sight! The turquoise waters of the channel contrast brilliantly with the white sand and black lava of the shoreline. The rocks have grown thick with green seaweed in places, speckled with

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bright orange 'Sally Lightfoot' crabs. Further up the shore a carpet of scarlet sesuvium succulents serves as groundcover for a grove of luminescent green prickly-pear cactus. Yellow-grey land iguanas sit beneath these, waiting patiently for pears to drop. Along the coastline one finds sea lion colonies, while frigates, swallow-tailed gulls and shearwaters glide playing with the thermals that form along the cliffs of this small but amazing island. Briefing and dinner.

### **Wednesday**

#### **North Seymour Island**

Today's morning starts with a dry landing for a view of the coast and the interior of North Seymour Island, one of the few uplifted islands in the Galápagos Archipelago. The trail leads guests to explore colonies of blue footed boobies, magnificent frigate birds, and swallowtail gulls. The sandy shore teems with Galápagos sea lions and marine iguanas. Vegetation is made up of cacti, palo santo trees and salt bushes. Lunch on board.

#### **Las Bachas (Santa Cruz Island)**

After WWII, US military barges were beached and abandoned here. Locals referred to the beach as the barges beach, a name that morphed to "bachas". Today it is an important nesting area for the east Pacific green sea turtle. Located on the north shore of Santa Cruz Island, it is a glorious white beach, with several brackish lagoons only a few steps away from the sea. These lagoons are the feeding grounds of various wading birds, from stilts to flamingos. Briefing and dinner

### **Thursday**

#### **Bartolomé Island**

Disembark at Bartolomé Island (dry landing) for a hike to the summit. A great way to start the day! This is a steep climb aided by a wooden staircase with handrails; the view from the top is worth the effort. There will be time for a panga ride around Pinnacle Rock to hopefully observe penguins before or after the walk. Lunch on board.

#### **Sullivan Bay (James Island)**

After breakfast, board the *panga* for the short ferry to the landing site at Sullivan Bay on the East Coast of Santiago. Wet landing on a white coral sand beach and begin the walk over lava that flowed less than 100 years ago. This is the perfect place to see and feel the volcanic origin of Galápagos.

The last major eruption on Santiago was probably in the early 1900's. One observer aboard a sailing vessel reported that the ship approached the lava flow so closely that the pine tar used to seal the hull of the ship began to soften, and the captain had to hurry the ship away from the bay. Briefing and dinner.

### **Friday**

#### **Baltra Island**

After breakfast, departure to the port and airport to take the flight back to the mainland.

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### **IMPORTANT NOTES:**

The itineraries and program are subject to change without prior notice, due mainly to adjustments in the policies and regulations of the Galápagos National Park, weather conditions, seasonal changes and safety reasons.



**Dry landing:** guests step from the dinghy onto rocks or a dock.

**Wet landing:** as the dinghy edges onto a sandy beach, guests step into knee-deep water and wade ashore

